



Juvenile Literary Hypertextual *Fanfiction*: evolution, analysis and educational possibilities

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ABSTRACT: In this work we analyse the evolution of *fanfictions* related to four of the most popular current *fandom* series: *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*. This is a descriptive investigation wherein the temporal evolution of *fanfic* production is studied. The research focuses mainly on the relationship between the periods of greatest creative *fanfiction* activity and the publishing of the different books of the respective series, their transmedia expansion and film adaptations, among others. The study has allowed us to observe that these fan communities are generally ephemeral, although strongly united by ties of affinity, as well as being creative and active. The results obtained suggest that these vernacular literary practices are the source not only of motivation, but also of a formative process of reading and writing that can be planned and developed in formal learning contexts.

Keywords: Literacy, transmedia, temporal evolution, fan, Community participation.

*La escritura hipertextual de los fans (o seguidores) de sagas literarias juveniles:
evolución, análisis y posibilidades formativas*

RESUMEN: En este trabajo se ha analizado la evolución temporal de la producción de *fanfictions* relacionados con cuatro de las sagas de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil con mayor *fandom* en la actualidad: *Harry Potter*, *Crepúsculo*, *Los Juegos del Hambre* y *Divergente*. La investigación se centra, principalmente, en conocer la relación entre los períodos de mayor actividad de creación de *fanfiction* y la publicación de los diferentes libros o series, su expansión *transmediática* y adaptaciones cinematográficas, entre otros. El estudio nos ha permitido observar que estas comunidades de fans son generalmente efímeras, aunque fuertemente unidas por lazos de afinidad, además de creativas y activas. Los resultados obtenidos sugieren que estas prácticas literarias vernáculas son la fuente no solo de la motivación, sino también de un proceso formativo de lectura y escritura que puede planificarse y desarrollarse en contextos de aprendizaje formales.

Palabras claves: Alfabetización, transmedia, evolución temporal, seguidor, participación en comunidad.

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Introduction

This work presents part of the results obtained during the second phase of the Research Development and Innovation Project, awarded by the Ministry of Economy and Competition of Spain. In this phase we explain how juveniles react to transmedia storytelling, in other words how they respond. We aim principally to recognise the various abilities and strategies required of the readers of these multimedia and multiplatform, discursively complex texts. Specifically, in this research we test the hypothesis that users' creative activity is linked to the publication of new narrative content and not so much to the transmedia translation of already published content.

Educational solutions are sought for the current demands of multiliteracies. This research aims to provide answers to the challenges of attaining an innovative, inclusive and responsible society of individuals capable of informing themselves, communicating, interacting and managing knowledge. Although there is an extensive bibliography concerning digital literacy and its value in the communication society, specific research on users' literary and creative response to transmedia storytelling is sparse. This research aims to fill the gap in knowledge relative to the evolution of the literary practises of *fanfiction*.

A line of research that explores the hypertextual, multiplatform, intermedial and interactive nature of texts arising from the development of digital technology is being consolidated. In theory, these new kinds of texts promote a kind of arbitrary, inconclusive, discontinuous and fragmentary reading experience (Chartier, 2006) which some specialists have defined as information scanning, like channel surfing or jumping from one source, content or medium, to another. (Scolari, 2008; Cassany, 2013; Morduchowicz, 2013). But the real change in reception, distribution and production of literary texts can be found in their ubiquitousness. As we shall see, peripheral social activities related to the reading of such texts increasingly gain protagonism, which increases the process of reception: from commenting on social media, reviewing the work on a virtual community of catalogisation, or participating in more complex and enriching hypertextual practises such as *fanfictions*.

Mass use of new technologies is fuelling the development of a digital society characterised by the convergence of technology, media and culture. This has forced the obsolescence or at least the reassessment, of terms such as audience, passive audience, literary writer or functional literacy. This has come about principally because of the development of the participatory culture, that is to say a society where the barriers to artistic expression and civic duty are blurred, with strong support for creativity and exchange. Furthermore, a kind of informal affiliation is formed, based on affinities, hobbies or interests where the more experienced share their knowledge and facilitate access to new members (Jenkins, 2008; Gee y Hayes, 2011). Aparici and Osuna describe this participative culture as having "no bars to civic expression, supporting creativity and the sharing of individual and collective creations" (2013, p.138).

Therefore, the participative culture integrates concepts such as collective creativity (Casacuberta, 2009), intercreativity (Berners-Lee and Fischetti, 2000) and collective intelligence (Lévy, 2004) etc. Large numbers of users coordinate and unite in this culture with

the aim of producing a common project. These groups generate large virtual communities based on the shared interests of members, for instance: *Potterheads* (followers of Harry Potter), *BookTube* (vloggers that talk about books and reading), or *fanfictioners* (fans of this kind of creative writing). The use of social media, conversations using mobile apps, creative writing in virtual communities have therefore all become every-day practices (Lankshear y Knobel, 2008; Cassany, 2009).

These virtual communities grant a sense of belonging based on group identity. Online users decide which community to join based on their preferences, which minimises or cancels out differences in age, sex, location, language, social or cultural standing, etc. For this reason, researchers such as Gee and Hayes (2011) choose to centre their analysis on areas of affinity generated on the web where users unite.

In this sense, they are developing narratives based on transmedia, meaning the narrative is dispersed across different mediums. This obliges users to navigate between different platforms or adopt what Jenkins (2008) describes as migratory behaviour in order to access the whole narrative.

In this sense, taking into account Scolari's inclusive definition (2013, p. 46) Transmedia storytelling has two primary vertebrae:

- The contents of the *canon* of rules (official information, texts from the author in the traditional sense following the hierarchical model of communication) are spread across multiple platforms.
- Followers of the canon play an important role in the development of the story, building on it, promoting and commenting on it, etc.

Despite the fact that not all transmedia storytelling begins as such, the success of books, TV or film allows the story to continue through other media. Some examples are *The Walking Dead* (Kirkman), *Matrix* (Lana y Lilly Wachowski), *Harry Potter* (J. K. Rowling), etc.

Literary practises in shared spaces: fanfictions

One of the creative possibilities in these shared spaces is *fanfiction*. This is the literary manifestation whereby fans appropriate the hypotexts and play with them: expanding, modifying, or filling gaps in the storyline. This practice is particularly relevant due to the creative, recreational and formative implications for users. We could define these as stories created by admirers (or detractors) or followers, based on their interests or passions: literature, cinema, television, videogames etc. (García-Roca, 2016b). It is difficult to precisely define *fanfiction* and its environment since it combines various platforms, genres, forms and grades. *Fanfiction* can therefore be found in the form of stories, songs, poems, drawings, films, animations, etc.

On these web pages, the figure of the author and reader are not defined in watertight compartments. On the contrary, these spaces of shared affinity facilitate and encourage

cooperation and interaction between users and include hybrid figures. Other users freely collaborate with the writers and help in specific aspects: offering to revise grammar, orthography, spelling, or narrative coherence as well as make suggestions on the storyline development. These *beta readers* have the opportunity to collaborate in the creation of stories and concentrate on the aspects that are easiest or most attractive to them, in addition to making suggestions, recommendations or corrections, acting as co-creators. At *fanfiction.net* for instance, users fill out a form specifying their strengths, weaknesses and revision preferences. A community of users is therefore created in which each member's role is not clearly defined and in which collaboration and feedback are prioritised among users.

A multitude of literary activities occur in the heart of these communities which develop important informal learning contexts (Cobo and Moravec, 2011), closely related to reader and writer development, and literacy in general. There is a notable effort towards the correct narration of the stories in order to make reading easy for both those who share the vernacular and those who read in languages other than their own. Specialists such as Jenkins (1992), Black (2008), Cassany (2012), Scolari and Guerrero (2016) who have analysed creative productions by fans from different perspectives, highlight the enormous didactic possibilities of *fanfics* in formal education and learning foreign languages.

These are therefore, unique opportunities to encourage reading and develop literary and multimodal competencies. This work is precisely more centred on analysing how to apply the motivation and potential for learning generated within these digital contexts in the classroom. Data such as the 780000 hypertextual narratives of Harry Potter (written in over 40 languages) at *fanfiction.net*, or the over 50 million downloads of Wattpad at Google Play show the notable interest in reading and writing among the generally young users. Despite this, there is a huge gulf between literary teaching in schools, and the vernacular, which continues to be inexplicably excluded from school literacy activities. It therefore begs the question: how can this be applied to the classroom and can it be integrated into educational proposals more in line with the digital reality. It must be pointed out that there are certain elements inherent to the context (García-Roca, 2016a) that cannot be directly transposed to the classroom:

- These are informal settings where users decide the actual learning itinerary they wish to follow, such as the reading of manuals or guides, provide feedback for other users that suggest changes, etc.
- Visiting these web sites is considered a pastime.
- Since these are virtual spaces, relationships formed therein are horizontal: there is no clear hierarchy based on age, sex or credentials, rather participants start from an equal status. Language barriers are also minimised.
- Constant communication is established by a community that shares the same tastes and affinities.

- There is great freedom of expression wherein author and intellectual property rights disappear. Writers can therefore write what they please.

Nevertheless, other aspects linked to motivation and learning related to informal educational contexts should be pointed out. Learning is not an explicit aim in these areas of shared affinity, but rather is a side effect of the creative process, of collaboration and community organisation (Ito, cited in Scolari, 2016). It is the freedom of the user and belonging to a group that induces youngsters to read and write hypertexts.

Objective/Hypothesis

The motivation to read has been one of the primary challenges in the field of literary education and language acquisition. If reliable data could be gathered on when users are most active on the *fanfiction.net* platform it would be possible to make headway in the elaboration of innovative teaching proposals that situate the reader and reading at the heart of the learning process and call for the inclusion of popular literary practises into formal education. From this perspective, this study analyses the temporal evolution of *fanfic* stories of series such as J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter*, Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight*, Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* and Veronica Roth's *Divergent* trilogy. We have tried to pinpoint the moment in the development of the narrative in which fan's creative activity has been most vibrant. The results obtained provide information on how to approach encouraging to read in the digital era, while revealing the keys to explain the complex process of interaction within virtual literary communities. In this way, this study contributes on the one hand to guiding teachers in the approach to creative hypertextual narrative activities, and on the other, explores the behaviour of these creative users.

Therefore, this work proposes solutions relative to the following general research aim:

- Examine the behaviour and motivation of the followers of juvenile literature as producers of creative hypertextual content.

This general aim is articulated in the following specific objectives:

- Examine the temporal evolution of the creative activity of the fans of these literary series'.
- Contextualise and locate the key *fanfic* author moments, from greatest to least vibrant.
- Evaluate the impact new narrative content has on the production of *fanfiction*.

Method

This is a quantitative, descriptive investigation (McMillan and Schumacher, 2005) wherein the temporal evolution of *fanfic* production is studied: when they are most active (in which case we only use hypertextual narratives created in *fanfiction.net*), and what factors determine the volume of publications. We have opted to take the date on which the users began writing or

sharing their writing with other users, to be the exact moment when a larger number of new creative content and of writers interacting simultaneously, is detected. Data was gathered directly from each *fanfic* file and processed in a spreadsheet.

We chose to analyse *fanfiction.net* since it is the largest repository of *fanfiction* and has also been the subject of extensive research (Black, 2008; Cassany, 2009; Scolari and Guerrero, 2016). The criteria for selecting the corpus has been the number of rewrites and of all these, recent literary series' have been chosen with the idea of analysing their temporal evolution since their inception. For this reason, works such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* (C.S Lewis, 1950) or *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954), have been discarded, although recent adaptations to film have caused renewed interest in these works.

Data from a total of 995554 juvenile literary hypertext narratives has been used. Of these, 73% corresponds to *Harry Potter*, 22% to *Twilight*, 4% *Hunger Games* and 1% (a total of 7780 texts) to the *Divergent* series. Crossover texts have been excluded because it is not always clear what their base text is (Ref: Guerrero and Scolari, 2016). Following this, new official publications (belonging to the canon), such as film adaptations or spinoffs (such as *Pottermore*) are introduced as an independent variation. This reveals the general tendency and user behaviour in the face of the amplification or development of the hypotext story.

Results

Below are the results obtained from analysing the chronological sequence of monthly *fanfiction* output. The X axis shows the momentary highs while the Y axis represents the total number of *fanfics*. The graph also includes vertical bars representing the publication of new books, films and extras, as well as the average and monthly production quartiles of new hypertexts in the horizontal axis.

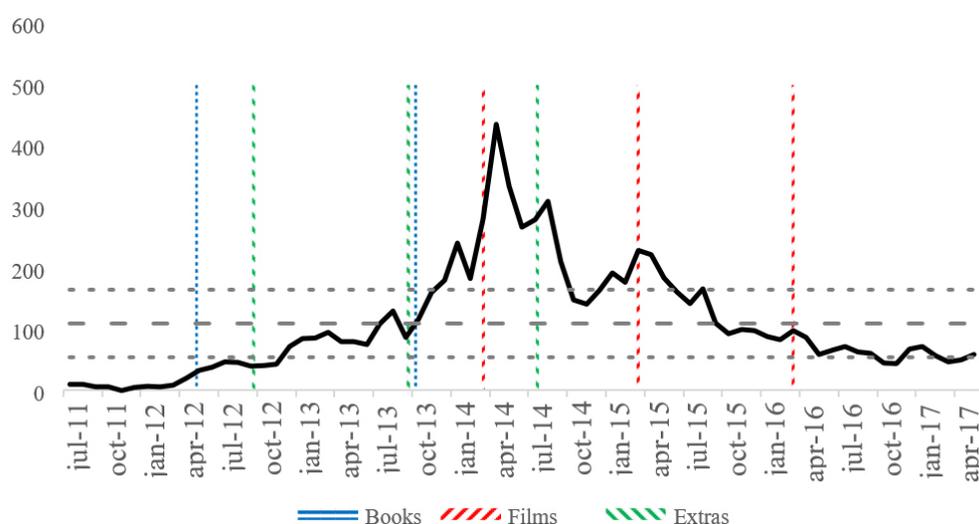


Figure 1. Temporal evolution of the creation of new fanfics in the *Divergent* series.

In the case of the *Divergent* books series 7780 *fanfics* were registered. The average production was 109.57 initiated per month and the maximum peak of activity reached 436 texts created in

March 2014. Following publication of the first book in April 2011, fans barely produced any creative activity. After publication of the second book, *fanfics* gradually increased. The first major spike comes after the final book was released, *Allegiant* (October 2013) which coincided with the second instalment of the collection *Four: A Divergent Collection* (September 2013). This collection consists of the parallel story of a secondary character and is therefore an extra. This all contributed to the number of hypertexts increasing threefold during those months. Shortly afterwards, with the release of the first film in March 2014 *Divergent*, amateur writing output increased further, producing the greatest spike in production. From this point, the number of creative productions reduced drastically until the publication, in July 2014 of the last three books in the *Four* series. This caused a moderate recovery in interest in *fanfic* production. When the marketing campaign for the second film in *The Divergent Series: Insurgent* began, followers' activity gradually picked up until its release. Two months later, activity began to reduce until it settled around the first quartile (54.7). The final film, which had an audience of less than 45% compared to the 70% of the first, did not significantly alter the downward tendency of hypertexts created in this space.

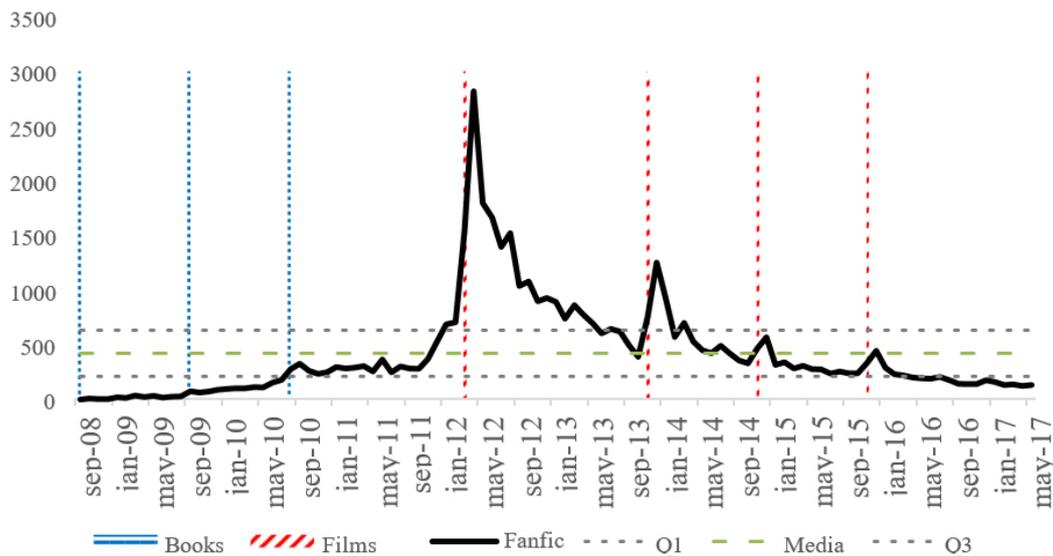


Figure 2. Temporal evolution of the *Hunger Games* series.

The Hunger Games series by Suzanne Collins registered a total of 47318 *fanfics*. Evidence of the success of this series on the platform is the 2815 texts written in just one month and an average of 419.7 monthly hypertexts per month. Books in this series instigated a timid production of hypertexts, but *fanfic* production increased notably around the release of the first film in 2012, multiplying by 10 the density of *fanfic* texts written in just 6 months. Immediately afterwards, fan activity descended notably during 17 consecutive months, until the second film in the series was released in 2013, when interest increased threefold with respect to the previous month. The following releases marginally increased amateur writer production, but the general tendency was consistently downward.

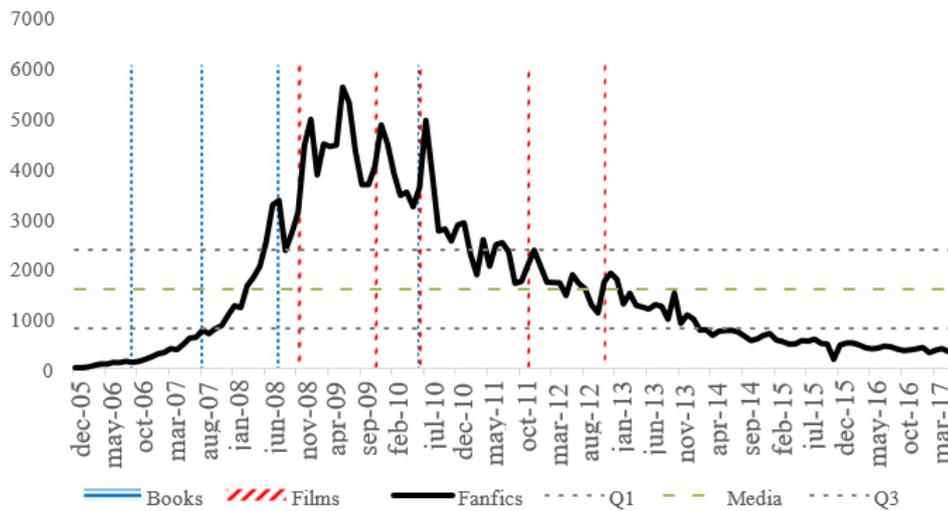


Figure 3. Temporal evolution of *Twilight Trilogy*.

Stephanie Meyer's main work, the *Twilight Trilogy* has 214216 hypertexts on this web. Although peak interest has not been as marked as the previous cases, it succeeded in inspiring 5565 new *fanfics* in just one month. The median is 1552.27 hypertexts per month, although no new stories have been published since November 2012. Graph 3 shows that *fanfics* increased exponentially during the first years after publication, with new story production quadrupling between August 2007 (748) and August 2008 (3320). It should be pointed out that an average of 4222.1 new *fanfics* per month was maintained between January 2009 and July 2010. Finally, writer activity declined after the last book was published, despite the release of the last two films: these did not build on the narrative but were adaptations for the screen.

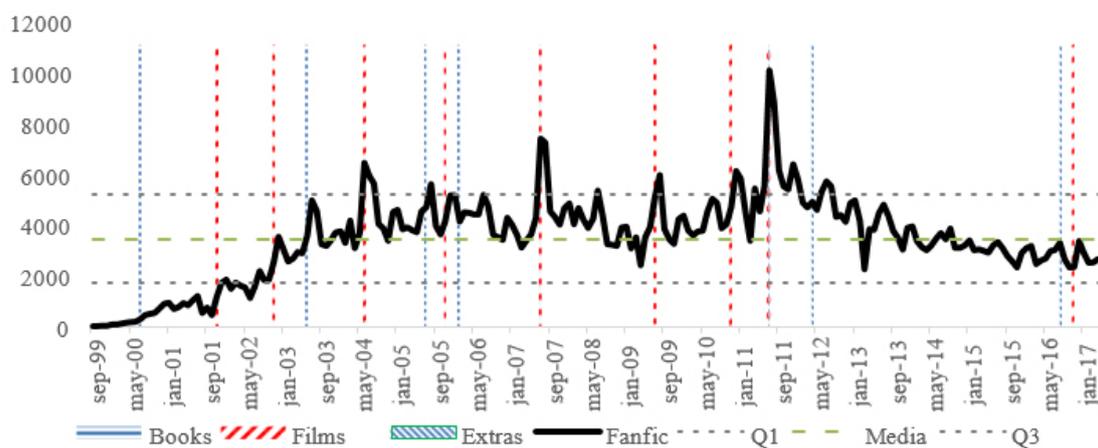


Figure 4. Temporal evolution of the *Harry Potter series fanfics*.

As far as the narrative world of Harry Potter is concerned, it must be pointed out that it is an exception in every sense, being the best-selling book series in history. The author has over eleven million followers on Twitter and it is the work that has inspired the largest number of *fanfics* with a total of 729487 (and 41351 crossovers). It consists of a wide number of works

enlarging the transmedia universe: novels, encyclopaedias, films, stage plays, videogames and webs with exclusive content. Therefore, in this case there are far more variables which cannot be included in this work.

First, it is important to note that *fanfiction.net* was registered in September 1998. Traffic to the web was far less since it was unknown, besides access to the internet was significantly lower. Nevertheless, the immediate effects on the production of *fanfics* caused by each film and novel are interesting. July 2011 was particularly relevant, when the last film version of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows- part 2* was released, which coincided with the *beta* version of *Pottermore*. All this caused the production of new hypertexts to reach over 10000 in just one month.

The decline in the number of *fanfics* created per month has been far less pronounced than in the previous series analysed, and it should be noted that activity has been more or less constant. This is due to the fact that the Harry Potter universe has developed not only in books and films, but also in many other media, formats and languages. The *Potterhead* community has also been characterised by intense activity, expressed though different cultural forms: *fanfictions*, *fanart*, *fanfilms*, fan theories, etc.

Lastly, we have analysed whether there are seasonal or monthly differences in each temporal series. No significant differences were found. The month with the most activity in the works analysed was January, with an average 20914 texts compared to the 20732 *fanfics* in October.

Table 1. *Month and Media*

<i>Month</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Media</i>
January	20914	May	20828	September	20829
February	20875	June	20834	October	20732
March	20838	July	20889	November	20778
April	20892	August	20949	December	20836

Discussion

By analysing the data, we have been able to find the causes of surges in interest, the variations, impact of new content and the precise temporal evolution of new texts created by the followers of these literary series.

In the series' analysed we have shown that amateur writing increases more or less following the publication of new content, particularly following the first film adaptations, which although they don't build on the story, do:

- Reach a much larger audience and increase the fan base,
- Offer followers an interpretation in a different medium, and
- Synchronise fans since films are available for a shorter time than novels.

It may be inferred that *fanfictioners* are loyal followers and fans (the *fandom*) and are the first to not only read and enjoy the narrative content, but also to venture to create and re-write.

In contrast, *fanfic* production gradually decreased after the premieres of the first films, despite the publication of new narrative content. The exception must be *Potterheads* due to the fact that this is a stable, longstanding community with a relatively consistent hypertextual production. This is due to the fact that J. K. Rowling has maintained fans' interest by adding new content to *Pottermore*, conferences, and social media etc. This means that as transmedia storytelling, *Harry Potter* is found not only in books, films and videogames but is much more dispersed. This makes analysis difficult since new editorial content is constant.

In this sense, it must be pointed out that *fandom* communities tend to be large and united by a strong sense of belonging. However, they are also in a sense, ephemeral: created temporarily around series, works and authors. As soon as the production of new content ceases, they gradually dissolve. Nevertheless, the sense of community remains latent, waiting for new narrative content.

Conclusion

Lastly, these vernacular literary practices by juveniles are important sources of motivation and learning in informal settings. Writers try to get their texts read by the greatest number of users and seek to improve their skills, spelling, originality, creativity, loyalty to the hypotext (making them competent readers) and work in collaboration etc. Therefore, they attain greater levels of competence in literary and multimodal skills, the use of digital tools and communication in general. There just remains one question: is this not the goal of formal education? And, how might these vernacular pastimes be linked to learning institutions without damaging their free and informal nature?

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