“The Zelda we have in our hearts”: virtual community on a video game fansite

Master’s thesis
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May 2019

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos
Tekijä – Author Pauliina Nihtilä	
Työn nimi – Title "The Zelda we have in our hearts": virtual community on a video game fansite	
Oppiaine – Subject Englannin kieli	Työn laji – Level Maisterintutkielma
Aika – Month and year Toukokuu 2019	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 84

Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli selvittää, miten yhteisöllisyys ilmenee videopelifaneille suunnatulla internetsivustolla julkaistuissa teksteissä. Taustatieto rakentui useiden tutkijoiden esittämistä virtuaaliyhteisöjen ja samankaltaisten käsitteiden määritelmistä, faniyhteisöjen ja pelaajien tutkimuksesta, sekä tietokonevälitteistä viestintää käsittelevästä kirjallisuudesta.

Aineisto koostui *Zelda Universe* -videopelisivustolla julkaistuista artikkeleista ja niiden kommenteista. Tekstit käsittelivät *The Legend of Zelda* -pelisarjan tarustoon ja pelimekaniikkoihin liittyviä aiheita, joista monet ovat olleet fanien keskusteluissa kestosuosikkeja. Aineistoa tutkittiin hyödyntäen tietokonevälitteisen diskurssin analyysiä ('computer-mediated discourse analysis'). Analyysissa tarkasteltiin tekstien piirteitä Herringin viiden tason luokittelua mukaillen: rakenne, merkityssisältö, vuorovaikutus, sosiaaliset käytänteet ja multimodaalisuus.

Tuloksia vertailtiin virtuaaliyhteisöjen määritelmiin. Sivusto osoittautui selkeästi kiinnostuspohjaiseksi yhteisöksi, johon niin kommentoijat kuin vakiokirjoittajatkin kerääntyivät jaetun harrastuksen eivätkä ihmissuhteiden vuoksi. Vuorovaikutuksen taustalla näkyivät oletukset jaetusta pelitietoudesta ja implisiittisistä käytössäännöistä. Sivustolla korostui analyyttisen ja avoimen argumentoivan keskustelun arvostus; osallistujat ilmaisivat tukea ja vastaväitteitä muiden teksteihin vapaasti, ja pelisarjan kehityksestä esitettiin vahvoja mielipiteitä.

Tutkimukselle haasteita loivat virtuaalisen materiaalin muuttuvuus sekä aineiston rajaaminen. Tuloksia tulkitessa on huomioitava, ettei aineisto sisältänyt jäsenille osoitettuja kyselyitä näkökulmista yhteisöön. Lisää saman aihepiirin tutkimuksia voitaisiinkin toteuttaa keskittyen sivustojen käyttäjien haastatteluihin; havainnoivista ja etnografisemmista lähestymistavoista saadut tiedot täydentävät toisiaan.

Asiasanat – virtual community, computer-mediated discourse analysis, video games

Säilytyspaikka – Depository JYX

Muita tietoja – Additional information

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ubiquitous quality of the internet has brought with it the development of online communities. Simple searches allow people to find spaces focused on a variety of themes, and interactive websites dedicated to a specific topic enable users to discuss their interests anonymously or behind names chosen by themselves. On these mostly text-based platforms that support few other types of interaction cues, linguistic and discourse choices are a primary means of building identities and constructing relationships. Contributors can use elements such as shared specific vocabulary, phrases originating from various media, and interactional conventions recognised by others in assumption of readers sharing their experiences and objects of interest. Conversations on discussion boards and indirect references to remarks and opinions of other members shape relationships and common expectations. In addition to the shape of direct communication between users, the very topics in and meanings conveyed by texts all illustrate the values oriented to on a website. This study examines how a shared sense of one virtual community like this is displayed, constructed, and maintained through fan-authored texts focused on a video game franchise. The data consists of articles and comments posted on *Zelda Universe* (ZU), a fansite dedicated to the *Legend of Zelda* (TLoZ) series.

Gaming is currently a popular activity that is becoming increasingly social, and fans engaged in activities related to it often display creative language use. Studies have examined how players switch linguistic codes and integrate elements from the source media into their speech while gaming: for example, specific terminology displays expertise and mutual understanding, while language choices can distinguish conversation topics and speaker roles (Leppänen and Nikula 2007: 358-359; Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio 2009: 162-163). Less research has been conducted on how the assumptions and features embedded in this communication emerge in contexts outside of the gameplay itself, such as on fansites or in discussion between friends. This is the side my study addresses. The shared expert identities of people invested in a field are not shaped only within a particular activity, but also in discourses related to it; in order to develop a multifaceted view of communal identities, these linked areas should also be studied.

Fandom studies have highlighted the emotional and conversational components of fan behaviour. Players have been found to identify strongly with game characters, and shared in-game experiences with other players have been argued to deepen emotional responses (Burn

and Schott 2004; Rigby and Ryan 2011: 92-93). Many fans enjoy discussing fictional characters' motivations and roles, comparing their interpretations with others and producing fan texts in the process (Curwood et al. 2013; Wakefield 2001). These conversations can include a variety of opinions, welcoming debates and lively argumentation. Fansites are therefore relevant spaces for studying community, as shared values emerge in discussion of common interests.

The framework of my study incorporates multiple theories of virtual community. Previous research has suggested a variety of criteria for defining online communities, most focused on the existence of a shared purpose, active participation, and a concentrated space for interaction (e.g. Jones 1997; Herring 2004, 2012). Virtual spaces mediated by the internet have been criticised for lacking features considered central in traditional notions of offline community, such as geographical closeness and face-to-face communication. Some of the approaches consulted in this study focus on explicitly characterising and analysing communities. Others do not necessarily provide general definitions but instead notions of concentrated interest spaces: the concepts of communities of practice and affinity spaces are featured (Gee 2003, 2005; Wenger 1998).

Prior research of online discourse has examined interaction and language use in spaces such as discussion boards, e-mail subscription lists, and social media streams (e.g. Delahunty 2012; Deumert 2014). Various aspects of the language and discourse displayed in these spaces have previously been studied using methods motivated by a multitude of perspectives, including conversation analysis, systemic functional linguistics, and discourse analysis (Androutsopoulos 2006; Knight 2009). The foundation of this thesis is built on computer-mediated discourse analysis as presented by Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015; Herring 2004), at the core of which are observation of recurring patterns and examination of content on multiple levels from sentence structure to social practices. Analysis of connections between the emerging features is supplemented with insights gleaned from discourse-centred online ethnography.

In the body of internet research concentrated on communities on casual chatting channels, there has been a lack of analysis on the carefully edited content of websites, as well as the construction of togetherness in asynchronous and indirect communication. The present study contributes to filling this gap by examining the manifestation of a community in texts that do not necessarily feature direct dialogue. The content of analytic feature articles is a main point of focus, but commentary by readers will also be considered. In a world where online interaction

is not only useful in bonding over personal interests but also important in maintaining professional relationships, insights into social workings on the internet are crucial. Studying virtual communities can provide information on how people with vastly different backgrounds negotiate shared values and form emotional bonds through a common interest.

This thesis consists of six sections, the first of which serves as the present introductory section. Chapter two presents the theoretical framework of the study, introducing key concepts and related research. Chapter three details the research design: the research questions, the data and its collection process are described, and the methods of analysis are explained. Chapter four is dedicated to presenting the analysis. Its results are discussed and compared to previous studies in chapter five, which also reflects on the effectiveness of the research design in practice. Finally, the implications and applications of the study are discussed in the sixth, concluding chapter.

2. STUDYING VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES AND FANDOM

This chapter introduces the theoretical concepts and previous research relevant to my study. I will first describe prior efforts in characterising virtual communities. The concept has been discussed from various perspectives, and comparing these views is beneficial in constructing a multifaceted analysis. Studies on fandom and the experiences of video gamers will then be introduced, as this thesis examines the content on a fansite. The final section overviews related research conducted in the field of computer-mediated communication, focusing on the construction of communal identities and affective bonds. It introduces two approaches to analysing computer-mediated texts, which will be elaborated on in chapter 3.3 on the methods of analysis. A brief summary of each section's relevance concludes this review of the framework.

2.1 Views on virtual community

Virtual community is a debated concept, and a variety of criteria for identifying and defining online communities has been proposed. Herring (2004: 338) argues that the study of online interaction tends to use the label too easily. Researchers suggest that not all spaces for virtual gatherings should be considered communities, and terms such as virtual groupings, collectives, or settlements ought to be used when a 'sense of community' does not seem to exist (Jones 1997; Blanchard and Markus 2004: 76). As Preece and Maloney-Krichmar (2005) note, the activities in focus or their mediating technologies often give names to online spaces: the same community may be called a game enthusiast community or a discussion board community depending on the perspective taken. Much criticism has asserted that online sites and groups lack features traditionally considered central to the concept of community, such as stable membership, long-term commitment, and physical proximity of participants.

Commonly cited criteria for virtual communities, as listed by Herring (2004, 2012), include aspects such as a shared purpose, active participation over the internet, support, along with criticism and conflict, acknowledgement of norms and roles, as well as emotional attachments and self-awareness of the group as a distinct entity. Jones (1997) argues that the existence of a virtual community requires a related virtual settlement, i.e. a common virtual space where sustained interaction by a variety of communicators occurs. On the other hand, Angouri (2016: 325) notes that some approaches describe communities as constructs emerging in membership negotiations, instead of them being dependent on criteria such as space. Attempts to develop a

precise definition for the term of virtual community have thus been scattered, and according to Herring (2012), referring to online groups as communities without further specification has become common in some fields.

Although characterisations of virtual community have often highlighted the role of computers or the internet, Baym (2000: 199) emphasises that the medium is not the only important influence in shaping or describing online communities. The topics discussed and the experiences of participants involved affect the way a group operates: Baym argues that a focus on soap operas, for example, encourages supportive talk of relationships, and that many participants share their own anecdotes and values related to the subject. However, she is careful to state that online communities are not predictable sums of their influences; each community is unique and constantly evolving. Jones (1997) similarly posits that the form of a virtual community is shaped by its social context rather than the technology mediating it. As sites of online-ethnographic research continue to develop, a shift has indeed been noted from medium-centred studies to a focus on the ways, reasons, and effects of people using semiotic resources (Leppänen et al. 2017).

The significant role of content focus is also discussed by Schwämmlein and Wodzicki (2012), who distinguish between two kinds of online communities. Common-bond communities focus on member profiles and are defined by interpersonal one-on-one relations, whereas common-identity communities are constructed around shared interests and help members in executing common tasks. The second type encourages communication from one member to the whole of a group and centres on common artefacts. As such, the content focus of a group affects its topics and interactional practices just as much as the affordances of different technologies do. Schwämmlein and Wodzicki's classification does, however, recognise that the two types of communities are often based on different kinds of online spaces: a focus on bonds utilises the customisable profile building in social networking technologies, while interest centrality prefers discussion forums and collaborative wikis.

In the process of constructing a community, prospective members affiliate with each other, forming bonds that aid in developing shared identities. Knight (2009) examines how bonds created through couplings of meanings and attitudes form communal identities. The concept of coupling refers to a relation between experiential meanings and evaluations: for example, a pair of workers speaking disbelievingly about a manager's conduct indicates a coupling of negative

attitude and a particular type of behaviour. In their discussion, the speakers distance themselves from one community of values while co-identifying as members of another. Knight introduces several strategies of affiliation, based on whether the interlocutors are rallying around a shared bond or rejecting an unshareable idea. In other words, communal identities are negotiated in discourse through declaration and reception of couplings (Knight 2009: 43). Knight argues that analysing these couplings offers insight into interpreting facets of identities built through social networking. Support for the role of shared attitudes is also provided by Tagg and Seargeant (2016: 344), who suggest that making alignments with opinions, groups, and cultural issues is a means of enacting online identities.

One way to attempt to identify a group as a community is to examine whether the participants exhibit a shared 'sense of community'. The components of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) sense of community framework are feelings of membership and influence, the integration and fulfilment of needs, and a shared emotional connection. Blanchard and Markus (2004: 67) note that the usage of the term has created confusion, as it is sometimes viewed as a result of living in a community and at others considered a definition of community itself. The authors argue for a process-oriented view in studying an online newsgroup: they posit that engaging in behaviour indicative of features associated with communities leads to the development of a sense of virtual community. According to Blanchard and Markus (2004: 66), this experience will not emerge without the members exchanging support, creating identities and making identifications, and producing trust.

Another construct related to virtual groups is that of communities of practice (CoP). As a concept it describes groups of people who have a shared passion or concern and who learn to better it as they interact. It is often applied to domains where learning and knowledge sharing is central, such as education and business (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). Wenger (1998) introduces three characteristics crucial to defining a CoP: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. The first criterion requires mutual relationships and interaction that make participation in a practice possible. As such, simply belonging to an organization or knowing about connections between people does not equate with membership in a CoP. The second characteristic refers to an undertaking collaboratively negotiated and defined by participants in the process of pursuing it. The final point comprises the tools, routines, and other resources that the community has generated or embraced as part of its practice. The parts of this repertoire are recognisable, yet reusable, and express historical trajectories in the

community. In other words, the description of a CoP includes a shared interest and commitment to a domain, a community displayed in interaction and joint activities, and a shared repertoire of resources to engage in a practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015).

Frequent visitors of established fansites certainly engage in exchanging experiences and information as well as developing new ideas in discussion. Their shared repertoire and common interest allow members to efficiently communicate with each other and voluntarily participate in activities without a need for constant explanation. Since CoPs enable connections across boundaries and are not restricted by organisational structures, the web provides promising grounds for them to develop: as Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) note, the internet broadens possibilities for community formation and invites new gatherings based on shared practices. Fansites allow participants to easily find like-minded people to embark on collaborative projects with. Wenger (1998: 56) states that just as our experiences are affected by participation in social communities, so do our actions contribute to shaping those communities in return. Participation in gaming sites helps members learn more about their object of interest and encourages them to share their own observations, collaboratively shaping the knowledge base of the community.

In addition to the complex notions of online communities, my research draws on the concept of affinity spaces as introduced by Gee (2003, 2005). Gee (2005: 214-215) argues that the idea of communities raises issues of participation, membership, and boundaries: since the depth of people's involvement in activities can vary at different times and between individuals, how should it be decided whether someone is a member of a group or not? As such, rather than being based on definitions of membership, Gee's notion emphasises a space in which people interact and where common endeavours are primary. The people gathered around shared interests in virtual spaces may not have anything in common in terms of geographical or demographical features, and membership boundaries are not an issue in sharing knowledge and content related to a favourite topic. Gee (2005: 225-228) presents a list of features of affinity spaces — some of which do share elements with proposed criteria for virtual communities. The characteristics include a primary common endeavour, newbies and masters sharing a common space, multiple forms of participation, and porous leadership, among others. Both intensive, in-depth intelligence and less specialised extensive knowledge are encouraged in affinity spaces, and individual expertise thrives alongside tacit and distributed wisdom.

Gee (2005: 218-220) explains two ways of viewing the 'signs', i.e. meaningful content, generated in affinity spaces. These signs can be accessed through multiple portals, such as guidebooks and websites in addition to a video game. The internal aspect of a space encompasses its content: for example, the design of a strategy game is an internal matter determined by the media's creators. An external view, on the other hand, focuses on the individual and social behaviour the signs inspire people to engage in. In the context of video gaming, an example of this is players talking about their impressions of a game. Gee (2005: 219) calls these emergent phenomena internal and external grammars. As these aspects of affinity spaces can transform each other, they are useful concepts in examining the behaviour of participants on a fansite. The way gamers react to a feature may affect the development of future releases or updates, which in turn provide new kinds of material for the fans to discuss.

This multitude of perspectives illustrates the complexity of the idea of virtual community. My study does not assume one definition to be used in the analysis; instead, I will examine the data in relation to these different views. Comparing the features of the theories presented here allows for a versatile examination of how extensively the various suggested community criteria apply to the website being studied. The examples and categorisations of elements in the approaches will function as guides for what to focus on in my analysis.

2.2 Video game fandom and participatory culture

Since the website in focus in this study is a space for fans of a game series, the background of my study features research on fandom. Visitors of ZU enthusiastically create derivative content and share knowledge related to the games, bonding over a shared interest. Fansites such as ZU encourage members to submit fanwork, and webmasters publish posts showcasing pieces by different artists. Smith (1999: 95) notes this as an example of a strategy for inclusion. These digitally mediated practices are often collaboratively constructed, and Curwood et al. (2013: 681) demonstrate that content creators enjoy publishing texts in affinity spaces because of the instant and direct feedback they receive. However, one does not need to be an active content producer to feel like a member of a fan group. Wakefield (2001: 135) explains that simply reading others' discussions and knowing that other people are following the same TV show can make 'lurkers', i.e. silent members who do not actively participate in conversations, feel a sense of companionship.

Gaming can be a very social activity, with players engaging in collaborative gaming via the internet or locally by using multiple controllers plugged into a home console. Rigby and Ryan (2011: 92-93) suggest that shared experiences with other players, such as engaging in battles together, deepen emotional responses and impressions of presence within a game. Nevertheless, a multiplayer option is not necessary to make gaming a social event, for the practices related to it enable a great deal of interaction. Fans review and replay their favourite works multiple times, frequently in the company of others, finding new details of interest each time. The discussion emerging from this scrutiny influences interpretations of the texts; fan reading is a social process that augments the experience of the original content, creating communal meta-text to base further perceptions upon (Baym 2000: 211; Jenkins 1992: 45, 98). Critical analysis is common in fandoms, and Jenkins (1992: 161) notes that writers of fanwork often deliberate the soundness of their ideas with others. Fans may even reach out to the producers of the original content if they feel a character has been wronged compared to earlier plot developments, or if a show is in danger of being cancelled. When successful, these communal efforts of contact and campaigning can affect canonical material and feel very rewarding (Jenkins 1992: 28; Smith 1999: 96).

The interactive nature of video games can make players feel as if they are a part of the virtual world: their actions have consequences and affect the narrative, which enforces impressions of authenticity (Calleja 2011: 21). Gamers may also strongly identify with the characters they are controlling as well as feel immersed in fictional environments, and this is often apparent in interaction between players (Burn and Schott 2004; Rigby and Ryan 2011). Players may use different languages and personal pronouns to switch between speaking as a real-life player and in the role of an in-game character (Burn and Schott 2004: 214; Leppänen 2007: 157; Leppänen and Nikula 2007: 358-359). Studies have also demonstrated that gamers' language use displays affective and evaluative reactions to in-game events (Piirainen-Marsh 2010; Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio 2009). As such, fans may enjoy discussing the sources of their experiences in detail and sharing the invoked feelings with others, creating affective bonds.

Baym (2000: 214) suggests that relating issues to fictional characters allows fans to talk about emotional topics that would be difficult to bring up with casual acquaintances in outside contexts. She argues that these discussions and participation in fandom interest groups help people encounter and understand different points of view. Besides learning new perspectives,

fans may also identify with characters burdened by issues they are personally struggling with: for example, female viewers of a TV show can deeply empathise with a heroine downplayed at a workplace and collectively criticise male screenwriters for this portrayal (Wakefield 2001: 132). Discussions like this may facilitate the formation of emotional bonds, strengthening a feeling of togetherness.

One of the features mentioned as characteristic of communities is a shared repertoire, and video game players certainly develop sets of linguistic resources applicable to specific games as well as to broader gaming contexts. Games often include specific terminology related to the narrative content, playing strategies, and technological aspects of each instalment. The usage of precise terms and repetition of game-specific phrases allows players to construct expert identities and demonstrate knowledge in their field (Leppänen 2007: 157; Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio 2009: 162-163). It may feel natural to discuss games in the language their content is presented in, and negotiating shared understandings is thus often related to language- and code-switching: for example, studies of Finnish players have demonstrated that conversations during gaming feature frequent instances of English borrowings, insertions, and stretches uttered in the foreign language (Leppänen 2007; Leppänen and Nikula 2007; Piirainen-Marsh 2008, 2010; Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio 2009).

A main target of analysis in the study of fan texts and activities has been fan fiction, i.e. fan-authored stories featuring characters and settings from existing media. (See e.g. the collection edited by Barton and Lampley 2014; Curwood et al. 2013; Jenkins 1992.) These texts display interpretations of the worlds they are based in and allow fans to develop ideas, often while interacting with other writers and readers on established sites. Other genres of fan texts, however, have received much less representation in research. Fan websites, magazines, and discussion forums can feature lengthy discussions on topics ranging from in-game history to gameplay mechanics and theories on character motivations. Instead of adding to the data on fan-authored stories, my thesis focuses on this more explicitly analytical commentary and discourse.

2.3 Studying online communication

Herring (2001: 612) defines computer-mediated discourse (CMD) as "the communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked

computers". The internet has facilitated the formation of groups and the spread of innovative language use, and Herring mentions that the computer medium enables variability in features such as asynchronicity and options of anonymity in conversations. However, these effects of the medium have not shaped computer-mediated communication (CMC) into a consistent genre of language use only displayed on the internet. In an overview of CMC research, Androutsopoulos (2006: 421) notes a shift to focus on user-related patterns and diversity, instead of treating all CMC as homogenous 'netspeak', as tended to be the case in early studies in the field. This chapter briefly discusses findings related to communicating similarities of interests online before setting up the research approach outlining the present study.

2.3.1 Computer-mediated communication

CMC research has investigated a broad range of communicative phenomena manifested on websites and chat channels. Linguistic features examined include the use of various emoticons, unconventional spellings, representations of spoken language, and the influence of variables such as gender, region, and age on language variation. Studies focused on the interactional aspects of CMC have researched concepts such as politeness, language play, style- and code-switching, and the establishment of participation frameworks (see Androutsopoulos 2006 for an overview). Vandergriff (2013: 2) notes that early findings on CMC cues such as emoticons and nonstandard punctuation tended to be generalised too widely, as features are often not analysed individually, but instead as a group, despite them being very context-dependent.

This prevalence of studies focused on the stylistics of 'netspeak' has meant that there has not been much room to inspect virtual communication through the discursive content of carefully formatted, essay-like texts. The present study contributes to filling this gap by focusing on examining carefully designed articles that may not display markers such as emoticons and exaggerated spellings. Its aim is thus to analyse meanings and interaction rather than chart typographic markers and language variation among users on the site. In contrast to the careful presentation of the articles, however, comments left on the articles by users of the site display more casual speech. This makes research on these more playful, unconventional language features useful material for comparison of the present data to previous studies.

Studies examining the role of language in signalling affiliation and emotional alignment in social media are relevant references in constructing the background for researching

communality. For example, Zappavigna (2012) explores the idea of ambient communities forming around ideas and values as people talk about daily rituals and special events on social media. She considers a more semantic than interactional definition of community: while direct links such as follower relationships on social websites do not necessarily lead to interaction between people, members can use searches to find strangers who share their views (Zappavigna 2012: 6, 99). As another related example, in a study on microblogging about coffee, Zappavigna (2014: 142, 151) describes how Twitter users employ hashtags and casual commentary to display evaluation and alignment to values related to the culturally iconic idea of coffee. In a similar fashion, fans can exhibit interest in games without directly talking about a series with others: posts on social media are not necessarily targeted at a specific person or published as part of a conversation, but anyone seeing them is often free to engage if they so wish. Indeed, Graham (2016: 311) argues that a focus on topic over profiles or relationships produces a more cohesive group identity.

As the present study investigates a space where people with shared interests gather and perform communal identities, the notion of identity is inevitably a relevant item to consider. The concept has indeed been a common theme in CMC research, and topics studied in recent years include matters such as playful self-presentation on social media (Deumert 2014) and alignments toward professional and national identity on a forum in a distance education program (Delahunty 2012). The intertextual and archival properties of digital texts have also been noted to offer flexible grounds for constructing narratives of self (Carrington 2009), and these individual histories can connect to form building blocks for communities of like-minded people – Angouri (2016) notes the importance of narratives of sameness in forging solidarity. Since these discursively constructed identities affect the way in which people orient to interactions, Stommel (2008) states that they can contribute to the development of communities. Her conversation-analytic study examines the relation of reified rules and norms to participation on a discussion board. Examining how identities are performed in discussions on the internet can aid in understanding what kinds of images fans want to project and assume of others.

2.3.2 Approaches to analysing online discourse

CMC has been studied from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives. As this thesis aims to examine linguistic, discursive, and semantic features of texts to find indications of communality, the main approach taken in it is that of computer-mediated discourse analysis

(CMDA). Herring (2004: 339) describes CMDA as “any analysis of online behaviour that is grounded in empirical, textual observations”. As such, instead of being a single theory or method, CMDA is considered a broad approach encompassing multiple methods for analysis. The umbrella of CMDA therefore allows the researcher to regard a wide range of elements, as opposed to strictly focusing on a narrow frame such as communication strategies in a detailed conversation-analytic study. Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015: 127) characterise the approach within CMC research by its focus on language and language use as well as discourse-analytic methodology, while recognising that CMC is increasingly multimodal.

The core assumptions guiding CMDA presume that discourse displays recurrent patterns and involves speaker choices, and that the technological features of communication systems can shape CMD (Herring 2004: 342-343). As the participants in conversations may be unaware of the patterns they are producing, Herring argues that self-reports of behaviour may not provide generalisable accounts of discourse. Direct, systematic observation is therefore a key part of the framework. Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015: 131) explain that the content analysis at the core of CMDA encompasses multiple levels from structure and meaning to wider social practices. These characteristics make the approach helpful in comparing the texts in my data to community criteria, as they allow the crafting of a multifaceted analysis based on observable evidence.

Androutsopoulos (2008) outlines an approach that combines systematic observation of activities and direct contact with actors. Discourse-centred online ethnography (DCOE) studies sites of online discourse, examining semiotic processes and their products through analysis of texts supplemented by emic insights gleaned from interviews. It charts typical behaviour and participant patterns on websites. In introducing methodologies utilised in the study of online communities, Preece and Maloney-Krichmar (2005) explain that ethnography has been used to discern what motivates people to participate in online spaces, how they express themselves, and why some visitors do not explicitly participate but rather observe. While one type of online ethnography considers the effect of communication technologies on the offline life of a community, another is focused on the internet as a site of everyday life where culture and community are formed. It is the second kind that provides the most relevant background for DCOE and my study.

DCOE targets relations on two levels. Systematic observation on the first level examines the relationships between the discourse units that compose a CMD space, such as multilingual practices on a discussion forum. The second layer inspects a set of connected websites that represent a lifestyle or social scene, uncovering characteristics and distinctions. (Androutsopoulos 2008). In an approach that takes these two levels into account, both communicative processes and the semiotic artefacts produced through them are relevant; answers to questions about observable features should be complemented with study of how their emergence relates to other activities. Androutsopoulos (ibid.) argues that an ethnographic perspective may aid in shaping research questions and contextualizing data, as it can provide access to perspectives from the inside that would be difficult to observe from communication logs alone.

The combination of these two approaches discussed provides a frame for my study. CMDA offers useful guidelines for analysing the data: Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015) describe multiple levels of analysis to consider, and Herring (2004) lists concrete examples of discourse features that can be regarded as displaying virtual communality. These focal points will be elaborated on in chapter 3.3 on methods of analysis. Despite the present study not featuring the participant interviews characteristic of ethnographic approaches, the ideas of observation in DCOE will be incorporated into the analysis. They will supplement the examination by providing insights into examining connections between features emerging in the analysis, as well as into patterns of behaviour and participation on the site.

In summary, this chapter has sketched the theoretical background of my thesis and situated the study among research on computer-mediated discourse and communality. First, characterisations of the concept of virtual community provided examples of discursive and interactive behaviours and overarching features to carefully observe in the data. Second, literature on the immersive nature of gaming as well as on gamers' language use and communication strategies explained some of the factors shaping the language and content of the articles, while studies on participatory fan culture illustrated fans' dedication to creating content that displays deep engagement in an interest domain. Third, related studies on online communication were introduced and the basic tenets of CMDA and DCOE presented. The following section explains the application of these approaches in more detail and introduces the aims of the study, which build on the work discussed.

3. SET-UP OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research design of my study: it will introduce my research questions and illustrate my motivations for choosing the data and methodology for the analysis. First, I will describe the broad aims of this study, which are then condensed into more concrete research questions and their possible implications. Descriptions of the data and its immediate context follow. The chapter will then detail the methodological approaches guiding this study, and finally discuss the ethical considerations of analysing content published by individual users on the internet.

3.1 Aims and research questions

The ease online communication has brought to searching for like-minded people and customising profiles enables individuals to engage in discussions and behaviour they might not participate in without the mediating technology. This flexibility and freedom of choosing who to associate with, as well as how to present oneself, make virtual communality a particularly interesting research topic — one that contrasts with the characteristics of membership in offline communities, which can often be mandated and limited by geographical location and identifiable physical features. Fan websites are popular spaces for people from a variety of backgrounds to interact in, and participation in them is becoming increasingly easy with the evolving features of ubiquitous mobile communication devices. Even though these computer-mediated channels for the exchange of ideas and information may not meet all the requirements proposed in definitions of community, interactions within them often exhibit an impression of togetherness. Studying such a space will provide information on how communities can be constructed without a need for face-to-face interaction, and on what sorts of means people can use to accomplish these affiliations.

This study analyses how texts written by people gathered around a shared interest on a video game fan website*, Zelda Universe* (ZU)*,* indicate and shape the existence of a virtual community. Literature on the topic has argued that not all virtual spaces and online settlements should necessarily be considered communities. The administrators of ZU make its intended nature explicit, as the site is called a *fan community* in its description. This study aims to find how the articles and associated discussion on the site display features proposed requirements for virtual communality in the theoretical framework previously introduced, and to characterise the kind of community their authors construct. Using extracts from the data, the image of shared values

and interests projected by recurring features in the texts posted on ZU will be explored and assumptions of knowledge inherent in the posts investigated. In order to do this, the study focuses on the following main question, broken down into two particular points of examination:

How is a sense of virtual community displayed in the featured posts *on Zelda Universe*?

- How do the participants utilise linguistic, discursive, and other shared semiotic resources to align with a fan community?
- What kind of communality do the contents of the articles and comments suggest?

Approaching the data from the perspective of these questions will illustrate how the actions of participants on the website contribute to constructing a shared space for a group of fans. As part of this process, it will be necessary to examine how the content of the articles supposes shared goals and ways of thinking. This question of content is connected to analysis of language, as the implicit assumptions and perceivable intentions of the writers are realised through different ways of language use. Each discussion participant can utilise linguistic resources such as word choices (e.g. pronouns or media-specific terminology), slang and playful orthography, nuanced tones (e.g. humour and sarcasm), and idiomatic or cultural expressions, among others. Using and understanding this repertoire overlaps with sharing discursive resources, which form the social knowledge of how discussion of a topic relates to others and what kind of talk is appropriate in different contexts. Examples of other semiotic resources, i.e. ways to generate meaning, that may appear in online communication include intertextual hyperlinks, stylised typefaces, and different ways of reacting to others' statements.

Based on an overview of early CMC research (Androutsopoulos 2006) and studies of virtual groups, such as those introduced in chapter 2, the focus of inquiry has often been on casual chat channels, mailing lists, and discussion boards. Androutsopoulos (2006) mentions that the edited content of websites and blogs has been less explored, and it is this sort of material that the present study will analyse. In the study of fan texts, a large portion of research has focused on narrative fan fiction. Despite the wide variety of topics discussed and text types featured on fansites, subscription lists, and most recently social media platforms, other genres of fan texts have been included only in a small percentage of the papers perused when charting the framework for this thesis. The present study contributes to filling this research gap by concentrating on analytical texts and commentary focused on speculating and connecting game-related elements and experiences, not weaving fictional narratives based on them. Furthermore,

Baym (2000) states that analysis of online communities has neglected close study, favouring anecdotes and hypothetical theorising instead. Guided by her observation, this thesis will be carefully and directly examining the language and content of the chosen texts.

3.2 Data selection and collection

This study examines texts written by fans of *The Legend of Zelda* (TLoZ) video game series. TLoZ is a fantasy action-adventure franchise published by Nintendo, spanning more than twenty games on home and handheld consoles, as well as additional material in the form of books, comics, and TV series. The games allow the player to explore detailed worlds, solve puzzles, and battle monsters as Link, a heroic protagonist who is often tasked with saving a kingdom and its princess from an evil usurper. Most of the games are not sequentially linked in story and instead feature different incarnations of the main personages, but the series has developed a rich body of lore and a cast of recurring characters over the years. Due to the few direct storyline links between the games, issues such as the series' overall timeline have been heated topics of theorising and discussion among fans.

As TLoZ is one of Nintendo's most successful and famous series, it has gathered a large and dedicated fan base. This makes a website focused on the franchise a suitable space for studying community: players engage in lengthy discussion and analysis of both the game contents and their own relationships to the series. Such discussion requires basic knowledge of the topic of interest and presumes participants to have had similar experiences with the media, allowing members to bond over a sense of shared histories. The visitors of many fansites include people who have been fans and active content creators for years, as well as gamers who regularly follow updates but admit to not posting content themselves very often. This causes the member bases of popular websites to be rather varied, enabling the researcher to examine posts by members with differing levels of commitment.

The present data consist of ‘featured’ articles published on ZU, one of the biggest and longest-running TLoZ fansites on the web. The administrators of ZU clearly label their site a community: the title bar of the website states *Zelda Universe – The Legend of Zelda fan community*, and according to the site’s info section, the space has been “serving the online *Zelda* community since 2001”. The website offers a wide variety of material related to the series, such

as detailed gameplay guides, frequently updated news posts, a media gallery, and active discussion forums.

Feature articles are relatively analytical texts of varying length, collected on the site in their own section separate from news articles and published in a format that enables reader comments. Each of these blog-formatted texts is written by a single author. Some writers have posted multiple articles, while others have contributed to the collection only once. The topics discussed in the articles range from in-depth analysis of recurring themes in the series to reviews of new games and personal recollections of growing up with the franchise. In a study of fan-created e-zines, Smith (1999) notes that feature articles display great devotion to a topic and draw visitors back due to their usefulness as reference material, reinforcing a site's credibility and authority within a fan community. The feature section is a relatively new addition to the website, which was established in 2001: the first article is dated June 16th 2013, and the first two and a half years presented less than ten features in total, as opposed to multiple articles per month in 2016.

In order to supplement the analysis of the articles with instances of clear interaction, samples of feedback left by readers on each article are also included as data in the present study. The option to write comments makes the articles interactive and directly engages the fan community to participate. Direct communication can be seen in the comment section, with visitors replying to others' posts and starting chains of reactions. Along with stating a reader's thoughts related to the topics raised in an article, comments may feature evaluations of the texts. Considering these shorter posts in addition to the self-contained articles thus offers evidence of discussions between multiple users, allowing observation of participation patterns and collaboratively constructed ideas.

Due to the limited scope of a Master's thesis, it would not have been plausible to study all of the articles published on the site in detail. Multiple criteria for choosing the data set were considered, and my reasoning for excluding and exploring the most prominent ideas is presented here. Picking texts published within a narrow time frame would have resulted in a sample too random and poorly representative. This is because there seemed to be no regular posting rate on the site: some months saw multiple articles only a few days apart, whereas other posts had weeks in between. On the other hand, the option of focusing on texts written by a single author would have limited the opinions and impressions of community to those of one person. The alternative of choosing articles by a number of different writers would have been

difficult to motivate as well, for finding a credible characteristic to base the author decisions on was challenging.

For these reasons, the final data set was selected using the topics of the texts. Certain subjects generate much more interest and discussion among readers than others, and as interaction is a central point in most criteria stated to characterise communities, it was considered sensible to analyse the articles with the most material available in the comment section, in addition to the main texts. The reactions to these articles encapsulate a desire to engage in joint practices and dialogue with others, and a variety of comments indicates the presence of multiple voices. Since the interpretation of meanings embedded in discourse is always influenced by their context, it is essential to regard entire texts, instead of simply isolating extracts and comparing them to similar ones in a vacuum. Preliminary examination also revealed each article to contain instances of multiple different phenomena relevant to the study. Due to these reasons, limiting the number of articles was deemed necessary in order to carry out an appropriately in-depth analysis.

The amount of data was first narrowed to articles published during a one-year period, in 2016. From this pool, the seven texts with the highest number of comments were chosen for analysis. At the time of data collection in January 2017, the number of comments added to these articles ranged from 11 to as many as 292. Cursory scanning of more articles indicated that similar features kept repeating with no new major categories emerging, and seven articles with their comments were thus considered to offer a sufficient amount of data to conduct a representative analysis. Excluded from the list of possible material was a series called *30 years in 30 days*, which summarises the releases and events in the franchise that took place each year. Since the articles in this series do not focus on any single topic and are more summary-like than analytical, they were not seen to conform to the rest of the data set.

As Androutsopoulos and Tereick (2016: 365) note, research objects on interactive websites have the potential to be constantly modified: the option to add or delete comments allows the number of contributors to change, and the content being viewed may often be edited at any time. This creates challenges for data collection, especially on popular sites that receive a constant stream of comments eliciting fast-paced discussion. The researcher is faced with the question of how to collect a representative data set by creating a snapshot of texts that could be modified the next moment. In this study, the data sources were not very actively transformed. The feature

articles on ZU are finished and polished by the time they are submitted to the site, so post-editing would seem to occur rarely if at all. Comments may be added at any time, but the majority of them are posted within the first few days of each article's publication. As such, the artefacts chosen to be analysed were relatively stable by the time they were gathered.

The articles and comments were copied into text documents in order to preserve the contents as they had been at the time of collection. The comments were organised using indents to indicate the different levels of replies in threads. In addition, screen captures were taken in cases where multimodal elements such as pictures were of particular interest. If changes had emerged after the initial data collection, they would not have been included in the study. No edits were, however, observed whenever the site was visited to view the texts in their native format for confirmation.

3.3 Methods of analysis

To examine the manifestation of a virtual community on the fansite, this study draws on perspectives used in the previous research on online groups outlined in chapter 2. The data will be dissected according to CMDA guidelines. In the discussion of the results, the criteria proposed in definitions of virtual communities will be compared with prominent elements and typical behaviour emerging in the core analysis.

Work on CMDA by Herring (2004) and Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015) provides useful tools for analysis, particularly in the examination of communication in the comment sections of the articles. This is because Herring (2004: 339) states the analysis of logs of verbal interaction to be the essence of CMDA. In her 2004 introduction to the approach, Herring presents a detailed account of the research process applied specifically to studying virtual communities. She describes the key methodological orientation of CMDA as language-focused content analysis and offers multiple examples of features that can be considered when assessing online community. However, Herring also notes that CMDA is more of a flexible approach than a single method – while it is built on the premises of discourse analysis, it is inductive in that observations made on the data drive choices of methodology.

Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015: 131) list five levels of CMD analysis: structure, meaning, interaction, social practice, and multimodality. The present study on fan community benefits from examining meaningful features on these multiple levels. First, a sense of communal identity may emerge in word choices and sentence construction starting from the structural level. Second, the writers expect certain meanings and allusions to be familiar to fans of the series. Third, interaction can be found not only in the comments but also in references to other articles and members within the blog texts. Fourth, the content of the texts is shaped by what the participants are used to seeing on the website and in fandom contexts. Related to this is the analysis of social practice, as it helps characterise how participants are expected to act and express themselves in a space. Fairclough (2003: 24-25) construes social practices as orders of discourse: they describe how language is networked together with other social elements, such as action, the material world, and social relations. Finally, texts viewed through computers on carefully crafted websites are noticeably multimodal, potentially including items such as pictures and hyperlinks to create and enhance meaning. Although the majority of content in ZU's feature articles is formatted text, the authors (and more rarely commenters) use pictures to clarify their arguments at times. It was therefore considered sensible to make note of this final level as well, despite it not being as prominent in the analysis as the other aspects listed.

In order to apply a CMDA-motivated approach, it is necessary to consider how to operationalise key concepts (Herring 2004). As the idea of community has been characterised through various features in literature, the researcher must decide which ones to prioritise and how those features can be illustrated as individual elements observable in the data. Herring (2004: 361) presents a table of discourse behaviours in different domains that have been suggested to indicate virtual communality. Some examples are the exchange of knowledge (domain of meaning), conflict management (domain of social behaviour), and in-group/out-group language (domain of structure). This list compiled by Herring functions as a useful guideline for the thesis at hand, as it provides precise examples of what to focus on. However, the author warns that attempting to analyse all of the behaviours included in the table is rarely feasible: operationalising the concepts into concrete textual evidence to look for is a major undertaking in terms of time, and it is therefore advisable to code only the aspects that the researcher believes to be most valid in each case. As such, this study will concentrate on addressing the features that are most prominent in the data as well as most relevant considering the research questions introduced.

CMDA provides the main tools for this study, but the investigation will be supplemented by ideas from another approach, DCOE. The examination of both edited texts and the actions producing them is conducive to illustrating a layered image of the community, and the indicated approach provides insight into investigating both elements. Androutsopoulos (2008) emphasises the importance of studying relationships instead of isolated items: the components of an online space are all connected, and texts published on it are not static artefacts to be analysed detached from their site of discourse. Accordingly, this study examines how different elements in the texts come together to form an impression of community. DCOE thus contributes further support for the analysis of social practice and implied meaning.

Despite the inclusion of two kinds of data, full-length articles and shorter comment replies, separating the analysis into parts based on the type of material was not believed to serve the purposes of this study. This is in line with the suggestion by Androutsopoulos and Tereick (2016: 367) who in a discussion of YouTube pages, which are also often authored by multiple people through video and comments, note that ideas and comments are not usually treated as separate objects of scrutiny. Similarly, the features and commentary on ZU will be examined as sets, for the topics discussed in the comments are tied to the contents of each article.

In the analysis section, extracts from the source texts are presented in a smaller typeface, separated from the body of the text using indents and blank lines. Chains of comments are displayed one post below another, with each reply being indented more than the preceding one. Two dashes (--) are used to indicate that a part of the paragraph or comment has been cut due to irrelevance to the precise analysis at hand. This is done in order to keep the length of the examples concise and highlight the features under discussion. Observations by the researcher, related to aspects such as multimodal features of the texts, are presented in double brackets [[ ]]. A bolded and underlined font is used to indicate where a hyperlink was inserted in the original posts. No other edits are made to the content of the data. Italics are used in the analysis to refer to words or phrases included in the data extracts. Each example has been numbered and will be referred to utilising these designations. In cases where multiple similar extracts are grouped together to be studied simultaneously, decimals are used to differentiate references to each piece (e.g. examples 6.1 and 6.2).

As per the discussion in the following section 3.4 on ethical considerations, the authors of the data extracts are cited using pseudonyms in an effort to protect their identities. In order to make

the analysis easier to follow, different naming schemes are used for the commenters and the writers of the feature articles. The article authors are referred to using combinations of the letter A and another letter following it in the alphabet (e.g. AB and AD). The names originally used by the commenters, on the other hand, are changed to letter-number-combinations all beginning with the letter C (e.g. C3 for the 3rd commenter appearing in the examples). These pseudonyms, used for purposes of referral in the text, are stated at the end of each example in parentheses ().

In order to minimise the need for detailed description when discussing each example, summaries of the feature texts are provided before presenting the thematic analysis. These summaries provide background information to aid in understanding why the topics of the featured articles are points of special interest in the TLoZ community.

Framed by the approaches described in this section, chapter 4 carefully examines the language use and content in the ZU articles and their respective comments. Recurring elements and interaction patterns will be compared to categorisations illustrated in the criteria proposed for online communities in prior research. This inspection will yield results indicating what sorts of observable features are characteristic of community construction and awareness in the texts on this particular website, how the participants utilise their shared resources, and how these features correspond to definitions of interest spaces and virtual communities.

3.4 Ethical considerations

A guide produced by the Ethics Working Committee of the Association of Internet Researchers (Markham and Buchanan 2012) was originally consulted when contemplating the ethical principles of the present study. The authors advocate a process-oriented approach, emphasising the need to deliberate and resolve ethical issues as they arise at all stages of the research process. The most significant question was that of whether the members of the fansite being identifiable could lead to harm in their life, career, or reputation. Further consideration became necessary in the middle of conducting the analysis, when the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was implemented and became a crucial factor in designing research in the EU. The GDPR details principles of anonymity and confidentiality in processing personal information about individuals. In addition to consulting the general guidelines of the University of Jyväskylä, through which this thesis is published, a 2018 guidance document on the GDPR by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) of the University of Sheffield was reviewed.

Processing the data used in this study was determined to comply with the requirements of the GDPR and good ethical practices for three main reasons. First, the UREC (2018) explains that the GDPR designates six possible legal bases for using personal data in research and suggests one of them to apply to most of the research at their university. The basis cited by UREC is also appropriate for this thesis, and it reads as follows: "Public interest: the processing is necessary for you to perform a task in the public interest or for your official functions". Studying texts written by people discussing a shared interest in an online environment produces results to further the understanding of how communities are shaped, a topic relevant in many areas of daily social life. Conducting a supervised research project is also a mandatory part of higher education. The excerpts analysed in this study contain no identifiable personal information; in other words, identifiers such as online usernames were only processed for the purpose of collecting data for academic research in the public interest.

Second, ZU is a public website with apparently high traffic and no restrictions of access. The feature articles and comments are freely viewable without registration, and quoting publicly available, published texts for research purposes conforms to the relevant regulations of copyright and privacy. Although most of the visitors to the site are likely fans of the series instead of people representing all sectors of the general public, these openly displayed texts cannot be reasonably interpreted as posts meant to be hidden or shared to a private circle of friends.

The third and final concern was that of names as identifiers. The authors of the feature articles on ZU sign their texts using what are presumably their real names, instead of usernames created for the site. Moreover, some writers explicitly mention their involvement with ZU on their professional portfolio sites. In contrast to the feature writers, most of the commenters use aliases when posting their thoughts. These pseudonyms are picked by each person and therefore project chosen images while protecting the commenters' offline identities. Due to these differences in presentation, separate systems of reference were considered, but it was ultimately deemed proper to process identifying information related to all writers the same way.

For the purposes of this study, the names of all the writers appearing in the data were pseudonymised to protect their identities. References to each author in the analysis use gender-neutral language, and the pseudonymised tags are combinations of letters and numbers that

contain no information about the usernames on the website. Omitting names entirely did not seem plausible, as it would have been difficult to discuss quotes with no individual participant labels to refer to.

To further obscure connections to the authors' original posts and subsequently their names, no hyperlinks are provided to the article pages and their titles are not mentioned in the analysis. As writing long feature articles can require a great deal of time and research, in other contexts it may be advisable to provide precise credit to the authors for their effort when citing parts of their work. However, as the names of the discussion participants were pseudonymised in order to protect their identities, it would have been counter-intuitive to include direct links to the texts in this thesis; following the links would have easily revealed the original usernames. It would not have been feasible to obtain individual permission for citations from every commenter and inquire about their preferences for names, as there was no contact information attached to the posts. This conflict between detailed credit attributions and identifiable names is one that was deliberated carefully. The final decision to omit links to the content and to pseudonymise all of the writers was made in order to protect the authors' identities as well as possible, complying with the privacy regulations and ethical principles discussed in this chapter.

4. FEATURES OF COMMUNALITY ON ZELDA UNIVERSE

This section presents the results of the analysis of the data. It is organised into seven main sections according to thematic similarities between the features discussed, and summaries of findings are provided to conclude each segment. Section 4.1 introduces the topics and main arguments of the feature articles, and segments 4.2 to 4.8 are devoted to analysing extracts from the data.

4.1 Summaries of the articles

Four of the seven articles explored in this study discuss aspects of the series' main character's role and development. In most TLoZ games, the player can freely choose how to name the protagonist, but his canonical name has always been Link. This appellation has been presumed to emphasise his role as the connecting link between the game and the player. Throughout the history of the TLoZ series, the main character has been a so-called silent protagonist: he has never had spoken lines written in the script, and the only sounds he makes are shouts and grunts as he fights and moves. In conversations with other characters, the player can use their imagination to fill in the blanks based on what Link's discussion partners say. The only exceptions to this silent characterisation have been some cartoons and spin-off games, which are generally disliked and not considered canonical entries to the series. Due to the freedom of naming and interpretation, each player can build a unique bond with Link and have different views on what is appropriate for his character. As his role of a silent player representative has remained unchanged since the beginning, the way Link is presented in each instalment is integral to many fans' enjoyment of the series.

AB and AC present opposing viewpoints to the issue of whether Link should be given voiced lines. In an article supporting a voiced protagonist, AB argues that Nintendo can be trusted to incorporate voice acting into the main series without compromising Link's role. By discussing the poorly received TLoZ cartoons and spin-off games that gave the characters spoken lines, the author posits that unlikable characterisation results from a bad script, not from the inclusion of voice acting. In contrast, AC emphasises the importance of a blank canvas for the player's imagination and connection to the game. Their article discusses the significance of Link's nonverbal actions and body language over explicit words, arguing that the character can have plenty of personality without spoken lines. The publication of counterpart articles like these on the site collaboratively creates fertile grounds for discussion.

Another attribute of Link's that has remained unchanged is his general appearance – and by extension, his gender. The protagonist has always been a child or a young man with elf-like features, most often clad in green and armed with a fabled sword. AD argues for the option to play as a female Link in their article on the hero's gender. They analyse the character's role as an audience surrogate, discussing how a female protagonist could help many players feel more invested in the story. The author asserts that having multiple gender options available would not harm the TLoZ experience, provided that Nintendo was respectful with female representation and did not change Link's core traits. This topic exemplifies the importance of players being able to relate to a main character and share the experience with others.

For most of the franchise's history, Link has also been known for being a rare left-handed swordsman. This tradition had never been flipped until Nintendo introduced motion controls for their gaming consoles in 2006. The change was rationalised by arguing that playing a right-handed Link would feel more natural for most players, who would be using their right hand to emulate swinging a sword. AE wonders why this new trait is being carried over to a new game despite the instalment's lack of motion controls. Their article discusses the connotations and implications of Link's left-handedness, noting that representation of left-handed people in media is valuable. AE concludes that while the characteristic does not affect the final presentation of a game, it does make Link special and change should thus come equipped with a good explanation. This article and the commenters' reactions to it provide another look at building connections through Link, as well as a willingness to jointly voice disappointment at decisions made by the game company.

The fifth article in this study examines elements from several games in the series to construct a possible setting for an instalment in development at the time. In a deductive discussion, AB guides the reader through their reasoning for placing the events of an upcoming game, *Breath of the Wild* (BotW), at a certain point in the history of the TLoZ world. Before the release of a guidebook called *Hyrule Historia* in 2011, timeline theorising had been a very popular topic among fans. This book confirmed the lore of TLoZ to have a complicated history, branching to alternate timelines at multiple points to cover the events of each game. At the time the article was published, BotW was more than half a year away from being released, and all discussion was thus speculation based on trailers and the book. AB's article is built on specific references to characters, locations, and storyline events, expecting deep familiarity with the series from

the reader.

In addition to examining characters and lore, some articles on the site discuss and criticise recurring gameplay features. AF overviews typical characteristics of water-themed trials in the series in their article addressing common complaints. The author explains that these dungeons are often slow to navigate and easy to get lost in, making them infamous for tediousness. As such, AF suggests streamlining the level designs as the key to improving players' experiences. They use situational anecdotes to describe common problems in water dungeons, sharing incidents and frustrations that readers are likely to feel connected to. Articles like this display familiarity with common opinions prevalent in the fan community.

Finally, the seventh article weighs a popular game against a newer entry in the series. In a comparative article, AB discusses the strengths and flaws of *Ocarina of Time* (OoT, released in 1998), often lauded as the best game in the TLoZ series. Spurred by a quote from the series director, the writer measures the story and gameplay of *Twilight Princess* (TP, released in 2006) against features of OoT. AB argues that while TP polishes many of OoT's raw aspects, it is not necessarily better as a rounded game. Instead of focusing on a single element like most of the other texts included in the study, this article is an example of discussion that compares two games through a wide variety of aspects. In doing so, it showcases broad familiarity with the object of interest from both the author and the commenters.

4.2 Debates and appropriate content

Due to many of the feature articles on the site discussing questions of opinion, they induce replies that argue for different views. As people are likely to form connections to valuations that match their own, examining reactions to arguments and topics raised illustrates what is appreciated in a community, and what is therefore part of its character. This section examines how ZU users express agreement or disagreement with content posted by others. Subchapter 4.2.1 is focused on commentary that openly evaluates writers' arguments and choices in topic, whereas segment 4.2.2 examines how views on norms of appropriate content and behaviour emerge in reactions to posts.

4.2.1 Agreement and disagreement

Many comments directly appraise the contents of an article or reply. They often contain positive feedback and agreement, as participants readily praise the authors before adding their own anecdotes or reflections to the discussion. This is exemplified in the first two extracts:

> (1) I really think you nailed all the key points here -- The one I keep thinking of throughout the article isn't the Water Temple though, but the Lakebed Temple in Twilight Princess. The stupid stairs and water flow always frustrated me to death! (C1)

In Extract 1 from a comment on the problems of water dungeons, C1 both agrees with the author of the original piece and compliments their text. The evaluation directly addresses the writer by using *you*, and the concept of *nailing it* is high praise. In addition to attaching a positive valuation to this article, the commenter ties their own experience into the review: C1 notes that they were thinking of a different water dungeon while reading, demonstrating that the text can invoke memories of other similar experiences – ones quite possibly shared by other players as well. The commenter finishes their turn with a negative evaluation of game content, lamenting how certain elements in the mentioned Lakebed Temple *frustrated* them *to death*. This display of feeling makes the comment personal, providing an attitude that others can affiliate with.

> (2) What an in-depth take on a talking Link! I hope the Official Nintendo® voice acting will be used in small doses rather than having never-ending exposition transfer from text to talking. (AC)

Extract 2 is another display of an explicit positive evaluation, commending the depth of the author's analysis on the possibilities of a voiced main character. AC builds solidarity by injecting a bit of humour into their comment: the capitals and trademark in *Official Nintendo® voice acting* emphasise and exaggerate the formal nature of upcoming voicework that would be a first in the franchise, as opposed to fan efforts the community may have seen before. This is further underlined by the negative valuation displayed toward Nintendo's ability to balance the amount of information given, as the commenter is concerned about *never-ending exposition*. AC seems to be somewhat hopeful about the prospect of voice acting, but is also subtly criticising Nintendo's choices in expository writing. Extracts 1 and 2 demonstrate the common practice of commenters expanding agreement by adding related thoughts, building connections between their own experiences and the views of another member. This can, however, also be seen in comment threads not necessarily concurring with the stance taken in an article:

(3) The difficulty of the water temples is a bit exaggerated. They're not that bad. The OoT one is mostly annoying because everyone always forgets that one key (You know the one.). (C2)

Agreed. The Great Bay Temple in Majora's Mask is FAR worse in my opinion. (C3)

I totally agree with you. I never understood why OoT was always the worst? (C4)

Example 3 demonstrates that commenters on the site do not only directly agree with the content of the articles, but also with that of each other's comments. Example 3 is a three-part conversation featuring three different people. In this exchange of comments, two instances of clear accord can be found: the participants explicitly use the verb *agree* to comment on the preceding texts. Interestingly, the parent comment can be interpreted to disagree with the article it was posted in reaction to: its writer finds the common discourse about aquatic temples to be *exaggerated*. These commenters are bonding over an opinion which perhaps differs from the norm in the community of players. In other words, they are not connecting through a sentiment shared with the author of the original article, but instead through mutual reactions to it. This demonstrates that affiliations can also be formed by deviating from the original idea being discussed.

The comment chain in Extract 3 also displays awareness of common experiences and opinions among TLoZ fans. The third commenter wonders why OoT *was always the worst*, suggesting that they have encountered multiple comments complaining about the game's water level over a long period of time. Furthermore, the top comment states that *everyone always forgets that one key* in OoT's temple, implying that the writer has a clear idea of how players tend to progress in the dungeon – likely based on their own experience. C2 expects the reader to share the same understanding: they appeal to the reader, saying *You know the one* in parentheses. What is quite possibly the same key is alluded to in another comment on the same article, displaying similarity of experiences. This awareness of common opinions is discussed in detail in chapter 4.3.

(4) The OoT water temple is like labyrinth. I have finished OoT like 5 times and I don't still remember the temple :D [[picture: a three-dimensional, complex-looking map of the temple]] (C5)

Agreed. Lol (C6)

Expressions of agreement can also be found in reactions to multimodal comments. In Extract 4, the brief reply agrees with the textual content of the original comment and is most likely

intended to display an amused reaction to the picture included within. The reply utilises the acronym *Lol* (laughing out loud), denoting amusement and connecting to the happy emoticon *:D* in the parent comment. Such choices display expectations of a shared repertoire: the recipient of the reply is assumed to know what the acronym means. This kind of language use is not exclusive to fans of the TLoZ series but is instead widespread on the internet, and the reader is thus presumed to be familiar with language practices in domains outside of the franchise as well. More assumptions of shared linguistic resources are explored in chapter 4.6 on expected knowledge related to the game series.

> (5) Controversy alert! Called it! (I refuse to take part in this discussion.) (C7)

The exclamations in Example 5 display predictions of how the discussion of voice acting is about to develop, as well as recognition of what earlier comments on the article have possibly already revealed. Calling the matter of a voiced Link a *controversy* demonstrates evaluation and awareness of the community's usual behaviour: the commenter expects conversation to become intense and is perhaps resigned to it (*Called it!*). The following explicit refusal to join the discussion strengthens this impression of sufferance and can function as a sort of evaluation. The commenter does not perhaps see the topic as worthy of consideration, or they are not willing to engage in the debate any comments might generate. Curiously, C7 has still decided to contribute to the discussion in a way: the act of commenting itself entails a desire to say something, even if it is only a sort of judgment on how other people are acting.

> (6.1) for the last time… NO, we've been through this, they won't do it because Link is what one might call a "placeholder avatar" -- Link's personality is up to the player, and giving them a voice would absolutely ruin that… so would you kindly drop it. (C8)

> (6.2) -- none of that matters as they are eternally bound to be reincarnated every "X" amount of years as the "same people!"... Yawn! Time to get off this topic now… (C9)

Examples 6.1 and 6.2 demonstrate disapproval of topic choices in posted content. The first comment is a reaction to the same article as Extract 5, containing another statement of discontent with advocating a voiced Link. The commenter expresses exasperation at encountering arguments for something they have already seen discussed multiple times before (*NO, we've been through this*). C8 is confident that Nintendo will not give Link a voice, displaying familiarity with the company producing the object of interest. Their argument of Link's role as a character coupled with a strong personal opinion (*a voice would absolutely ruin that*) leads the commenter to ask the author to *kindly drop* the topic. C9's comment displays

similar fatigue with the subject of Link's gender, as discussing it makes them *yawn* and they assert readiness to move on to other matters after briefly explaining why Link should remain male. As such, the negative couplings of tiredness and repetition in both comments display annoyance at a topic the commenters apparently consider over-discussed. Posts like these are ways to express disappointment with content on the website, indicating disinterest in a specific subject while still caring enough to contribute to the discussion in an evaluative manner.

> (7.1) Bruh. It has been confirmed that Link is a male. I don't want to hear anything about this topic anymore. (C10)
>
> (7.2) ughhh this freaking subject again… seriously tired of it (C11)

The next two comments express similar fatigue with long-deliberated questions. Example 7.1 is a reply to AD's article on Link's gender. C10's blunt statements imply that this topic has been debated a great deal in the past, and the commenter sees no need for further discussion; according to them, the matter has already been settled. Similarly, C11's reaction to a discussion on Link's new right-handedness (in Extract 7.2) is overtly negative, emphasising the commenter's tiredness with the subject using an onomatopoeic groan (*ughhh*). In contrast to the explanatory remarks in Example 6.1 above, these two posters do not provide reasoning or evidence for their claims. C10 states Link's gender to be a confirmed fact without elaborating on the source, and this certainty is why they personally are not interested in hearing *anything about this topic anymore*. C11 is simply *seriously tired* and does not see a need to explain why. These extracts demonstrate that users can express dismissal without adding supported arguments to the discussion.

> (8) -- You've probably been playing Zelda longer than I have, how have you still not caught on to the fact that the Master Sword has always appeared randomly throughout Hyrule with no explanation as to how it's able to move on its own? -- Don't pull that crap on me. (C12)
>
> > -- I think you're playing devil's advocate a little too much here. No one was "pulling crap" on you. -- my point is that you shouldn't be so aggressive about people believing something that is at least heavily implied, let alone playing the victim card about having people trying to deliberately lie to you or something.
> > Have a nice day! (C13)

Participants can challenge contributions deemed to be insufficiently motivated. In Example 8, C12 is replying to a comment questioning why the Master Sword, a series staple, would be resting in a forest if it was lost in the sea in a previous game on the proposed timeline. Their post implies an expectation of cumulative knowledge: a fan posing questions about the logic of a recurring, enigmatic element in the series is *pulling crap* in the commenter's perspective. This

confrontative stance prompts another member to join the discussion in an effort to placate C12 and defend the original poster. C13 argues that there are grounds to construe explanations for the Master Sword's history and suggests that the replier is therefore *playing devil's advocate*, purposefully provoking debate and *playing the victim card*. The commenter encourages C12 to adopt a less harsh approach to discussion and finishes their post with a polite greeting, displaying the attitude they are promoting. In sum, Example 8 demonstrates two key qualities: expectations of knowledge required from members and an unwillingness to tolerate aggressive behaviour.

> (9) -- Also, what's with the hate towards right handedness and the narrow view of right handed people. You sound a bit too ignorant and unimaginative. Holding onto some sorrow sentiments as if left handedness makes you inherently different or quirky. Naaaahhh, gtfo. (C14)

In addition to differing opinions of game content and characterisation, disapproval can also be related to social issues not present in the original media. Example 9 is a case of interpreting representations of a group of people as offensive. The commenter first argues that Link is ambidextrous in their view, and then sharply disagrees with the way the author presents their discussion. The article in question features some mentions of traits and percentages associated with left-handedness, and C14 regards their inclusion as *sorrow sentiments* that signal *hate* towards right-handed people. They accuse the author of being *ignorant* and presenting an *unimaginative, narrow* impression of the right-handed majority versus left-handed people. The commenter does not see a writer with such perceived views as being welcome in this space and fan community, bluntly telling them to *gtfo* (get the fuck out). This disagreement illustrates how the media in focus is not the only topic that can prompt discussion in a fan community; other cultural questions may also elicit debate in a space frequented by people from various backgrounds.

This section has demonstrated different ways of expressing agreement and disagreement with both fellow commenters and the content of the articles. The reactions of discussion participants display a willingness to make clear statements of opinion, affiliating with or rejecting views by drawing on evaluative language resources. Posters on ZU compliment others' work by using adjectives with positive affect and explicitly agree with arguments; positive evaluation is often unambiguous, building an appreciative space. In contrast, disagreement can be conveyed through a variety of more opaque strategies. Commenters may complain about having seen debates on a topic too many times or express refusal to participate in further discussion,

indirectly disagreeing with choices in published content. Some discord takes the form of insulting remarks and judgment of the original author's views. Disapproval is often related to members' impressions of appropriate discourse and website content, which is the topic of the following subsection on norms in the community.

4.2.2 Norms of content and behaviour sketching community boundaries

> (10) Pfft. You guys just don't get it, do you? The reason why Link should stay silent is because I plain don't trust modern day people to make a good character that can talk anymore. -- I loved his general disposition in the Akira Himekawa Zelda manga. (No let's not start an arguement [*sic*] on this subject just because you don't like them. Agree to disagree and move on.) -- (C15)

Extract 10 illustrates a derisive reaction to an article whose contents the commenter disagrees with. It is part of a long, dissenting reply to the text arguing in favour of a voiced Link. C15 begins with a dismissive rhetorical question of how the author (and presumably some other writers on the site) *just don't get it*, do they, accentuated by an onomatopoeic representation of scornful laughter. The commenter raises the TLoZ manga series as an example of good characterisation and assumes that some fans may not share their enjoyment of the comics, expecting and pre-emptively deflecting arguments. Despite asking the reader to *agree to disagree and move on*, C15 has decided to write a long comment expressing strong disapproval of the original topic. This contrasts with the commenter's own advice, even if the note is made in relation to the Zelda comics instead of the subject of the article. After some statements on how there are too many opinions on Link's character, C15 confronts the writers on ZU as a group within the same comment:

> (11) -- I think you guys are off your rockers for even making articles like these. First the dumb gender-neutral thing, now this. You always pick incredibly controversial subjects. You must love stirring up hate and trouble.
> -- Since when did the ZU news section become a place to post long opinionated articles on what should or should not exist in the Zelda series? -- (C15)
>
> > You realize that this is a FEATURES article and NOT a NEWS article, right? Maybe read a little harder next time buddy. (C16)
> >
> > > Yeah, I realize it's a feature article but it's also right there in the news section. -- (C15)

In Example 11, C15 displays strong opinions on the quality of content posted on ZU. They background their argument by referring to previous texts published on the site, displaying familiarity with content in the community. The commenter seems to be annoyed at the themes the article authors are embracing: C15 negatively describes the writers as being *off your rockers*,

writing *dumb* and *controversial* articles. They argue that the authors are purposefully *stirring up hate and trouble* by choosing these subjects to write about. This coupling of the writers' choices with negative evaluations continues as C15 concludes their critique with a question on the norms guiding the site's content, which another participant then reacts to. In sum, the parent comment quoted in extracts 10 and 11 exhibits firm disapproval of the article and indicates that the text violates C15's views of appropriate content on the website.

C16's reply to the comment discussed above questions the validity of C15's complaint by mentioning the unique designations given to content on various parts of the website. Their use of full capitalisation on the most significant words (*FEATURES article and NOT a NEWS article)* emphasises the implication that different expectations are placed on items classified to belong to different sections of the site. Due to this, C16 considers the text appropriate and tells C15 to *read a little harder next time*, suggesting that the original commenter did not consider the article's immediate context before criticising its publication. C16's use of *buddy* notably implies a friendliness that includes the posters in the same group, in spite of the chiding correction offered in the comment. C15 replies to this with an acknowledgment of the article being labelled a feature, but notes that it is also included in the news section. (An examination of the site reveals that all types of articles would seem to be included on the front page full of news for some time until newer pieces replace them.) Following this admission, C15 offers further motivations for why they consider articles like this unlikable:

> (12) -- Zelda fans should not be divided and made to fight and take sides like this. We all love the Zelda we have in our hearts, and to change any of these things -- is to basically say "**** you" to any person who had a different view of the series from what the new "official" version shows. No one should take away what someone loves like that. (C15)

Extract 9 displays a strong sense of a shared community, as well as a desire to maintain it and unite fans. C15 argues that fans of the series *should not be divided* or *made to fight and take sides*. They wish for solidarity and tolerance of others' opinions within the community – even though their own post begins with a rejection of the writer's views. The commenter uses the first-person plural pronoun to include fans as a large group in their proclamation, creating an impression of speaking on many others' behalf. To finish their argument, C15 appeals to the reader's feelings: no one *should take away what someone loves*. Their disapproving comment implies that an argumentative article on a debated subject can be construed as an attack against those who do not agree with the original author's opinion. Woven into C15's posts quoted in extracts 10-12 is the high value placed on each fan's individual bond to the TLoZ series: they

have a certain impression of the Zelda that they love in their *hearts,* and changing established features would insult it. This emotional connection to the games is the key topic in chapter 4.7.

(13.1) stop bloody trolling (C17)

(13.2) Why do you keep spamming this post?!?!?!? (C18)

Perspectives on appropriate material also emerge in reactions to repetitive posting. The two comments in examples 13.1 and 13.2 are replies to content that appears multiple times in the comment section of one text, the article on BotW's timeline. The first is in response to a screencap of an in-game item, and the second reacts to a comment focusing on the supposed location of the Master Sword. The users posting this image and speculation have presented them in numerous replies to different comments, broadcasting their opinions directly in response to multiple people. In doing so, they have annoyed other members browsing the page who have likely seen the content constantly re-emerge: the commenters are accused of *trolling* and *spamming*, both of which are negatively valued terms used to describe repetitive and inappropriate behaviour on messaging boards. In other words, these examples indicate that participants are expected to respect others' opinions and not inject their own thoughts into every thread of discussion. Conduct of the kind reacted to in examples 13.1 and 13.2 defies norms of commenting.

(14) God, its a game... Get over it... -- Jesus h Christ don't we have more important things to worry about? (C19)

> Well, if you care about "important things" (like saving the world from billionaires), a website about Zelda isn't really "the place to be" ;) --
> Also, for your information -- Link (and all of his incarnations) are most an avatar than a character like the writer explain if you read this article.
> You're welcome :3 (C20)

Some discussions denote perceptions of boundaries that separate ostensibly valid members of the fan community from people interpreted not to display genuine interest. In Example 14, C19 expresses disapproval towards the continuing discussion on Link's gender. They tell the writer (and possibly other commenters) to *get over it*, suggesting that this topic has been debated enough and there is no use in arguing about it. The commenter seems to find the subject trivial, as they urge the participants to worry about *more important things* than a game. C20's response implies that this is not a suitable attitude to hold in the community: they note that ZU is not *the place to be* for someone not interested in debating elements of the games in depth. The replier places C19's mention of *important things* in quotation marks, creating a dubious tone: they may

find this argument pretentious and thus offer an abstract, unrealistic example of what these so-called more important things could be. The winking and smiling emoticons *;)* and *:3* soften the tone of the reply, creating a lighter mood than sole words would have done. C20 is thus politely suggesting that the original commenter is not behaving according to community norms nor properly respecting members' efforts to generate discussion; their remark of *if you read this article* implies that C19 may not have even fully reviewed the material before commenting.

> (15) Why the F does my comment say: waiting to be approved by ZU.
> Good bye ZU, fucck Not gonna wait in line for approval.
> This is so restricting, debating beomes inconvenient. (C21)

This chapter has demonstrated that disagreements and debates are common in comments, and the final extract presented above emphasises that members expect freedom in expressing their opinions. In Example 15, C21 criticises practices afforded by the commenting platform on the website. The content of a post of theirs has automatically been left hidden until a staff member has the chance to review and publish it. C21 expresses disapproval by cursing and telling the space *good bye*, indicating that they are frustrated and unwilling to *wait in line* to continue discussion on the fansite. ZU's comment section is not a real-time chatroom, but this complaint suggests that quick posting is seen as an essential feature in asynchronous communication as well. The commenter's description of the system as *restricting* and *inconvenient* implies that ease and freedom of *debating* are important in an enjoyable community that members want to remain part of.

The examples discussed in this segment reveal that ZU users have developed conceptions of appropriate topics and ways of presenting ideas. When participants' perceptions of norms and suitable content are threatened, they can react with strong disapproval and even insult other writers. The members' views of community boundaries emerge through sharp reactions to content perceived as inappropriate. Authors writing about debated topics can be accused of purposefully dividing fans into opposing groups, and people constantly repeating their own posts receive exasperated replies. These users are breaking some others' impressions of unwritten norms of suitable conduct and welcomed membership. Commenters are passionate about articles that create opportunities for discussion through topics which do not incite trouble, and someone who does not deem the subject of a TLoZ-related debate important enough is indeed considered to be in the wrong place.

4.3 Conflict prevention and awareness of common opinion

Section 4.2 demonstrated how disagreements can often emerge in discussions on the site. Their escalation into heated debates may be deterred through means of conflict management and prevention. This is often tied to impressions of predominant opinions on ZU: when writers suspect that their views may clash with commonly accepted ones, they preface arguments with disclaimers of not wanting to undermine others' thoughts. The present section discusses extracts illustrating this connection.

> (16) Just a few years ago, the concept that voice acting should be prominently featured within *The Legend of Zelda* series was not universally accepted. -- it was generally well believed that voice acting the minor characters would utterly ruin the series. --
> No planets were destroyed and no *Zelda* game was declared ruined. -- In fact, people seemed to generally be of the opinion that -- voice acting was a great addition to the series -- (AB)

In accordance with Baym's (2000: 212) observation of fan communities displaying a sense of group opinion, the writers demonstrate clear awareness and knowledge of shared views among TLoZ players. In Extract 16, AB prefaces their article advocating a voiced Link by exaggeratedly recounting opinions presumably expressed by other fans. They first explain what the common stance on potential voice acting in TLoZ has been, then mentions that an upcoming game is planned to feature voices, and finally depicts fans' reactions to this piece of news. The author seems to have followed the community for a notable period of time: they have developed an impression of how the popular opinion has shifted over multiple years. AB first notes that the idea of voiced characters *was not universally accepted*, and is confident enough in their fandom knowledge to claim that many felt voice acting would *utterly ruin the series.* AB follows this by stating that once a trailer for the newest game, BotW, featured snippets of voice acting, *no Zelda game was declared ruined*. As such, the writer displays a close familiarity with how the fan opinion has developed over time and is able to use this knowledge as background for their analysis.

> (17) -- outside of casual mentions by fans (such as myself), the CD-i games -- tend to get shoved to the periphery. And I'll be honest; I understand that. -- (AB)

Awareness of common views also aids writers in preventing conflict. In the previously mentioned article on voice acting, AB discusses some commonly disliked spin-off games and notes that they tend to be disregarded in discourse on the series. Unlike most of the franchise, they were not developed by Nintendo, and their gameplay and cutscene animations have gained a notably negative reputation. Extract 17 demonstrates that the writer is aware of these games

being treated as objects of ridicule and expects the reader to know the same: before shedding some possibly controversial positive light on these instalments, they first concede to the common opinion of ignoring the games by saying *I'll be honest; I understand that.* This statement emphasises that AB is not attempting to defend the games nor make them the focus of the article, regardless of what may be argued in the rest of the text. It may thus lessen the chance of a reader misinterpreting the writer's intentions and focusing on this material in a potential counterargument.

> (18) -- *Ocarina of Time* doesn't live up to the rose-tinted nostalgia that seems to be omnipresent within the fan community. -- I've come to find that criticizing *Ocarina of Time* on a forum is sure to bring out defenders from every direction. -- Some would consider it blasphemy. (AB)

Discussion of group opinions reveals hints of which kinds of views are the most well-received in the community. In the article Example 18 is extracted from, AB argues that an old fan favourite should not necessarily be considered the best instalment in the series. Their description of *rose-tinted nostalgia* implies that fans tend to view OoT through a distorted lens, giving it excessively positive ratings due to fond memories. AB plainly claims that the game does not *live up to* these assessments and summarises their experiences of expressing views that deviate from the common opinion. The author's remarks on this topic and on that of voice acting provide evidence of some sentiments being more accepted than others in the community: criticising well-loved games or unchanged traditions can be likened to *blasphemy*, generating strong opposition. Notions like these indicate that members are expected to share certain views.

> (19) Though I have not made a final decision on this topic, there are several problems with some of these arguments I would like to point out. -- (C22)
>
> > -- 1. They've never voiced Link, but they have voiced Samus and the result was not popular.
> > 2. Giving Link a voice DOES detract from his actions and expressions. -- (C23)
> >
> > > 1. If you are referring to other M, I agree that that was a disaster. --
> > > 2. I hadn't really though about it like that. It makes more sense to me now and I think it is a valid point now that I understand what you mean better. -- (C22)

Unlike the emotionally charged debate analysed in the previous subchapters, some commenters take a very organised and careful approach to disagreement. In Extract 19, C22 forewords a comment on the article arguing for a non-voiced Link by softening the solidity of the opinions they are about to express: the commenter has *not made a final decision* on the topic but still wishes to address points that seem problematic to them. C22 does not plainly push their views on the reader, but instead *would like to point out* the issues they have noted. These polite and

hedged constructions are in stark contrast to the aggressive disapproval displayed in posts such as extracts 9-11. The parent comment by C22 is followed by a reply organised using numbered points. This allows the original poster to follow the same structure and refer clearly to each statement of C23's they are responding to, reducing the potential for misunderstandings. The commenter is preventing conflict by clearly claiming that they agree with C23's first point and explaining how the replier helped them see another side to the second issue. All this shows that C22 recognises and appreciates C23's (and the article writer's) contributions, decreasing conflict and thus strengthening solidarity.

> (20) -- This may be a controversial position. You may have some concerns with the concept, and that's fair. I posit that (a) this would allow more people to enjoy the games we love, and (b) it would have no ill effects on the quality of the game -- (AD)

Writers can acknowledge the difficulty of deliberating certain topics in advance. In Example 20, AD prefaces their analysis of Link's role as a relatable audience surrogate by noting that they expect their own opinion on gender options to be contentious. The author explicitly admits it to be potentially *controversial*, predicting for some fans to disagree with their views. AD placates the reader in advance, addressing them directly and acknowledging they may have problems with the article. By saying *that's fair*, AD implies that they respect different opinions and are not attempting to stir trouble. The clear statement of the writer's arguments indicates that the purpose of the article is only to explain and argue for their own view, not to claim that other notions are wrong. As this extract is featured within the introductory paragraphs of the article, it ensures that the reader is aware of the author's intention from the very beginning. Example 20 displays understanding of group opinion as well as the relation of the writer's own thoughts to it: by describing their own position as controversial, AD assumes that much of the fandom thinks differently.

> (21) -- I do want to make it known that I don't begrudge anyone for having a different opinion than mine, and I respect that the writer of the article said it was "fair" if other people had their own concerns with the idea. The article itself isn't poorly written or anything, I simply disagree. -- (C24)
>
> > Hey [[C24]], thanks for the excellent response. I appreciate you taking the time to go into so much detail here. -- (AD)
> >
> > > Thanks for staying civil, you never know what's going to happen when you post something potentially controversial on the internet. --
> > > For the record even though I don't have quite the same opinion, it was still a good article and I did enjoy reading it. (C24)

Prefaces and placations are also found in replies. Extract 21 consists of a chain of replies to the same article: the firsts comment lists reasons why C24 disagrees with AD's view, and the subsequent excerpts are parts of the discussion that follows. C24's disclaimer of not attacking people with contradicting opinions is preceded by multiple notes related to the content of the article, which AD then addresses in their reply. AD directly praises the commenter's effort on an *excellent response* before addressing their points. C24's reaction to this implies preparation for a possibly aggressive reception: they thank AD for *staying civil*, expressing that they were uncertain about what to expect when saying something *potentially controversial* on the internet. This suggests that the commenter may have seen or experienced hostile debates in the past, and their original attempt to prevent conflict in the first comment (*I do want to make it known that I don't begrudge anyone*) enhances this impression of wariness. Indeed, C24 reiterates (*for the record*) their non-hostile intent in their reaction to AD's response: despite the differences in opinion, they found the piece *a good article* enjoyable to read. This discussion demonstrates that members can take great care in making sure their comments and critiques are not perceived as personal attacks that would generate conflict.

The extracts studied in this section demonstrate both intent to reduce conflict in the community and understanding of what may cause it. Some writers recognise in advance that their opinions may be contentious, and arguments can be phrased in ways that induce mild discussion and end in mutual agreement. Commenters may preface their ideas with respectful acknowledgment of others' contributions to make their input less aggressive and avoid disrespecting different opinions. In order to be able to predict a need for this conflict prevention, writers must have an impression of how other fans are likely to react to their statements. As such, the writers' recognition of potentially controversial positions demonstrates awareness of common opinion and typically shared views. Article authors are able to overview the development of prevalent fan reactions to a topic over time and anticipate counterarguments to their propositions.

4.4 Encouraging interaction

Interaction between members is an integral part of shaping a community, and replying to others' posts is a direct way of initiating it. As the individual webpages presenting articles on ZU feature an embedded commenting platform in the immediate context of the texts, most discussion occurs without specific prompting. Nevertheless, writers can use questions and positive comments to encourage readers to contribute their opinions. This section presents

examples of participants inviting discussion by using language that displays appreciation of commentary.

> (22) -- Certainly, if you can think of any favourite examples of Link's body language showing off his personality, I would love to hear from you in the comments below. (AC)

Some of the articles employ clear prompts to inspire input from readers. Extract 22 from AC's analysis on a voiceless Link encourages players to share their memories of the character's actions. The author mentions two instances of Link's body language being particularly expressive and observes that many more examples could be discussed — AC *would love to hear from you* about them. This prompt directly addresses readers through the use of a second-person pronoun, and the phrase of *loving* to hear from someone assures them that their commentary would be valued. In addition to attaching a positive affect to the idea of interaction, the suggestion utilises a formatting-level reference by directing readers to *the comments below*. This ensures that even new visitors know where to find the comment option. It also ties the article to its immediate context on this particular website: the remark would not make sense on a platform that did not offer the same commenting setup.

> (23) -- That is just my two cents on the issue. I tried to pull all my knowledge together to give some reasoning as to why it might be in the adult timeline. -- I'm open to criticism and questions! (C25)

Direct calls for comments are not the only way to explicitly welcome interaction. The statement concluding Example 23 from the BotW timeline discussion is less of a request for input than an indication of willingness to debate. After explaining their thoughts on story trajectory, the commenter modestly downplays the strength of their reasoning. Unlike many of the other contributions to the debate, C25 is not particularly assertive about their opinion: the game *might* be in the adult timeline, and they note that the lengthy comment is just their *two cents on the issue.* Indeed, their final remark of welcoming *criticism and questions* encourages others to even disagree with C25's reasoning. They are not only looking for positive affirmations but welcome contrasting arguments as well. The declaration of being *open* to feedback invites readers to comment without necessarily asking for it. C25's tentativeness of claims can also be construed as a way to reduce the potential for combative rejection of the commenter's opinion (see subchapter 4.3 for discussion on conflict management).

(24.1) Hey, just saying: There are a lot of excellent replies here. Great discussion. Thank [*sic*] for playing, everyone. (AD)

(24.2) I love the theories everyone is presenting. -- (C26)

Stimulation for active participation can also come in the form of members applauding each other's contributions. Besides praising a specific article or reply, users can make positive general comments to strengthen solidarity and express appreciation for lively interaction. In Example 24.1, AD leaves a comment on their own gender-focused article to compliment the discussion it has generated. This comment is not a direct response to any other, but instead an independent remark written after the author has presumably debated their points with multiple other members. AD uses strong adjectives to positively evaluate the participants' contributions (*excellent replies, great discussion)*, building an appreciative atmosphere. Addressing a clear thank-you to *everyone* can further make readers feel included in the community. Similarly, C26's post in Extract 24.2 praises a large body of comments. It is an addition to the timeline discussion, complimenting others' work before briefly presenting the commenter's own thoughts on the topic. Posts like these display engagement and interest in other members' contributions to the community: a person expressing delight at a discussion can be assumed to have read it. Receiving positive affirmation and seeing thanks may encourage members to participate in more exchanges.

Examples 22 to 24 display various efforts to generate discussion and sustain interactivity on ZU. Members can unambiguously ask others to leave comments on their posts, or they may hedge their claims and declare a willingness to answer questions. Expressing interest and appreciation for others' collective contributions is another way to inspire activity while shaping an appreciative environment that welcomes discussion, emphasising the existence of a shared interest that connects people and thus contributing to a sense of community. Statements of the sort discussed in this chapter are examples of discursive choices that emphasise eagerness for interaction, but they are certainly not the only sources of activity on the website. The very practice of publishing analytical articles on a platform that enables easy commenting is an invitation for discussion — especially since many of the topics are ones that the authors recognise to be objects of continuous debate in the community.

4.5 Referencing other users and spaces

Conversations commonly only address each interlocutor's statements, but participants on ZU can also add to ongoing discussions by referring to posts made by other users. In addition to mentioning contributions published on the fansite, texts may include links and references to other sources, often incorporated as support in arguing for a claim. This intertextuality is directly related to recontextualisation, i.e. extracting elements from one context and reusing them in another, implying changes in meaning (Chandler and Munday 2011). The following examples display the different functions that intertextual elements can have in building connections within the site's userbase as well as situating ZU within a larger network of TLoZ-related material, illustrating what kinds of shared knowledge outside the specific website is expected from fellow fans.

> (25) To put more to what [[x, name removed]] has said: Voice acting gives a preconceived notion of what we should feel in a given scene. -- (C27)

Instead of simply adding their own opinions without a preface, commenters can explicitly refer to a previous poster's statement. Example 25 links the comment to other ones in two ways. First, it is connected to a parent comment through the design of the messaging platform: using the reply feature places the new post under the original, allowing readers to know at a glance that the texts are linked. Second, C27 constructs their sentence in a way that directly mentions another post: *to put more to what x has said* clarifies the one whose comment is being mentioned. C27 does not paraphrase the ideas in x's original message, but instead adds their own comments to the discussion with a passing acknowledgment of x. In other words, C27 recontextualises the contents of another person's post to function as a background for their own arguments. This purpose and the preceding phrase of *to put more to* imply similarity in the subjects of the posts; it would make little sense for C27 to contribute something unrelated. Interestingly, Extract 25 is not in fact a response to the comment by x that is being referred to. Both x's and C27's posts are replies to another comment in the same thread. By building on x's post without summarising it, C27 assumes that the parent commenter has read all the replies linked to their comment. Discussions like these can build complex networks of references that involve interaction between multiple people.

> (26) Editor's Note: This article is the first part of a two-part series. The second part, written by [[first name]], **can be found here** and takes the the [*sic*] opposite viewpoint. (AB)

Some feature articles published on ZU prominently mention other pieces produced by different authors on the site. Extract 26 is presented as a bracketed preface to one of the articles discussing voice acting in TLoZ. AB does not elaborate on the contents of the mentioned author's text, choosing instead to introduce it as simply an article with *the opposite viewpoint*. The meaning of this description is understandable in its context: the article's title reveals AB's stance even if the reader does not peruse the body of the text. A very similar note can be found in the linked article, which argues for the main character's continued silence in contrast to AB's support for a voiced Link. In order to coordinate writing two articles with different perspectives on the same topic, as well as to feature similarly formatted prefaces in the both of them, the writers must have carefully communicated with each other. The publication of such linked articles is therefore a collaborative effort.

There are multiple ways to refer to another member on a fansite, and AB's mention of the other author in Example 26 displays a casual familiarity: the writer is introduced using what is presumably their first name and nothing else. From this, a friendly relationship between the authors could be inferred – on the other hand, informality could simply be a custom among feature writers. Regardless of the reason, the casual and straightforward mention of a name creates an impression of bringing the opposing article's author close to the reader; there is an authentic person behind the piece, and they are an approachable member of the community just like any other participant. This ease of reachability is enhanced by profile boxes included at the end of each article. Their contents include a representative picture chosen by each writer, a short introduction, and links to their works on the site as well as to other spaces they can be messaged in. Such multimodal additions contribute to presenting the authors as prominent figures in the community, while simultaneously making them easy to contact and become acquainted with.

> (27) I didn't know about this post but its really well done. I made a youtube video about the same subject. -- Sorry for this shameless self promotion but I thought it would be worth showing. [[embedded video]] (C28)

As illustrated above in chapter 4.2.2, participants exhibit internalised views on what kinds of reactions the comment section is meant to be used for. In Extract 27, C28 first praises AE's article on Link's handedness (*its really well done)* before announcing that they have also explored the topic. C28 embeds a self-made video into the comment and calls this action

shameless, displaying awareness of how their behaviour relates to norms: promoting one's own work in a comment on another's article is not seen as entirely appropriate. The compliment and the self-reprimanding acknowledgment of shifting attention to the commenter's video channel thus function as buffers that soften the threat of breaking unsaid rules. Despite recognising the potential impoliteness, C28 still feels the content is *worth showing*; it is their contribution to the discussion in place of a text-only comment. The commenting platform's accommodation of multimodal content allows users to participate in diverse ways that showcase creativity. Incorporating a video or picture instead of explaining views via text can allow a commenter to choose a mode they are most comfortable using, as well as to enrich discussion with cues and material that would be difficult to describe with written language.

> (28) No. I could go on about this why this is a bad idea but I've already done that months ago on a similar article on Nintendo Everything. (C29)
>
> > Would you be willing to provide a link to that comment? I think it is a good idea (obviously), but I'm always willing to be convinced. (AD)

AD's reply in Example 28 is another display of willingness to engage in discussion and broaden the author's views, similar to cases analysed in section 4.3 on conflict management. C29 bluntly rejects the view of gender options that AD presents in their article, simply saying *No* and asserting they could talk at length about why gender selection is *a bad idea*. However, the commenter chooses not to explain this view, instead stating that they have already done so elsewhere. The lack of specific source information causes AD to ask for elaboration, as finding a single comment on a possibly popular site would surely be a difficult task. The author politely requests a link to the commenter's reasoning, displaying interest in other members' opinions. Despite C29 not providing a hyperlink to the text being alluded to, the act of mentioning *Nintendo Everything* ties them to a wider TLoZ community beyond ZU, building a connection between the websites through similarity in topics.

> (29) -- I don't know if you've been in the forum thread, but I did write some overly-long thoughts on how the Sheikah Eye suggests a post-Imprisoning War placement. -- (C30)

Besides referring to content published on other platforms, ZU members mention posts located elsewhere on the fansite. The feature articles and their comment sections are not seen as isolated spaces, but instead as part of the website along with its discussion forum and other components. In Extract 29, C30 mentions writing their thoughts on timeline theorising in a forum topic. Akin to Example 28, the commenter does not specify the contents of the post being referred to. They do not, in fact, even confirm the name of *the* forum, but an association with ZU can be inferred

from the post's immediate context. The reader is expected to be somewhat familiar with the content the message board usually holds: the comment features neither a hyperlink to *the forum thread* nor a mention of which specific thread is being invoked. It can be assumed to discuss the same topic as the article being replied to, but in order to find the thread, an interested reader must have basic knowledge of how to navigate the ZU forums and assess the correct section for this sort of theorising.

> (30) -- Before diving into body language and its role in Link's self-expression, I do want to address that yes, dear reader, you are wise to point out Link has talked before in ***The Adventure of Link*** **and** ***The Wind Waker***, but when have we ever heard him say an entire sentence? -- (AC)

Mentions of background sources may be used to deflect criticism in advance. AC's article supporting a voiceless Link predicts dissenting comments and averts them by directly addressing the reader on a particular detail. Included in the statement in Example 30 is a mix of humour and frustration, woven into the expectation that someone might object to a blanket statement of a voiceless Link by referring to short clips of grunted agreement or off-screen portrayal. In other words, the writer alludes to a possible counterargument utilising something that may be considered nit-picking. The construction of *yes, dear reader, you are wise to point out* can be interpreted as humorously exasperated in tone. The excessive positivity in *dear* and *wise* differs from the rest of the article, and its preceding note of *I do want to address* indicates that the writer expects someone to bring up the following instances and wants to stress that they are already aware of them. Through this disclaimer, AC is attempting to prevent criticism and possible conflict around their article in a roundabout polite manner.

References to other texts are often foregrounded, but links to various content can also be seamlessly incorporated into arguments. Extract 30 contains a hyperlink to a description of Link's characteristics on *Zelda Wiki*, an encyclopedia about the series that can be edited by any visitor. Embedded in the mention of *The Adventure of Link and the Wind Waker,* this linked text details the brief moments of arguable lines in the games indicated. As such, it has three functions: providing elaboration on the writer's claim, giving it credibility by referring to a source, and establishing connections between fansites by directing the reader to an affiliated site. Features like these illustrate how the intertextual affordances of online platforms can enrich the meanings embedded in texts in multiple ways at once.

> (31) -- We do have one major clue that might help us narrow down our selection, and this one comes from Aonuma himself. **During an interview with *Time* magazine**, Aonuma gave a few details regarding the overall plot behind *Breath of the Wild.* -- (AB)

In addition to consulting collaboratively constructed wiki articles and posts by other fans, authors quote and paraphrase official information published in outside sources. In their analysis of the series timeline, AB refers to statements by Eiji Aonuma, the producer of TLoZ. There is no elaboration in Example 31 on what Aonuma's role is, and the man is only referred to by his surname. The reader is expected to have enough background information to know why a quote from *Aonuma himself* can be considered important. (This reliance on a common knowledge base is the main topic of discussion in subchapter 4.6.1 on series lore and canon.) The reference is directly linked to an article published on *Time* magazine's online version, lending credibility to the ZU author's claims by including an exact source. This contrast to the unspecified mentions in examples 28 and 29 may be due to the nature of the source text: unlike sites dedicated to Nintendo, *Time* may not be a source commonly accepted or particularly familiar to TLoZ fans.

In summary, posters refer to statements by both other ZU members and outside sources to enrich their texts. Mentioning posts by fellow users displays engagement and interest in what interlocutors contribute to discussion. This recontextualisation of others' statements demonstrates how users draw on a shared pool of resources to compose texts that acknowledge members' input, and collaborative efforts are particularly prominent in articles that are presented as counterparts to each other. Linking quotes from outside sources, such as interviews or informative wikis, can add credibility to arguments. Furthermore, this intertextuality draws connections between ZU and other related sites, building networks and situating the texts in a wider context than their immediate surroundings on the fansite. Participants may mention posts they have written in other contexts without including links to them; familiarity with spaces such as the ZU forums and another Nintendo-focused site is expected from the reader a part of the community of TLoZ fans.

4.6 Expectations of common knowledge

The writers assume familiarity with concepts related to the series' story as well as its game mechanics from the reader. This is a way to enhance the impression of a distinct group with shared interests: texts with specific contents exclude people who do not understand them from

the audience, placing these people outside the community. In this chapter, subsection 4.6.1 inspects instances of writers displaying familiarity with concepts related to the canonical story of the series and expecting the same from the texts' target audience. Segment 4.6.2 considers references to media not focused on TLoZ, examining how members relate issues in the franchise to a shared wider cultural context.

4.6.1 Series lore and canon

> (32) -- where this new game for Wii U and Nintendo NX might fit amongst all the resurrections of Ganon and the timeline gotchas.
> -- With four segments of the timeline to choose from (naturally counting the pre-*Ocarina of Time* segment before the three-way split transpires) -- (AB)

Expectations of specific expertise are most noticeable in articles focused on story-related topics, such as a game's placement within the series timeline. In Example 32, AB discusses the relation of an upcoming game to the lore recounted in the rest of the series. The writer expects the reader to have prior knowledge of timeline-related theorising: making sense of bracketed remarks such as *the pre-Ocarina of Time segment before the three-way-split* require the reader to understand what happened before the mentioned game, as well as what comes afterwards. Indeed, the adverb *naturally* implies this to be obvious knowledge. The article repeatedly refers to the different story branches using terms such as *the Adult timeline* and *the Fallen Hero timeline,* both of which may only elicit a vague impression of their contents without elaboration. This is an example of a text whose intended audience is a particularly experienced subset of fans; even to a person who is familiar with the basics of the series, parts of the article may remain unclear. The history of Ganon, a recurring main villain, is described in the text, but some other characters and essential artefacts receive no elaboration.

> (33) -- we could also say he talks all the time when referring to the dialogue selection parts of the game (when you choose what you respond with, and hope you don't say "no" to Kaepora Gaebora for the hundredth time). -- (AC)

Herring (2004: 362) notes that the use of humour can be considered a means of creating solidarity, contributing to the construction of a community. In cases where recognition of the humour requires specific knowledge, readers who do not fit within the target audience will not enjoy the experience of shared jokes. A quip about a minor character in Extract 33 would be lost on a player not familiar with OoT. Kaepora Gaebora is a character who offers Link a long-winded explanation about an element in the game, after which the owl asks the player whether they understood everything. Unexpectedly, the default selection is *no* instead of *yes*, which leads

to many players accidentally having to listen to the entire spiel again. The writer hoping *you don't say no to Kaepora Gaebora for the hundredth time* can therefore be interpreted as humorous exasperation by fans of the series. A reader not acquainted with the game may pass through this remark without layering a particular joking tone onto it.

> (34) I just want "fans" to understand that Link is an INCARNATION of the hero, so it's completely plausible to have a female Link in future LoZ games. --
> -- Link is the ONLY character in the Nintendo brand where it actually makes sense due to reincarnation. (C31)
>
> > The thing is it doesn't respected the series -- If you read the end of the first page of the Hyrule historia (i guess technically the 2nd) Shigeru miyamoto literally says "Each time the world is blanketed in evil, a young boy and girl will be born.". (C32)

Example 34 illustrates the use of game lore as a basis for arguments on Link's gender. C31 utilises an uppercase typeface to emphasise Link's status as not a single recurring character but instead a reincarnation of the same concept. The confident statement of Link being *the ONLY character in the Nintendo brand* who could have an explanation for variance in gender displays broad familiarity with not only TLoZ, but with the game company's large body of other works as well. However, C32 disagrees with C31's claim and refers to a series guidebook (*Hyrule historia*) to support their argument: since the lore states that a boy and a girl must counter evil forces, the series' titular Princess Zelda must have a male Link by her side. (In a further reply, C31 notes that the principle would also hold if both characters' genders were swapped.) This precise quotation – page numbers, source, and exact wording included – lends the commenter credibility as a participant expertly familiar with the subject. It also assumes the reader to recognise Shigeru Miyamoto's authoritative role as the creator of the series, shaping views of basic knowledge expected from members.

As a notable detail in Extract 34, C31 places *fans* in quotation marks when making their point about important knowledge. This may imply that people the commenter considers true fans of the series should already be aware of the liberties afforded by reincarnation. Those who do not note this are not eligible members of the fan category and are accordingly being labelled with an approximation of the word. This emphasis can therefore be a subtle way of shaping definitions of community members and boundaries. (More discussion on the topic of rejectable traits and behaviour can be found in chapter 4.2.2.)

(35) Link is right handed because Miyamoto and Aonuma said so. End of discussion. (C33)

> Haha yeah that's pretty much how it is with anything at the end of the day. But if that's the case, it's silly that Aonuma didn't just say so. (AE)

Extract 35 further illustrates the weight placed on respected authorities in the TLoZ community. The comments in it are replies to AE's article on Link's modified handedness. Statements made by Miyamoto and Aonuma, the series creator and producer respectively, are considered final and canonical due to their status; in C33's view, referring to statements by them is enough to declare *end of discussion*. The commenter does not consider the topic worthy of debate, since there is already an official stance on it. However, the timing of the creators having *said so* is left unclear, as the commenter does not provide a source or specific information on their claims. AE's reply agrees with the principle of the two men's word on TLoZ-related matters being conclusive *at the end of the day,* but notes that Aonuma actually *didn't just say so.* This links AE's reply to the article being commented on, as they have questioned Aonuma's controller-related explanation for Link's right-handedness in it.

(36) -- the problem I have with the fallen timeline is Aonuma said it's the same temple of time from Oot -- (C34)

> Please send me the link where Aonuma said its the same temple of time from OOT. Not that I don't believe you but I haven't been able to find anything regarding a confirmation like that from Aonuma. (C35)

Chapter 4.5 demonstrated examples of members not attaching details to mentions of other texts, but Example 36 indicates sourcing of quotes to be important in the community. This difference may be due to the nature of the references: posts by fans do not hold as much weight as presumed statements by series creators, and *Aonuma said* falls into the latter category. Extract 36 consists of two replies in a long chain of comments discussing details of timeline placement in the newest game. Simply paraphrasing a statement from an expert authority is not always sufficient: C35 is asking for a direct link to the source so that they can confirm the argument's credibility. They are careful to state that they are not doubting C34, but instead asking for verification on something they have not come across. This protects the previous commenter's face, lessening the threat and aggression potentially posed by the message.

This segment has demonstrated the importance of TLoZ-related knowledge in participating in discussions on the website. Authors of articles expect readers to be familiar with storyline lore and minor characters, and commenters' debates with each other include references to official

sources such as guidebooks. Statements by central figures in the series' production are commonly used to add credibility to arguments, but these people are only referred to using last names without elaboration on why their word is regarded as conclusive. In other words, their roles and influence are considered common knowledge. Incorporating series-specific terms and elements into discussion shapes the participants as experts in a field of shared interests, and simultaneously underlines the role of this expertise in proving participant status in the community: it would be difficult to make meaningful additions to discussions without recognising the references, and the resulting lack of interaction opportunities and understanding would surely lessen the sense of belonging in a group.

4.6.2 Other cultural knowledge

> (37) -- Nintendo has a *pretty* good track record with how they treat gender, but they've made some missteps. Letting Team Ninja destroy Samus' character in *Metroid: Other M* or letting Koei anywhere near original female character designs in *Hyrule Warriors* were missteps. -- (AD)

Knowledge of games outside the TLoZ series is also required to fully understand the discussions on ZU. AD exemplifies potential problems with new elements by referring to other games in their article on Link's gender. In Example 37, the author argues that Nintendo has *made some missteps* with gender treatment, referring to character designs in some other games produced by the company. This point of criticism presumes knowledge of the gaming field from the reader: games such as *Metroid* are not directly related to TLoZ, and the mention may therefore raise questions for someone not familiar with other franchises of Nintendo's. AD does not explain why they consider the designs problematic, and as such expects the reasoning for this claim to be obvious to anyone acquainted with the works in question. Further complicating the remark are mentions of *Team Ninja* and *Koei*, divisions of another company that participated in developing the games. Authors using such references construct a framework of expected cultural knowledge for the reader: they are assumed to be familiar with other popular video game titles to understand intertextual arguments' relation to TLoZ.

> (38.1) -- RPGs, or at least more specifically JRPGs -- have slowly drifted away from this paradigm as the capacity with which to tell stories has improved. To have a silent protagonist is no longer "industry standard"; it's industry rarity. -- (AB)

> (38.2) -- there are similar franchises that have made the leap to being fully voiced -- and found significant success at it. *Tomb Raider*, *Prince of Persia*, *Assassin's Creed* -- (AB)

Not only do statements of game history place expectations on the reader, they also display the writer's knowledge in a domain of interest. AB makes assertions about the gaming field in

Extract 38.1 from their article on voice acting, stating that JRPGs (Japanese role-playing games) have *slowly drifted away* from a *paradigm* of silent heroes. Writing such statements requires prolonged interest in gaming; the author knows enough to describe why changes have slowly happened and to call Link's character an *industry rarity.* They speak of RPGs as a familiar category and are able to *more specifically* narrow the discussion to a subgenre. This display of expertise affirms the authors' place in an interest community, and the article continues with more comparisons of TLoZ's features to those of other works. To provide another example, AB lists games of a similar genre that feature full voice acting in Example 38.2. In doing so and claiming them to have *found significant success*, the author performs the identity of a fan experienced in gaming news on a wider scale than simply following developments in one franchise.

> (39.1) -- For instance, do you remember how you envisioned Harry Potter the first time you read *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, or has the Daniel Radcliffe movie version clouded your original picture of the Potter boy? -- (AC)
>
> (39.2) -- an above-average number of history's greatest minds, artists, and musicians have been left-handed individuals -- Isaac Newton, Alan Turing, Bill Gates, Paul McCartney -- (AE)

Video games are not the only field of media the reader is expected to be familiar with. AC argues in Example 39.1 that a voiceless Link allows the player more freedom of imagination, comparing the case to that of book characters originally brought to life through nothing but written text. To elaborate on this, AC asks the reader whether their image of Harry Potter has been influenced by Daniel Radcliffe's portrayal in the movies. The *Harry Potter* series is certainly a widely known cultural phenomenon, yet a mention of it still contributes to narrowing down the audience: a person who did not have access to these books or movies as a pastime would be left outside the group the writer is directly addressing by using the pronoun *you* throughout the extract. In addition to knowledge of fictional stories, familiarity with celebrities and historical figures is expected. In Example 39.2 from their article discussing Link's left-handedness, AE lists a number of famous left-handed personalities when pondering a scientific theory about the relation of handedness to intelligence. References like these construct an audience that shares knowledge of popular media with the writer and is able to connect it to the arguments presented.

> (40) What is really annoying to me was the explanation Aonuma gave..."because the attack button is on the right side of the controller"
>
> [YOU DON'T SAY] < -------Insert meme here. (C36)

Along with alluding to series-related jokes, such as the exposition in Extract 33, ZU participants utilise resources from other sources to enrich their commentary. The comment in Example 40 voices disappointment at the series producer's explanation for Link being right-handed in BotW. C36's bracketed remark alludes to a picture depicting a man with an incredulous expression and the words "YOU DON'T SAY?" typed above his head. Originally a photo of actor Nicolas Cage, variations of this image have become a viral meme used as a sarcastic response to something the poster considers an obvious observation. C36 recontextualises this meme by transforming its message into plain text instead of retaining the original image's multimodal quality, yet the uppercase quote alone will most likely be sufficient to spark recognition in a reader familiar with the source. Awareness of the intertextual reference is facilitated by the format the last line of the comment is presented in: the bracketing, typed arrow, and suggestion of *insert meme here* separate the mention of the image from the rest of the comment and instruct the reader to imagine the picture. The element of humour created by the inclusion of the meme may be replaced by confusion for a member who has not seen the source, and this post is thus targeted at an audience familiar with image macros. This demonstrates that besides knowing common abbreviations, members of the fansite are also expected to be accustomed to memes unrelated to TLoZ but prevalent in communication on the internet.

> (41) -- if you are a weekend gamer and have to hand dad your control Sunday evening until the end of the school week be sure to finish off the temple to at least the boss chamber by Sunday supper. (C37)

An interest in video games and related media is not the only trait that the members perhaps unconsciously apply to the people reading their texts. Some of the articles and comments also make assumptions of the aspects of the daily lives that the users of the site lead. In Extract 41, C37 appears to be offering tips for finishing water dungeons based on their own experiences with time-limited gaming. They are assuming that some other fans reading the articles on ZU are also allowed to only play during weekends. In this particular case, play time is being controlled by parents, implying that the writer and reader are construed as minors. A similar restriction on play time could, however, also be caused by lack of free time due to work – plenty of adults may also be *weekend gamer*s. Regardless of the exact designation, Example 41 indicates that the commenter is comfortable sharing some information about their everyday life

and expects other members of the site to be able to empathise. C37 is also clearly aware of common design patterns in the games, as they tell the reader to at least reach *the boss chamber* of any water dungeon before taking a break.

> (42) -- I find the notion of that barrier to be STUPID. Not because it's not a real thing, but because it spreads segregation. -- It's odd because saying to to a female character is disregarded as sexist, but saying no to a male character or reducing it to an option is something no one bats an eye about. -- (C38)

The participants in discussions do not only connect TLoZ talk to other games and popular culture but also to real issues in society. Example 42 is a response to the article on Link's gender, commenting on the notion that people cannot relate to the character if his gender – and possibly other features – do not match those of the player's. C38 emphatically calls this idea *STUPID*, proceeding to argue why experiencing a game through an avatar not modeled after the player is not a worse option by default. The further remarks included in this extract connect the discussion to a wider discourse on the representation of women in media. The comment displays familiarity with usual reactions to the proportion of male versus female characters: rejecting a female avatar is considered sexist, but dismissing a male option is something *no one bats an eye about*. This approach to discussing Link's gender situates the debate in a larger context than its immediate relation to the game series and the website, demonstrating that members are not averse to relating themes found within and surrounding the games to more general issues that may affect participants' lives. By doing so, posters can make implications about their values related to life in general through incorporating them into discussion of their shared media interest — even if they may not explicitly mean to do so.

Examples 37 to 42 illustrate how discussion on ZU does not only consist of elements related strictly to TLoZ. Members are also expected to recognise references to other game series, as well as to media such as popular books and movies. Users are able to relate design choices and issues of representation in other media to elements of TLoZ, enriching analysis of the fans' object of interest. As such, users of ZU are construed as a group interested in following and consuming a wider scope of media than only the game series being focused on. Posters also make assumptions about the ways in which other visitors of the site may incorporate gaming into their everyday schedules, and in doing so, are comfortable in sharing aspects of their own lives others may be able to relate to.

4.7 Shared connection to the games

This section examines how connections between ZU participants are built through referencing experiences related to the series. Assumptions of common gaming occurrences and shared history with TLoZ are first discussed in segment 4.7.1. Recounts of memories related to events in the games frequently overlap with connecting the player's actions to those of the main character, and this concept of identifying with the controlled avatar is the main topic of subchapter 4.7.2 – linking players with the character creates another level of connection between members, embodied in their posts.

4.7.1 Common experiences

> (43) -- There was a sense of belonging as you joined Telma's resistance against Zant, there were tugs at the heart strings as you restored Ilia's memory -- (AB)

Writers on the site refer to in-game developments as occurrences that the reader is assumed to have encountered. AB's article comparing OoT and TP in Example 43 connects supposedly relatable feelings to events transpiring in the games. The reader is expected to have been emotionally invested in the story of a temporarily amnesiac side character, and to have felt *a sense of belonging* upon seeing Link become part of a group. Sharing experiences that provoke sympathetic responses allows participants to bond over couplings of storyline events and emotions; asserting feelings that the reader is supposed to have felt can be presumed to reflect the writer's personal reactions as well. Discussing these emotionally charged events forms affective bonds, helping members affiliate with sentiments only understood by other players.

> (44) -- Like, remember that part in Gerudo Valley where you need to find your way across the blowing sand? It would be nice to have a sort of water temple like that -- I have these memories of Monster Hunter Tri for Wii, all my friends who had played the previous games said that swimming was the worst new mechanic that the game had. (C39)

Assumptions of common experiences are not necessarily tied to emotional responses, as Example 44 on the topic of water dungeons demonstrates. C39 asks whether the reader remembers a certain part in one of the games (which happens to be OoT, the instalment discussed in the article), bringing up a mission objective without describing how it affected the player. Rather than being an actual question, this can be considered a rhetorical device to prompt the reader to consider the right memory: since the commenter goes on to say they would like a temple *like that*, the continuation assumes that the reader is familiar with the location. Moreover, the extract refers to another game as well as commentary by others as elaboration for the

poster's opinion. The nature of this mention contrasts with those examined in chapter 4.6 on expected knowledge: familiarity with *Monster Hunter Tri* may enhance the image invoked by C39, but it is not necessary to understand the point of the statement. The article criticises water temples, of which swimming is often a major part, and the commenter notes that adding swimming mechanics to another game has been considered something of a mistake. C39 cites other people who have some experience with previous games in the mentioned series, adding credibility to their statement and connecting a network of fans.

> (45) -- A new era of *The Legend of Zelda* is upon us! -- indeed, we've seen six hours of live coverage by Nintendo's Treehouse at E3 and many more from news outlets across the globe -- (AB)

In addition to discussing memories of in-game events, writers invoke experiences of following series news and development. These assumptions of mutual interests can be enhanced by the authors explicitly using grammatical choices that entail a sense of common opinions. Example 45 demonstrates recurring plural pronouns in AB's article discussing the TLoZ timeline based on pre-release information on an upcoming game. AB begins with a thrilled statement of new TLoZ material being *upon us*, noting that *we've seen six hours of live coverage.* This inclusive phrasing indicates that the reader is assumed to be just as excited about the new game as the author, following news coverage as it has emerged. Again, terms such as *Nintendo's Treehouse* and *E3* (Electronic Entertainment Expo) are not explained; the reader is thought to be familiar with the annual video game event and Nintendo's activities during it. Opening the article with clear excitement and first-person constructions immediately excludes people who are not enthusiastic about new details and theorising from the target audience. The writer uses these plural forms in their deductions throughout the article, connecting other fans to their speculation and encouraging members to participate in further discussion.

> (46) -- Link is defined by many things: the tools we wield when we play, the land we save, the monsters we defeat, the dungeons we explore, the characters we meet. A green tunic, a sword, the Triforce of Courage. -- (AD)

In Extract 46 from the article discussing Link's gender, AD attributes the protagonist's actions to the players through a similar semantic choice. The repeated use of the first-person plural pronoun *we* has two notable functions: it associates the player with Link and identifies the reader in the same group as the writer. The fans do not simply play the game; they meet characters and defeat monsters themselves. Readers are assumed to have experienced wielding the same tools and exploring the same worlds as the author. This example demonstrates deep

familiarity with the game series, as AD is able to confidently list the elements that define Link's core character. Furthermore, they expect the reader to know the same – a green tunic and a sword may be easy to imagine, but an element called the *Triforce of Courage* may be a cause for confusion for someone who has not played the games. It can indeed be considered part of Link's very definition, as it is a recurring divine power that usually marks his status as the hero, but a passing reader would most likely not be aware of this. AD' narrative therefore construes fans of the series as a group who share experiences of strongly identifying with the main character and his actions when playing the games, as well as gaining knowledge of core elements associated with the protagonist.

In summary, writers on ZU discuss their experiences with the games under the impression that readers will be able to relate to them. Posters associate feelings with storyline events without questioning their universality, and readers are expected to have closely followed news coverage of upcoming games. This shared history is apparent on the level of word choices as well: frequent use of the first-person plural pronouns includes the reader and author in the same group of fans who have followed the stories of TLoZ together, and the reader is tied to Link's adventures through using the second-person singular to recount actions *you* are expected to have taken in the main character's role. This connection between Link and the player is further exemplified in the following section.

4.7.2 Identifying with the avatar

> (47.1) -- when I was a kid I was the only lefty I knew. Then met Link and saw a lot of myself in him characteristically which was new and cool. -- Miyamoto said Link is called such because he bridged the gap from the player's reality to the game's and this went double for me as I could actually see myself in the real world be presented in the game to such a degree. -- (C40)
>
> (47.2) I still want Link to be a lefty. Cuz' I'm a lefty. (C41)

Commenters on ZU articles display self-awareness of the connection they have developed to the world of the game series. In Example 47.1, C40 explains how they relate to the character of Link due to having multiple traits in common. The commenter precisely states they could see themselves being represented in the games, saying that having many similarities with the main character was *new and cool*. This description emphasises the rarity of left-handed people as well as characters in media: *meeting* Link was memorable for the poster, as they had been *the only lefty* they were familiar with until that point. The reference to the series creator Miyamoto's explanation demonstrates that, in addition to being able to analyse their own attachment to the

protagonist, C40 is unambiguously cognisant of Link's function and the reasoning behind his name. C41 in Extract 47.2 similarly wishes to maintain a connection to the character through their shared handedness. The commenter does not offer any reasoning related to the lore or gameplay of the series — they want Link to remain left-handed simply *'cuz I'm a lefty*. Regardless of the soundness of arguments that may be presented in favour of a new right-handed Link, C41 does not want their shared trait with the protagonist to change. These comments exemplify the importance fans place on being able to relate to the character functioning as their avatar, and shared features can shape communal identities for members such as C40 and C41.

> (48.1) -- Let us keep seeing the world through his emotions and his eyes. -- We interpret the degree of the emotion. It is not told to us. -- Leave the formula that has worked so well alone. Please. (C42)
>
> (48.2) -- That results in a personal and emotional attachment on a level that is deep, pure and unique to each person who plays. We may play the same game, but we all have our own personal feelings and attachments throughout the game. (C42)

Link's role as the mediating connection between the player and the game is considered a major component in developing fans' attachments to the franchise. The quotations in Example 48 are taken from two different comments that the same person has contributed to the discussion of voice acting in TLoZ. In Extract 48.1, the commenter argues that Link does not need a voice, for his eyes and emotive reactions function as a lens through which players experience the games. C42 uses first-person constructions to talk about *us* in explaining their viewpoint: while Link's emotions are initially referred to in third person, *we interpret* their degree and the strength is *not told to us*. This creates an impression of the writer speaking on behalf of many players, portraying the TLoZ community as a group who form *deep, pure* attachments to emotionally charged moments in the games. To preserve this affordance of emotional connections, C42 makes a plea to *leave alone* a tradition that has *worked so well*. Despite speaking as part of a group, C42 recognises the uniqueness of each fan's bond in Extract 48.2. Players form their *own personal feelings and attachments throughout the game*, yet these experiences are similar enough to bring fans together and make sharing them with others appealing.

> (49) Link, of course, is us, the persona we embody when we play a *Zelda* game, the avatar of our own heroism; the stand-in that represents us in the world of the game. -- The stronger our connection to Link, the stronger our link to the world becomes. (AD)

The protagonist's relation to the player is often implicit in the background of discussions on ZU, but writers can also deliberately draw attention to this connection. Akin to Example 48

above, Extract 49 is a clear acknowledgment of Link's role and his importance in shaping players' attachments to the series. In AD's article on Link's gender, the writer describes the main character as *the stand-in that represents us* in the games. Link is the *avatar* and the *persona we embody*. These descriptions display awareness of and interest in critically studying the functions of different elements in the games; AD's article indeed features analysis of Link as an audience surrogate, comparing the character's role to examples from other media. Identification with Link is again presented using inclusive language, as the writer could phrase their statements with more distant subjects such as *the player* but chooses instead to talk about *us* as a group. The last sentence in Example 49 summarises the relevance of the topic: the strength of the gamers' connection to Link is the strength of their attachment to the TLoZ world, which can be a major factor in enjoying the games. Stating this as a fact emphasises the importance of Link remaining a relatable constant that brings fans' experiences together.

This section has demonstrated how TLoZ fans on ZU are rendered as a group that strongly identifies with the main character of the games. The integrity of Link's character is deemed essential; suggestions of changing traditions are met with counterarguments often coupled with emotional pleas, as was also illustrated in chapter 4.2 on debates. Members speak of forming unique emotional attachments to the series through Link, and long-established traits such as his left-handedness are considered important enablers for identifying with the avatar and thus being able to see oneself in the game world. The extracts reviewed here follow the patterns of pronoun choice discussed in the previous section 4.5.1: the writers' language use contributes to shaping an in-group by talking about *our* connection to Link and *us* seeing the game world through interpreting his emotions. Among some posters describing their unique personal attachments to the series, a shared sense of relating to the main character is seen as a significant part of being a TLoZ fan. This suggests that in spite of discussion on the website being mostly interest-focused instead of contemplating issues in individuals' lives, the sense of community on ZU also contains a personal dimension: through discussing the main character in particular, members address questions that are personally significant to them and reveal their own histories.

4.8 Evaluating the object of interest

Included in many of the articles are evaluations of Nintendo's decisions on game-making and series promotion. This corresponds to a feature of affinity spaces as described by Gee (2005: 219-220): by giving negative feedback on gameplay elements or offering suggestions for

improvement, fans attempt to reach the series designers and thus influence the internal grammar of the portals of the affinity space, i.e. the content and design patterns of the games. In addition to characterising a joint enterprise, collaborating on appraisals and sharing opinions offers members a way to bond.

> (50) -- Nintendo just can't seem to adapt its dungeon-diving formula to wetter climates. While *Ocarina of Time's* Water Temple is the most famous for driving players crazy, nearly every water-themed dungeon starting from *A Link to the Past* to the present has something about it that literally puts a wet blanket on your adventure. -- (AF)

Extract 50 provides an example of a player expressing disapproval at game design. In their article reviewing the series' water-themed levels, which are infamous for their perceived difficulty, AF criticises Nintendo's dungeon design for being unsuitable for these aquatic challenges. The author claims that the dungeons have a reputation of *driving players crazy* and goes on to list examples of features that support this argument, invoking experiences that they expect other players to share. AF's quip of these layouts putting *a wet blanket on your adventure* builds solidarity through a humorous, supposedly relatable statement. Besides demonstrating a willingness for critical commentary, this example is thus another illustration of familiarity with common opinions in the fandom (see chapter 4.3 for discussion on opinion awareness). Furthermore, the writer is clearly experienced with the series history: they complain that the company *just can't seem to adapt* its usual designs to water dungeons, indicating experience with multiple instalments. Articles and comments exploring perceived flaws in the community's object of interest demonstrate that the fansite encourages evaluative, in-depth discussion.

> (51.1) -- I don't think anyone ever had a problem with the fact that they used their right thumb to push a button that makes Link use his left hand on screen. If Nintendo seriously thinks that this is suddenly an issue, they are severely underestimating the entire gaming community. -- (AE)
>
> (51.2) -- The integrity of the character I grew up with felt important. -- trudging it down to a detail that insults his gaming audience -- didn't make sense to me, either. (C43)

Disappointment with the company's reasoning for changes can be another source of affiliation. Extract 51.1 is part of AE's article on the tradition of a left-handed Link. The writer challenges Nintendo's answer to the question of why BotW's protagonist is right-handed despite the game not featuring motion controls, which were used to justify breaking the custom in two prior games. Introducing producer Aonuma's reasoning of attack buttons being on the right side of the controller, AE notes that they do not believe *anyone ever had a problem* with something that has, in fact, been the case in most TLoZ games over the years. AE criticises Nintendo for

severely underestimating the gaming community with a rationale that can be so easily overturned, suggesting that flimsy explanations can be interpreted as disrespectful to dedicated fans. Extract 51.2 is part of a comment on the same article, and its author displays even stronger disappointment by calling Aonuma's explanation an *insult* to the *audience* interested in TLoZ. Statements like these imply expectations toward producer behaviour: when contentious decisions are made, fans should be respected by giving a viable explanation. As C43's comment demonstrates, players may develop specific impressions of characters and other elements over a long period of time, and poorly motivated changes to familiar formulas can lead to dissatisfaction.

> (52) So, does anybody else feel like Nintendo is just having a jape? -- I'm thinking that Nintendo purposefully included all these references to different bits of the timeline for the sole purpose of keeping us guessing and, in perhaps the best way possible, keep us from spoiling ourselves by looking at the small details.
> Nintendo, you beautiful troll. (C44)

In contrast to the examples discussed above, evaluations of the company's conduct can also be positive or humorous. In Example 52, C44 likens Nintendo's actions to those of a *troll,* a fundamentally negative term most often used to describe someone posting confusing or off-topic messages. However, the commenter jokingly calls Nintendo a *beautiful* troll*,* coupling the term with an unexpected positive evaluation and thus suggesting that the company is cleverly teasing fans. In addition to the adjective containing a positive valuation, further support for a good-natured interpretation is provided by the remark that these actions are saving fans from spoilers *in the best way possible*. The second-person pronoun *you* grammatically addresses this remark directly to the company, but even if a representative of Nintendo did not happen to peruse this fansite and see the comment, it could have a humorous function in amusing other fans. C44 also involves the reader by posing a direct question (*does anybody else feel like)*, prompting discussion of the company's possible intentions. Instances of subtle humour like this strengthen solidarity by creating a light and involving atmosphere, as well as showing appreciation for the publishers of the franchise bringing the community together.

> (53) In the end all this doesn't matter since I hate the artwork, so I probably won't play the game. I did not play Wind Walker for that very reason. (C45)
>
> haha, you sound worse than a genwunner. (C46)

Assessment is not always followed by careful reasoning, and participants' critiques can be based on subjective preferences alone. Extract 53 is a comment on the article theorising the timeline

in BotW. Instead of directly addressing and analysing Nintendo's design choices, C45's criticism and dismissal are framed as a personal opinion: they *hate* the artwork and *probably won't play the game*. The commenter also mentions not playing a prior game for *that very reason,* hinting at disappointment over a longer period than just the current situation. C46 responds to this complaint by derisively laughing at C45's reasoning. Woven into the reply is an expectation of specific video game culture knowledge: *genwunner* is a pejorative term used in the *Pokémon* fandom, relating the comment to another series published by Nintendo. It refers to people who only appreciate the first generation of *Pokémon* media and often bash newer content, irritating other fans of the franchise. The strength and relevance of C46's reply would be lost on a reader not familiar with this infamous category of players. This comparison of C45's commentary with an unflattering term implies disapproval at the user's post and perhaps rejection of them as a welcome member of the fan community; the argument is viewed as poorly supported and unwanted.

In summary, the examples discussed in this final subchapter exhibit a willingness to express disagreement with Nintendo's actions and game design. Writers on ZU openly criticise gameplay patterns and company representatives' explanations for controversial decisions. This critique is often complimented by suggestions for improvement and analysis of reasons for the problems; TLoZ fans are interested in seeing the series develop in a positive direction, indicating a shared goal to pursue. Despite negative evaluation being common, bluntly dismissing remarks are met with disapproving replies. As such, a constructive and carefully motivated approach is preferred when presenting criticism. This correlates with the observations on disagreements between members in sections 4.2 and 4.3 on agreement and conflict management – debates are also often hedged and arguments clearly organised in order to reduce conflict.

5. DISCUSSION

This chapter further formulates answers to the research questions presented in section 3.1 by discussing prominent features of content on the website, based on the insights that emerged in chapter four. In section 5.1, results of the analysis are compared to the criteria for virtual communities depicted in the overview of different approaches in chapter two. Following this in section 5.2 is more discussion on the general characteristics of ZU that can be inferred based on the features discovered. Finally, segment 5.3 contains observations on the strengths and challenges of the setup that emerged during the course of research. Reflecting on the process provides potentially useful information for further studies on similar topics and elucidates the context the results should be interpreted in.

5.1 Present findings and definitions of virtual community

Zelda Universe exhibited sustained interest and regular activity, as many writers have contributed to the site over multiple years. In 2016, several feature articles were published almost every month, and there were comments posted to contribute to every one of the core texts examined. This steady activity conforms to Curwood et al.'s (2013) findings of content creators appreciating affinity spaces for the direct feedback their content receives. Active participation and continued activity, as well as the information exchange arising from them, are considered central in multiple concepts of virtual community (Herring 2004, 2012; Blanchard and Markus 2004). These participation patterns on ZU certainly evidenced constant interaction, even if the amount of discussion generated varied in the case of each text. The subheadings in this chapter loosely group together similar observations made on the content and characteristics of the data, relating the combined insights to the various notions of communality.

5.1.1 Focus and shared resources

In Schwämmlein and Wodzicki's (2012) classification of communities based on common bonds or common identities, ZU represents the latter category. Fans gathered on the site based on a shared interest, and the information and collaborative analysis emerging in discussions helped members gain more knowledge in the field. In discussing their experiences of connecting to the games, participants oriented to a common identity as TLoZ fans. Due to the public nature of the posts, any visitor could join a conversation; the interactive focus was on texts geared towards the whole of the group instead of one-on-one messaging. These features are a clear contrast to

the concept of common-bond communities, which emphasise member profiles and one-on-one relationships instead. The focus on topics over relationships may have contributed to constructing a more cohesive group identity, as posited by Graham (2016: 311); every participant on the site had a common interest and was thus able to easily share experiences and join in discussions.

In order for a site to be considered a community of practice as described by Wenger (1998), mutual engagement in the form of participation and mutual relationships is required. The latter existed on ZU at the very least between the feature writers, who collaborated on planning articles that functioned as counterparts to each other. The authors also used their own recognisable names and profiles to leave comments on others' work. Some commenters appeared multiple times in the data set, engaging in discussion on more than one article. These members may have developed relationships with other active participants; however, no claims can be made on this due to the data not containing any explicit expressions of recognition apart from acknowledgments between the mentioned feature writers. Plenty of interactive participation was observed in the data: members replied not only to the contents of the articles, but also to comments made by others. In some cases, this led to lengthy discussions in which more than two people were involved.

Due to the analytical and argumentative nature of most of the articles, great variance in opinions was observed in the data. Some commenters enthusiastically expressed agreement with the authors, while others voiced sharp disagreement and provided counterarguments; although respectful approaches were preferred, posters openly invited discussion. This acceptance of dissent and critique signified an appreciation for development, and criticism and conflict (along with support) are indeed noted in Herring's 2004 overview of community criteria. The prevalence of critical reasoning and analytical argumentation observed in texts on ZU is an interesting characteristic for an online platform. The affordances of various levels on anonymity in CMC can elicit trolling, unfounded insults, and other forms of mean-spirited or inappropriate commentary, derailing discussions especially in popular spaces. The data analysed in this study exhibited very little of such unproductive messaging in comparison to rational debate and constructive criticism. This behaviour is conducive to building communality, as it displays respect for other participants and the effort of engaging in in-depth debates can strengthen commitment.

Another component of CoPs, a shared repertoire of resources such as vocabulary and stories, was evident in discussions on ZU. The writers of the blog texts clearly assumed a familiarity with concepts present in the games; the texts were targeted at an audience just as interested in getting immersed in the fantasy world as the author. Participants were expected to be acquainted with both game lore and mechanics, as the writers used in-group jargon built on video game terminology and recounted game-related experiences they supposed readers to share. This discussion of storyline features, characters, and gameplay mechanics without explanations displayed knowledge of the topic and experience with series history, along with familiarity with a broader scope of video game media. The shared linguistic repertoire on ZU corresponds to previous findings of gamers constructing expert identities via precise language use (Leppänen 2007: 157; Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio 2009: 162-163).

In addition to knowledge of game terminology and lore, the fans' repertoire included familiarity with inside jokes arising from in-game elements and series history. Debated topics and common annoyances were approached in an amusing manner via jokes and exaggerations in some instances, and humour is indeed listed as a means of creating solidarity by Herring (2004: 362). Members referenced internet memes in comments and mentioned game-specific features that had gained a comical reputation within the fan community. As remarks like these would lose their effect on a reader not familiar with their origins, they both displayed expectations of communal knowledge as well as reinforced an impression of togetherness. Fans could be assured that their humour would be understood and accepted in this space, and the comprehension of such inside jokes can function as a divider between members of an in-group and other people.

Evidence of the existence of norms was another part of a developed repertoire. Repeatedly posting the same content violated routines of commenting, and texts perceived as pointlessly debating established series traditions defied impressions of appropriate content. Participants were aware of prevailing opinions in the fan community and used this knowledge to assess which views could cause discord or entail admissions of contrasting arguments. Implications of dividing fans into groups or attacking users with different opinions were not tolerated, and appreciation for in-depth analysis was expected. Members displayed self-awareness of acceptable behaviour by apologising in conjunction with promoting their own material and approaching controversial topics with disclaimers of not downplaying others' opinions.

5.1.2 Sense of unity and emotional connections

Multiple data extracts demonstrated that the participants experienced a shared emotional connection to the series. This component of the sense of community theory (McMillan and Chavis 1986) emerged most prominently through the members' links to the games. They identified with the main character and his actions in the storyline, and this connection was often extended to discuss memories players were assumed to share: talk of Link's actions either addressed the reader as the agent or included them in the same group the writer belonged in. Supportive talk emerged particularly in discussing traits of the protagonist and his connection to the player; participants agreed on the importance of relatable characterisation and shared similar experiences of feeling emotionally attached to the games.

The members also exchanged support in the form of positive evaluation of others' contributions. Texts were complimented and placating prefaces used to minimise the threat of conflict, resulting in some carefully worded and mild-mannered debates. Herring (2004: 356) lists such positive politeness as one indication of support. However, as the data were strictly focused on texts analysing the games, discussion of personal issues was not clearly observed. Confiding in others on private matters, as well as divulging personal information such as real names, could have helped in producing the trust that Blanchard and Markus (2004: 66) consider integral to a sense of community. This lack of overt discussion of personal matters differs from studies of support communities (see types of virtual communities in Herring 2012) and emphasises ZU's place as an interest-based community. Nevertheless, a personal dimension emerged in participants bringing up personal connections to attributes of the main character and relating discussions to wider social contexts incorporating values oriented to. They also shared anecdotes of personal experiences with the game series, and connections to the writers' individual lives could therefore be seen in the data as more implicit features of the texts.

A sense of unity was apparent not only in expert vocabulary and common experiences, but also in word choices on the grammatical level of displaying agency. The writers often used plural first-person pronouns, presuming collective experiences and agreement; the group of fans was construed to encompass both the writer and readers as authors recounted what *we* had felt and seen. On the other hand, second-person pronouns were used to directly address the reader as well as to connect them to the games: the articles included prompts encouraging comments and told Link's story through actions attributed to the player. These features implied orientation to

a group welcoming equal discussion of a joint passion, as well as a shared identification with the characters starring in the games.

The multiple instances of debating in the data indicated that enacting online identities through aligning with opinions, as suggested by Tagg and Seargeant (2016), functioned more on the level of individuals than in constructing a group identity over a single view seen as superior. Nevertheless, observing ways of presenting arguments revealed that members had developed impressions of which opinions were most common in the community. Assertions interpreted to be threatening unity were coupled with negative attitudes, eliciting criticism of disrespect. This valuation can be considered a part of shaping the ambient communities discussed by Zappavigna (2012): fans aligned to TLoZ itself as a positive interest, and individually to varying evaluations of opinions related to the series.

5.1.3 Similarities to affinity spaces and fandom studies

The range of topics and approaches featured in the articles welcomed multiple types of knowledge, and this is one of the characteristics of Gee's (2005) affinity spaces. Publishing works by different authors encouraged the distribution of individual, intensive knowledge: different fans were interested in researching different topics. Extensive insights were visible in the data in the participants' wide familiarity with the features of the game series as a whole, and in their ability to connect elements from different instalments to others. Commentary on articles that focused on topics such as timeline theorising demonstrated collaborative efforts to construct a rational storyline, while discussion on character traits shaped opinions on the game company's plans by highlighting the positives and negatives of possible developments. As such, one description of the CoP component of joint enterprise on ZU could be the pursuit of creating and archiving knowledge through analysis and discussion of series features. Wenger (1998: 56) argues that members' actions shape communities, and this sharing of observations certainly sculpted the knowledge framework of the fansite.

ZU presented articles by multiple writers, showcasing a variety of opinions and giving different voices exposure. The website also included posts promoting collections of fan works, such as digital paintings and crafts, but these were not examined in the analysis due to not meeting the criteria used to collect data. As noted in Smith (1999: 95), submitting and publishing pieces of fanwork is a strategy for inclusion. This openness to featuring the work of numerous fans with

different backgrounds and levels of experience in art or writing, as well as the ease of adding comments, facilitated participation and mutual engagement. It may have furthermore contributed to the construction of the feelings of influence and membership discussed in McMillan and Chavis' (1986) sense of community theory, but since members were not interviewed in this study, claims of subjective feelings cannot be made. Nevertheless, this variety of content displayed appreciation for members' efforts and a willingness to collaboratively construct a growing base of content.

5.2 Characterising the Zelda Universe community

The very fact that TLoZ fans on the site were motivated to write lengthy and analytical articles about various themes in the games displayed commitment and deep interest in the domain. A further indicator of dedication and passion was the distribution of comments in the data: articles about opinions on long-debated topics in the fandom, such as where an upcoming game would fit on the timeline or whether the main hero should get a voice actor or remain silent, received the most replies. Remarks questioning the importance of character-related discussion were met with implications of rejecting the commenter as a valid community member; communal identities negotiated on ZU included an appreciation for analysis and respect for voicing opinions.

A prevalent concept in many of the articles was the strength of the fans' connection to the main character. Writers spoke of Link's actions in the game world as if they were the players' own, and multiple articles contemplated how features such as his gender and silence affected the ease of identifying with him. Some posters argued that giving Link's character more versatility would help a wider range of players feel engrossed in the games, while others reacted with strong disagreement and rejection to suggestions of changing established traits. These discussions demonstrated immersion and narrative presence in-game, as described by Rigby and Ryan (2011); participants recounted their personal experiences of feeling represented in the fictional world through the protagonist. This impression of a shared connection can be argued to function as a joint emotional bond, in place of established mutual relationships between members. As Angouri (2016) writes, narratives of sameness forge solidarity – sharing experiences that built similar fannish identities brought the members of ZU closer together, allowing them to bond over relations to a character. Such discursively fashioned identities shape

how members align to interactions, and are accordingly stated by Stommel (2008) to affect the development of communities.

The participants openly criticised aspects of game design, analysing reasons for negative reception of certain elements and precautionarily mapping problems with potential changes in characterisation. In terms of Gee's (2005) presentation of the features of affinity spaces, the fans were aiming to influence the internal grammar of the TLoZ space. Since this research project was neither a longitudinal study nor a widespread one, no claims can be made about whether these discussions gained enough momentum to affect the development of future games. Nevertheless, they certainly affected the internal grammar of the fansite: the acts of publishing texts and commenting on them added new content to the space. This publication of new ideas, in turn, changed how participating fans viewed older TLoZ material and allowed them to remix it by connecting elements to fresh discussions. In tandem, the site's external grammar, i.e. how members interacted with signs produced in the space, was affected as well. Reactions to past texts may also have helped shape the tendencies of conflict management observed in the data, as writers displayed awareness of which opinions were likely to be considered controversial. However, the snapshot characteristics of the data set limit interpretation of how expression of opinions may have developed: this study featured a modest number of articles published in a limited timeframe, so direct comparisons with older discussions could not be made.

The site allowed members to present individual ideas and compare them to others' through commentary and discussion. Some commenters noted that discussion threads had helped them look at a feature or issue from a new angle, drawing attention to meanings not previously considered. This corresponds to Baym's (2000) argument of discussions in interest spaces helping participants understand different points of view. ZU members collaboratively created extensive knowledge that considered points of interest from multiple angles, creating new resources to base further analysis upon. Furthermore, comments noting new viewpoints were indications of building the communal meta-text discussed by Baym (2000: 211) and Jenkins (1992: 98): conversations integrating multiple perspectives are likely to affect how the fans interpret their future playthroughs of the games.

Real-life issues that emerged in the discussions were tied to the representation of groups of people in media. Akin to Wakefield's (2001: 132) observations of women identifying with female TV characters being brushed aside, participants related to Link most strongly through

traits they shared with him. Analysis of his gender on ZU led to discussion of the role of gender in storytelling, and listing good qualities associated with left-handedness was considered offensive towards right-handed people by a commenter. However, exchanges like these were rare in the data; discussion was mostly contained within the series' framework. As such, Baym's (2000) suggestion of fans talking about difficult emotional issues through relating them to characters did not particularly apply to ZU. This may be explained by the topic of the shared interest: unlike the soap operas mentioned by Baym, TLoZ is focused on adventure instead of relationships and particularly emotional storylines. These observations conceded with the idea of online communities being shaped by content rather than medium.

5.3 Reflections on the research design

Gee (2011: 26) notes that people "have a problem of taking too much for granted" when speaking and listening within a familiar culture. He emphasises that it is therefore important for discourse analysts to "make what we take for granted new and strange". In this study conducted by a researcher who had prior familiarity with the topic in focus, special attention was paid to the potentially problematic bias. Since I had enjoyed the TLoZ series for years, I was very familiar with many of the series-specific themes and terms before embarking on this research project. Due to this, I was careful to keep in mind the guideline of attempting to consider the data in terms of what a reader not familiar with the series may not be able to fill in. On the other hand, as Gee (ibid.) recognises, an insider may be better equipped to infer meanings and consider why actions are performed a certain way. My double role as a fan and a researcher is therefore likely to have had both benefits and hindrances for the interpretation of the data.

Devising criteria for data collection was one of the main challenges in planning the thesis. The present study used a representative data set chosen based on the amount of commentary each article on the site generated. This main criterion resulted in the data pool containing three articles by one author, while each of the other four featured writers only had one text included. Ideally, each examined article would have been composed by a different writer, to ensure as much variety in member representation as possible. However, since comments were included in addition to the longer texts, this approach to data collection nevertheless resulted in a set with numerous different voices. A key part of characterising virtual communities is examining interaction patterns within them, and prioritising articles that had generated the most discussion was therefore deemed justified in this study. If an even more diverse and balanced selection of

voices was desired, similar research could sample its data based on authors instead of topic or comment rate.

In addition to analysing the contents of the body of the messages, features such as the posters' usernames and the feature writers' profile texts could have been considered in identifying indicators of communal elements and identities. Including these components would have made the data set more varied, but it carried the risk of increasing the amount of material featured in the study too much to be reasonable. (Processing clearly identifiable personal data would also have, of course, required very different preparations with regard to ethics and privacy.) The question of how much data is enough depends on how the analysis in each study is organised: pinpointing and categorising common features in a variety of texts may require samples from more articles than an approach that focuses on intricately analysing a handful of texts as wholes. As such, research focused on recurring language patterns of couplings and vocabulary choices, for example, could use a larger pool of data than this study examining ideas and discussions. Since the purpose of this study was to investigate communal features emerging in analytical texts and discussion, member profiles would not have necessarily conformed to the rest of the data set, even if they may display alignments to views and identities.

This study was designed to examine previously existing data. No members of the community were interviewed, and analysis was based on insights that could be gained from the contents of public posts published on the website. Thus, the data did not include explicit statements by members specifically written to describe their community, since no such question was asked in the posts; researchers cannot make definitive claims about a speaker's feelings or intentions based on observation alone. As can be derived from the literature reviewed in chapter 2.1, subjective feelings of togetherness and emotional connections play a significant role in creating and describing a sense of community. Even if a participant in a space displayed all of the behaviours suggested in a definition of virtual communities, could they truly be considered a member of that community if they did not personally identify as one? This question is one that crystallises some of the main difficulties in formulating definitions of community. In reviewing the results of this study, it is therefore important to recognise the absence of these testimonies of personal identification.

Answers to direct questions of description are, however, not the only way to display a members' views of their own communality. Many of the extracts studied in this thesis displayed opinions

of what was appropriate or offensive to someone identifying as a TLoZ fan and participating on the site. An outsider to a community will often develop their impression of its members and customs based on observation instead of interviewing the members. As demonstrated in the theoretical framework of this thesis, the concept of online communities is a complex one, and the methods of this study focused on analysing behaviour and conceptions transmitted through language in individual posts and open conversation. As such, the approach taken in the present study provided information on how the members' interpretation of their own community manifested through implications in everyday discussions of their shared interest. Observational and more ethnographic, interview-driven studies therefore complement each other, together shaping understanding of the different aspects of the phenomenon of communities.

A final challenge related to the format of the data. As was briefly discussed in chapter 3.2, texts published on digital platforms can be constantly transforming. It is therefore essential for the researcher to save copies of the data being examined. Concurrently with the preliminary analysis stage of this study, the website on which the articles were published underwent a brief period of server maintenance, during which the featured content was unavailable. Not all of the articles had been converted to text documents at this point, and progress was accordingly hindered until the data move was finished. The articles were soon accessible again, but this incident demonstrated the importance of efficient data collection. Researchers conducting similar studies on artefacts on the web would be wise to swiftly gather and organise relevant data as soon as their source has been decided.

This chapter has sketched an overall view of how posts on ZU related to descriptions of virtual community, and how challenges arising from the research design were approached. Contents on the website were found to display multiple features of different definitions of virtual communities, communities of practice, and affinity spaces. ZU could be characterised as an interest-focused community of gamers who were gathered and connected via their common identities as TLoZ fans, and whose participation in discussions demonstrated a shared repertoire that included knowledge of game-related concepts and perceptions of appropriately argumentative content to post. Particularly representative of ZU were a shared emotional bond to the game world and its characters, and an appreciation for detailed collaborative analysis of recurring concepts. The key issues in designing and conducting the study related to limiting the data pool and collecting the material for analysis. The implications and applications of the results presented in chapters 4 and 5 will be considered in the following, concluding section.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis analysed the features and content of an online video game fan community. Its purpose was to examine how the composition of fans' posts displayed impressions of belonging to a community, to describe what kind of communality the features observed incrementally suggested, and to consider how they related to those listed in literature on virtual communities. The data consisted of feature articles and comments published on a video game fansite called Zelda Universe, and these fan-authored texts were analysed using guidelines of computer-mediated discourse analysis. Prior research on virtual communities, fandom, and affiliation in computer-mediated communication composed the background for the study. The findings were compared to criteria presented in various definitions of virtual community, as well as to descriptions of the related concepts of affinity spaces and communities of practice. Through such an approach, the study aimed to produce insight into the shaping of communities mediated by the internet.

In summary, analysis of the data revealed a common interest -focused community that displayed many of the features listed in the literature consulted and whose members appreciated in-depth discussion of series staples. Knowledge of series lore and video game terminology was expected from the readers, indicating a shared repertoire of semantic resources. The analytic nature of the discussions displayed expertise and commitment and indicated a desire to affect the development of the object of joint interest. Agreement with others' arguments was expressed freely, and members were encouraged to participate in discussions through positive evaluations and comment prompts. Issues that elicited disagreement and debate displayed perceptions of norms: the most aggressive criticism was directed at content deemed unsuitable, i.e. repeated posts, over-discussed topics, and texts that were perceived as offensive toward a subgroup of fans. Participants made references both to posts within the site and to outside sources, locating the community within a network of similar spaces and acknowledging others' work through intertextual connections. Solidarity was built through employing series-specific humour and sharing similar experiences related to the games. Members also described the importance of strongly relating to the main character of the games, emphasising the role of the game world and stories in bringing players together.

No small cliques or close-knit, exclusive mutual relationships were observed in the data: discussions were open for anybody to join, and individual member profiles were not relevant

in forming a communal identity of TLoZ fans. Participation on the website was based on common interests and the sharing of opinions, which the members affiliated with and thus formed connections through emotional responses. A joint enterprise of collaboratively creating and distributing knowledge could be inferred: the articles were analytical in nature, and members engaged in argumentative discussions with multiple interlocutors. In this space of game-specific conversation, personal issues were not a prominent topic of deliberation. This further exemplified the interest-based quality of ZU as a community and contrasted with definitions highlighting the importance of mutual bonds and supportive interaction related to private problems.

Prominent in the study were in-depth debates and new points of view collaboratively emerging from them. Members both challenged and praised others' theories and assertions, shaping a community appreciative of analytical discussion. Observation of ZU data suggested that positive evaluation of others' work and statements valuing different opinions are viable strategies for displaying appreciation and encouraging members to participate, strengthening solidarity. Despite many of the articles not being explicitly presented as conversation starters, all of the articles studied generated in-depth discussion within which differing points of view were freely expressed. This highlights the role of interaction in shaping the characteristics of a community: on ZU, perceptions of appropriate content, positive affiliations, and community boundaries could be inferred from reactions to participants' posts. There are often no clear written descriptions of what a community values or how its members are expected to act, and studying the discourse of people participating is therefore essential in attempting to understand its norms. Although ZU presented as a space that welcomed debate, members were often careful to frame arguments in a polite and respectful manner.

Since the focus of many CMC studies has been on topics of identity and language variation in chat rooms and discussion forums, studying community features on a less conversation-focused part of a website created information on a combination somewhat neglected to date. While feature articles are not built on direct conversation in the same fashion as casual discussion threads, embedded in the texts were nonetheless implicit assumptions about common values and opinions as well as explicit connections to posts written by other members on the site. This study featured a mixture of analytical articles and conversational comments of varying lengths, and as such provided findings based on two kinds of data that were connected to each other through topics and references. The results were more focused on connections built through

shared interests and collaborative knowledge than support on personal issues. Researching these more indirect contributions to shaping relationships broadens the knowledge on perceptible community features.

A computer-mediated contemporary space for common interests and collaborative endeavours does not necessarily correlate with traditional notions of community, yet the people participating in activities within it may feel and display a strong sense of communal identities. ZU members did not indicate mutual cognisance of each other beyond a common leisure interest — discussion and collaborative efforts did not require physical proximity, close acquaintance, or a sense of duty. Studying virtual communities produces contemporary clues on how affective relationships and shared spaces are constructed in environments that do not necessarily involve face-to-face interaction or identifying information. In addition to facilitating the formation of personal relationships among people with varied backgrounds, the internet is a vital channel for the maintenance of professional connections. Examining the features of lasting online communities thus provides information useful not only for people in search of others with shared interests, but also for those designing websites for customer audiences and professionals.

Computer-mediated communication is constantly evolving as new kinds of web platforms are developed. Mobile devices in particular are making it easier to engage in interaction in a variety of situations. Despite the popularity of microblogging and profile-based social media, fan websites focused on more traditional articles and comment threads are still thriving. Unlike fleeting and personalised social media streams, they are centralised spaces for in-depth discussion and the exchange as well as archiving of knowledge. Examination of these sites offers insight into what people value in online communities and how they build bonds through shared interests and stable membership. Observing the discussion emerging on ZU demonstrated that people still value the detailed content published and communities formed in fan-administered spaces. At the time of this report's finalisation in the spring of 2019, feature articles were still being published on ZU at a steady pace.

Further research could adopt a more ethnographic approach, interviewing members in addition to, or instead of, observing texts produced through user interaction. This would complement observational conclusions by yielding descriptions of participants' feelings about communality. Websites could also be examined in their entirety, in contrast to the present data set drawn from one section; the study at hand demonstrated that posts on fansites cross-reference other texts

and are influenced by discussions emerging elsewhere in the shared space. Due to the limits of a Master's thesis, this study only examined one fansite against theories of community. Comparative research using multiple spaces, such as an interest-based community and a profile-based one, could be conducted to learn more about the prominent features of each type.

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