The Harry Potter fandom and the fall of J.K. Rowling: A dying community?

A look at the impact of J.K. Rowling's actions on the Harry Potter fan community on YouTube

Student name: Michelle van Leeuwen

Student number: 549392

Supervisor: William McCarthy

Master Media and Creative Industries

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Abstract

The Harry Potter franchise is one of the most popular media franchises in the world, and has a dedicated fan following. Harry Potter fans have formed communities on many social media platforms, and an especially interesting one is the Harry Potter fan community on YouTube. However, in the last five years, controversial actions of Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling have affected the state of the fandom. In 2016, a black actress was cast to play Hermione Granger in the play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child,* a choice J.K. Rowling endorsed on Twitter, and which received very mixed reactions. In 2016 the movie *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* was also released, a prequel to the Harry Potter story and the first movie in a new series in the Harry Potter universe of which J.K. Rowling was the scriptwriter. Her writing for this movie was generally well received, but the sequel that was released in 2018, *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald,* was not. Comments J.K. Rowling made about the sexual relationship of characters Grindelwald and Dumbledore angered many fans, who thought it was unnecessary and ridiculous to share this information, and a form of queerbaiting. Lastly, in 2020, J.K. Rowling posted a series of tweets that were considered to be transphobic by many of her fans. The aim of this study is to uncover the consequences of her actions on the Harry Potter fan community on YouTube, and how the nature of YouTube as a social media platform is related to this. Fan communities on YouTube is a subject that has not been researched enough yet, so this study fills part of that gap. Additionally, this study demonstrates the effects that fan communities have on the personal lives of individuals. The results of this study show that the actions of J.K. Rowling have negatively affected the state of the Harry Potter fan communities on YouTube within a process that has taken place over several years. The consequences have been so severe, that there have been dedicated Harry Potter YouTubers who have chosen to leave the fandom. Also, the nature of Harry Potter YouTube fan communities has slightly changed as well, as fans have reacted in different ways to the controversies and the community has therefore become more divided. The study shows that there are three possible reactions: loyalty, acceptance and rejection. Additionally, the effects of the J.K. Rowling controversies are noticeable in the social awareness of the YouTube community, and in the self-reflection of the YouTubers.

Keywords: fandom, Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling, audience studies, YouTube

Table of contents

1. Introduction

This research is about the popular Harry Potter franchise, its fandom on the digital platform YouTube, and the actions of author J.K. Rowling. Harry Potter started as a series of seven books, written and published from 1997 to 2007. The books were adapted into eight movies by the studio Warnes Bros. from 2001 to 2011. During this time, Harry Potter grew into a massive franchise and gained an immense fan following (Walton, 2018). The Harry Potter book series has become the biggest selling book series of all time, with more than 500 million copies sold worldwide (Weiss, 2018). The Harry Potter universe is still expanding, even after the original books and movies have finished. With new prequel movies, a sequel play, the publication of Hogwarts textbooks, websites and online platforms, Harry Potter is still very much an active intellectual property (Gymnich & Scheunemann., 2017).

Harry Potter owes part of its success to timing, as it was released when the Internet was growing rapidly. Consumers were always craving new Harry Potter content, and this could be found online in the form of user generated content. This started with the launch of Harry Potter websites as early as 1998. This trend intensified in 2001, when the first Harry Potter movie was released, and by 2003 the online Harry Potter community had exploded. The created content included fan-art, fanfiction and speculations about the upcoming books (Gunelius, 2008). In 2008 however, most of the online fandom resided on websites. This changed around 2011, when the Harry Potter YouTube community became prominent. YouTube is an interesting and often challenging platform to study, and YouTubers have formed a complex network full with content creation and social interaction (Burgess & Green, 2018).

J.K. Rowling herself is a very active participant in the online Harry Potter fandom, mostly on the social media platform Twitter. However, her online activity has started many controversies in the Harry Potter fandom. Examples include Rowling's statement that Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore is gay in 2007, the casting of a black actress to play Hermione Granger in the play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* in 2016, and the comments she made about characters Dumbledore and Grindelwald in regards to the movie release of *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* in 2018 (McLeod & Holland, 2017). These comments were about their sexual relationship, which fans found ridiculous and unnecessary, and J.K. Rowling was mocked for it. She was also accused of queerbaiting for

not actually including these parts of their relationship in the movie (Shamsian, 2019). The situation escalated even more when in June, 2020, Rowling posted a tweet that was considered transphobic by many people (Gardner, 2021). After this, Rowling posted more tweets containing her views on transgender rights, and eventually wrote a lengthy essay about the subject (J.K. Rowling, 2020). This started a series of events that produced a lot of critique on Rowling not only as a person, but also as an author (Gardner, 2021). These controversies have undoubtedly had some sort of effect on Harry Potter fans. According to Gardner (2021), J.K. Rowling faced immense backlash from her fans because of these words, many of whom had found comfort in the Harry Potter stories, but now felt betrayed and hurt by the author, saying that she has outed herself as transphobic. Reactions were like those of Moon (2020), a transgender man and former Harry Potter fan, who expressed his anger towards J.K. Rowling in a blog post. He stated that J.K. Rowling's words are harmful and dangerous to the transgender community, and that it is a shame and disappointment that the woman who was a hero of many people who grew up with Harry Potter would do this (Moon, 2020). Even Daniel Radcliffe, the actor who portrayed Harry Potter in the movies, spoke out against J.K. Rowling, saying that he did not agree with her statements (Radcliffe, 2020). Other Harry Potter actors followed in his footsteps soon after (Gardner, 2021). Additionally, book sales for Harry Potter experienced a sudden drop in June, 2020 (Pocock, 2020).

This research is academically relevant because even though fandom is a popular research topic, the evolution of online communities and fandoms on social media platforms through the years has not been researched extensively. Bury (2016) has been one of the few researchers who has looked into the subject, and her research provides insight in the history of online communities on social media platforms. However, her article only addresses Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr as possible social media platforms for online community forming in the present day. Liew (2020) builds on Bury's (2016) research, and she adds to the discussion by analyzing fandoms on small, intimate and closed networks on mobile smartphones, like WhatsApp. Liew (2020) briefly mentions the practice of creating fan videos on YouTube, but throws YouTube together with other 'similar' platforms like Facebook and Tumblr. Liew (2020) and Bury (2016) do not talk about the workings of online YouTube communities, and this research fills that gap. This research is also academically relevant because of the way it analyzes Harry Potter. Harry Potter has naturally been the

subject of many articles and books, but looking at its fandom with a specific focus on YouTube would be a new research angle. The research is socially relevant because of the way online fandoms and communities have the ability to change the lives of individuals. This is always changing, as evidenced by the recent J.K. Rowling controversies. Her behavior automatically has consequences for the entire Harry Potter fandom, and everybody in it. How do people deal with the fact that their beloved book series now has such negative statements attached to it?

1.1 Research questions

Based on this background, the research question is: **How have developments concerning Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling affected the nature of Harry Potter fandom communities on YouTube from 2016 to 2021?** The Sub-question is:

- *How has the evolving nature of YouTube shaped Harry Potter fandom communities on the platform?*

The answering of the sub-question is necessary, as it helps to understand the way Harry Potter fandom communities on YouTube work and shows whether this has changed over the years. This in turn will show if Harry Potter fan communities on YouTube have changed over the years as a consequence of J.K. Rowling's actions.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter provides a theoretical framework, and explains the key concepts and relevant theories for this research, including participatory culture, audience engagement, online communities and various theories regarding audience reactions. It also gives insight in research that has previously been done on Harry Potter and the role of J.K. Rowling in relation to the Harry Potter fandom.

2.1 Media convergence and participatory culture

A deeper understanding of both and participatory culture and media convergence helps to answer the research questions. Jenkins (2006) mentions participatory culture, which means that consumers are contributing to existing media with their own creations and are no longer passive spectators. This describes what happens when Harry Potter fans create their own content and post it on YouTube. In order to detect change in the Harry Potter fandom, an understanding of participatory culture is therefore necessary. Jean and Burgess (2018) also talk about participatory culture in relation to YouTube. YouTube's innovation lay in the ease of use of the platform for people with little technical knowledge. By design it is a platform that makes it possible for ordinary people to engage in cultural participation. Participatory culture is crucial for its existence, as YouTube could not exist without people posting content (Jean & Burgess, 2018).

Jenkins (2006) defines media convergence as "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (p. 2). It means that information and content can be shared quickly through online platforms, and that audiences will actively search for the type of media content that they want to see. This ties in with the development that Harry Potter fans are looking for more Harry Potter content, and can explain why the Harry Potter fandom is constantly evolving. It is also relevant in explaining the power and influence J.K. Rowling has, even years after the Harry Potter books have been published.

2.2 Collective intelligence

Collective intelligence means that "none of us can know everything; each of us know something; and we can put the pieces together if we pool our recourses and combine our skills." (Jenkins, 2006, p. 4). It is shared knowledge and media content that is built upon by individuals. According to Jenkins (2006), a greater collective intelligence is a consequence of media convergence and participatory culture, as more people are actively sharing information and creating content. Already in 2006, this was starting to have an effect as Jenkins mentions the shift from old 'traditional' media to new media that was happening around this time, saying, however, that new media does not replace old media, but interacts with it in more complex ways thanks to media convergence. The Harry Potter YouTube fandom is an example of technological convergence: new media, YouTube, is interacting with old media, the Harry Potter books and movies. It specifically ties in to the research question, as the J.K. Rowling controversies are arguably an example of collective intelligence. The entire fandom knows about these events through online sharing, and this concept provides insight in its effect.

2.3 Fandom

Central to the research question is the concept of fandom. According to Bury (2016), an important characteristic of fandom and fan communities is that the members have direct contact and interactions with each other. Her research shows that it was the Internet that brought opportunities to read and create fan fiction, find new information and make friends. These developments in online communities and fandom go back to the key concepts; media spreads faster and wider through new technological innovations, people actively participate online and therefore media consumption and being a fan has become a collective process.

Williams (2018) edited a book that discusses the different reactions fans can have to endings, changes and transitions of a media object. Williams (2018) states that 'being a fan' for many people is tied to their sense of self-identity, and that fans can be very emotionally involved. She argues that there is no single theory that can cover all types of fan responses, but that her book instead "covers a diverse range of topics and case studies to discuss common themes from various empirical and theoretical perspectives" (Williams, 2018, p. 4). However, she does state in her introduction that based on her research, fan responses can very broadly be defined in three main reactions: 1) fans expressing sadness and grief, but

vowing to never leave the fandom, 2) fans accepting that the piece of media is changing or ending, and that the fandom may no longer play a major part in their lives as a consequence, and 3) fans rejecting the piece of media, and distancing themselves from the fandom.

One of the articles from Williams' book is by Booth (2018), who discusses the very thin line between love and hate in fandoms. He speaks of fan affect, and defines this as the deep emotional connection fans have with a media object. His argument is based on the theory that fan affect shifts all the time, and that it can transition from positive to negative. According to Booth (2018), this also means that fandoms are constantly in process. This can eventually lead to fan euthanasia: "the desire for a quick end to a once-favored text in order to relieve the pain and/or suffering of watching a beloved text end poorly" (Booth, 2018, p. 76). Booth believes that fans can feel like they have moral authority, with them "feeling entitled to *know* the correct meaning or representation in the media object" (Booth, 2018, p. 78). This includes fans demanding the ending of a show that has gone on for too long in their opinion. This means that they defy the authority and intentions of the creator. Booth's (2018) article focuses on television shows, but this theory is very much applicable to the Harry Potter fandom as well.

The importance of endings is once again emphasized by Lamerichs (2018), who is the author of another article in Williams' book. Lamerichs (2018) states that an ending can make or break a show. She also says that creators and fans can have very different ideas about an ending, as evidenced by the example of the ending of *The Sopranos*. Her article is about the ending of television shows, but the fundamentals apply to the ending of books and movie series as well. Lamerichs (2018) relates the fan responses to active audience participation in the form of fan edit videos, and argues that this is part of our current participatory culture. As she says: "In our participatory culture, fans have tools and creative skills to contribute to the storytelling process if an ending does not live up to their expectations" (Lamerichs, 2018, p. 140). To summarize, she argues that stories do not just belong to the creators anymore, but that the audience has some sort of control over them as well. Lamerichs (2018) talks about the importance of narrative closure, which she defines as the expectations and desires of fans regarding the ending, and the way these are met. The presence or absence of narrative closure can have a profound effect on the way fans interpret an ending, as Lamerichs (2018) argues that audiences desire closure that brings them satisfaction. When not all the questions are answered with the ending, fans might not be satisfied and will try to

answer these questions themselves, and envision an alternative ending. However, even when media does provide closure within the text, fans might not always agree with how this was done, and again they will try to come up with another ending. Lamerichs (2018) concludes that audiences need to be satisfied with an ending, otherwise they will take matters into their own hands.

2.4 Online communities

Online fandom can be related to online community creation, which the participants of Bury's (2016) research explicitly do. It is a place where they feel understood, and where they can share their interests with likeminded people. A suitable social media platform for communities and online fandoms should make it possible for users to meet new people based on shared interests, provide the possibility to have in-depth conversations about those interests and should not interfere too much with users' 'real' life (Bury, 2016).

According to Bury (2016), "community has always been at the heart of participatory media culture" (p. 628). New technologies have brought many new possibilities for communities to form, and for people to enter fandoms. Fans therefore have become very active users of social media. However, Bury (2016) states that "to date however, there are no studies that analyse social media in direct relation to community making" (p. 628), maintaining that this article is one of the few that examines community and fandom through the ages, and how it has changed. The first research on online fandom and communities was done in the 1990s, when it was linked to the rise of the Internet. An important characteristic of fan communities is that the members have direct contact and interactions with each other. In the 1990s, Bacon-Smith (1992) argued that many members of fan communities were too far apart to form actual close connections, and speaks of interest groups rather than communities. This changed with the rise of the Internet and the arrival of new technologies that made interactive communication possible, regardless of distance. Bury (2016) argues that virtual communities are just as real and meaningful as real-life communities.

But how does this work on social media platforms? Bury's (2016) research shows that it was the Internet that made involvement with fandom and fan communities possible for many people, as early as the 1980s. It brought opportunities to read fan-fiction, make friends, and find new shows to watch related to their interests, at that time mostly through

platform Usenet. In the 1990s, these activities began to intensify, and more opportunities arose. This was because of the arrival of websites, email, and widespread Internet. The participants of her research relate online fandom to community, as it is a place where they feel understood, and where they can share their interests with likeminded people. Many people state that they started joining online fandoms and communities around the year 2000. The friendships formed in these communities can go deeper than just the shared fandom interests, and grow stronger on a personal level.

Liew (2020) argues that digital technology has now become indispensable to being a fan and community formation, with social media platforms being able to shape fan communities. She builds on Bury's (2016) theory that not all social media platforms are suitable for fan community formation, but leads it in the direction of small and intimate social media platforms. Liew (2020) concludes that members of WhatsApp fan communities enjoy more personal and closer relationships with each other, because they already know each other offline. This contradicts a part of Bury's (2016) theory, as she says that online communities are best formed when it does not interfere with the real lives of the members too much.

Rotman and Preece (2010) also focus on the perspective of YouTube users, and the forming of online YouTube communities. They define an online community as "a group (or various subgroups) of people, brought together by a shared interest, using a virtual platform, to interact and create user-generated content that is accessible to all community members, while cultivating communal culture and adhering to specific norms" (Rotman & Preece, 2010), p. 320). They argue that online communities are created through user participation, as this strengthens the boundaries and the sense of belonging: the people are what makes a community. They look for friendship and belonging, and have a shared purpose or interest. YouTube is crucial in providing the opportunity to do this: "to them, it is a community that serves as a platform for communication and interaction rather than a broadcasting application." (Rotman & Preece, 2010, p. 330).

2.5 YouTube

Bury's (2016) theory is related to the Harry Potter fandom and community on YouTube, since YouTubers often identify themselves as being part of a community, and have formed a complex network full of content creation and social interaction (Burgess & Green,

2018). Bury's (2016) article has been used by other researchers for their own work on online communities and fandom (Lacelle & Simelio, 2017; Hunting, 2019; Linden & Linden, 2017; Barnes, 2018).

YouTube launched in 2005, and was then simply a video sharing website. The platform was very open from the beginning: anyone could upload whatever content they wanted. YouTube became successful very quickly, and was the number one video sharing website as early as 2007. According to Burgess and Green (2018), YouTube owes its success to four key features: video recommendations via the 'related videos' list; an email link to enable video sharing; comments; and an embeddable video player. Early on, it was more of a supporting website for other social media platforms instead of a social media platform on its own, but this has changed over the years. YouTube now provides a platform to become 'famous', with many success stories (Burgess & Green, 2018).

When it comes to YouTube, a distinction can be made between traditional and user-generated content. A slight majority of the content posted to YouTube is user-generated, produced by amateurs (Burgess & Green, 2018). This is usually content created outside of traditional media sources, such as television, cinema and the music industry. This is an interesting distinction, as the Harry Potter books and movies are types of traditional content, but Harry Potter YouTubers adapt their interest in this for user-generated content.

Much of this relates to the concept of audience engagement, which is an important part of participatory culture. Harry Potter Youtubers fit these terms of audience engagement, since they are both content creators and Harry Potter fans themselves. They are an audience that engages with the creation of YouTube videos, and have an audience that engages with them as well. YouTube is therefore a very suitable platform for audience engagement (Burgess & Green, 2018).

2.6 Harry Potter

In a book dedicated to Harry Potter, Gymnich and Scheunemann (2017) describe the so-called Harry Potter 'phenomenon': the extreme hype and anticipation for the new books, which started after the first three Harry Potter novels were published. According to them, the intensity of this phenomenon was highly unusual for novels, and it shows how impactful the Harry Potter books were. They state that the release of the first Harry Potter movies also very much contributed to this. As mentioned before, Harry Potter benefited from its timing,

and the Internet was quickly used to create a fandom: "since the 1990s, fans have increasingly used the Internet to construct an international virtual community, sharing their fascination with the wizarding world in forums or by means of fan fiction." (Gymnich & Scheunemann, 2017, p. 12). An important development was the creation of *Pottermore* in 2011, the official Harry Potter fan website. Gymnich and Scheunemann (2017) also argue that it is important to remember that not only the circumstances created the Harry Potter phenomenon, but also the Harry Potter stories themselves; people fell in love with the characters, the magical world, the stories and the adventures. They argue that the Harry Potter stories can be applied to many real-life social issues. One of the biggest examples is the racism that muggle-born witches and wizards have to endure from so called 'pure-blood' wizards, a storyline that is essential throughout the entire Harry Potter series.

Gymnich and Scheunemann (2017) also take a specific look at the Harry Potter fandom, and explicitly link fandom to participatory culture, based on Jenkins' (2006) theory. They maintain that fans actively participate in world-building activities, by creating fan-fiction or fan-art, and by openly discussing plot points and interpretations. As they say: "from today's perspective, the Potterverse can be thought of as a vast world-building transmedia narrative whose kernel can already be found in the characters and plot of *Harry* Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, and which has kept expanding and becoming more and more complex ever since the publication of the first *Harry Potter* novel" (Gymnich and Scheunemann, 2017, p. 29). They also add that the Harry Potter fandom provides a sense of safety and belonging for many fans, stating that the fandom feels like home to them. They conclude that the Harry Potter universe is always in motion and always developing, and that the intense fan participation plays a big role in this.

In a later article, Gynnich et al. (2017) confirm this yet again, as they describe how the Harry Potter universe is still expanding, even after all these years, and after the books and movies have ended. This can be seen by the releases of the play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child,* written by J.K. Rowling, John Tiffany and Jack Thorne, and the movie *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them*, the screenplay written by J.K. Rowling, both in 2016. *Cursed Child* is a sequel to the Harry Potter books, following the children of the main characters of Harry Potter. According to Gymnich et al. (2017), this play is heavily based on nostalgia for the original Harry Potter stories. *Fantastic Beasts* is a prequel in the Harry Potter universe, taking place about 70 years before Harry Potter starts. Even so, there are many references to

the original Harry Potter story to be found in this movie as well. But there is also the official fan website *Pottermore*, a platform that has changed a lot over the years. It used to be an interactive fan website when it was launched in 2011, but has since transformed into a platform where J.K. Rowling publishes official new information regarding the Harry Potter universe, which according to her is to be considered 'canon'. The website also provides background information on characters, creatures, places and objects from the Harry Potter universe (Gymnich et al, 2017).

2.7 J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter controversies and the role of the author

Texts are often connected to the identity and interpretation of the author, with Barthes (1968) saying that "the *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, thought the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us" (p. 42). Barthes (1968), however, argues against this practice, and says that the text and the author should be separated. The reader decides the meaning of the text, and decides how to interpret it. Imposing an author on a text limits the possibilities of interpretation, so the author should be irrelevant according to Barthes (1968). The 'death of the author' theory is relevant to the Harry Potter controversies that have taken place in the past five years, and the role J.K. Rowling has played in these.

2.7.1 Harry Potter and the Cursed Child

First of all, there was the play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child,* released in 2016. Hecke (2017) writes about Harry Potter and the practice of queerbaiting in regards to the Harry Potter series and the *Cursed Child* play: "Queerbaiting can be understood as referring to instances of queer performativity, while not keeping the promises made in this way, in order to create a cultural product (such as a novel, movie, TV series, etc.) which is compatible with the preferences of the (heteronormatively inclined) masses." (Hecke, 2017, p. 196). To summarize, queerbaiting is a performance of queerness in a piece of media, without that piece of media actually including queer characters. According to Hecke, this is not actual queer representation, and it is not enough for the public. This issue became relevant with the release of *Cursed Child*, a story that includes a close friendship between new characters Albus Potter and Scorpios Malfoy. Hecke (2017) states that the text includes

many hints and references to a potential relationship between the two boys, but the story never follows through with this. On the one hand Hecke (2017) admits that the complexity of their relationship is somewhat an improvement, but on the other hand she maintains that it is queerbaiting nonetheless. According to her, this led to disappointment from the public.

Then there is also the issue of racial representation, something that J.K. Rowling has received a lot of critique on through the years and that yet again became relevant with the release of *Cursed Child*. Seymour (2018) describes the practice of racebending Harry Potter characters, which entails fans drawing and editing Harry Potter characters to be racially diverse. This is a response to the lack of racial diversity in the Harry Potter universe. Racebending can be done in both fanart and fanfiction. According to Seymour (2018), Harry Potter fans have a very dynamic and active relationship with the text, and this relationship is always evolving: "Fandom is a vibrant rewarding space where the participatory culture is performed both in online and offline spaces" (p. 335). It also makes it possible for fans to experiment with socially relevant issues in online communities. Seymour (2018) says that being able to relate to the experiences of beloved characters is very important for fans. Racebending can provide that. In 2016, a black actress was cast to play Hermione Granger in *Cursed Child*, a choice that received mixed reactions. Some fans called the casting inconsistent with the books, and not according to canon, while other fans were happy with the representation. Seymour (2018) states that even though it is impossible to determine whether the racebending fanart directly led to this casting, it at least made the desire for more diverse racial representation known.

2.7.2 Fantastic Beasts and the Crimes of Grindelwald

J.K. Rowling got even more backlash with the release of *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* in 2018, a movie for which she wrote the screenplay. The movie spurred up multiple controversies, but one that was particularly badly received by the public was the relationship between Albus Dumbledore and Gellert Grindelwald. While the later Harry Potter books got darker and more adult, queerness and racial minorities were never represented. J.K. Rowling has been accused of queerbaiting in her description of the relationship between Albus Dumbledore and Gellert Grindelwald, and these accusations only got stronger once she revealed that Dumbledore is gay in 2007. Although Hecke (2017) says that an argument can be made that the Harry Potter series includes metaphors for real-life

social issues, for example in the way Muggles and werewolves are discriminated against by pure-blood wizards, but adds that again, this is not true representation for the public.

2.7.3 The 2020 transphobia scandal

Lastly, there is the infamous J.K. Rowling transphobia scandal in 2020. Duggan (2021) wrote a specific article about J.K. Rowling, the controversies she has been involved in, and the hostility between Rowling and her fans. The Harry Potter fandom is still very active, but is now also a political battlefield, with fans fighting against J.K. Rowling herself. Duggan (2021) also cites 'the death of the author' theory by Barthes (1968), saying that text comes into being between the writing and the interpretation of the readers. There is not one 'ultimate' meaning, but multiple interpretations are possible. According to Duggan (2021), the serialized nature of the Harry Potter book series makes it especially suitable for multiple interpretations, as there are many gaps within the text. Some of the messages of the books might even be considered contradictory. She argues that the most interesting gaps are between the explicit and implicit ideologies of the text; the explicated ideologies being fighting systems of oppression and emphasizing with minorities, and the implicit ideologies being the preference of heteronormative relationships and traditional family lifestyles. As Duggan summarizes: the explicit ideology is progressive, while the implicit ideology is conservative. This provides readers with the possibility to choose their preferred ideology. Interpretations can also be made based on very subtle hints to certain topics and the moments of silence within the text. J.K. Rowling has encouraged her readers to read into those subtle moments and to interpret them in their own way. This also relates to what is known as "queer reading", in the case of Harry Potter in regard to sexuality and gender, as Duggan cites numerous examples (2021). The Harry Potter fandom is not only very large, it is also extremely active and productive. Adding to that, the fandom is especially attractive to people who feel marginalized, and because of the many themes and interpretations they feel a connection with the books. Participation in the fandom emphasizes these themes. Duggan (2021) says that this history explains the close relationship readers have with the Harry Potter books, and the importance of their interpretations (2021). Reading is a form of self-building, a way for people to discover themselves. This expresses itself in the form of fanfiction, where fans can write the characters however they want, and invent new versions of them; versions to whom they feel even more connected. This includes gender shifting and

transformations. The writers and readers of fanfiction can become very attached to these versions and interpretations of the characters. Basically, the characters have started to live a life on their own. However, this has led to a sometimes more complicated relationship with author J.K. Rowling, as she also expressed some very clear interpretations of her characters, claiming that these are the 'right ones'. This way, Rowling tries to control the readers' interpretations of the characters, according to Duggan (2021): "Rowling's encouragement of fans is an encouragement that extends only to those interpretations she considers to affirm her own vision and to align with her politics, which are less progressive than many fans had initially assumed" (p. 14). Adding to that, J.K. Rowling keeps adding information to the Harry Potter universe, which Duggan (2021) describes as her "refusing to die" (p. 13). This new information however is becoming increasingly unwelcome with the fans. This became especially problematic when Rowling started expressing her views on trans rights, views which were perceived to be transphobic by many of her fans. J.K. Rowling shared her views in multiple tweets, and eventually in a lengthy blog post. Harry Potter fans were shocked and horrified to read them, especially because of the inclusive themes of the Harry Potter books. As a consequence, they felt extremely betrayed by J.K. Rowling (Duggan, 2021).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study aims to explore changes and developments in the Harry Potter fandom on YouTube, in reaction to J.K. Rowling's behavior in the past five years. The answer to the research question and sub-question were found by conducting a qualitative content analysis of YouTube videos of a number of Harry Potter YouTube channels.

3.1.1 Justification

There are multiple reasons that explain why qualitative constant analysis is the most suitable research method for this research. First of all, this is because of the constant new developments in the Harry Potter fandom, as evidenced by J.K. Rowling's controversial tweet only one year ago. Qualitative research is flexible, and therefore most suitable for an explorative approach regarding these constant changes. The research question, data collection and data analysis can be adjusted according to the findings (Boeije, 2010).

Secondly, this research focuses on the perspective of the people in the Harry Potter fandom, specifically on the perspective of Harry Potter YouTubers. Qualitative research allows these people to describe their experiences and the situation in their own words (Boeije, 2010). What they say in their videos is not limited to prewritten questions and concepts, and therefore qualitative research is necessary.

Thirdly, qualitative methods are most suitable to research and analyze change. This entire research is based upon the change within the Harry Potter fandom, and again, qualitative research methods offer the flexibility necessary to properly analyze this change.

And lastly, qualitative research makes it possible to interpret and explain the concepts that are being researched. And that is exactly what this research has done; explaining and analyzing the changes in the Harry Potter fandom.

3.1.2 Setting

The setting of this research is YouTube, and the data was collected through YouTube videos. YouTube was chosen as a setting, because the platform offers the most diverse and insightful data when it comes to analyzing a fandom. As explained in the theoretical framework, YouTube as a platform is designed to invite audience participation, and it is very

easy to use (Burgess & Green, 2018). It is also a suitable social media platform for forming online communities, based on the guidelines by Bury (2016). She states that on a suitable social media platform for communities and online fandoms, it should be possible for users to meet new people based on shared interests, provide the possibility to have in-depth conversations about those interests, and should not interfere too much with users' 'normal' life (Bury, 2016). For example, Facebook is often interwoven with a person's normal life, and Twitter makes in-depth conversations very hard due to the 280-character limit. Instagram is primarily visual, and the relatively short captions and comments on posts do not allow lengthy discussions. Therefore, these platforms are not as suitable for a study about the online Harry Potter community. YouTube however, does fit all of these requirements.

3.2 Sampling

This research collected data through purposive sampling, as the data was selected intentionally according to the needs of the study (Boeije, 2010).

For this research, five YouTube channels that are Harry Potter related were selected. These channels were selected based on Internet lists that contain the best 'Harry Potter YouTubers' (Brown, 2019; Unicorn, 2017). All of the YouTube channels are personal channels, meaning that they are created and maintained by one person. The names of the YouTube channels are the following: 1) Seamus Gorman, 2) Tessa Netting, 3) Cherry Wallis, 4) The Bakeey, and 5) Vegard.

Seamus Gorman, who gave his YouTube channel his own name, lives in the UK, is 23 years old, and posted his first YouTube video in August, 2015. His channel and his content are dedicated to multiple fandoms: Pixar, Disney, Star Wars and of course, Harry Potter (Wikitubia, n.d.). The Harry Potter videos Gorman has created include theories about the Harry Potter universe and future content, reviews about new content, and discussions about relevant Harry Potter developments. He posts a new video at least once a week, and currently has more than 390.000 subscribers (Seamus Gorman, n.b.).

Tessa Netting's channel was previously called "tessaROXX TV", but has since been changed to simply "Tessa Netting" (Bunk'd Wiki, n.d.). She is 25 years old, lives in the United States, and posted her very first Harry Potter video in 2012. This was a parody video, including a rewritten version of a song from the musical 'Book of Mormon', and the video quickly went viral. She has created Harry Potter content ever since, including Harry Potter

hauls, reviews, vlogs, reaction videos and more. Her YouTube channel is the biggest of the ones that are being analyzed, with more than 709.000 subscribers (Tessa Netting, n.b.)

Cherry Wallis is another UK based YouTuber, and she is 31 years old (Wikitubia, n.b.b). She started posting videos on YouTube in 2011, initially about lifestyle and makeup. At the beginning of 2016 however, she started creating Harry Potter related videos, and as of right now her entire channel is dedicated to Harry Potter. She mostly films hauls and unboxing videos, showing Harry Potter merchandise. Cherry Wallis currently has more than 661.000 subscribers (Cherry Wallis, n.b.).

TheBakeey is a channel run by Sophie, who is 24 years old (Famousbirthdays, n.b.). Sophie started her channel in 2015, and has been creating Harry Potter videos ever since. Again, these videos include hauls, reviews, discussions and reactions. She has a particular fondness for the Harry Potter character Severus Snape, and has filmed several videos dedicated to this. Sophie has more than 225.000 subscribers (TheBakeey, n.b.).

Lastly, there is the channel of Vegard, created in 2013. This channel was originally called "WiseHufflepuff", but Vegard changed it to his own name in 2017 (Vegard, 2017). Vegard is 21 years old, is Norwegian, but speaks English in his videos. He also makes the same type of Harry Potter related videos, but also includes personal lifestyle videos as of 2020. His channel is the smallest, with currently more than 181.000 subscribers (Vegard, n.b.).

3.3 Operationalization and measurements

In the coding, this research looked at the key concepts as mentioned in the theoretical framework: participatory culture and collective intelligence. Collective intelligence could be seen in the mentions of other media channels, either as a source of information or as a direction to further reading. All media sources are relevant to answer the main research question, but the mentions of other YouTube channels specifically are important to answer the sub-question regarding YouTube as a platform.

Another important aspect to take into account were the calls to action in every video that was analyzed; this included every instance where the YouTuber asked their audience to do something, whether it is something as simple as liking the video, or leaving a comment. This can also relate to the previously mentioned measurement, when a YouTuber asks their audience to watch another video or consume another piece of media. This practice

measured the participatory culture present in the Harry Potter YouTube fandom, as it demonstrates how viewers are not always merely passive, but also active participants in the way Jenkins (2006) describes. Participatory culture was also measured in the number of views a video has. This showed how engaged audiences were with a video.

Another way to measure collective intelligence was to make note of all instances where the 2020 J.K. Rowling controversy was mentioned. This is an event that did not originate on YouTube, but has been present on the platform nonetheless. Even though the 2020 transphobia controversy has been the biggest and most impactful out of all of them so far, other controversies surrounding J.K. Rowling or the Harry Potter community in general were points of attention. Again, these controversies usually travel across different platforms and therefore show the impact of media convergence, and to a certain degree also of collective intelligence. People often add their own information and experiences to the discussion, and take it further from there.

Williams' (2018) fan theory was measured in every mention of either loyalty, acceptance or rejection of the Harry Potter fandom, as this is the basis of her theory. Any mention of feelings towards the fandom, and in particular a change in those feelings, were relevant to make note of. This could include expressing desire to stay in the fandom, or to state that they will leave that fandom. It was also measured in mentions of the Harry Potter fandom being split, as this theory describes different ways of dealing with the same situation.

Booth's (2018) theory of fan euthanasia was measured in any mention of a desire for new Harry Potter content to end. This did not have to mean that the YouTuber wishes to leave the Harry Potter fandom, but only that they wish that no more official Harry Potter content would be produced. Mentions of negative feelings towards new Harry Potter content that already exists were also of relevance to this theory, particularly when it was stated that this content ruins the original books and movies. At the same time, a specifically stated desire for more content measured the absence of fan euthanasia.

In regards to Lamerich's (2018) theory, negative feelings towards Harry Potter content were also of importance. Even more specific, it was measured every time a YouTuber suggests an alternate development or ending for Harry Potter content. Again, this theory was also measured in statements of new Harry Potter content ruining old Harry Potter content. An important word to pay attention to for this measurement was 'canon', as

this shows whether the YouTuber accepts information as 'true' or not. As the need for closure is an important part of Lamerich's (2017) theory, anything that suggests that the feeling of closure for Harry Potter has been disrupted, or is not satisfying, was also taken note of.

Barthes' (1968) "the death of the author" theory could be seen in every mention of 'separating the art from the artist'. It could also be seen in rejections of J.K. Rowling as the author, and the wish of YouTubers to distance themselves from her. Mentions of admiration of J.K. Rowling, and specifically linking her to Harry Potter could be seen as the opposite. To summarize, any expressed opinion on J.K. Rowling was of importance to this theory. This again, was linked to the scandals and controversies, and attention was also paid to mentions of that.

3.4 Data collection and analysis

This research collects data in the form of YouTube videos. However, the focus lies not on the visuals, but on what is being said by the creators in the video.

From each of these YouTube channels, Harry Potter related videos were selected for qualitative content analysis. Six videos were chosen from each channel, so a total number of thirty videos were analyzed, a suitable amount for qualitative content analysis according to methodological guidelines. This research looked at three eras in time. Firstly, the era of 2016-2017. This era saw the release of both *Cursed Child* and *Fantastic Beasts*, and even though *Cursed Child* caused some discussion, *Fantastic Beasts* was generally well received by the public. Secondly, the era of 2018-2019, as this era represents the release of *Crimes of Grindelwald* and the subsequent controversies. It is interesting to see how this affected Harry Potter YouTubers, and how they dealt with the situation. And thirdly, the era of 2020 until present day. This era is known for the J.K. Rowling transphobia scandal, which was very impactful. YouTubers dealt with this development in different ways. For the data collection, each of the five YouTube channels provided two videos from each era. This made it possible to detect any changes in a systematic way.

In order to be able to answer the research questions, purposive sampling was necessary. When selecting videos for the data collection, this research went through all the public videos of each of the YouTube channels from 2016 onwards, based on a couple of criteria. Firstly, videos with 'J.K. Rowling' in the title were selected, whether this was in

relation to her controversies or whether this was related to a more positive video. All of these videos did express an opinion on J.K. Rowling in one way or another, so therefore they are suitable to answer the research question. Secondly, videos that were reviews of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* were selected. All of these pieces of new Harry Potter related content bring about some form of change in the Harry Potter universe, and are able to determine the reaction Harry Potter fans have to this. Adding to that, they are all related to Harry Potter controversies. Thirdly, videos that were specifically about the Harry Potter fandom or about a personal Harry Potter experience were selected. These videos provide insight in the workings of the Harry Potter fandom, and whether this has changed over time. Lastly, whenever a YouTube channel did not have enough videos that met any of these criteria, a random Harry Potter video from the appropriate time period was selected.

This research is based on qualitative content analysis, and therefore the data was analyzed through a process of coding. Coding is the process of segmenting and reassembling all the data, based on certain categories, and giving them a summarizing label (Boeije, 2010). In order to analyze the change in the Harry Potter fandom through the years, this process has been conducted three times, for each of the three time periods. The first step of the process was to read all the selected data, and formulate codes. When going through the data, it was important to apply constant comparison to make sure all the important categories, themes and concepts are covered (Boeije, 2010). Coding the data consisted of several steps. First of all, the data was divided into fragments based on category, and anything relating to the theoretical framework was written down. After this, the fragments were assigned a suitable code. This step is known as open coding (Boeije, 2010). In the case of this research, focus on the key concepts with the help of the previously described measurements was important, and in fact, the key concepts provided a deductive framework to start with in the coding. At the same time, it was also important to look inductively to find new codes within those main key concepts, which eventually led to new conclusions in the research. Eventually, as a result of the open coding, an initial coding scheme was produced.

After the open coding a process of interpretive coding followed. This means that this research looked at the data and the initial coding scheme, and interpreted the meaning behind the text. Some of the codes slightly changed to reflect certain situations within the

context of the video (Boeije, 2010). Non-verbal communication and tone were taken into account. YouTube videos can often be lighthearted, and determining the difference between seriousness and joking was essential in this step.

The next step in this research was the process of Axial coding, where data was put back together in new ways and connections were made between categories. In this stage, the codes were revisited and analyzed, to determine whether they properly covered all the fragments. Some of the codes proved to be more important and present than other codes, and it was important that this is reflected in the coding scheme. A process of selective coding was necessary for this research, which determined which codes were actually relevant to the research question. After this process, a final coding tree was produced (Boeije, 2010), as seen in Appendix A. As mentioned before, this entire process was repeated three times, and the three final coding trees were used to answer the research question and the sub-question.

3.5 Validity and reliability

It is also necessary to explain why this research is valid and reliable. Firstly, in order for a research to be valid, enough data should be collected to support the claims of the study (Tracy, 2010). Of course, the definition of 'enough' is relative, but this research is bound to the methodological guidelines that have been provided. These guidelines state that this research needs 30-40 YouTube videos of approximately 3-5 minutes to be valid. As the research collected data from 30 videos of approximately 10 minutes, this criterion is most certainly met. Secondly, the data has to be appropriate to answer the research questions of the study (Tracy, 2010). As described before, the videos were purposively collected with the research questions and the relevant topics in mind, from YouTube channels that are all dedicated to Harry Potter. The videos were also selected with three relevant eras of time in mind, as analyzing a change of time is the base of this research. Thirdly, that data was collected and coded by using procedures appropriate for qualitative content analysis (Tracy, 2010).

Adding to that, this research is reliable because of its credibility and sincerity (Tracy, 2010). It is sincere because it is transparent, as every step of the research has been described and explained. The credibility of a research is determined by its trustworthiness

and plausibility (Tracy, 2010). Concepts and theories have been described in detail, and provide an insight in research relating to this study.

4. Results

This chapter describes and analyzes the results of the research, based on the codes that have been found through the coding process. It explains how the codes relate to the theoretical framework, and the previously conducted research.

4.1 The coding process

The coding process was conducted in accordance to the previously described methodology. Firstly, three initial coding schemes were produced based on a process of open coding. Across the three initial coding schemes, this first process provided roughly 180 open codes, many of them resurfacing in more than one coding scheme, an many of them overlapping (Appendix A).

Because the collected data consists of YouTube videos, paying attention to the tone of the video was important. It became apparent very quickly that all the YouTubers from the sample regularly made jokes and were lighthearted in videos from the 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 era, even when expressing negative feedback. But once a video is about the seriousness of the 2020 J.K. Rowling scandal, the tone changed to reflect that. The tone of a video was determined through the editing style, the visuals, the emotions the YouTuber displays, and the background music. This was relevant to the process of interpretative coding. Because the videos were watched many times already before the process of coding started, much of the interpretation had been taken into account during the open coding. Therefore, the process of interpretative coding did not affect the coding schemes much.

However, it was immediately clear that there was a lot of overlap in these codes. For example, there were many codes related to J.K. Rowling, but a closer look determined that they expressed either a positive opinion, or a negative opinion, which meant that these codes could be analyzed together. Also, some codes needed a better name to summarize them. This process of axial coding led to a more coherent and improved coding scheme.

Lastly, a process of selective coding was conducted. Overall, there were very few codes that were not necessary to answer the research question. This is because most of the codes are relating to each other, and leaving out something would not give sufficient insight in the results. However, one code that was deleted was 'Harry Potter merchandise'. This is something that came up in many videos, but did not lead to any conclusion of interest, and did not provide any information for answering the research question. The axial codes were

then rewritten into 11 separate selective codes, with seven codes appearing in all three coding schemes, two codes appearing in the coding schemes of 2018-2019 and 2020-2021, and two codes only appearing in the coding scheme of 2020-2021 (Appendix A). These selective codes are discussed in the following sections.

4.2 New Harry Potter content

As there have been multiple instances when new Harry Potter related content was released from 2016 to present day, it is not surprising that new Harry Potter content was an important and recurring code in the collected data.

In the era of 2016 – 2017, the feedback to new Harry Potter content from Harry Potter YouTubers is mostly positive and constructive. This era saw the premiere of the play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, the book release of the script of this play, and the release of the movie *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. The data shows overall excitement for this new content, and the YouTubers expressed positive feelings. There were regular instances of negative feedback, but this is given in a mostly constructive way. *Cursed Child* had some mixed reactions, with YouTubers stating that the plotlines did not always make sense. Vegard (2016) however, adds that he thinks the play provides an interesting concept, some good character moments and beautiful quotes. The most negative feedback can be found in a video from Seamus Gorman, where he expresses his negative feelings towards the *Cursed Child* screenplay (2017). Seamus is of the opinion that *Cursed Child* does not fit in with the Harry Potter universe, stating that he would "rather consider this to be some sort of like Harry Potter fanfiction" and that he does not "personally believe it is canon" (2017). His biggest point of critique is that *Cursed Child* ruins the original Harry Potter stories:

> "(...) meaning that for this book to be considered canon, every event after this event is slightly different, and on an alternate timeline to the events in the books and movies. Which is why I believe this book ruins the series, because if you believe this book to be canon, all the events that occur after the Prisoner of Azkaban aren't quite canon so you might as well throw away your copies of the Goblet of Fire, Order of the Phoenix, Half Blood Prince and Deathly Hallows, because if the Cursed Child is canon, they are not" (Seamus Gorman, 2017).

This is in line with Lamerichs' (2018) theory on how fans need closure. With the release of *Cursed Child,* the narrative closure of the original Harry Potter series was evidently disrupted for Seamus Gorman. However, his negative feedback is on the published script of the play, and not the actual play itself, as Seamus acknowledges in the beginning of his video. When it comes to *Fantastic Beasts,* positive feedback included praise for the music, the new characters and the visuals, while the negative feedback included dislike for the special effects and CGI. The data also shows that people have different reactions to the same development in Harry Potter content. While Vegard (2016) says that he disliked the plot of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them,* which was rather confusing, Sophie (The Bakeey, 2016) expresses excitement over this, saying that it was a good kind of confusing, and that she loves to research plotlines and predict future events. Something that is worth noting, is the Cherry Wallis (2016) did not film a review about the *Fantastic Beasts* movie, but instead posted a haul video where she showed the *Fantastic Beasts* related merchandise that she had bought. She is very positive about the merchandise, and also shows a positive attitude towards the movie, but does not go in further detail in her opinions (Cherry Wallis, 2016).

In the era of 2018-2019, a shift in attitude towards new Harry Potter content is noticeable. In 2018 the movie *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* was released, and the YouTubers are not as positive about this movie as they were about the first *Fantastic Beasts.* The movie is called unnecessary, confusing, dragged out and not nearly as good as the first movie. There were especially a lot of mentions of things not making sense within the Harry Potter universe, and therefore ruining the original books and movies. These are again something that support the need for narrative closure (Lamerichs, 2018), as the new content appears to have a disruptive effect. However, not all feedback was negative. Tessa Netting (2018) claimed to very much love the movie, and to enjoy the confusing plotlines and mysteries. She even said that she cannot wait for the next movie to be released. However, even Tessa had some points of critique, especially in regards to a much talked about cameo of professor McGonagall from the original series, who, according to the original books, was not supposed to be born yet at the time of *Crimes of Grindelwald.* Tessa calls this unnecessary fanservice, and states that "unless it is important to future movies, breaking canon like this is not worth it in my opinion" (Tessa Netting, 2018). Seamus Gorman (2018) also expressed displeasure with this cameo, and is overall very negative about the movie. He states that the film was poorly structured, and that the storyline was

very stretched out. Vegard (2018a) acknowledges the mixed reviews *The Crimes of Grindelwald* had gotten, and reads some of these reviews in his video. He says that he himself is somewhere in between. He did not hate the movie and enjoyed certain aspects, like the visuals and the plot points that related to Harry Potter, but he adds that he also did not completely love the movie. He states that he agrees with the negative feedback on J.K. Rowling's writing for this movie (Vegard, 2018a). Overall, however, there still appears to be excitement for new instalments of Harry Potter content, and the YouTubers express looking forward to more Harry Potter content in the future. Cherry Wallis said in 2019 that she is still "living in her magical bubble", and that she does not consider the Harry Potter universe to be done or over. She also mentioned that she would watch 12-hour Harry Potter movies if it meant that they could include all the details from the Harry Potter books (Cherry Wallis, 2019). Sophie (TheBakeey, 2018) expresses excitement for new Harry Potter content in general, and *Crimes of Grindelwald* in particular. Even Seamus said in a later video: "I still have a hope in the back of my mind, that she can salvage something out of Fantastic Beasts, because the Dumbledore Grindelwald stories got to be good right, like surely, it's got to be good?" (Seamus Gorman, 2019). There was no call for new Harry Potter content to stop yet, and therefore, Booth's (2018) concept of fan euthanasia cannot be found at this point in time.

In the era of 2020-2021, no new Harry Potter content was produced, so there are no mentions of views on new Harry Potter content in the selected videos. However, Sophie did say in a Q&A video: "and you know, more content, I don't care if it's bad at this point, I know a lot of people will disagree with me on that. But I'm all for just content and if I don't like it, I'll just wipe it from our memory" (TheBakeey, 2021). This means that she at least would still like to see more Harry Potter content in the future, and does not even care about the quality. Apart from this mention however, excitement for new Harry Potter content was absent. An absence of excitement is not an explicit instance of fan euthanasia in the way Booth (2018) describes, but the fact that it was now absent whereas in previous eras it was not, does seem to indicate that there is a no general desire for more Harry Potter content.

4.3 The Harry Potter fandom and community

In the era of 2016-2017, there is much love for the Harry Potter fandom, and the Harry Potter community. Positive experiences with the fandom included feeling a sense of

belonging, a sense of understanding and a positive impact on personal lives. Tessa Netting (2017) dedicated an entire video to her relationship with Harry Potter, and how much she loves the universe, the fandom and the community. Before discovering the Harry Potter fandom, she often felt misunderstood. But after she started posting videos, she found an entire community dedicated to the books that she loved so much:

> "they had as much passion and emotion about Harry Potter as me, and for the first time in my life, I didn't feel weird or misunderstood about Harry Potter. I felt accepted and loved because of the Internet" (Tessa Netting, 2017).

Tessa found friends, work opportunities and even her fiancée through the Harry Potter fandom, and it is clear that it heavily impacted her personal life (2017). In addition to this, there were also Harry Potter related events, as Cherry Wallis mentions (2016). Cherry talks about how she was invited to the Harry Potter Studio Tour in 2016, and how much she enjoys spending time with likeminded people. Love and acceptance are words that were repeatedly used to describe the feeling the Harry Potter fandom provides. However, there are also some downsides of the Harry Potter fandom that are mentioned in this time period. Sophie (TheBakeey, 2017) expressed her frustrations about the shaming that occurs in the Harry Potter fandom; fans who put down other fans because they do not own enough Harry Potter merchandise, or have not consumed Harry Potter in the 'right' way. Sophie (TheBakeey, 2017) stated that being a Harry Potter fan is in your heart, and that nobody should be shamed for that.

In the era of 2018-2019, the fandom seemed to stay the same. The YouTubers again expressed their love for the fandom and what it has brought them, but there were again some points of critique when it comes to shaming other fans in the community, which they did not condone. As Tessa Nettings says:

> "I accept all fans. We all fell in love with the story in some way, so we should welcome everyone in this community. This community is so special and so incredible and has brought me such amazing experiences and friendships that I will cherish for the rest of my life" (Tessa Netting, 2018).

However, it also becomes clear that certain controversies were starting to have an effect on the fandom as well, which becomes especially evident from a video from Vegard (2018b), in which he talked about the possibility of the Harry Potter fandom dying. He concludes that although certain developments have had their effects, he is of the opinion that the Harry Potter fandom itself will never die, as there will always be people who love Harry Potter:

> "I personally think the Harry Potter fandom, like, is maybe in a decline at the moment but I don't think it will die… ever, or at least not in the coming years, I think it will live on for many, many, many more years. maybe not in the same way, but at least in some form of way" (Vegard, 2018b).

In the era of 2020-2021, the fandom changed in sentiment. Seamus Gorman published a dedicated video to the development shortly after J.K. Rowling's transphobia scandal, in which he expresses his thoughts on the Harry Potter fandom. Something he does not condone is the attitude of some of the fans in regards to their opinions, stating that this mentality destroys the fandom:

> "Once there's this massive group of them believing that the opposite opinion isn't valid, it can start to create a mob mentality, making the fandoms unwelcoming to new people joining" (Seamus Gorman, 2020b).

He calls this an elitist mentality, and admits that he has been guilty of having this mentality in the past. This is evident in a video he posted earlier in 2020, when he says that the Harry Potter books are "children's books" and "you don't have an excuse" not to read them, "unless you literally can't read" (Seamus Gorman, 2020a). This demonstrates the way Harry Potter fans can be very accusatory, and can shame other fans, even though Seamus is now aware of it and says he would never do it again (Seamus Gorman, 2020b). Adding to that, he wants to emphasize that this elitist mentality concerns a massively vocal minority, and that the Harry Potter community is better than others when it comes to having those kinds of mentalities (Seamus Gorman, 2020b). Seamus does not think that the Harry Potter fandom will completely disappear, but he does think that it has permanently changed:

"Obviously, I don't think it's just going to completely disappear off the face of the earth. There's always going to be Harry Potter fans here and there. Whether the fandom and this big community is still going to be out there doing what fandoms do, I don't know, we'll see" (Seamus Gorman, 2020b).

Still, not everybody is negative about the state of the Harry Potter fandom. Sophie says she actually loved the discussions: "I think it's because everyone has different opinions, and there's still, like stuff, which we still haven't really came to a conclusion on (…) I think that's what keeps me so involved" (TheBakeey, 2021).

4.4 J.K. Rowling

J.K. Rowling, as the author of the Harry Potter series and the screenplays of the *Fantastic Beasts* movies, has a long history of interaction with her fans, and has a massive online presence.

In the 2016-2017 era, there is nothing but praise for J.K. Rowling. Not all YouTubers talk about her extensively, but the ones who do are full of admiration. Cherry Wallis describes J.K. Rowling retweeting her picture as one of the best things that happened to her in 2016:

"I took a picture which you probably recognize and I tweeted it to Lumos, might have cheeky tagged JK Rowling, not thinking she'll ever see it because I've tweeted JK Rowling, many times. Anyway, she saw it, and she retweeted it, which I… I nearly had a heart attack on the floor" (Cherry Wallis, 2017).

Tessa Netting (2017), in her video dedicated to her relationship with Harry Potter, profusely thanks J.K. Rowling for writing the Harry Potter series, and for bringing this story into her life. It becomes clear that at this point in time, J.K. Rowling is admired as an author. When Seamus Gorman (2017) critiques *Cursed Child,* he repeatedly distances J.K. Rowling from the play, stating that "you can tell it isn't really written by JK Rowling". There are no mentions of the black Hermione casting, and there is no critique on J.K. Rowling.

In the era of 2018-2019, the opinions of J.K. Rowling have changed for some of the YouTubers. In the negative feedback on *Crimes of Grindelwald*, the bad quality of J.K.

Rowling's script is mentioned multiple times. To the people who are still loyal to J.K. Rowling, Seamus Gorman says: "stop defending her! I'm not saying reprimand her, and send her abuse but if you just let her off with something like this, she's not gonna learn from her mistake and make an even bigger one with one of the future films" (Seamus Gorman, 2018). Seamus Gorman (2018) accuses J.K. Rowling for stretching out new content for the money, and not because she actually wants to tell a good story. However, he is asking J.K. Rowling to do better in the future, and he is not asking her to stop creating new Harry Potter content altogether at this point. In a later video, Seamus Gorman specifically talks about why he thinks J.K. Rowling is in decline (2019). This video is a response to all the controversies surrounding the *Crimes of Grindelwald* movie, and he accuses J.K. Rowling of queerbaiting her audience by not showing more of the Dumbledore and Grindelwald relationship: "And it's honestly a real shame because Fantastic Beasts provided itself as the perfect opportunity for J.K. Rowling to show it wasn't an afterthought, and that Dumbledore actually was gay, but she's clearly just gone to the complete extreme and into overkill to prove that it wasn't this after all" (Seamus Gorman, 2019). He even adds examples of the popular 'J.K. Rowling reveals new information' meme, to "dilute" the seriousness of the "real-life issues" he is discussing. This meme makes fun of J.K. Rowling's tendency to keep sharing bits of information about the Harry Potter universe, by writing short Tweets or other social media posts in which the information Rowling shares is ridiculous, unnecessary, extremely over the top, and unasked for. An example of this meme that is shared in the video is: "no one: JK Rowling in 2013: Voldemort was a depressed gay man of color" (Seamus Gorman, 2019). Again, Seamus Gorman does not necessarily blame J.K. Rowling for wanting to continue the Harry Potter universe, but he does blame her for how she is doing it, as "she's doing it in a way that's tarnishing the reputation of her original stories" (Seamus Gorman, 2019). Then on the other end of the spectrum is Cherry Wallis, who was given the opportunity to meet J.K. Rowling in person:

> "Monday, the 24th of September 2018, I met the woman that has changed my life, my hero, the woman that has injected magic into my heart into millions of people's hearts. The woman that created the wizarding world. Our wizarding world. JK Rowling" (Cherry Wallis, 2018).

She describes it as the best day of her life, and praises J.K. Rowling for her writing and charity work. Cherry Wallis (2019) makes one small comment on J.K. Rowling in a later video. She says she thought the revelation that wizards and witches in the 18th century did not have toilets, but would relieve themselves where they stood and then magically vanished the evidence was ridiculous. Even though she usually considers information that J.K. Rowling releases to be canon, this piece of information she could not accept as being true. However, she does deliver this statement with a humorous tone whilst making jokes, and does not seem to be truly angry or disappointed (Cherry Wallis, 2019). Tessa Netting is also still positive about J.K. Rowling, saying in regards to the *Crimes of Grindelwald* that she is sure everything will make sense in the end, because she trusts J.K. Rowling completely and has faith in her (Tessa Netting, 2018).

Then J.K. Rowling made her fall from grace in the era of 2020-2021. She posted the much-discussed transphobic tweets, and this led to reaction videos from many of the YouTubers. They call her transphobic, harmful, dangerous and problematic. The praise and the admiration are gone. As Seamus says: "She's not only rationalizing transphobia to her already transphobic followers, but she's also causing followers with complete blind loyalty to her to, also maybe unknown to themselves, be actively transphobic" (Seamus Gorman, 2020b). However, Vegard talks about the fact that there is still support for J.K. Rowling out there, even though he does not agree with this: "I think a lot of people brush away JK Rowling's comments by saying that is just her opinion, but those words can really hurt someone, and has hurt a lot of people, and it's not okay, it's not okay" (Vegard, 2020a). He admits that J.K. Rowling is still, and always will be the author of Harry Potter, and that this makes the relationship with her often troubled. Many people love Harry Potter, and cannot accept what has happened:

> "People see hate towards the creator of a series that that is near and dear to their heart, and then they go into attack mode because they feel, like for a lot of people Harry Potter, like a lot of people find comfort in Harry Potter, and they see J.K. Rowling being attacked or critiqued and they immediately get defensive and are inclined to support JK Rowling, just because of the fact that she's the creator of something that they're emotionally attached to" (Vegard, 2020b).

Tessa Netting, who was previously full of admiration for J.K. Rowling, states her distress and sadness in regards to the situation:

"For years she was a huge hero of mine, like I bawled my eyes out when I met her, those were genuine tears, it was a genuine reaction when I met her in 2018. I was meeting the person who wrote these stories that changed my entire life, and introduced me to all the people in my life that I love" (Tessa Netting, 2021).

She acknowledges that J.K. Rowling is the author of Harry Potter, and that she will always be grateful for that, but that she cannot fully support her anymore. Tessa even goes as far as removing her Harry Potter tattoos:

"I do not agree with any of those things that she's said, you know, I've made a video about this, I've talked about this, like, I think that what she is saying is actively hurting the trans community. I've talked about this, but it still hurts. So, I can't have her signature tattooed on me, I just can't. It's like, it's painful kind of to look at because I feel like I still feel weirdly betrayed by her and away. I don't know, it's, I probably shouldn't have idolized her ever in the first place" (Tessa Netting, 2021).

Something that is worth noting is that neither Cherry Wallis or Sophie (TheBakeey) have posted anything relating to the J.K. Rowling incident, and have never expressed their opinions on this on YouTube. Instead, they posted regular Harry Potter content. This shows that they do not reject the Harry Potter fandom and continue to be a part of it, but at the same time an absence of critique on J.K. Rowling does not mean that they support her views. These YouTubers also have not said anything in defense of J.K. Rowling, but choose to completely ignore the scandal. Sophie (TheBakeey, 2020) did post a video in June of 2020 that was called "Reacting to Harry Potter Unpopular Opinions", but this video does not address the J.K. Rowling scandal, or any other Harry Potter related controversies. Instead, it is a fun spirited and lighthearted video in which Sophie reacts to the unpopular opinions about the plot of Harry Potter of her viewers with humor and jokes, and it does not reflect any true negative feelings whatsoever. Something that is very remarkable is that in July, Cherry Wallis (2020b) announced that she is opening an online store where she will sell her

own Harry Potter themed clothing collection. In her case, it can therefore be argued that she did not want to distance herself from J.K. Rowling or the Harry Potter fandom because it would hurt her own upcoming business (Cherry Wallis, 2020b). Whether they agree with J.K. Rowling's views or not, it can be concluded from this that for Cherry Wallis and Sophie (TheBakeey) the relationship they have with the fandom is too important to step out of it.

4.5 Change and controversies

In the era of 2016-2017, there are no indications of any change in the Harry Potter fandom. In the era of 2018-2019 however, changes do take place, as a result of the controversies, and some of the YouTubers address this in their videos. Vegard (2018b) says that he feels that there has been a definite shift in the Harry Potter fandom, and in the way people are interacting with the Harry Potter universe. He states that there are two reactions: "so, the people who felt like these controversies are very important, and who kind of decide that this isn't something we should support, they were over here, and they were fighting with people who were like, oh I don't care that much about the controversies, I just liked the movie, whatever, I don't care" (Vegard, 2018b). With this, he says that fans either reject the changes and developments, or they accept it and stay in the fandom. As became evident in the previous section, J.K. Rowling's actions and words played a major role in this. These two reactions resemble part of Williams' (2018) theory of possible reactions in a fandom, except that Vegard combines 'acceptance' and 'loyalty' in one reaction. Vegard (2018b) expresses sadness about the splitting fandom, and thinks that even though disagreements are normal, it has now intensified to a degree that it affects the community too much, stating that "the only thing that I think may happen is that it's just going to change, the way that fans are interacting, and maybe it will continue to get divided as the series moves on" (Vegard, 2018b).

In the era of 2020-2021, the change in fandom became even more noticeable, arguable because the J.K. Rowling transphobia tweet scandal has been the biggest Harry Potter related controversy so far. Seamus Gorman (2020b) identifies three different ways of reacting to these developments, and this time it is exactly according to Williams' (2018) theory. Firstly, there are the people who accept the controversy, stay in the Harry Potter fandom, but distance themselves from J.K. Rowling, described by Seamus Gorman (2020b) as "those who are happy to support Harry Potter, just separating art from artists, or I guess

book from author". This statement is also in accordance with Barthes' (1968) 'death of the author' theory, as it describes people distancing the author from the books. Seamus Gorman (2020b) says that understands that reaction, and that he thinks most fans are reacting that way: "I don't really ever think about J.K. Rowling when I'm consuming Harry Potter like, do people do that? And I think that's what this fandom will continue to live on" (Seamus Gorman, 2020b). Secondly, there are the people who completely reject the Harry Potter fandom, people who "just feel completely done with Harry Potter and don't even want to think about it anymore (Seamus Gorman, 2020b). Seamus Gorman (2020b) says that this is his personal reaction to the controversy, and that he does want to be part of the Harry Potter fandom anymore. Then lastly, there are the people who stay loyal to both the Harry Potter fandom and J.K. Rowling: "and then of course you've got the final camp, those who are in full support of JK Rowling" (Seamus Gorman, 2020b). In Williams' (2018) words, these reactions can be summarized as acceptance, rejection and loyalty. Vegard (2020a) also talks about the Harry Potter fandom yet again, and how people react to the changes, stating that he supports people who want to leave the fandom, and that he understands the feeling of betrayal. However, something that is mentioned in multiple videos, is that there are still possibilities to be a Harry Potter fan without supporting J.K. Rowling. Both Seamus Gorman and Vegard recommend supporting Harry Potter content creators on the Internet, reading their fan-fiction, and buying unofficial merchandise (Seamus Gorman, 2020b; Vegard, 2020a). This means that even though they have their own personal reactions to the changing fandom, they do not think that the fandom should completely disappear.

4.6 YouTube

In the era of 2016-2017, the only YouTuber who talks in-depth about her relationship with the platform of YouTube, is Tessa Netting (2017). She describes her history with Harry Potter, and how she decided to upload her first video, which was a Harry Potter parody song. The experience of creating something and sharing it with the world was something that she instantly enjoyed: "I made one of my ideas come to life. I made magic happen. I crave that feeling every day, the feeling and pride of creation" (Tessa Netting, 2017). She states that this video instantly had a massive impact on her life by going viral: "I couldn't believe it, not just the fact that so many people were watching this video, but that there were so many Harry Potter fans out there that loved this series as much as I did" (Tessa

Netting, 2017). YouTube as a platform made it possible for Tessa to share her love and to join a community. This example shows how much of an impact YouTube videos can have, and how fast they can be shared all over the world. It is no surprise that at the beginning of the video, Tessa says: "I read post after post of people sharing their love for Harry Potter and wanting to do the same, but a simple Instagram or Facebook post wasn't big enough, wasn't meaningful enough, so, I decided to make this video" (Tessa Netting, 2017). This shows that YouTube possesses all the requirements for online community forming as stated by Bury (2016). It allows users to meet new people based on shared interests, as has happened for Tessa Netting, is provides the possibility to have in-depth conversations about that interest, as Tessa Netting clearly does in this video, and it does not interfere with real-life too much, as Tessa Netting did not know many Harry Potter fans in hear real life before starting her YouTube channel.

In the era of 2018-2019, YouTube still seems to contribute to forming communities, and still provides the possibility to meet friends. As described before, Cherry Wallis met J.K. Rowling at an event in 2018, and was there together with many of her fellow Harry Potter YouTuber, whom she considers close friends. They even got a Harry Potter tattoo together, to commemorate the event, stating that "this had to happen, this tattoo had to happen on this day, Monday, the 24th of September 2018" (Cherry Wallis, 2018). Cherry Wallis' video about meeting J.K. Rowling also featured Tessa Netting, picturing Tessa meeting Rowling as well. However, Tessa Netting's video of this meeting is not featured on her YouTube channel anymore. Some Internet research showed that the video of Tessa Netting is still available to watch, but is now 'hidden' on YouTube, meaning that you can only watch it if you have the specific link (Tessa Netting, 2019b).

In the era of 2020-2021, some developments happened. Most importantly, two of the YouTubers decide to quit making Harry Potter videos as a direct consequence of the many controversies, and of the J.K. Rowling transphobia controversy in particular. The first is Seamus Gorman, who says that he does not wish to make Harry Potter videos anymore: "Because I don't know if you've noticed I haven't made a Harry Potter video in four months, because it just hasn't been something I really want to talk about" (Seamus Gorman, 2020b). He does not want to belong to the Harry Potter YouTube community anymore. The second one is Vegard, who explains that he cannot forgive J.K. Rowling for what she has done, and that it has tainted the Harry Potter experience for him: "a lot of people are able to separate

it, but I personally am not able to do that" (Vegard, 2020b). The other three YouTubers however still produce regular Harry Potter content, and have not shown any indication that they are going to leave the community. As Sophie says: "obviously, YouTube has kept me very much involved, because you guys behind there, with your comments and whatnot, and you're in love with it as much as I'm in love with it" (TheBakeey, 2021). The Harry Potter YouTube community therefore still exists, and still operates according to Bury's (2016) theory, but nevertheless has changed over time.

4.7 Authority over the Harry Potter universe

Ideas on who has authority over the Harry Potter universe, and who can decide what is canon, appear a couple of times in the data. In 2017, Seamus Gorman still very much gives J.K. Rowling authority over what is canon in the Harry Potter universe, as can be seen in his statement:

"Also, in this play Cedric Diggory becomes a Death Eater, like I'm refusing to accept J.K. Rowling wrote that, and he's one of the last wizards I could ever imagine becoming a Death Eater. Unless you can get video proof from J.K. Rowling saying Cedric Diggory is a Death Eater and that he killed Neville Longbottom, I'm just going to refuse to believe The Cursed Child's canon. Until then, it is wrong" (Seamus Gorman, 2017).

Tessa Netting (2018) tries to readjust her perspective of canon in regards to *Crimes of Grindelwald,* stating that "The only way that this can make sense in my brain is if one is going by movie canon not book canon" (Tessa Netting, 2018). Seamus Gorman (2018) also states that the events from *Crimes of Grindelwald* cannot be canon, and at this point he seems to have lost respect to J.K. Rowling's authority over the story in comparison to 2017. In his video from 2019 he actually starts making fun of J.K. Rowling and the information she keeps adding to the Harry Potter universe, indicating that he no longer takes her authority seriously.

However, even among fans there can be disagreement on what is canon. The Harry Potter stories inspire multiple interpretations, but this can also cause fights in the fandom.

Seamus Gorman states in 2020 that he does not agree with fans who think that their interpretation is better than others':

"You know, you see the problems with fandom start to come in when you get some particularly extreme fans, who I don't doubt have enjoyed and consumed the content as much if not more than most, but they start to think that their interpretations and opinions of the media are superior to anyone else's, which is just flat out wrong" (Seamus Gorman, 2020).

4.8 Audience Engagement and other media channels

Audience engagement is present in all three eras. The YouTubers always ask their viewers to like the video, leave a comment or to subscribe to their channel. This shows the presence of participatory culture on YouTube. The only exceptions are the very serious videos of Vegard (2020a) and Tessa Netting (2020), in which they address the situation of J.K. Rowling's transphobia tweet scandal. When the topic gets very serious, self-promotion and encouragement of audience engagement tends to move to the background for some YouTubers. Another instance of participatory culture can be seen in a video of Sophie (TheBakeey, 2020), a video she made in cooperation with her viewers. She asked them to send her unpopular Harry Potter opinions, and she reacts to them in the video. This reflects the relationship she has with her viewers, and how they are sometimes necessary for her to be able to make new videos. It also shows how much participatory culture is integrated in the YouTube platform.

Audience engagement also appears in the number of views and number of comments a video has. Looking at these numbers, it quickly becomes apparent that in every era, the video with the most views is a negative one. In 2016-2017, the most viewed video is Seamus Gorman's (2016) review about *Cursed Child*, which is mostly negative. In 2018-2019 the most viewed video is again one of Seamus Gorman (2019), and it is his video about the decline of J.K. Rowling as an author. This is actually the most viewed video out of all of them, with more than 1.1 million views (Seamus Gorman, 2019). In 2020-2021, the most viewed video is the one where Tessa Netting (2021) announces that she is removing her Harry Potter tattoos in response to the J.K. Rowling transphobia scandal. Even though the negative videos are the most popular, other videos from the same era still have a solid number of views, with Cherry

Wallis' (2020) unboxing video posted during the transphobia scandal being viewed more than 198.000 times. Seamus Gorman's channel is also the channel with the most comments on each video in all eras, regardless of whether the video was positive or negative. This shows that the number of comments also relate to the YouTuber themselves, and not only to the specific topic of the video. Seamus Gorman's videos are mostly based on discussions, and therefore attract the most responses in comments.

Other media channels are referenced throughout all the eras in time. This includes other social media accounts of the YouTubers, other videos on their own YouTube channel, other Harry Potter YouTubers and videos, news articles, blogposts and websites. Tessa Netting (2019) mentions texting her close friend and fellow Harry Potter YouTuber Brizzy Voices about Harry Potter related stuff, and how they get excited over the same Harry Potter topics. One very interesting example is the article Daniel Radcliffe (2020) posted on The Trevor Project, an article that is cited by multiple YouTubers as a source. All these examples demonstrate the presence of collective intelligence.

4.9 Social issues and self-reflection

Socially relevant issues, and transgender rights in particular, became a prominent theme in the era of 2020-2021, in a direct response to J.K. Rowling's actions. Some YouTubers want to emphasize that they do not share those views: "I cannot continue to publicly praise and support her and although I deeply love Harry Potter, I in no way support her views or condone her actions on this topic" (Tessa Netting, 2020). Vegard also expresses that: "like I hope that, I said something I said on Twitter as well, I hope that with this channel I'm kind of creating a safe space for queer people within the Harry Potter community" (Vegard, 2020a). The desire to provide a safe and welcoming environment seems to become important from 2020 onwards. Tessa Netting says that you do not have to discard Harry Potter, as "Harry Potter brought joy into your life, and that joy belongs to you, what you gained from reading those stories is still valid and real, you are allowed to hold on to the goodness of that, you are allowed to still love and enjoy Harry Potter if you want to" (Tessa Netting, 2020). She explains her plans to support the transgender rights movement in the same video:

"I will donate a portion of any Harry Potter related brand deal that I received to charities that support the LGBTQIA + community. If I ever release any sort of merchandise myself, I will donate a portion of that. I will also personally keep track of how much money that I spend on official Harry Potter merchandise, and then at the end of the year, match that amount in donations" (Tessa Netting, 2020).

4.10 Discussion

The results of this research give relevant insight in the workings of the Harry Potter fandom on YouTube, and provides interesting findings in relation to the theoretical framework. Firstly, there is the way the YouTubers react to changes in the fandom. The data shows that the three main reactions are the same as Williams (2018) describes: loyalty, acceptance and rejection. Both Vegard (2020) and Seamus Gorman (2020) even mention these exact reactions in their videos. The only difference is that Williams (2018) describes 'acceptance' as also leaving the fandom, while the data shows that 'acceptance' in the Harry Potter fandom means staying in the fandom, but distancing yourself from the creator. Apart from the mentions of the three possible reactions in some of the videos, they can also be seen in the way the YouTubers themselves react to changes in the Harry Potter fandom, and specifically to the J.K. Rowling transphobia scandal. Tessa Netting reacts in acceptance, as she clearly distances herself from J.K. Rowling in multiple videos, but still expresses love for Harry Potter and explicitly states that she will not leave the Harry Potter fandom. Cherry Wallis and TheBakeey react in a form of loyalty, as they do not distance themselves from anything in reaction to the scandal, and do not even speak about it. However, it can be argued that it is not true loyalty, as they are also not defending J.K. Rowling's actions in their videos, but simply choose to ignore it. It might be possible that their reaction is also one of acceptance behind the scene. Vegard and Seamus Gorman react in rejection, as they have quit making Harry Potter YouTube videos since the scandal happened, and have stated that they do not wish to be part of the fandom any longer.

The second theory that is very prominent in the data is Barthes' (1968) 'the death of the author'. The evidence of this theory can be seen in the multiple occasions where YouTubers mention the possibility of separating the art from the artists, and also in the way their opinions of J.K. Rowling have changed over the years. The most prominent example can be seen in the reaction of Tessa Netting, who until 2020 has had nothing but praise for J.K.

Rowling, and on multiple occasions says she trusts J.K. Rowling when it comes to creating new Harry Potter content. However, after the 2020 transphobia scandal, Tessa no longer wishes to have anything to do with J.K. Rowling, even going so far as to removing her J.K. Rowling tattoo. She continues to be in the Harry Potter fandom, saying that Harry Potter belongs in her life, but from her videos it becomes apparent that J.K. Rowling is now 'dead' to her. The 'death of the author' theory also appears in the recurring theme of who has the authority over Harry Potter content. But as can be seen in the results, this has changed with time. In 2016, Seamus Gorman (2016) still refers to J.K. Rowling as the only one who can confirm or deny new information, but in later years, fans start to make up their own minds. This also relates to the theory of Lamerichs (2018), with Harry Potter fans sometimes changing events, or suggesting better ways for the plot to go in new Harry Potter content.

Lamerichs' (2018) theory can also be seen in the way new Harry Potter content disrupts the narrative closure of the original Harry Potter series for some of the YouTubers. Lamerichs (2018) emphasizes how important this narrative closure is for fans, and how much of a negative impact the absence of narrative closure can have. As comes forward in the data, the original Harry Potter series did have a satisfying ending for many of the fans, as has also been stated by Gymnich et al. (2017) when they talked about the strength of the Harry Potter phenomenon. But the new content contradicts some of the original plot points, and therefore ruins the original series according to some of the YouTubers. It is also noteworthy, however, that this is not the case for everybody. Cherry Wallis and Sophie (TheBakeey) do not express any negative feelings towards new Harry Potter content, with Sophie (TheBakeey, 2021) even stating that she can never have enough of it, no matter how bad it is. This again shows that the Harry Potter fan community on YouTube is split, and have different reactions to certain events.

The data clearly shows that YouTube is a very suitable platform for forming online communities, as YouTube fulfills all the requirements that a platform, according to Bury (2016) should have for this purpose. It provides the possibility to make friends, to have in-depth conversations and discussions, and when somebody starts a YouTube channel it does not interfere with their real life too much. Something that is interesting however, is that maintaining a YouTube channel and being active in the community can have a profound impact on people's personal lives as a consequence, as the YouTubers mention this several times. Both Tessa Netting (2017) and Cherry Wallis (2018) mention the wonderful

opportunities their YouTube channels have brought them, how it has shaped their lives and how it has brought them many new friends. This indicates that even though YouTube will not interfere with personal lives when just starting a channel, it might do so when the channel turns out to be successful. It also shows that knowing people offline beforehand is absolutely not a requirement for creating a community and forming strong personal bonds, as Liew (2020) says in her research.

The data also shows that YouTube as a platform is built on participatory culture, and collective intelligence. Especially the concept of audience engagement is very prominent in the data. The YouTubers constantly ask their viewers to interact with them by leaving comments, liking the videos or by subscribing. They intend to have a conversation with their audiences, and to relate to their experiences. Seamus Gorman (2020) says that he is aware that there are possible reactions to the changes in the Harry Potter fandom, and this is something he is aware of because of the comments on his videos. Viewers share their experiences and their thoughts, and he addresses them in the videos he creates. Both the YouTubers and their viewers are therefore part of a participatory culture in the way Jenkins (2006) describes, as they are contributing to the existing Harry Potter universe with their own thoughts and feelings, and are actively creating content by doing so. Additionally, the Harry Potter YouTubers connect with each other and with other media sources, as can be seen in the many references to other media channels. They also occasionally reference other videos, either videos they have made themselves, or videos by other Harry Potter YouTubers, and by doing so it can be argued that they are contributing to the collective intelligence in the Harry Potter fan community on YouTube. The Youtubers collect the information, create a video in which they share the information, and therefore their viewers are aware of this information as well. Not only the factual information is of importance here, but also the reactions and opinions that are already out there are shared in this way.

Most importantly for this research, it is interesting to see just how much influence J.K. Rowling has over the entire fandom. She was admired, praised, beloved, but then the sentiment on YouTube completely changed as a consequence of her actions, and it has had a profound effect on the fandom in general. This can clearly be seen when looking at the three analyzed eras. In 2016-2017, J.K. Rowling was popular and loved, and in the YouTube videos there was no critique on her whatsoever. Seamus Gorman (2017) did critique *Cursed Child,* but distanced J.K. Rowling from his negative feedback. In 2018-2019 however, there was

definitely a case of fan euthanasia, as described by Booth (2018), as fans are starting to wish that she would not create more content. The J.K. Rowling 'meme' that Seamus Gorman (2019) features in his video is proof of this. J.K. Rowling's decline can also be seen in the way her authority over what is canon in the Harry Potter universe is starting to be questioned, and not all her fans trust her anymore in regards to creating new content. At this point, some fans were starting to lose respect for J.K. Rowling, and started to mock her. Still, all the YouTubers were willing to give her the benefit of the doubt at this point, and it did not lead to anyone leaving the fandom yet. However, in 2020-2021, J.K. Rowling made her full fall from grace. For many of her fans, the transphobia scandal proved to be too much to forgive, as evidenced by two of the YouTubers leaving the Harry Potter fandom completely. Even the fans who continued to stay in the fandom, did not say anything in praise of J.K. Rowling anymore. It also led to the fandom being more self-aware, and more supportive of social issues, like transgender rights.

5. Conclusion

This research has analyzed the Harry Potter fandom on YouTube, and how it has changed over the years. What can be concluded, is that the developments surrounding J.K. Rowling have affected the nature of Harry Potter communities on YouTube very much indeed. Her words, her actions and her decisions have changed the Harry Potter fandom on YouTube to become more divided. This is not only the case for J.K. Rowling's personal actions, but also for the new Harry Potter content that has been released, for which J.K. Rowling gets blamed. Things have gone so far, that two of the five YouTubers that were analyzed have even stopped making Harry Potter videos altogether. It becomes clear from this research that many people were willing to give J.K. Rowling the benefit of the doubt for a long time, and that they were willing to trust her. However, the 2020 transphobia tweet scandal was something that could not be excused for this group. Even though this event proved to be a breaking point, this research also shows that the fandom was already changing in 2018, and that it was becoming divided. Even in 2017 there was talk of frustration in the Harry Potter fandom, with some fans apparently shaming others. This shows that the Harry Potter fandom was never perfect to begin with, but it has most definitely shifted a lot more towards the negative side. It can be seen from the results that the chosen Harry Potter YouTubers ended up being divided as well. Three of them have addressed the issues, and their changing sentiments towards J.K. Rowling, while the other two have continued with their content as if nothing has changed. For them, maybe nothing has changed indeed, but the absence of praise for J.K. Rowling on their channels might indicate that it has affected their channels nevertheless. These different reactions are supported by theories from other researchers, as shown in the theoretical framework. Overall, it can be concluded that J.K. Rowling's actions have worsened the state of the Harry Potter YouTube fan community.

As for YouTube as a Harry Potter fan community platform, it has undergone some changes over the years as well. Overall, the data proves that it has been a very solid and strong fan community over the years, providing possibilities for Harry Potter fans to connect and to form personal bonds with each other over their shared interest. However, the biggest change can be found in the 2020 transphobia scandal. At this point, some Harry Potter YouTubers changed their perspective on being part of the community, which can again be

seen in the fact that two of the YouTubers chose to leave the community completely. Even so, both of these YouTubers made a point of saying that they understand that there are still many fans who wish to remain in the community, and that they will not judge you for being a Harry Potter fan. The only thing they do not condone, is continuing to support J.K. Rowling herself, and support for J.K. Rowling is indeed absent on all the researched YouTube channels from this point onwards. Applying 'the death of the author' (Barthes, 1968) seems to be the most common method to continue to stay in the Harry Potter fandom, with several YouTubers explicitly distancing J.K. Rowling from their love for Harry Potter.

Several of the YouTubers also made a point of becoming more inclusive, more welcoming and more supportive of minorities and transgender people. Apart from this change, sentiments towards the Harry Potter YouTube community have always been relatively positive. YouTubers love the sense of belonging, the friends they have made and the content they have created. YouTube therefore seems to remain a suitable platform for communities, even in difficult times.

This research is of course limited by several elements. First of all, only 30 videos were analyzed for this research, while the chosen five YouTube channels combined contain hundreds of videos. Therefore, it is very well possible that there are videos that contain data relevant to this research that have not been selected for analyzation. For further research, it would be advisable to analyze more videos to get even better and more cohesive results. Secondly, this research only focuses on active Harry Potter fans on YouTube who upload videos, and not on the viewers. Viewers of Harry Potter videos can still very much be part of the Harry Potter fandom, and participate by leaving comments. For further research, a look into the comments on Harry Potter videos could provide interesting findings. Thirdly, this research only analyzed YouTube channels containing videos created in English. Harry Potter is a worldwide phenomenon, and the books have been translated in more than 80 languages (Gymnich & Scheunemann, 2017). It could be worth researching whether Harry Potter YouTube communities in other countries have different opinions about the actions of J.K. Rowling. Overall, this subject is worthy of more research.

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Appendix

A. coding schemes

Table A1: 2016-2017

Open codes	Axial codes	Selective codes
- The plotlines of *Fantastic Beasts* were confusing at times - I loved the confusing plotlines of the *Fantastic Beasts* movie - *Fantastic Beasts* had the balance just right	Confusing plotlines in new Harry Potter content	New Harry Potter content
- I enjoyed learning more about Grindelwald - The characters in *Fantastic Beasts* add depth - I absolutely loved the creatures featured in *Fantastic Beasts* - I liked Credence as a new character	Good characters in new Harry Potter content	
- I don't personally believe *Cursed Child* is canon - You can tell *Cursed Child* is not really written by J.K. Rowling - Cedric Diggory is a Death Eater - Hermione Granger goes into politics - Every book in the Harry Potter series is ruined by the events of *Cursed Child*	New Harry Potter content going against canon	
- I love to theorize about what is going	Looking forward to more Harry Potter content in the future	

to happen in the next *Fantastic Beasts* movie - I look forward to research more Harry Potter content - I am excited to see where the plot goes		56
- Harry Potter helped me through difficult times - My Harry Potter YouTube video went viral - I made friends through the Harry Potter community - Harry Potter made me want to become an actor - I met my boyfriend through the Harry Potter community	Impact of the Harry Potter fandom and community on personal lives	The Harry Potter fandom and community
- I felt loved in the Harry Potter community - Other Harry Potter fans understand my jokes and references - The Harry Potter community is the best fanbase ever	Feeling loved and accepted in the Harry Potter community	
- There are people who say you are not really a Harry Potter fan if you do not own enough merchandise, and that is annoying - Owning Harry Potter items does not make you a fan	Feeling frustrated with the Harry Potter fandom	
- I went to Harry Potter movie midnight premieres	Harry Potter related events	

- I was invited to work with the Harry Potter makeup artist - I was invited to the Harry Potter Warner Brothers Studio Tour		
- J.K. Rowling retweeted my tweet - J.K. Rowling has seen me, and knows who I am - Thank you, J.K. Rowling, for creating the Harry Potter universe	Positive opinion about J.K. Rowling	J.K. Rowling
- A video is necessary to properly express my love for Harry Potter - YouTube changed my life	Positive experiences with YouTube	YouTube
- I do not personally believe *Cursed Child* is canon - Cedric Diggory cannot be a Death Eater - I never saw Hermione going into politics	Fans deciding what is canon in the Harry Potter universe	Authority over the Harry Potter universe
- I do not think J.K. Rowling considers *Cursed Child* to be canon - If J.K. Rowling says so, *Cursed Child* is canon	J.K. Rowling deciding what is canon in the Harry Potter universe	
- If you liked this video, please give it a thumbs up - Do not forget to give this video a like - Let's see if we can get this video to 8000 likes	- Asking for likes	Audience engagement

- If you liked this video, subscribe to see more content - If you want to see more of my content, you can subscribe here	- Asking to subscribe	
- What are your thoughts on *The Cursed Child*, please let me know in the comments - What did you think of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them*, let me know in the comments - What is your Harry Potter story?	- Asking for comments	
- If you want to follow me on Twitter or Instagram, click here - You can also follow me on Twitter	Referring to other social media channels	Other media channels
- I created a Harry Potter parody video - My Harry Potter video went viral	Referring to own Harry Potter channel	
- I met my best friend Brizzy through YouTube - I immediately texted my friend Brizzy	Referring to other Harry Potter YouTubers	
- I have bought a lot of Harry Potter merchandise - I received *Fantast Beasts* merchandise - I collect Harry Potter items and wands	Owning Harry Potter merchandise	
- There are people who say you are not really a Harry Potter fan if you do not own enough merchandise	Shaming other fans for not owning Harry Potter merchandise	

Table A2: 2018-2019

Open codes	Axial codes	Selective codes
- *Cursed Child* ruins the original Harry Potter stories - McGonagall being in *Crimes of Grindelwald* does not work with the original story	New Harry Potter content ruining the original story	New Harry Potter content
- I saw *Cursed Child* and it was fantastic - I loved *Crimes of Grindelwald* - *Crimes of Grindelwald* had memorable dialogue and good visuals	Enjoying new Harry Potter content	
- *Crimes of Grindelwald* does not make any sense - I enjoy researching confusing plotlines - *Crimes of Grindelwald* throws a lot of information at you - I get how some people can get confused watching this	Confusing plotlines in new Harry Potter content	
- *Cursed Child* cannot be canon - McGonagall was not alive during *Crimes of Grindelwald*, but was in the movie anyway. - Nagini is now an Asian woman - Dumbledore has another younger brother	New Harry Potter content going against canon	

- *Crimes of Grindelwald* is a set-up movie - Why is McGonagall in this movie, it is not necessary. - The film feels unnecessary	New Harry Potter content containing unnecessary information or not enough information	
- *Crimes of Grindelwald* was badly structured - *Crimes of Grindelwald* was badly written - Grindelwald does not even commit any crimes	New Harry Potter content is of bad quality	
- I got a tattoo in New York with two of my Harry Potter friends, who are also Harry Potter YouTubers - Thank you to my friends for experiencing this magical day with me - I am texting with Brizzy about my Harry Potter theories	Making friends and sharing experiences	The Harry Potter community and fandom
- All of the people I met were so kind - It is okay to disagree about things - I accept all fans in the Harry Potter community - The community is special and incredible - I got a tattoo to show off my love for Harry Potter	Feeling loved and accepted in the Harry Potter community	
- I do not think the Harry Potter fandom is ever going to end	The Harry Potter fandom is never going to die	

- There will always be people who read Harry Potter - The stories are not going to disappear		
- Do not tell people they are not real fans if they do not consume Harry Potter correctly - Harry Potter fans can pressure you - The community has split	Feeling frustrated with the Harry Potter fandom	
- I have a lot of respect for J.K. Rowling, and I want to give her the benefit of the doubt - J.K. Rowling is an incredible author - J.K. Rowling is my hero, and the woman who has changes my life - I will never forget the day I met J.K. Rowling - Maybe this was not J.K. Rowling's intention	Positive opinion about J.K. Rowling	J.K. Rowling
- The meme mocking J.K. Rowling is funny - J.K. Rowling adds details to the story to make herself seem more inclusive - J.K. Rowling had made a downfall - J.K. Rowling is milking the Harry Potter universe	Negative opinion about J.K. Rowling	
- YouTube changed my life - I love having conversations with you guys	Positive experiences with YouTube	YouTube

- I did not know there was a Harry Potter community on YouTube until I posted my first video - Because of my channel, I became even more obsessed with Harry Potter		
- I do not believe that *Cursed Child* is canon - I do not believe J.K. Rowling has been planning the Nagini plotline for 20 years - Dumbledore's and Grindelwald's relationship should be featured in the movies	Fans deciding what is canon in the Harry Potter universe	Authority over the Harry Potter universe
- J.K. Rowling says that *Cursed Child* is canon	J.K. Rowling deciding what is canon in the Harry Potter universe	
- Johnny Depp was cast as Grindelwald	Johnny Depp controversy	Harry Potter controversies
- Nagini is an Asian woman - Nagini being shown in captivity is problematic	Nagini controversy	
- In 2007, J.K. Rowling said Dumbledore was gay - J.K. Rowling revealed that Dumbledore's and Grindelwald's relationship was 'incredible sexual' - Dumbledore's sexuality is not featured in *Crimes of Grindelwald*	Dumbledore and Grindelwald controversy	
- I will cherish the Harry Potter community for the rest of my life - I will always enjoy Harry Potter	Loyalty to the fandom	Changes in the Harry Potter fandom

- I have hope J.K. Rowling will do better in the future - There are people who don't care that much about controversies	Accepting change	63
- J.K. Rowling must stop - There are people who think we should not support these controversies	Rejecting the fandom	
- If you liked this video, please give it a thumbs up - Do not forget to give this video a like	Asking for likes	Audience engagement
- You can subscribe by clicking here	Asking to subscribe	
- Leave your thoughts in the comments - Let's have a discussion in the comments	Asking for comments	
- Do not forget to check out my Twitter page - You can find links to my other social media in the description below	Referring to other social media channels	Other media channels
- I have talked about *Cursed Child* before in a video - I posted my first video, a Harry Potter haul	Referring to own Harry Potter channel	
- I got a tattoo in New York with two of my Harry Potter friends, who are also Harry Potter YouTubers - There are people out there with more knowledge than me	Referring to other Harry Potter YouTubers	

- Seamus Gorman often posts about this		

Table A3: 2020-2021

Open codes	Axial codes	Selective codes
- I will always want more Harry Potter content, I do not even care if it is bad at this point	Looking forward to more Harry Potter content	New Harry Potter content
- I met up with Sophie (TheBakeey) and Laura - I met my fiancée through the Harry Potter fandom	Making friends and sharing experiences	The Harry Potter community and fandom
- There is an amazing community out there - I like the discussions, and that everybody has a different opinion - The Harry Potter fandom is part of me - The Harry Potter community is a family, it is a safe space	Feeling loved and accepted in the Harry Potter community	
- There are always going to be Harry Potter fans here and there	The Harry Potter fandom is never going to die	
- I am aware of the toxicity in the Harry Potter fandom - Some fans think their interpretations are superior, which is just flat out wrong - I never felt welcome in the Harry Potter community - There is an elitist mentality in the Harry Potter fandom	Feeling frustrated with the Harry Potter fandom	
- J.K. Rowling will always be the author of Harry Potter, and I	Positive opinion about J.K. Rowling	J.K. Rowling

	thank her for writing the books		
-	She is causing people who are loyal to her to be actively transphobic - What J.K. Rowling said is harmful and dangerous - I am so disappointed in J.K. Rowling - This was my childhood hero, how could she have these transphobic views	Negative opinion about J.K. Rowling	
-	I started making videos about Harry Potter, and I got sucked down the rabbit hole - My Harry Potter haul did better than my other videos - Obviously, YouTube has kept me very much involved	Positive experiences with YouTube	YouTube
-	Separating the art from the artist	Fans deciding what is canon in the Harry Potter universe	Authority over the Harry Potter universe
-	J.K. Rowling has tried to alienate a portion of her audience with the tweets she has posted - J.K. Rowling recently went on a little transphobic rant on Twitter	Transphobia tweet scandal	Harry Potter controversies
-	There are those who are in full support of J.K. Rowling	Loyalty to the fandom	Changes in the Harry Potter fandom
-	There are people who are happy to stay in the fandom, while separating the art from the artist - I think there are ways to appreciate	Accepting change	

- the story without putting more money in J.K. Rowling's pockets - Although I deeply love Harry Potter, I can in no way support J.K. Rowling anymore - J.K. Rowling built Harry Potter, but we build the community		
- I feel like people are completely done with Harry Potter and want nothing to do with it anymore, like myself - For some people, this leaves them feeling like they have to completely leave the Harry Potter fandom - It is important to not brush away the comments J.K. Rowling made	Rejecting the fandom	
- Like the video - Give this video a big thumbs up if you liked it	Asking for likes	Audience engagement
- Subscribe! - Click here to subscribe if you want to see more videos - Subscribe, because I would love to have you here	Asking to subscribe	
- Let me know your thoughts on this in the comments - I would love to hear your thoughts	Asking for comments	
- Here are some of J.K. Rowling's recent tweets	Referring to other social media channels	Other media channels

- Like I said on Twitter as well - Go over to my Instagram page to see it		
- I met up with Sophie (TheBakeey) and Laura - I watched a video by someone who explained why what J.K. Rowling said is dangerous and transphobic	Referring to other Harry Potter YouTubers	
- Daniel Radcliffe said it really well in the blog post he wrote - There is a link in the description to more information if you want to read up on it	Referring to other articles	
- At a point in time, I feel like I was a toxic fan - I chose to spread this elitist mentality, to have this elitist mentality - I felt like I needed to address this	(Former) elitist mentality and shaming other fans	Self-reflection
- Trans woman are woman, trans man are man, and non-binary people are non-binary - What I'm hoping to do with this channel, is to create a safe space for queer people - Trans woman, trans man and non-binary people are loved and welcome, here on this channel	Support for transgender rights	Social issues