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A Song of Hopeful and Cynical Hatewatching: Analysing Fan Engagement through Game of Thrones TikTok edits

ABSTRACT

Game of Thrones is a globally renowned television phenomenon that left many viewers frustrated, and yet its fandom remains fiercely active on TikTok, where fans rework or critique the series through creative videos. This study dives into this paradox, exploring how fans engage with Game of Thrones through TikTok edits by applying Jonathan Gray's (2020) concepts of hopeful and cynical hatewatching. Considering the idea of convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006), the rise of TikTok has transformed how audiences interact with media content, creating new spaces for fan expression and critique. This research addresses the problem of understanding how these interactions reflect broader patterns of audience behaviour in a participatory digital culture, particularly in the context of fan labour produced for a series that has generated great disappointment among its fanbase. The central research question guiding this study is: How does fan engagement with Game of Thrones TikTok edits reflect patterns of hopeful hatewatching and cynical hatewatching? To answer this question, a qualitative content analysis was employed as its methodological approach, allowing for a nuanced examination of fan engagement and responses. Data was collected from TikTok using specific hashtags related to Game of Thrones, resulting in a sample of 50 videos and the top 10 comments, which were analysed under four main themes: *hopeful hatewatching*, *cynical hatewatching*, *community engagement*, and *sustained fandom*. Hopeful hatewatching was characterised by fans' creative reclamation of the narrative, where they propose alternative plotlines and defend character arcs, demonstrating a persistent emotional investment despite the show's flaws. Conversely, cynical hatewatching reflects a critical engagement where fans express disappointment and mock the series' perceived failures, often bonding over shared grievances. Additionally, the study highlights the role of community engagement, where fans interact with each other through comments and edits, fostering a sense of belonging and collective identity. The analysis underscores that hatewatching is not merely a negative response but a complex practice that sustains fandom, illustrating how disappointment can fuel creativity and ongoing dialogue about the series. Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of contemporary fandom by demonstrating that even flawed narratives can remain culturally relevant through active fan engagement, thereby reshaping the dynamics between media producers and consumers in the digital age.

KEYWORDS: *hatewatching, fandom, participatory culture, Game of Thrones, TikTok edits*

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1. Introduction

The rise of social media platforms has transformed how audiences engage with television content, creating new spaces for fan interaction, interpretation, and critique. Among these platforms, TikTok has emerged as a particularly dynamic arena for fan-driven content, where users create and share short-form videos that reimagine, celebrate, or critique popular media (Shutsko, 2020, p.110). This thesis explores fan engagement with Game of Thrones (Thrones) TikTok edits, focusing on how these interactions reflect broader patterns of hatewatching and hopeful hatewatching. These terms, in relation to audience engagement, describe the dual ways audiences engage with media; Gray (2020, p.35) describes hopeful hatewatching as the optimistic anticipation of narrative resolution or character development, while hatewatching involves continued engagement with a show despite dissatisfaction or critique. By examining TikTok as a site of fan activity, this study seeks to explore how these patterns are demonstrated in a participatory digital culture and what they reveal about modern audience behaviour. The research question guiding this study is: How does fan engagement with Game of Thrones TikTok edits reflect patterns of hopeful hatewatching and cynical hatewatching?

As a global phenomenon, this study's focus on Game of Thrones provides a compelling case study for examining how modern audiences process and respond to media that both captivates and disappoints them. At a societal level, understanding these new forms of fan engagement helps illuminate broader transformations in media consumption patterns. The societal relevance of this research lies in its exploration of how digital platforms shape cultural consumption and community formation. Thrones, as one of the most influential television series of the past decade, has left a lasting impact on popular culture (Das, 2024, p.1130), and its reception on TikTok offers insights into evolving audience practices. TikTok's algorithmic curation and emphasis on user-generated content have created a space where fans can collectively process, reinterpret, and critique media in ways that reflect both their emotional investment and their frustrations (Shutsko, 2020, p.110). The communal dynamics of TikTok engagement reflect broader societal shifts in how media functions as a medium for community building. As Tompkins and Guajardo (2024, p.1) observed about gaming communities, social media platforms use algorithms to recommend content to users and therefore have become great places for fan communities to creatively 'fix' or reimagine stories in ways that go against the official versions. This transformation has shifted media criticism from a solo experience to a collective analysis where shared disappointment or cautious optimism forms the foundation of social connection. This trend is especially noticeable today, as people spend more time online. For younger audiences especially, online communities built around TV shows, movies, and games have

become important social spaces (Tompkins & Guajardo, 2024, p.2). The logic between affection and criticism that characterises hatewatching also offers valuable insights into how audiences process disappointment in cultural products to which they've formed deep attachments. As Tompkins and Guajardo (2024, p.14) note, these engagements reveal how audiences interact with transformative fanworks even when adopting critical stances. In today's media landscape that is dominated by franchises and serialised storytelling, understanding these dynamics becomes essential for comprehending how audiences form and sustain narrative attachments .

Media consumption plays a significant role in shaping emotional responses and social relationships, as it is integrated into daily life (Nabi et al., 2021, p.85). The emotional benefits and pitfalls of media consumption are critical to understanding audience engagement, particularly in the context of social media platforms (Nabi et al., 2021, p.85). Additionally, media can serve as a source for learning adaptive emotional responses, which is especially relevant in the context of fan interactions on platforms like TikTok (Nabi et al., 2021, p.86). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending how audiences navigate complex media landscapes, where the lines between enjoyment, critique, and fandom are increasingly blurred.

Academically, this study makes significant contributions to media and fan studies by examining how TikTok's unique platform dynamics shape expressions of hopeful and cynical hatewatching. While scholars have explored these engagement patterns in other contexts (Shutsko, 2020, p.111), their manifestation on TikTok with its distinctive creative tools and participatory culture remains under-researched. This study addresses this gap while engaging with critical debates about fan labour and visibility. As Duffy et al. (2021, p.1) underline, TikTok creators must navigate the precarious nature of platform algorithms and shifting audience tastes. This context is crucial for understanding how Game of Thrones' fans employ "visibility labour" (Duffy et al., 2021, p.3) when producing hatewatching content, from nostalgic edits to cynical memes. The research builds upon the foundational theories of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006) and anti-fandom (Gray, 2003), while accounting for how TikTok's algorithmic curation complicates traditional notions of fan agency (Duffy et al., 2021, p.8).

This study provides a framework for understanding contemporary hatewatching that acknowledges both TikTok's transformative potential and its constraints on fan creativity. By examining how the Thrones fandom negotiates these tensions, the research offers insights into the evolving relationship between legacy media properties, digital platforms, and engaged audiences in today's modern age. Research on hatewatching has largely focused on traditional media engagement, such as live-tweeting, forums, and long-form video critiques, which emphasise textual responses and

discussion-based interactions (O'Boyle, 2022, p.153). Earlier studies of fan participation also tended to examine platforms like blogs and message boards, highlighting the multifaceted nature of media-audience interactions (O'Boyle, 2022, p.154). However, TikTok introduces a different kind of fan engagement, where its short-form, algorithm-driven content prioritises visual and auditory expression over extended text, encouraging new forms of hatewatching that have not yet been fully explored (O'Boyle, 2022, p.160).

Three aspects of TikTok stand out in this context. First, its algorithm fosters echo chambers where hopeful and cynical hatewatching can intensify, reflecting a trend where social media platforms are used for both serious and playful commentary (Highfield, 2015, p.2030). Second, remix culture on the platform enables fans to creatively rework disappointing narratives, often through "fix-it" edits, which aligns with the participatory practices that have evolved with the rise of social media (Highfield, 2015, p.2031). Third, the combination of sound, visuals, and editing allows for layered emotional responses by blending nostalgia, irony, and critique in ways text-based platforms do not, as seen in the irreverent practices that characterise online engagement (Highfield, 2015, p.2029). This study aims to show how digital platforms foster new forms of fan expression that merge creativity with critique, offering fresh insights into how participatory culture is evolving in the algorithmic era (O'Boyle, 2022, p.171). This study explores how TikTok's distinct format shapes hatewatching behaviours, using Game of Thrones as a case study. It aims to show how digital platforms foster new forms of fan expression that merge creativity with critique, offering fresh insights into how participatory culture is evolving in the algorithmic era (Highfield, 2015, p.2031).

Methodologically, this research advances fan studies by analysing how short-form video platforms facilitate new forms of engagement. Unlike text-based or long-form fan productions, TikTok edits compress complex emotional responses, whether hopeful reimaginings or cynical critiques, into concise formats. This reflects what Duffy et al. (2021, p.4) identify as creators' need to constantly adapt strategies for visibility, while maintaining authentic fan expression. The methodology chosen for this study is qualitative content analysis (CA), which is particularly suited for exploring fan engagement with Thrones edits and the patterns of hopeful and cynical hatewatching. This method allows for a systematic description of the meaning embedded in qualitative data, essential for understanding nuanced expressions of fan engagement on social media platforms like TikTok. By utilising a codebook, the research categorises various aspects of fan interactions, focusing on elements that relate directly to hopeful and cynical hatewatching, such as "expressions of enjoyment," "critical commentary," and "nostalgic references". The total sample included 50 diverse edits to ensure varied perspectives, while Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis

software, was used to systematically code comments and identify differences between hopeful and cynical hatewatching. This study developed an effective framework for analysing short-form fan videos. This approach is crucial for understanding how TikTok's unique features facilitate specific emotional expressions, from ironic detachment to nostalgic longing, as highlighted by Duffy et al. (2021, p.6) in their examination of the emotional labour involved in maintaining visibility on these platforms.

By analysing TikTok edits of Thrones, this research aims to contribute to bridging fan and digital media studies, offering insights into how fans use digital tools to express their hopes, disappointments, and critique while interacting with fan labour. Furthermore, it addresses the broader implications of fan behaviour and explores how fan engagement with edits affects the creation of fan content.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following section of this study aims to address the question of how hatewatching is demonstrated by the *Game of Thrones* (*Thrones*, henceforth) fandom when it comes to their engagement with TikTok edits, through a conceptual framework centred around theoretical perspectives that underline the complexities of fandom and audience interactions. Here, the main theories to be explored are about fandom studies and fan culture, but more specifically the active role of audiences, the emotional and interpretive dimensions of fandom, and the influence of digital platforms on fan practices to guide the study and analyse how fans negotiate their frustrations and hopes towards Thrones through edits.

2.1. Active Audiences and Participatory Culture

To begin this chapter, *active audiences* will be used to understand fan engagement and participatory culture, as it involves active involvement in media culture and community (Livingstone, 2013, p.3). This means that participation is not merely an individual act but advances certain interests, which can be seen in how fans engage with media content like TikTok edits (Livingstone, 2013, p.3), making it a notable aspect of fandom studies. Additionally, Costello & Moore (2007, p.124) highlight that viewers are not passive consumers but continuously engage in meaning-making and interpretation of media content as active audiences.

Similarly, *interpretive communities* (Costello & Moore, 2007, p.126) provides a structure for understanding how Thrones fans collectively engage with media texts through shared practices and meanings. These communities develop distinct patterns of engagement, particularly through hatewatching, that are visibly expressed in their creations and circulation of TikTok edits. As Costello and Moore (2007, p.126) emphasise, interpretive communities are defined by their collective interpretations and discussions, where members bond through common media usage and textual interactions. These ideas align with the way that fans of Thrones actively participate in creating and sharing TikTok edits even years after the last season's premiere, reflecting their engagement with the narrative and characters of the series.

Such practices illustrate how fans have a platform to navigate between hopeful hatewatching, expressing optimism about narrative developments, and cynical hatewatching, where they critique or mock elements of the show, through consuming fan-made edits. While platforms like Reddit or

Quora facilitate verbose textual discourse, TikTok's visual format enables fan communities to articulate their shared sentiments through more immediate means. The BookTok community on TikTok, as discussed by Teel and Lund (2024), exemplifies this case by allowing primarily female readers, or fangirls, to connect over their love of literature through emotional responses and shared experiences rather than critical analysis. This community-building aspect is highlighted by the prevalence of comments that express emotions and seek interaction, which collectively account for a significant portion of engagement on BookTok videos (Teel & Lund, 2024, p.1). The platform may amplify hatewatching practices, allowing fans to collaboratively express critique through comments on edits that reinforce their communal interpretations. This visual mode of engagement represents a significant evolution in how interpretive communities negotiate meaning, moving beyond only text-based discussions of the show but also adapting to newer media formats and interacting with other fans.

Building on the previous concepts, Henry Jenkins' theory of *participatory culture* continues to redefine media fandom, by advancing fans from passive consumers to active cultural producers who shape, critique, and reinvent media content. At its core, participatory culture describes a dynamic ecosystem in which audiences collaboratively create, circulate, and transform mere consumption into creative engagement. This concept highlights a strong support for creating and sharing creations, and a sense of community among participants who believe their contributions matter (Jenkins, 2018, p.19). In the context of Thrones' fandom, participatory culture is particularly significant as it allows fans to form alternative interpretations of the show and express their creativity through various forms of cultural production, such as fanfiction such as those found on Archive of Our Own (*Archive of Our Own*, n.d.). Individuals often engage in a complex balance of fascination and frustration with the texts they love, leading them to actively rework and reinterpret these narratives (Jenkins, 2018, p.16). This framework demonstrates how fans actively assert agency over media narratives through digital platforms, like TikTok, transforming passive viewership into dynamic cultural participation by interacting with edits. Continuing on, the importance of participatory culture in the Thrones fandom lies in its ability to empower fans to negotiate their feelings and experiences through media. This process of negotiation is not just individual and it occurs within communities where fans discuss and debate interpretations, thereby shaping collective understandings of the media (Jenkins, 2018, p.16). This can be applied to fans of Thrones, who produce edits, share perspectives, and collectively discuss the series' final season years after its release. For instance, there were fans who rejected the fixed or canon events of the series and garnered online attention by publicly petitioning to remake the final season of Thrones (Aquilina,

2019). This shows that fans engage in participatory meaning-making that also challenges traditional notions of authorship that represents a reorganisation of production, where media used to flow directly from studio to audience, but fans now circulate their own labour through other means.

Ultimately, this section has underlined how Thrones' fandom represents contemporary active audiences and participatory culture, where viewers move away from passive consumption to become meaning-makers and producers. As Livingstone (2013) and Costello and Moore (2007) establish, fans form interpretive communities that collectively engage with media texts by not merely consuming content, but continuously renegotiating its meaning through shared practices. The longevity of Thrones edits, years after the series' finale, proves that fan engagement is not short-term, but rather a sustained dialogue between audiences and text. Jenkins' (2018) exposition of participatory culture clarifies how platforms like TikTok facilitate this dynamic as fans don't just react to the text, but they have the agency reshape it through edits, especially those that express haterwatching. These practices collectively demonstrate a shift in media dynamics when audiences transition from consumers to co-creators, the text ceases to belong solely to its producers. The enduring labour of Thrones fans, whether critiquing through cynical edits or repairing narratives through hopeful ones, proves that for active audiences in participatory culture, a story's events are open for collective reinterpretation.

2.2. Fan Labour and Engagement

After establishing active audiences and the definition of participatory culture, next is to address the core of fan practices and to note how fan labour and emotional engagement can be interlinked. The concept of fan labour has become increasingly significant in discussions of participatory culture, particularly as digital platforms enable fans to engage with media texts in creative and transformative ways. *Fan labour* refers to the unpaid, often emotionally invested work that members of fandom communities undertake, including the production of fanfiction, artwork, and video edits (De Kosnik, 2012, p.99). Despite its cultural and economic value, this labour is frequently dismissed or undervalued, as fandom is still largely perceived as a recreational activity rather than a form of productive work (De Kosnik, 2012, p.108). Among the most prominent manifestations of fan labour today are fan edits which are short, reworked video compilations that reinterpret, critique, or reimagine existing media. These edits, which snowball on platforms like TikTok and YouTube, display how fans actively engage with source material, generating new

meanings while simultaneously serving as unofficial marketers for the original content (Zhang & Wu, 2022, p.328).

Fan edits are particularly compelling as a form of fan labour because they encapsulate the dual emotions of fascination and frustration that drive much of fandom's creative output (De Kosnik, 2012, p.104). For instance, in the case of Thrones, fans produced countless edits that either celebrated the series or expressed disappointment with its final season, some edits reworked narrative arcs to align with fan expectations, while others compiled scenes to highlight the show's earlier strengths, effectively curating nostalgia (Zhang & Wu, 2022, p.328). These practices underscore how fans function as *prosumers*, which Derbaix et al. (2023, p.4) define as active participants who both consume and produce content, often without expectation of financial reward. The labour involved in creating these edits is substantial, requiring technical skills in video editing, a deep understanding of the source material, and the ability to evoke specific emotional responses from audiences. Yet, De Kosnik (2012, p.105) notes this work is rarely compensated or formally acknowledged by media producers, reinforcing the paradox that fans enhance the commercial value of media properties while remaining marginalised in industry narratives

The emotional dimensions of fan labour are equally critical to understanding its significance. *Affective engagement*, the intense emotional connections fans form with media texts, fuels much of this creative output (Sandvoss et al., 2018, p.1). However, the unpaid nature of this labour can lead to emotional exhaustion, as fan editors navigate the pressures of audience expectations, algorithmic demands, and the personal investment required to sustain their creative practices (Zhang & Wu, 2022, p.335). For example, creators who produce critical edits often termed hatewatching content perform *emotional labour* by channeling frustration into creative work, while those crafting hopeful edits invest in fostering communal optimism (Zhang & Wu, 2022, p.330). These dynamics, when applied to the Thrones fandom after the last season, highlights the complex relationship between fan labour and emotional labour, where fans not only produce content but also manage the affective dimensions of audience interaction. Different fans may opt to accept the canonical ending given by the producers, while others can reject this and turn towards the fan labour that peers produce to find the feeling of community and support for their negative emotions so they do not feel alone in being wronged by the original (Kustritz, 2016, p.8).

2.2.1. *Paratexts in the form of Fan Labour*

To expand fan labour further, the concept of *paratexts*, first articulated by Gérard Genette in 1987, will be addressed. Paratexts refers to all the elements surrounding a text that offers readers the choice to engage with the text or turn away, emphasising their role in making a text present in the world (Genette & Maclean, 1991, p.261). It is noted that paratexts are not merely decorative but serve as a "zone of transaction" that influences how a text is received and understood (Genette & Maclean, 1991, p.262). In other words, these elements, such as the covers or titles of the text, are a gateway into shaping our first impressions and guiding our experience with the text. Furthermore, Genette and Maclean (1991, p.254) categorises paratexts into two main types; peritext, which includes elements physically present within the book, and epitext, which encompasses external messages such as interviews and reviews.

Where Genette and Maclean (1991) originally examined publisher-controlled elements like titles, prefaces, and cover art, Geraghty (2015) underlines how fan-created content, from TikTok edits to memes, now constitutes a vital category of paratexts that actively reshape cultural engagement with media properties. This is particularly evident in the fandom surrounding Thrones, where fan-produced paratexts, like fanfiction and edits, have created alternative narrative ecosystems that both challenge and supplement the source material.

Geraghty (2015, p.2) argues that studying these fan paratexts is essential to understanding modern media consumption, as they represent "cultural practices that expand narrative worlds" beyond their original boundaries. In the Thrones universe, this manifests through various participatory acts like fanfiction that reimagines character arcs, YouTube video essays that critique narrative choices (Movie Overload, 2024), and especially TikTok edits that compress complex criticisms or alternative visions into short videos. These paratexts do not merely comment on the text but they become sites of what Laukkanen (2024, p.36) terms "paratextual reauthoring," where audience engagement fundamentally alters a text's cultural meaning and reception. This explains that paratexts play a significant role in shaping the relationship between active audiences and the media they consume, particularly in the context of Thrones' finale which provides a compelling example of this phenomenon. Where HBO presented Bran Stark's coronation as a triumphant resolution, fan paratexts on TikTok, through supercuts highlighting his lack of narrative buildup, memes mocking his vacant expressions, or edits replacing the coronation music with ironic tracks, collectively reframed this moment as a narrative failure (*TikTok - Make Your Day*, n.d.). This also showcases Geraghty's (2015, p.3) observation that paratexts allow fans to "create meaning through various

practices... which contribute to the overall narrative and cultural significance of the original texts". While these paratexts create a rich environment for audience engagement and interpretation, it also adds legitimacy to fandom discourse. For instance, paratextual online discourse legitimises a certain association with what constitutes "must-see TV" and "must-review" content, thereby reinforcing the cultural capital of the series (Castleberry, 2015, p.128-129).

This participatory culture of paratexts enables fans to contribute their interpretations and critiques, which in turn influences the broader discourse surrounding the show. Laukkanen's (2024, p.46) analysis of Thrones memes demonstrates how this paratextual ecosystem can even influence production. When the character Gendry returned after seasons of absence, fan-created memes joking about "Gendry's endless rowing" became so popular that Joe Dempsie, the actor of the character, referenced them in interviews (Lewis, 2019). These fan practices also illustrate the tension between corporate authorship and fan interpretation which remains unresolved. As Laukkanen (2024, p.43) notes, the internet's decentralised nature allows a diverse range of views to come through, making it impossible for producers to fully control a text's reception. Thrones fans demonstrate this through paratexts that rewrote Daenerys Targaryen's character arc, by using the same footage from the show but reedited with different music or pacing to present her descent into madness as either more justified or entirely reversed. These transformative works don't just critique the text, they embody what Geraghty (2015, p.2) identifies as fan culture's power to expand narrative worlds beyond their official boundaries.

Viewers can expand upon the series' canonical events through their engagement with paratexts, using these creative extensions to process and reinterpret the narrative. This active audience practice is particularly valuable for navigating the show's complex storytelling and its multitude of intersecting character arcs and plotlines, which often defies conventional narrative structures (Castleberry, 2015, p.127). This interplay between different forms of paratextual engagement illustrates how active audiences navigate complex narratives and cultivate a vibrant community around different media, ultimately shaping their viewing experience and the cultural significance of the text itself. So, where paratexts were originally positioned as supporting materials that guide interpretation, the explosion of fan-created content on platforms like TikTok has transformed paratexts into primary sites of meaning-making.

2.2.2. Tensions between Prosumers and Producers

Despite the clear value of fan labour and how it provides a gateway for producers to connect with their targeted consumers, media industries have often approached fan creativity with hesitation.. On one hand, Scott (2009, p.3) points out that corporations benefit from the free promotion and audience engagement generated by fan edits and on the other hand, they frequently issue copyright takedowns or fail to acknowledge fan contributions. Scott (2009, p.8) critiques this dynamic through the lens of the *regifting economy*, where media producers co-opt fan practices under the guise of gift-exchange while primarily prioritising protecting commercial interests, compromising the fan communities that sustain long-term engagement. This can be seen in HBO's treatment of the Thrones fandom, Sarikakis et al. (2015, p.3) highlights the network's strategy of managed participation, wherein fan engagement is encouraged for promotional purposes such as incorporating fan-reaction videos into DVD marketing, while maintaining strict copyright control. This duality manifests in stark terms through initiatives like fan-art competitions, where submissions carry explicit disclaimers that "no royalties of any kind now or in the future" will be granted to participants (Sarikakis et al., 2015, p.3). The understanding is that even when money changes hands, the underlying motivation remains rooted in the relationships and shared experiences within the fandom (Kennedy & Buchsbaum, 2022, p.4). This perspective aligns with the broader gift economy, where the exchange of fanworks is seen as a way to affirm community ties and celebrate mutual interests (Kennedy & Buchsbaum, 2022, p.4). Moreover, the regifting economy allows for a nuanced approach to compensation, where fans can receive monetary support for their labour while still contributing to the communal spirit of fandom. This is evident in how some fan creators view compensation as a means to sustain their craft rather than as a shift towards commercialization (Kennedy & Buchsbaum, 2022, p.5). By framing these exchanges within the context of gift culture, fans can navigate the complexities of monetization while preserving the essence of their community-driven practices. Such policies reveal an imbalance where fans are incentivised to invest creative labour, yet their contributions remain firmly outside formal recognition frameworks, with intellectual property rights exclusively reserved for the original creator, George R.R. Martin (Sarikakis et al., 2015, p.11).

The consequences of this approach are as follows. Firstly, it generates a chilling effect on transformative works, as evidenced by HBO's frequent copyright strikes against unauthorised remixes and edits (Sarikakis et al., 2015, p.11). Secondly, and nonideal, it fosters alienation within fan communities, who perceive their labour as valued for its marketing utility rather than its creative

merit (Sarikakis et al., 2015, p.13). This tension emphasises a fundamental disconnect in digital participatory culture, seeing as fan labour has become indispensable to media structures, its compensation and recognition remain old-fashioned, stuck within models that prioritise control over collaboration.

In conclusion, for producers, recognising fan labour, especially fan edits, as an integral part of media ecosystems could yield significant benefits. With fan edits functioning as organic marketing tools, extending the reach and cultural relevance of content long after its initial release, and partnerships with fan editors, such as official edit contests or revenue-sharing models, goodwill can develop and deepen audience loyalty (Stanfill & Condis, 2014, Section 3.4). Acknowledging fan labour as a legitimate form of creative work would align with broader shifts toward participatory media economies, where audiences expect to be active contributors rather than passive consumers (Derbaix et al., 2023, p.13). This aligns with paratexts as gateways to audience engagement, where fan creations now constitute vital, if unofficial, extensions of the narrative world (Castleberry, 2015; Geraghty, 2015; Laukkanen, 2024). Fan edits represent a vital form of fan labour that blends creativity, emotional investment, and cultural critique. Media producers must move beyond exploitative or dismissive approaches and instead develop strategies to ethically engage with fan communities. By doing so, they can harness the full potential of participatory culture while respecting the fan labour that sustains it.

2.3. Hopeful Hatewatching and Cynical Hatewatching

To further refine fan labour's significance, it is now necessary to continue with Gray's (2020) concepts of hopeful hatewatching and cynical hatewatching to provide a framework for analysing such emotional responses. The sustained phenomenon of Thrones fan edits, even after the show's controversial conclusion, exemplifies the complex interplay between cynical and hopeful hatewatching (Gray, 2020). These dual modes of engagement demonstrate how modern audiences transform disappointment into active participation, reshaping their relationship with problematic media texts through digital platforms. Gray's (2020, p.34-35) framework reveals how hatewatching operates as both critical practice and creative intervention, with fans simultaneously rejecting and reworking the source material.

Hopeful hatewatching is a viewing practice where individuals continue to watch a show they dislike with the expectation that it might improve over time. This form of hatewatching often arises

when the premise of a text is appealing enough to raise hopes, but the execution eventually disappoints the viewer (Gray, 2020, p.35). This type of hatewatching reflects an individual's passive acceptance that the text may not meet their expectations, indicating a broader issue where audience needs are not being adequately addressed in the media landscape (Gray, 2020, p.36). Hopeful hatewatching serves as a commentary on the frustrations of viewers who feel that their desires are consistently unmet, compelling them to continue watching in the hope that the show will eventually deliver on its initial promise (Gray, 2020, p.36).

This manifests through fan edits that attempt to fix the maligned final season of Thrones, proving that hopeful hatewatching is identified as engagement driven by anticipatory redemption. These edits, which may reorder scenes, insert alternative soundtracks, or reimagine character arcs, represent significant emotional labour (Zhang & Wu, 2022, p.335), as fans invest creative energy to align the narrative with their expectations. This practice aligns with Costello and Moore's (2007, p.139) concept of *cultural production*, where fans actively reinterpret texts to serve communal values. The continuous emergence of these hopeful revisions through short-form video edits beyond the show's official ending reflects the depth of fans' investment in the story's initial promise and their refusal to accept its official conclusion. Essentially, hopeful hatewatching is characterised by a blend of anticipation and disappointment, where viewers remain engaged with a text that they believe has the potential to fulfill their expectations, despite its shortcomings as a whole.

Conversely, *cynical hatewatching* is a form of viewing characterised by a critical and often detached engagement with media, where the viewer approaches films or shows with skepticism and a sense of disdain (Gray, 2020, p.36-37). This type of hatewatching is not motivated by a desire for enjoyment but rather by a need to critique and confirm negative expectations about the content. In this context, the pleasure derived from cynicalwatching is rooted in the act of criticism itself rather than in any enjoyment of the content, and despite viewers bracing themselves for disappointment, they are still often led to engage with media that they expect to be subpar (Gray, 2020, p.38). Thus, cynicalwatching reflects a broader phenomenon, where viewers feel compelled to witness the decline of a once-celebrated medium, reaffirming their beliefs about its inadequacies (Gray, 2020, p.37). When fans produce edits that critique the series' perceived failures, Gray (2020, p.37) describes that they are creating a "cinema of negative guarantees," so these compilations of narrative inconsistencies and ironic supercuts allow viewers to derive pleasure from performing critique rather than from the text itself. As Madison et al. (2025, p.2-3) note, such practices facilitate social bonding through shared disdain, while Nabi et al. (2021, p.90-91) would recognise this as paradoxical media consumption, where negative emotions become gratifying through communal performance.

Consider the case of Amazon Prime Video's *The Rings of Power* which generated controversy due to its culturally diverse cast, which some fans received negatively (Boisvert & Gagnon, 2024, p.192). This backlash led to the formation of various interpretive communities, each attempting to either defend or criticise the production in distinct ways, illustrating the complexities of hatewatching in the digital age (Boisvert & Gagnon, 2024, p.192). The case revealed scores of anti-fan groups that criticised the series, showcasing how fans and anti-fans engage with the series and each other, blurring the lines between different groups (Boisvert & Gagnon, 2024, p.193). Overall, this form of hatewatching serves as a representation of the viewer's expectations of media and the perceived failures of contemporary cultural production, highlighting a complex relationship between audience engagement and media consumption (Gray, 2020, p.38).

Ultimately, Game of Thrones hatewatching edits reveal how digital fandom negotiates problematic texts through simultaneous rejection and recreation. The coexistence of cynical and hopeful engagement suggests that in platform economies, even disappointment holds value as a driver of sustained relevance in media. TikTok edits, as a form of fan labour and cultural production, therefore allows fans to express their emotional responses and reinterpret the series in ways that reflect their hopes or frustrations. Since both practices, in the context of this study, involve engagement with the series through edits, it is clear that TikTok serves as a crucial space for fans to express these dual modes of hatewatching, often blending celebration and critique in their interactions with edits, both as producers who share their creations and consumers who comment and circulate other fans' work.

2.4. Digital Convergence and Textual Poaching

The phenomenon of Thrones fan edits on TikTok exemplifies the intersection of digital convergence and textual poaching, demonstrating how contemporary fan practices reshape audience engagement with media texts. *Digital convergence*, defined as the merging of previously distinct media platforms (Baruch, 2020, p.688), has enabled fans to transition from passive consumers to active co-creators, appropriating and reworking original content through TikTok's short-form video format. This aligns with Jenkins' (2006, p.136) concept of *convergence culture*, where grassroots creativity intersects with commercial media, as fans migrate their practices across platforms (Lamerichs, 2018, p.14), using TikTok's algorithmic infrastructure to share reinterpretations of the series. The platform's features such as duets, stitches, and sound remixing, facilitate *textual*

poaching, where fans take elements from the original text to create new narratives that reflect their own perspectives (Bennett, 2014, p.8). These edits range from celebratory tributes to critical reworkings, illustrating how fans simultaneously engage with and disengage from the source material, asserting their agency over its meaning.

Textual poaching in this context is not merely derivative but transformative, as fans employ their own skills and tools to challenge Thrones' narratives. For instance, edits that reimagine Daenerys Targaryen's arc or excise the controversial final season epitomise Jenkins' (1992) framework of fans as poachers who rewrite texts to align with their expectations. These practices are further complicated by the dual dynamics of hopeful and hatewatching (Gray, 2020). Hopeful edits often romanticising overlooked character relationships or fixing plot holes, reflect a desire to salvage the series' potential, while cynical edits compile narrative inconsistencies or ironic memes to perform critique (Madison et al., 2025, p.2). Both modes constitute fan labour (Hill, 2017, p.4), as fans invest unpaid creative effort to sustain the text's cultural relevance, even years after its conclusion.

TikTok's algorithmic logic amplifies these practices by privileging emotionally charged content, creating feedback loops where fan edits gain visibility through communal engagement. This mirrors Baruch's (2020, p.690) observations about fan-led translation communities, where participatory labour fosters collective identity. The platform's affordances encourage iterative remixing, for instance, a hopeful edit may be stitched with cynical commentary, spawning chains of reinterpretation that blur the line between tribute and critique. Such interactions exemplify digital convergence's role in reshaping cultural production, as fans leverage TikTok's infrastructure to negotiate hierarchies with producers (Matthews, 2018, p.2). The resulting edits function as both cultural commentary and communal expression, reinforcing fandom's role as a space where audiences reinterpret media through collaborative creativity (Costello & Moore, 2007, p.139).

TikTok's algorithm promotes post-based virality, which allows fans to quickly adapt and create content that resonates with current trends, fostering a community where fans eagerly anticipate posts from fellow fans and influencers alike. This shift from persona-based fame to post-based engagement means that fans are not just passive consumers but active participants in the content creation process, often looking forward to the latest trends and posts from their favourite creators (Abidin, 2020, p.79), which can be applied to their favourite editors. The notion of *visibility labour*, which is crucial for TikTok influencers as they curate their online presence to attract and maintain audience attention, involves not only creating engaging content but also navigating the expectations of their respective fandom, where hatewatching can ensue. This behaviour can lead to increased

visibility for the creator, as engagement metrics such as comments and shares are often driven by both positive and negative interactions (Abidin, 2020, p.84).

The emotional labour of hatewatching is sustained by TikTok's platform affordances, where the algorithm privileges emotionally charged content, ensuring both hopeful and cynical edits gain visibility. This creates self-reinforcing cycles of engagement where hopeful edits inspire further creative reworkings, cynical critiques generate chains of comments and responses, and both forms maintain the text's cultural relevance beyond its natural lifecycle (Yin, 2020, p.486). This challenges traditional models of audience engagement by demonstrating how disappointment within fandom can fuel creative output rather than abandonment (Yin, 2020, p.488), as platforms transform criticism into a form of cultural participation, and fan labour persists as both tribute and protest. The role of algorithmic practices in shaping how content is consumed and produced on TikTok shows that prosumers engage in strategies to optimise their visibility too, such as using trending audio memes and participating in viral challenges (Abidin, 2020, p.80). This creates an environment where Thrones fans can not only support their favourite creators but also contribute to the content ecosystem by responding to posts, thus reinforcing their role as prosumers in the TikTok community.

In conclusion, Thrones TikTok edits underscore how digital convergence and textual poaching empower fans to redefine their relationship with media texts. By appropriating, critiquing, and reimagining the series, fans assert their influence over its legacy, transforming passive consumption into active cultural participation. These practices highlight the evolving dynamics between producers and audiences in convergent media landscapes, where fan labour and platform algorithms collectively sustain and subvert the original text's cultural footprint.

2.5. Rationale for Theoretical Approach

This study employs an interdisciplinary theoretical framework to analyse Game of Thrones TikTok edits as a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing emotional, critical, and technological dimensions. Fan studies provides the foundational lens for examining fans' active role in content creation and sharing, framing them not as passive consumers but as participatory agents who reshape media texts. Complementing this, theories of affective engagement and audience reception illuminate the emotional and interpretive dynamics underpinning fan practices, exploring how edits elicit collective joy, disappointment, or critique. Crucially, the concept hatewatching are integrated to dissect the dualistic nature of fan engagement on TikTok. These frameworks reveal how fans

fluctuate from reclaiming the series' potential to sharing ironic or critical commentary, reflecting tensions between devotion and deflation. Finally, TikTok's structures as a digital platform promotes prosumer labour through digital convergence and textual poaching. The platform's ecosystem fosters a culture of anticipatory interaction, where fans and influencers co-construct meaning through edits and comments, reducing boundaries between support and critique. In sum, this theoretical framework captures the interplay between fan agency, affective investment, and platform logics, offering a clear lens to interrogate how fan edits persist in digital culture through participatory reimagining.

3. Method

While other qualitative methods like critical discourse analysis or thematic analysis could also be applied to this study, this study employs content analysis (CA) as its methodological approach to explore how fan engagement with Game of Thrones TikTok edits reflects patterns of hopeful hatewatching and hatewatching.

CA is particularly effective in this context because it focuses on the emotional and ideological dimensions of the content, enabling researchers to delve into how language constructs meaning and expresses emotions within fan-created materials (Taherdoost, 2022, p.57). The method's emphasis on contextual analysis further enhances its applicability, as it allows for an exploration of the dynamics within fan interactions and the broader cultural implications of their content (Taherdoost, 2022, p.57).

In this section will be the description and justification of the use of CA, outline of the proposed sample and sampling strategy, operationalise key concepts, and an explanation of the process of data collection, processing, and analysis.

3.1 Research Design

This study employs qualitative content analysis (CA) which is particularly suited for exploring the research question regarding fan engagement with Thrones edits and the patterns of hopeful and cynical hatewatching. This method allows for a systematic description of the meaning embedded in qualitative data, which is essential for understanding the nuanced expressions of fan engagement on social media platforms like TikTok (Schreier, 2014, p.170).

By employing a codebook, this study categorises various aspects of fan interactions, focusing on elements that relate directly to the concepts of hopeful and cynical hatewatching. For instance, the coding frame can include categories such as “expressions of sadness” which can help in abstracting the data to a higher level of meaning while still capturing the essence of fan sentiments (Schreier, 2014, p.170). This systematic approach ensures that every relevant part of the TikTok edits is examined, thereby reducing the risk of bias that may arise from preconceived notions about fan behavior (Schreier, 2014, p.171).

Moreover, the flexibility of qualitative content analysis allows researchers to adapt their coding frames as new themes emerge from the data, which is crucial when analysing dynamic and evolving content like fan videos (Schreier, 2014, p.171). The method enhances the reliability of the

findings, ensuring that the categories used to interpret fan engagement are clear and unambiguous (Schreier, 2014, p.171). This exhaustive approach not only aids in identifying patterns of hopeful and cynical hatewatching but also provides a comprehensive understanding of how these patterns manifest in the context of fan to fan interactions with Thrones content on TikTok.

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

This study adopted a hybrid sampling approach that blended intentional search strategies with organic algorithmic discovery to examine Thrones-related TikTok edits and their associated comments. This method captured both researcher-identified content and platform-recommended material, reflecting how users naturally encounter and engage with cynical and hopeful hatewatching discourses within TikTok's ecosystem.

The edit selection process began with targeted searches using the #GameofThronesEdit hashtag and hashtags of the main characters' names to establish an initial dataset. As the researcher engaged with this content, TikTok's recommendation algorithm subsequently surfaced additional relevant edits in the personalised "For You" feed, which were then incorporated into the study. This dual-phase approach acknowledges the platform's central role in mediating content visibility while maintaining some researcher direction. The sampling period spanned between March and April 2025, and the final sample comprised 50 videos, with a deliberate limit of no more than three edits from any single creator to prevent overrepresentation of individual perspectives and maintain diversity within the dataset.

Comment selection followed specific criteria to balance analytical carefulness with realistic representation. Only substantial comments containing five or more words were included to ensure meaningful qualitative analysis, with selections made from the top of each video's comment section until ten eligible responses per edit were identified. This top-to-bottom selection process preserved TikTok's native engagement hierarchy while filtering out very brief or incomplete reactions. Although the primary analysis focused on these main comments, select replies were retained when necessary to provide contextual clarity, though these were not counted toward the ten-comment sample and were considered part of the original comment.

This methodology offers several advantages for studying platform-native fan practices. By combining initial search-based sampling with algorithmically delivered content, it captures both intentional and organic manifestations of fan labour. The inclusion limits per creator help mitigate

individual bias, while the standardised comment selection process ensures consistency across the dataset. The approach particularly suits research examining how the visibility and circulation of fan critiques is developing, as it mirrors how fan-made content can easily reach ordinary users who use TikTok.

3.3 Processing and Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved TikTok edits being collected using the search criteria outlined above. Each edit was saved in a folder on the app itself for analysis. Metadata such as hashtags, captions, and engagement metrics were also recorded. After the collection of data, the gathered comments and descriptions of their respective edits were reviewed and coded on Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, and the imported data was saved within a project file, which could be regularly backed up to prevent data loss.

Through this platform, each comment was treated as an individual data unit, allowing for an organised and systematic analysis. The software's features for document management enabled a straightforward categorisation of each comment efficiently in relation to the predefined codebook, ensuring all relevant data was easily accessible for coding and analysis to identify recurring themes, discursive strategies, and emotional tones. Initial coding focused on distinguishing between hopeful and cynical hatewatching. The language used in the comments was analysed to uncover discursive strategies (e.g., celebration, critique, irony), and was categorised using a codebook that consisted of three main categories *Hopeful Hatewatching*, *Cynical Hatewatching*, *Community Engagement*, and *Sustained Fandom* (see Appendix A). This is supplemented by eighteen fleshed out codes (see Appendix B) that were inductively developed as different themes kept surfacing.

By utilising content analysis, this study provided a nuanced understanding of how fans used TikTok edits to engage with Thrones, reflecting patterns of hatewatching. The proposed research design ensured a systematic and rigorous approach to data collection and analysis, while also allowing for the exploration of the emotional, discursive, and platform-specific dimensions of fan engagement.

3.4 Operationalisation

The following codes have been developed to systematically analyse fan engagement with Thrones and its fan-made TikTok edits, capturing the nuanced ways fans express their responses

through patterns of *Hopeful Hatewatching*, *Cynical Hatewatching*, *Community Engagement*, and *Sustained Fandom*. Each code is defined with specific linguistic and thematic markers to ensure consistent application throughout the analysis, allowing for a structured examination of the full spectrum of emotional, critical, and communal responses within fan discourse.

Hopeful Hatewatching captures fans who critique the show while still expressing investment, often through reimagining or defending its elements. HH_ALTERNATE_FIXES identifies comments where fans rewrite plotlines or propose alternative outcomes (e.g., "Arya should've died instead"), reflecting a desire to "fix" perceived narrative flaws. HH_BOOK_COMPARISON codes references to the book series as a way to highlight the show's unfulfilled potential (e.g., "The books gave Jaime a better arc"), emphasising a comparative critique. HH_CHARACTER_DEFENSE includes justifications of characters' actions or rejections of mainstream criticism (e.g., "Daenerys was gaslit!"), showing protective fandom. HH_JOY marks moments of unironic appreciation or emotional payoff (e.g., "Jon and Ghost reuniting healed my soul"), while HH_NOSTALGIA captures longing for earlier seasons (e.g., "Seasons 1–4 were perfect"), indicating bittersweet attachment.

The set of codes for *Cynical Hatewatching* focuses on more overtly critical or mocking engagement. CH_BOOK_SNARK documents sarcastic or derisive comparisons to the books (e.g., "D&D really gave us Bran without the magic?"), where the source material is weaponised against the show. CH_CHARACTER_PORTRAYAL covers complaints about character arcs or treatment (e.g., "They did Varys dirty"), revealing dissatisfaction with creative choices. CH_DENIAL captures outright rejection of canon events (e.g., "This can't be real GOT lore"), reflecting disillusionment. CH_DISAPPOINTMENT codes explicit frustration (e.g., "Ruined the show over that?"), and CH_SARCASM identifies ironic or mocking humour (e.g., "He had more potential than Bran the Boring"), showcasing detached ridicule.

The *Community Engagement* codes examine how fans interact within TikTok's communal space. COMM_EDIT_APPRECIATION highlights praise for the technical or creative aspects of edits (e.g., "The audio sync is genius"), emphasising aesthetic engagement. COMM_FAN_LABOUR calls for acknowledgments of other fanworks (e.g., "Make an edit where Jon kills Dany properly"), demonstrating collaborative fandom. COMM_INTERACTION captures exchanges that build rapport, including inside jokes or shared critiques, while COMM_REFERENCE tags nods to niche fandom humour (e.g., "Tormund's 'big woman' here"), reinforcing communal identity.

For *Sustained Fandom*, the codes track long-term fan attitudes beyond immediate reactions. NEG_CHARACTER logs outright criticism or disdain for characters (e.g., negative nicknames),

whereas NOSTALGIC_GRIEF captures mournful reflections on lost potential (e.g., "This scene hurts now"). POS_CHARACTER documents enduring praise (e.g., "King in the North," "Dragon Queen"), and UNCONDITIONAL_LOVE identifies declarations of loyalty despite flaws (e.g., "Flaws and all, still a masterpiece"), illustrating resilient attachment.

By applying these codes, the analysis can map how fans negotiate their relationships with Thrones through critique, creativity, humour, and enduring passion, within the participatory culture of TikTok edits. This operationalisation ensures systematic analysis while accommodating the complexity of fan discourse. The codes account for both critical and appreciative engagement, allowing examination of how hatewatching coexists with persistent fandom. Particular attention is given to linguistic cues and rhetorical patterns. By anchoring these codes in observable textual features, the analysis maintains rigour while remaining sensitive to the creative, often playful nature of fan commentary.

3.5 Credibility and Reliability

As both a scholar and a fan of Thrones, I maintained reflexivity throughout the research process. Regular peer debriefing sessions with students outside of my study helped balance my insider knowledge of the Thrones fandom with necessary analytical objectivity when interpreting TikTok comments. This dual perspective proved valuable in navigating fan vernacular and cultural references, while conscious reflection and consultation with colleagues mitigated potential interpretive biases stemming from personal investment in the source material.

This study maintains transparency throughout all research phases, from the initial data selection and coding to theme development and analysis. By providing detailed documentation of each methodological step, including the rationale behind coding decisions and analytical processes, the study ensures its findings are both reliable and reproducible. Such transparency enables other researchers to critically evaluate the work's validity, replicate its approach, and verify the trustworthiness of its conclusions. This commitment to clarity strengthens the study's credibility but also contributes to broader scholarly discourse on fan engagement and digital media analysis.

Ethical Considerations: Only public TikTok content was analysed, with usernames redacted. The study complied with platform terms, excluded toxic comments, and stored data securely. Focus remained on critique rather than personal attacks.

The research analysed only publicly available TikTok content and as usernames are part of the platform's creative culture, the research attempts to retain most usernames within the results. This

is necessary as keeping usernames helps track discussions between users, possibly identify patterns across creators and properly credit fan work. It was ensured that analytical focus remained firmly on critique of creative content rather than personal attacks, aligning with established ethical frameworks for social media research.

TikTok's algorithm may have skewed content visibility. The 5-word comment minimum excluded brief reactions, and the 2025 time frame captured only a snapshot of fandom discourse. While CA's interpretive approach allows multiple readings, the methodology ensures credible insights into hatewatching practices.

Several constraints shaped this study. For example, TikTok's algorithm may have influenced content visibility in the dataset as I interacted with edits during data collection. Other limitations to consider is that the 5-word minimum for included comments potentially excluded meaningful brief reactions and the 2025 data collection captured only a temporal snapshot of evolving fandom discourse.

While content analysis' interpretive nature inherently permits multiple readings of qualitative data, the systematic methodology employed ensures the findings provide credible, well-substantiated insights into contemporary hatewatching practices. These limitations nonetheless highlight valuable avenues for future research, particularly regarding algorithmic impacts on fan discourse.

4. Results

The following section dissects the results of the research, going through each category and code with some codes overlapping depending on the comments. This section dissects the key findings from the analysis, which revealed four main themes: *hopeful hatewatching*, *cynical hatewatching*, *community engagement*, and *sustained fandom*. By exploring these themes, we examine how audiences engage with hatewatching through the narratives of TikTok edits, addressing the broader question of user comment interaction in online spaces. Comments and usernames containing odd fonts, invalid, unreadable symbols and emojis were automatically removed or replaced with “@user” to maintain clarity and consistency, while retaining the original content as much as possible. Typos are also mended for clarity’s sake.

4.1 Hopeful Hatewatching

4.1.1. *HH_ALTERNATE_FIXES*

The most prominent pattern of hopeful hatewatching emerged through fans actively rewriting the show's narrative, with *HH_ALTERNATE_FIXES* capturing 87 instances of fans proposing alternative character arcs and plot resolutions. These comments revealed a dynamic where disappointment transformed into creative energy, as participants reconstructed relationships and storylines they felt were mishandled or weakened by the show's writers, describing the lost potential of the characters, and the hopeful tone of what could have been.

Many fans used humour to address their wishful outcomes and express their longing, like @Atlas-Liberty's hyperbolic "'THEYRE HAPPILY MARRIED' I scream as the doctors put me away" or @vee's equally dramatic "'THEYRE STILL TOGETHER AS A FAMILY!!' i yell as i get dragged to the psych ward", both using exaggerated jokes about being clinically insane to process their emotional investment in unrealised happy endings.

Beyond jokes, fans engaged in serious narrative revisions, offering alternate endings to canon events. The character limitations of TikTok's comment format led some users, such as @ahm.3ddd, to develop their proposed revisions across multiple replies. The comments detailed a scenario in which Robb Stark would have outmaneuvered the Lannisters, and claims that “the west is lucky that the writers didn't do this” because the show would have ended sooner. This reveals how

fans utilise the platform's threaded reply function to articulate complex fixes to canonical events. With fans positioning themselves as co-authors who could mend the plot through collective revision, these comments functioned as critique.

Other fans projected hopeful futures onto characters, like @Turcan-Cristina imagining "him surviving would have been so good for the show. imagine him making the decisions about Dany, Cersei" regarding Robb Stark, or @Ladyyxoo's wishful "In another universe him and Sansa rule the north" about Theon Greyjoy. These patterns demonstrate a form of hopeful hatewatching, where fans maintain emotional ties to the text despite its flaws. By processing their disappointment through creative reclamation, they reveal a persistent investment in Thrones, using humour and collective revision to sustain their engagement.

4.1.2 HH_BOOK_COMPARISON

The following code, HH_BOOK_COMPARISON, depicts 17 comments that contrast the series with George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels, often to express hope for unresolved narratives or critique the show's deviations. These engagements reflect hopeful hatewatching by privileging the books' unfinished potential over the show's concluded and often maligned outcomes. Some observable patterns that emerged were the following.

To begin, some fans reveal their anticipation for book-exclusive resolutions to the series' ending, looking to the unpublished *The Winds of Winter* novel to sustain optimism about character arcs the show failed. Comments like "THEY WILL GET MARRIED IN WINDS TRUSSSTTT" (@user) and "in the books they live happily ever after in tarth (trust me i'm in grrm's walls and he wrote it, i saw with my own eyes)" (@unemotionallystable). The tone of fantasy or delusion underscores a communal coping mechanism, where humour and exaggerated certainty guides optimism about the books' uncertain future.

Other comments highlighted characters with richer book narratives, contrasting their TV portrayals such as "For olenna fans, she is well alive in books and even more badass than just killing Joffrey. Hehe." (@bbeliza) and "George didnt even get his potential, didnt give him even a pov but Richard Madden somehow managed to be people's favorite" [about Robb Stark] (@berylaine). Here, the books function as a countertext, allowing fans to delegitimise the show's choices while preserving attachment to the franchise.

Some users also cited book lore to reinterpret show events optimistically. "This makes more sense in the books, as its a hint that aegon isn't an actual targaryeon but a man who will be loved as a targaryeon by the people for however long his reign is" (@alex). Such comparisons reveal a latent hope that the books will retroactively "correct" the show's perceived flaws, a hallmark of hopeful hatewatching's investment in unrealised potential

4.1.3 HH_CHARACTER_DEFENSE

The code HH_CHARACTER_DEFENSE, uncovered 61 quotations reflecting fans' passionate advocacy for characters, often framing their narratives to align with more satisfying or morally consistent arcs. This pattern leans into hopeful hatewatching, as fans justify, or correct perceived writing failures to preserve their connection to the story.

Many comments construct alternative characteristics, rejecting the show's choices in favour of more resonant versions. For example, "I'll never forgive the writers for making him leave her. MY Jaime would NEVER" (@Alotta), asserting a truer, more loyal version of the character beyond the show's portrayal. Similarly,

'She betrayed Ned she told Cers-' SHE WAS 11 YEARS OLD. She was always told Robert grew up with Ned like brothers and she was away from her mom. SHE TRUSTED 'AUNT' CERSEI bc Ned never told her not too (@MJ)

justifies Sansa Stark's mistakes. These defences often carry a protective, almost redemptive tone, suggesting fans cling to their understanding of characters' actions despite disappointments.

Others emphasise characters' overlooked virtues or growth saying things like "I'll never listen to those who say Sansa didn't have a redemption arc. She learned from her mistakes and she accepted Jon as her true brother." (@Brih). Even defense of former versions of characters were seen, "Thx I never understand the people say 'it was necessary' no that wasn't and If you thinks it was you completely miss the point of her character she was butchered. Dany would never burn innocent" (@ymri), implying a hopeful counter-narrative where her compassion prevails over the show's canon events.

While some comments verge on hating characters, often spark defensive replies, reinforcing communal efforts to salvage meaning.

he's so boring... hate to admit it but his character is so one-sided no ups and downs just straight up 8 seasons of 'the honorable knight' who saves everyone... (@muxe.dikka)

[Reply] he died mate i think that classes as a down (@matilda - Creator)

These defences often carry a hopeful tone, implying a truer version of the character exists beyond the show.

4.1.4 HH_JOY

HH_JOY captures 12 quotations where fans express deep emotional satisfaction and celebratory engagement, demonstrating how hopeful hatewatching manifests through positive communal experiences. These comments highlight fans' ability to derive explicit joy from the show despite its controversial narrative choices.

Many reactions focus on emotionally resonant reunions and relationships. "I SOBBED when they were reunited. After all they'd been through??! Ugh I'm tearing up just thinking about it." (@gimli) exemplifies how fans cherish meaningful character connections. Similarly, "his relationship with the stark girls was the best part of the show to me... i'm so happy they never tried to make it weird or anything like he was fr the dad that stepped up..." (@beannut69) celebrates the purity of certain bonds, emphasising how these dynamics provide emotional anchors for viewers.

Cathartic moments of justice and closure also generate enthusiastic responses. "i believe every single one of us are grateful to olenna for fulfilling our heart desires towards joeffery.. God i was so satisfied am i alright?..." (@sheesh) reveals collective appreciation for narrative payoffs that align with audience expectations. The use of "we" and "us" underscores the shared nature of this satisfaction.

Redemption arcs inspire particularly hopeful engagement, as seen in "I love how Sansa found it in her heart to forgive Theon after everything. That's the true mark of being a family (and to

think that Theon once thought that the Starks are not his family...” (@Visenya-Ravenwood). This highlights fans' investment in characters overcoming their past traumas. Even ambiguous moments, like speculation about a character's identity, “best part is we don't know if that's truly his face, he could've done this so much, for so long, he may not even remember his own face” (@ImCopper1), demonstrate joyful engagement with the text's complexities.

4.1.5 HH_NOSTALGIA

HH_NOSTALGIA (n=22) reflects comments of bittersweet longing for earlier, more beloved iterations of Thrones, demonstrating how hopeful hatewatching manifests through selective remembrance and idealisation of the show's past. This pattern reveals a tension between disappointment and enduring affection, as fans revisit and celebrate earlier seasons while distancing themselves from later narrative choices.

Many comments emphasise the stark contrast between the show's peaks and its decline. Some users pose questions which spark replies that frame the early seasons as worthy of appreciation despite later failures, highlight how fans compartmentalise the show's quality, preserving their love for its stronger moments;

I still haven't seen the show but I know the last season is is horrible is it still worth watching
(@liam)

[Reply] season 1-4 are great. 5-6 are messy and then 7-8 is just awful” (@louiejb) [Reply]
yes just shut ur laptop half way through the last episode and i promise your good...
(@moon)

Others express wistful attachment to specific eras seen in comments like @anat's simple declaration (“never skipping s1 Stark family edits...”) and @Alexandra-Vlad's lament (“I miss the times when season 8 hadn't happened”). These reveal a nostalgic retreat to earlier, emotionally resonant storylines. Similarly, critiques of later seasons, like @User8100002230's observation about Daenerys's changing presence (“She looked like she wasn't human in season 1 (in the best way). The other seasons she just looked progressively like a beautiful girl in a blond wig”), underline a preference for the show's initial appeal.

4.2 Cynical Hatewatching

4.2.1 *CH_BOOK_SNARK*

Similar to CH_BOOK_COMPARISON, CH_BOOK_SNARK (n=11) exemplifies cynical hatewatching through fans' cynical, weaponised comparisons between the Thrones series and its source material. These comments reveal disagreements with the adaptation, using the books as evidence of the show's narrative failures while maintaining bitter engagement.

Fans frequently highlight the books' superior complexity to underscore the show's shortcomings. @Angel's exasperated remark, "I been reading the books and seeing just how much magic there is and how much more simple the show was in comparison is so strange... Bran is one of my favorites in the book but in the show he's...yeah", embodies a dismissive tone, reducing the adapted character to an unspoken failure. Similarly fans interact with the editor to share their grievances and give advice,

Also prepare yourself for so much more magic and plottwists when reading asoiaf! honestly, it's better to read it after watching the show, coz you'll see everything past S4 as fanfiction otherwise..." (@user)

[Reply] i sure hope so! the last few seasons were painful to watch (@Avery - Creator)

Critiques often target specific creative choices with palpable resentment. Some comments echo the same sentiments, condemning how writers handled characters; "never forgiving the directors for making it seem like the only way women could cause change was by acting like men, there are so many capable women in the books that don't fight that are ruined or cut" (@Drew2thiccy) and "the writers fumbled from episode 1 not giving the Stark siblings their time together, Jon and Sansa don't have a distant relationship in the books, he thinks of her as often as Arya and she him" (@Sad-Elf-Nightmare-Lady). These remarks go beyond comparison, weaponising the books to delegitimise the show. Yet the continued engagement, through edits and debates, reveals how cynical hatewatching sustains fandom, as fans bond over shared grievances

while clinging to the story's unrealised potential.

4.2.2 CH_CHARACTER_PORTRAYAL

CH_CHARACTER_PORTRAYAL, with 43 quotations, demonstrates fans' furious rejection of the show's character arcs, particularly regarding perceived regression or wasted potential. These comments reveal deep resentment towards the writers' creative decisions, with different arcs emerging as a focal point for collective outrage.

The most dominant critiques target Jaime's narrative conclusion, with comments like "I hate how they ruined Jaime's character! Character development and arc for NOTHING" (@Chewy) encapsulating the sentiment. This disappointment was felt through interactions; "I've literally just finished the show. His ending was so underwhelming" (@grace) followed by [Reply] "genuinely felt so rushed and lazy. all that character development just for him to end up alone" (@matilda), suggesting the show undermined years of carefully constructed growth. The bitterness extends to missed opportunities, "The fact that they ruined Jamie's relationship w Brienne (ruined his whole arc in general) and they STILL didn't give us Tormund x Brienne at the end is so UUUUHGGGGHHHHH" (@Jai), demonstrating how fans catalogue multiple grievances simultaneously.

Fans particularly object to characters being artificially diminished for dramatic effect. "One of the smartest characters of the series turned fool in the final seasons." (@shoegum), implies character assassination, while "im so sick of the show making Cersei and Jaime some kind of sick and twisted tragic romance, ruins Jaime for what????" (@yeah) rejects the romanticisation of toxic dynamics. These remarks go beyond disappointment, outlining the show's choices as actively sabotaging their own narrative integrity.

4.2.3 CH_DENIAL

With 33 comments, CH_DENIAL can be linked to HH_ALTERNATE_FIXES as it highlights fans' outright rejection of canonical events, showing how viewers cope with narrative dissatisfaction by collectively dismissing unpopular plot developments. This pattern reveals a particular form of engagement where fans protect their investment by treating the show's conclusion as non-canonical.

The comments showcase varying degrees of deliberate ignorance towards the finale. Sarcastic remarks like “Wdym this was the last episode nothing bad could ever happen to this loving family” (@Megs) and “For my own mental wellbeing I do not recognize s8 after the second episode” (@sarah stark) emphasised the use of humour to reject the show’s canon events. Similarly, “The show ends after Dany’s big speech. Because I will NEVER accept that he would have let Jon live...” (@Care), further affirmed by the edit creator’s reply, “fr the last season was just horrible fanfiction” (@user - Creator), dismisses the finale, framing later events as unworthy of acknowledgment.

More denial emerges in comments like “Grey Worm would have never let Jon snow lived” (@AffectedXAleshia) and “#1 reason I choose to ignore the final episodes of the season ;,) the way they ruined Jaime and broken her heart” (@Leah-Grace), using character logic to justify their rejection of outcomes. This pattern highlights how cynical hatewatching can manifest as collective gaslighting of the text itself, with fans bonding over their refusal to accept disappointing resolutions while paradoxically remaining engaged enough to protest them.

4.2.4 CH_DISAPPOINTMENT

CH_DISAPPOINTMENT captures 71 comments of fans expressing the profound letdown towards Thrones’ final seasons. This code reveals cynical hatewatching through bitter expressions of wasted potential and broken expectations, where fans articulate their disillusionment while remaining engaged enough to critique.

The comments demonstrate exasperation with the show’s creative decisions. Terse remarks, “The writers had one job with the ending” (@watter315’s), encapsulate the prevailing sentiment of failed responsibility, while “Sucks they took half his wits for the last couple seasons” (@Matt) suggests Tyrion’s diminished intelligence and perceived erosion of established traits. More straightforward reactions like “This plot line ended up disappointing...” (@user) conveys quiet resignation amidst broader outrage.

More visceral reactions like @Veer’s critique of Rickon Stark’s last moments

I will always be mad about how they barely cared when Rickon was murdered. that psych0path let him run for his life just to let him bleed to death in the grass, and afterwards everyone in that battle-

[Reply] just stepped on his body. and the Starks that were still alive barely spoke or cried

about it??? aint no way. that's your youngest brother, man

highlights emotional betrayal through detailed knowledge of character logic. Likewise, @adriy's exasperated "the whhhhooooollleeee damn show she repeatedly stated she would not be her father and they threw that ALL away for a terrible last season..." comment, referencing Daenerys' character development. By measuring the finale against years of established storytelling, fans frame their disappointment as inevitable, a perspective that defines these reactions as fundamentally cynical.

4.2.5 CH_SARCASM

43 quotations under CH_SARCASM illustrate cynical hatewatching through more biting humour and ironic commentary, revealing how fans use mockery to process their disappointment while maintaining engagement with Thrones. This pattern displays a particularly sharp-edged form of participation, where wit replaces outright rejection.

The comments employed dark comedy to underscore their sadness. For example, comparing the Stark family to experiencing trauma, "When my card declines at therapy so they bring out the stark family" (@Hiccup). Similarly, @2voik's comment regarding the audio used in the edit, "nothings gonna hurt u?... bro they literally die", uses exaggerated disbelief to highlight the edit's irony.

Several remarks feign ignorance or rewrite history to make their point. There were sarcastic claims like "Such a shame they cancelled it after 6 seasons :(" (@Giann_uh) and @Peanut's "*What's your favorite horror movie* "idk maybe all of Game of Thrones." I feel in love with this show to the point I till cry like a baby watching it" which transforms praise into critique through framing it as a horror story.

Though playful on the surface, some remarks carry critique, addressing the prioritisation of witty spectacle over preserving storylines like "the stark classic risking your life just for a good line" (@Molly-Sue). The comments' surface-level amusement represents how sarcasm dissects writing flaws, while being playfully dismissive.

4.3 Community Engagement

4.3.1 *COMM_EDIT_APPRECIATION*

To reveal how fans collectively celebrate TikTok edits, creating spaces for both emotional and technical admiration, *COMM_EDIT_APPRECIATION* (n=99) was used. These comments demonstrate how community engagement can foster positive interactions even within a haterwatching context.

Many responses express profound emotional connections to edits. Through comments like “This could be the last edit I see on this app and it will have all been worth it” (@Mudpuddle) and “I've been watching this video for 10 minutes and the reason is that I'm crying. I can't believe I actually CRIED watching this” (@user), fans' praise show how edits facilitate deep, shared emotional experiences. @nadia's comment “OH MY GOOOOOD THE SOUNDS ???!!!! PERFECT WITH EACH BEAT AND THAT ENDING??? CHEFS KISS THATS MY FAVE SCENE OF JON” similarly demonstrates how edit appreciation becomes performative within fan communities.

Technical admiration features prominently, with fans analysing editorial craftsmanship. @max's analytical breakdown of the scenes used

LOVE THE ATTENTION TO DETAIL!!! for example, ‘when ned stark lost his head, who was truly responsible?’ and then a shot of littlefinger, along with cersei's demonstration at the end. very very underrated edit, you have the eye and the talent for this kind of stuff...

and @Bbbbbbb's simple “Bro your edit should be in hbo” elevates creators' talents while pointing out the professionalism of editing artistry. The focus on lyrical synchronicity shows how fans collectively decode creative choices, “the lyrics suit so well in relation to their relationship, I love this!” (@vveniat). These interactions create a counterbalance to haterwatching's negativity, putting an emphasis on the engagement within the editing community.

4.3.2 COMM_FAN_LABOUR

COMM_FAN_LABOUR (n=20), captures the collaborative creativity and demand for fan-generated content that sustains the Thrones fandom, demonstrating how community engagement manifests through requests, inspiration and collective storytelling efforts. These interactions reveal a dynamic ecosystem where fans actively shape alternative narratives.

The comments showcase direct creative appeals through specific audio suggestions, “i beg you to make one about arya with The Bolter by taylor s” (@totonha), and detailed scene requests, “hear me out, an edit just like this one but including ned “your brother or your lover”, robb “oh is he?” and sansa “tommen baratheon? another bastard” (@user). This illustrates how fans curate content through creative requests that they expect editors to be able to execute, another example being “waiting for an edit like this but with ‘chaos is a ladder’” (@шишка) which anticipates Varys’ famous monologue to be used as an audio.

Fan labour extends beyond editing to inspire derivative works, as shown by @Jess's claim that “This edit literally made me write a 40k fanfiction...”, shows how these edits can serve as creative catalysts for fandoms. @jessie's alternate universe fanfiction request for Robb Stark, “need me a fic where he kept his word and married roslin frey”, further shows how fans collectively workshop narrative corrections to the original material.

The community also somehow self-regulates its creative demands, with comments like “yall make your own edits w sansa and margaery, let this one be...” (@saffa), revealing tensions around content ownership and creative saturation. These interactions form a participatory culture where fans act as both consumers and commissioners of alternative content.

4.3.3 COMM_INTERACTION

To capture the dynamic exchanges between creators and viewers that sustain engagement within Thrones' TikTok community, COMM_INTERACTION (n=49). These interactions reveal how fans build relationships through praise, technical discussions, and shared interpretations, creating a participatory culture that exists alongside both hopeful and cynical hatewatching practices.

The comments showcased various forms of creator-viewer engagement. For instance, this can be seen through @Noah's casual acknowledgement of a creator, “Editing House Stark. Welcome

to my moot list.”. This hints at a common social media dynamic of a “moot list”, or “mutual list”, where creators and followers mutually follow each other based on shared content interests.

There were also technical inquiries such as @kåt's question about editing apps and the creator's direct reply, “after effects” (@Cuvvr), showing the two-sided aspect of these spaces, where skills are shared openly.

Interpretative discussions emerge in exchanges like viewers' requests for clarification and creators' explanations:

what does that quote mean??? I'm slow... (@anna)

[Reply] The way i interpret it is that the first part is expressing how they're flawed and have the capacity for violence but the second part is a person that they care about so they look past that (@sophie - Creator)

showing how fans collaboratively decode content.

Playful banter is exemplified by mock concern “someone needs to confiscate Taylor Swift and the stark siblings from you” (@gracie), and the creator's self-aware reply, “it's actually becoming a problem i have made so many...” (@daisy). This maintains a lighthearted, friendly tone even when directly addressing repetitive content trends from the producer.

The pattern also includes enthusiastic praise and grateful responses from creators,

this is the best edit I've ever seen. and I have a very high screen time (@wassup)

[Reply] Damn this the best compliment i ever got... ty for the follow too check out some of my follows too they cook better than me (@user)

illustrating how mutual appreciation fuels continued participation, even recommending other creators. These interactions create a feedback loop where creators feel valued and viewers feel heard, sustaining engagement regardless of fans' overall stance toward the source material.

4.3.4 COMM_REFERENCE

The code COMM_REFERENCE (n=23) reveals how fans employ shared lore, behind-the-scenes knowledge, and jokes to construct collective meaning around Game of Thrones content.

The comments showcase various types of referential engagement. Some translate quotes from the show, “for anyone wondering she said 'all men must die' and he said 'all men must serve.'” (@H), facilitating understanding for peers, while @faith's remark about Jaime and Brienne (“were they lovers? no. worse”) relies on established fan understanding of complex character dynamics. Such exchanges reinforce community bonds through shared decoding of the text.

References extend beyond the show itself to production trivia, as seen in @lex's explanation about Kit Harington and Maisie Williams' real-life reunion mirroring their characters' on-screen moment “...they had been filming in different countries for several years so this was the first time really seeing each other since one of the earlier season.” This blending of diegetic and extradiegetic knowledge creates richer engagement for initiated fans.

The community also develops its own referential language, with @user's "On your way lord commander" serving as both praise and an inside joke. Some fans reference show dialogue to celebrate creators' efforts too, merging original content with fan labour; “This edit is SO UNDERRATED, great job man, power resides where good edits reside” (@kuldashoff_). These interactions demonstrate multilayered engagement that extends far beyond passive viewership, highlighting the community's deep immersion in both the narrative and meta-narrative dimensions of the show.

4.4 Sustained Fandom

4.4.1 NEG_CHARACTER

NEG_CHARACTER (n=12) captures fans' complex, often contradictory relationships with Game of Thrones characters, blending criticism with enduring engagement. These comments reveal how sustained fandom thrives even through negative sentiment, as viewers remain invested in characters they simultaneously critique or reject.

The remarks range from outright disdain to begrudging admiration. The comment "They can never make me like you Jon Snow" (@The-Violet-Witch) and @bob's dismissal of the character despite the edit ("Jon Snow didn't deserve the EFFORT putted in this masterpiece") reflect explicit rejection, yet their engagement suggests lingering investment. Similarly, @Adaś's "I love her but she's so annoyingggg in last 2 seasons" highlights how frustration coexists with affection, sustaining dialogue around character arcs.

Even morally contentious figures provoke nuanced responses. @DoYouLikeBecki's conflicted view of Tywin ("i absolutely despise tywin but i admire his power and discipline...") demonstrates how polarising characters maintain relevance through their complexity. Meanwhile, @REMINERA's blame towards Robert, "I'll never forgive Robert for taking this family to the south", shows how fans sustain engagement by attributing narrative consequences to specific characters. These interactions reveal how negativity fuels, rather than diminishes, fandom activity.

4.4.2 POS_CHARACTER

Oppositely from NEG_CHARACTER, POS_CHARACTER (n=100) showcases fans' unwavering admiration for Thrones characters, demonstrating how positive attachments sustain engagement regardless of narrative disappointments. These comments reveal deep emotional investments that persist even when the show's writing falters.

The remarks express steadfast loyalty to beloved characters. Following a similar template to comments from the previous section but with positive framing, comments like "They can never make me hate you Jon Snow" (@Tobster) and "most solid character in the show, the only people hating just wanna be different" (@Timo) demonstrate how fans vigorously defend characters against criticism. Fans expressed enthusiastic praise through creative turns of phrase, such as "jon s4-s5 is the coolest fictional character ever" (@rz) and "half man, yet twice the character anyone else was" (@Tayven-Hawthorne).

Even when critiquing the show's choices, fans maintain character devotion. @Atiana-Carrasco's disappointment ("My favorite character I hated his ending... he should of been on the iron throne") and @Kenzi-Post's praise about Olenna Tyrell ("She didn't win the game, but she sent the other players back about 20 spaces) all show how positive regard survives narrative letdowns. These responses illustrate how character-focused appreciation creates durable fandom engagement, with fans celebrating their favourites' qualities regardless of plot outcomes.

4.4.3 NOSTALGIC_GRIEF

NOSTALGIC_GRIEF (n=40) captures fans' bittersweet longing for Game of Thrones' earlier seasons, revealing how emotional attachment persists despite later disappointments. These comments demonstrate sustained engagement through mournful reflection on lost potential and first-viewing experiences.

The remarks express wistfulness for initial narrative promise and character dynamics. @auna's "Wish I could watch for the first time again" and @Mia's memory of "I remember watching it for the first time..." highlight how fans cherish their original emotional connections to the story. The declarations "I'll never recover from the Stark family" (@Halie) and "Sobbing.. I missed when everything was at peace" (@Sheps) frame the Stark family's fate as an enduring source of sadness.

The regretful observations, "The fact that they are all only together for one episode makes me sad" (@skye.batemxn), also highlight how fans grieve missed opportunities, sustaining engagement through what might have been rather than what canon delivered.

4.4.4 UNCONDITIONAL_LOVE

UNCONDITIONAL_LOVE (n=18) captures fans' enduring devotion to Thrones, demonstrating how appreciation for its achievements persists despite later disappointments. These comments reveal a fandom that celebrates the show's legacy while acknowledging its flaws, sustaining engagement through balanced admiration.

The remarks highlight different aspects of fans' unwavering appreciation. Some fans focus on the show's technical and narrative excellence in early seasons like "They did the best at capturing the medieval experience" (@Unth) and "first 3 seasons of GOT are still the best television has ever been and ever will be" (@Pinky). Other comments are more nuanced, wherein fans compartmentalise their criticism, maintaining love for the show's strengths while recognising its decline; "It's impressive how a series managed to ruin in its final hours, it remains an amazing series, but I can't ignore that end." (@ry999) and "Game of thrones easily was in the greatest shows of all time list until the last season..." (@HorrorGeek). Lastly, other fans position the show beyond its controversial ending with comments like "Idc what anyone says this show is going down in history as a monumental piece in the world of cinema" (@freerthanamerica). Overall, these patterns reveal

how unconditional love sustains fandom through selective focus on positive elements.

5. Discussion

This study has explored how Game of Thrones fans engage with the series through TikTok edits and comments, focusing on the interplay between hopeful and cynical hatewatching. The findings reveal a complex ecosystem of audience engagement, where fans go between nostalgic reimagining and sharp critique as they process their relationship with a text that both captivated and disappointed millions. Far from being a rigid practice, hatewatching emerges as a spectrum of behaviours, from affectionate idealisation to outright rejection, all of which paradoxically sustain long-term fandom.

By analysing these practices through the lenses of hopeful hatewatching, cynical hatewatching, community engagement, and sustained fandom, this research provides a framework for understanding how modern audiences negotiate narrative dissatisfaction in digital spaces. The answer to the central research question of how fan engagement with Game of Thrones TikTok edits reflects these patterns lies in the dialectical relationship between creative reclamation and performative critique. Fans are not passive consumers but active participants who reshape their disappointment through communal practices, using TikTok's tools to remix, mock, or repair the narrative.

The systematic analysis presented in earlier chapters such as identifying key codes, themes, and engagement patterns, demonstrates that fan responses are deeply intertwined with platform-specific affordances. TikTok's algorithmic curation, remix culture, and emphasis on viral trends amplify certain types of critique while fostering spaces for collective mourning or reinterpretation. Below, we synthesise these findings, reflecting on their implications for fan studies, digital media, and audience behaviour, while also critically assessing the study's contributions and limitations. Ultimately, this research highlights how participatory platforms like TikTok transform viewers from mere spectators into co-creators of meaning, sustaining engagement with media long after its original broadcast.

5.1 The Paradox of Hopeful Hatewatching

Hopeful hatewatching emerged as a dominant theme, characterised by fans' refusal to

abandon emotional investment despite the show's perceived failures, and this manifested in three key ways. Firstly, fans used hopeful hatewatching to repair narratives and exercise agency. The HH_ALTERNATE_FIXES and HH_CHARACTER_DEFENSE codes illustrated how fans actively correct the text in their own way. By proposing alternative plotlines or defending butchered arcs, fans function as co-authors, leveraging TikTok's editing tools to restore perceived narrative integrity. Importantly, these acts are not delusional but communal with a shared refusal to accept creative decisions deemed unworthy of the story's potential. Next, nostalgia was used as a coping mechanism which is seen through HH_NOSTALGIA and HH_JOY. These revealed how fans privilege early seasons, using edits to isolate moments that align with their idealised version of the show. This selective memory allows fans to maintain affection for the franchise while compartmentalising later disappointments. The prevalence of Stark family edits, for instance, underscores a longing for the show's initial emotional coherence, which fans argue was fractured by rushed plotting in later seasons. Lastly, the use of humour as a bridge between critique and affection was evident in the data. Multiple humorous comments served a dual purpose: critiquing the show's choices while preserving emotional connection. By framing grievances as jokes, fans mitigate their disappointment without fully disengaging.

5.2 Cynical Hatewatching: Bonding Through Disillusionment

In contrast, cynical hatewatching thrived on collective dissent, with fans weaponising the show's flaws to forge communal identity. The codes CH_BOOK_SNARK and CH_DENIAL exemplified Gray's (2003) anti-fandom, where engagement is sustained through critique as fans derided the adaptation or rejected canon entirely. These acts were not passive but performative, a way to signal belonging to a group that feels they know better than the writers.

CH_CHARACTER_PORTRAYAL comments highlighted a sense of betrayal, where fans framed narrative choices as personal affronts and their criticism escalated into moral outright frustration. However, the persistence of these debates, even years after the finale, reveals their function as methods of communal grievance, sustaining engagement long after the text's conclusion. Fans used jokes in a more negative tone as well. CH_SARCASM represented how humour could mask bitterness. This tactic allows fans to participate while distancing themselves from earnest investment, thus preserving their self-image as discerning viewers.

5.3 The Role of Community: Labour, Validation, and Hierarchy

TikTok's participatory culture transformed individual grievances into collective action, with fan labour serving as the glue that binds hopeful and cynical hatewatchers.

COMM_EDIT_APPRECIATION and COMM_FAN_LABOUR showed how fans demanded and celebrated edits that "fixed" the show. These acts blurred the line between critique and creation, exemplifying convergence culture, where audiences reshape narratives across platforms. Notably, HBO Max's engagement with creators and fan edits legitimised this fan labour, revealing how industries now co-opt fan dissent for marketing. Somehow, COMM_REFERENCE and COMM_INTERACTION exposed how shared knowledge created hierarchies, with book-accurate fans often positioning themselves as more authoritative. This reflects the idea of fans having a cultural capital, where niche references signal status within the fandom.

5.4 Implications of the Research

This study bridges several gaps in fan studies and media theory. Unlike prior work framing hatewatching as a toxic practice, this research shows it is a spectrum that individuals experience, from nostalgic idealism to sardonic mockery, that sustains fandom. TikTok's algorithmic amplification of various content shapes how hatewatching manifests, differing from discourse-focused forums like Reddit. This phenomenon has profound implications for content creators and media industries, who must now contend with audiences that do not merely accept narratives but insist on reworking them to fit their expectations and desires. The rise of "fix-it" culture on TikTok, where fans rewrite disappointing storylines, represents a dramatic shift in the power dynamics between creators and consumers. It's important to note that official HBO Max accounts engaged with fan edits too, revealing how industries are slowly understanding the weight of fan labour through modern means, exemplifying the structure of regifting economies and prosumers.

Finally, the study has important implications for digital literacy and media education. As platforms like TikTok become primary spaces for media interpretation and critique, understanding how these environments shape audience perceptions and expectations is vital for developing critical engagement with popular culture. The research can inform discussions about algorithmic influence on fandom, the democratisation of media criticism, and the evolving relationship between professional creators and amateur reinterpreters in the digital age.

5.5 Limitations and Future Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into TikTok's unique dynamics, it also reveals several limitations that point to potential areas for further research. One significant limitation is the platform bias that is unavoidable in TikTok's algorithm. The algorithm tends to favour content that users interact with even once, which can potentially amplify extreme reactions. This bias may skew the types of content that users are exposed to, leading to a more polarised viewing experience. Consequently, future research could explore how this algorithmic bias influences user behaviour and the overall fan experience on the platform.

Another limitation pertains to the temporality of the data used in the study. Data collected post-2019 may reflect retrospective coping mechanisms rather than real-time reception. This means that users might be reacting to content with the benefit of hindsight, which could affect the nature and intensity of their responses. Understanding the difference between real-time and retrospective reactions could provide a more nuanced view of how fans engage with content over time. Future studies could investigate how temporal factors influence fan reactions and coping strategies.

Additionally, the demographics of TikTok's user base present another limitation. The platform is predominantly used by younger individuals, which may skew the findings away from the perspectives of older fans, but there is no real way to distinguish users' ages. This age disparity could lead to a lack of representation of older fans' viewpoints, potentially missing out on valuable insights into how different age groups engage with and react to content. Future research could address this by examining how age and generational differences impact fan behavior and engagement on TikTok.

To build on these insights, future studies could compare hatewatching behaviours across different platforms. For example, comparing the Thrones community on Reddit with TikTok users could provide a broader understanding of how platform-specific features influence fan reactions. Additionally, examining fandoms with unresolved source material, such as A Song of Ice and Fire (ASOIAF), could offer further insights into how fans cope with and react to incomplete or controversial narratives. By exploring these avenues, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of fan engagement and hatewatching reactions across various platforms and demographics.

5.6 Conclusion: Hatewatching as a Cultural Phenomenon

This research reframes hatewatching not as a failure of the text but as a success of fandom's adaptability. Whether through hopeful reclamation or cynical mockery, Game of Thrones fans have constructed a self-sustaining ecosystem where disappointment fuels creativity, debate, and even joy. In an era of contested canon and franchise fatigue, these practices offer a blueprint for understanding how audiences negotiate love despite flaws, a dynamic increasingly central to modern media consumption.

Ultimately, the endurance of Game of Thrones fandom underscores a radical truth: the worst thing a text can do is not to disappoint, but to be forgotten. Hatewatching, in all its forms, ensures that even flawed stories remain culturally alive.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Codebook

Categories	Comments
<p>Hopeful Hatewatching:</p> <p>Hopeful hatewatching refers to fans' optimistic engagement with Game of Thrones, characterised by positive emotional investment and anticipation of satisfying narrative or character outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of celebratory language or visuals (e.g., highlighting heroic moments, romantic relationships). - Emphasis on redemption arcs, character growth, or narrative resolution. - Positive affective tones (e.g., nostalgia, admiration, hope).
<p>Cynical Hatewatching:</p> <p>Hatewatching involves continued engagement with Game of Thrones despite dissatisfaction, often characterised by critique, irony, or mockery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of critical or satirical language or visuals (e.g., mocking plot holes, character decisions). - Emphasis on disappointment, frustration, or dissatisfaction with the series. - Negative affective tones (e.g., anger, ridicule, cynicism).

<p>Community engagement:</p> <p>This refers to different forms of engagement, like fan-to-fan engagement refers to the active participation of fans in creating, sharing, and interpreting media content between each other.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interaction with other fans through comments, replies, and likes. - Engagement between fans based on the edit (e.g., complimenting the editor, sharing thoughts about the edits)
<p>Sustained fandom</p> <p>This category is about tracking long-term fan attitudes beyond immediate reactions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explicit admiration for Game of Thrones, sparked by the edit, despite its shortcomings

Appendix B: Codes used

Code	Comment
CH_CHARACTER_PORTRAYAL	Critique of character portrayals ("They did Varys dirty").
CH_DENIAL	Rejecting canon ("This can't be real GOT lor").
CH_DISAPPOINTMENT	Explicit frustration, disappointment or sadness ("Ruined the show over that?")
CH_SARCASM	Sarcastic, ironic or joking comments ("Bran the Broken? More like Bran the Boring").
COMM_EDIT_APPRECIATION	Praise for edit/editor's creativity ("The audio sync is genius").
COMM_FAN_LABOUR	Mentions of other fanworks ("Make an edit where Jon kills Dany properly").
COMM_INTERACTION	Exchanges between fans that build rapport, inside jokes, or communal critique.
COMM_REFERENCE	Jokes/references that only other fans would understand ("Tormund's 'big woman' here").
HH_ALTERNATE_FIXES	Rewriting/imagining different outcomes ("Arya should've died instead").
HH_BOOK_COMPARISON	Fans mention the books to highlight unfulfilled potential, using the books as a blueprint for what could have been ("The books gave Jaime a better arc...").
HH_CHARACTER_DEFENSE	Justifying characters against criticism, or supporting characters' actions ("Daenerys was gaslit!").
HH_JOY	Pure positive feelings, unironic happiness, appreciation, excitement, or warmth ("Jon and Ghost reuniting healed my soul").
HH_NOSTALGIA	Longing or talk of earlier seasons or characters ("Seasons 1-4 were perfect").
NEG_CHARACTER	Underlines negative comments on characters, whether based on qualities, actions, or simple hating. Includes negative titles/nicknames for characters.
NOSTALGIC_GRIEF	Sadness over lost potential, regretful comments ("This scene hurts now").
POS_CHARACTER	Underlines positive praise of characters, whether based on aesthetic qualities, moral actions, or simple admiration. Includes celebratory titles/nicknames for characters ("King in the North," "Dragon Queen").
UNCONDITIONAL_LOVE	Admiration for aspects of the show despite shortcomings ("Flaws and all, still a masterpiece").

Appendix C: Volume of codes

