

Reading popular literature and digital media: Reading experience, fandoms, and social networks

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Abstract

Media and communication technology and its rapid development has had a revolutionary effect on the reading habits of readers and fans of popular literature. The main topic of this paper is “the new age readers”, especially their reading habits, interactions, fan activities and identity creation. Our purpose is to trace the transformations in reading habits that occur with digital media and social networks. We have conducted in-depth interviews with Slovenian and foreign readers, who view the Internet as an absolute necessity for reading popular literature products. The analysis shows that Slovenian readers who strongly connect reading activities with the Internet subsequently bring global fan activity trends, such as fan fiction and real person fiction, to Slovenia. There is also a strong support for an identity construction thesis and our findings are also congruent with the thesis of consumer tribes, since we argue that new age readers construct their identities in a weakly connected group of people, who prefer to communicate on different digital communication channels rather than in real life.

KEYWORDS: reading habits, popular literature, digital media, social networks, fan activities, identity construction

I read almost exclusively on my iPad. It has totally changed my reading habits. I can hear about a book and have it in my hands in seconds. I can finish one book in a series and have the next one right away. I have my books with me anywhere I go. I have thousands of books in my iPad library and have read almost all of them at least once. I follow books on Wattpad. Sometimes I buy book that I like in a printed version. Printed books are still awesome and I like to collect them. That's why I can also understand people who hate e-books (Foreign Interviewee 9, 29 May 2014).

ANTHROPOLOGICAL NOTEBOOKS 20 (2): 103–126.

ISSN 1408-032X

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E-books are lighter, they take up less space, are available all the time and are simple to buy or download. I can get them for free on the Internet. It's just that those aren't real books. You can't physically turn the pages and you can't display them on a shelf. Since I read e-books, I have no idea what the book covers look like. I don't know if I prefer e-books or printed books. They both have their advantages and disadvantages (Slovenian Interviewee 5, 1 March 2014).

Introduction: Comparative study of Slovenian and foreign readers

Popular literature, its production, and consumption have been challenged by numerous changes throughout history. The World Wide Web and digital media-communication processes, which were created as an effect of technological and social development, have influenced the use of popular literature and, therefore, completely transformed both reading and publishing to their cores (Carnoy & Castells 2001; Borgman 2000). This progress has not only affected how libraries (Griffey 2010) and publishing businesses (Van der Velde and Ernst 2009) are managed, but has also changed authors' activities (Hillesund 2011) and the habits (Liu 2005) of readers of popular literature. One of the advantages that these transformations of technology have to offer to readers and other actors within the cultural circuit, such as writers and publishers, is the use of digitalized databases of literature contents, which have enabled online book purchases, reading literature on e-readers, and online reading on social media platforms. Digitalisation and mediatisation have also impacted the construction of online connections between readers and have created easier accessibility to the implementation of fan activities (Pearson 2010). By being a part of the new media, these services have completely changed consumer interactions with the media (in this case, readers' interactions with books). Consequently, readers' emotional, spatial and temporal relations to books are changing.

New media and communication technologies and developments in production and use of books have not only brought changes in reading habits, but have had a wider effect on a popular literature culture, since strict lines between cultural circuit actors have become blurred (Koltay 2011; Nentwich 2006). This results in changes in the process of the construction of readers' identities: they are no longer merely consumers, but also manufacturers. In this paper, we primarily research the role of the consumer, who is simultaneously also becoming an author and a publisher.

As not much research has been done concerning digital reading in Slovenia, we are attempting to determine the main characteristic of Slovenian readers who are present in digital environments and who view the internet as an absolute necessity for reading popular literature products. As a result of globalization, social networks have grown in popularity and have become the primary channels through which Slovenian readers exploit book fandoms and constantly interact with foreign book fans. Therefore, our study addresses questions regarding the correlation between Slovenian and foreign readers, their use of digital books, and their reading habits.

The most recent comprehensive survey that gathered information on reading and reading habits of Slovenian readers was conducted in 1999 (Žnidaršič et al. 1999); however, this research did not gather data about readers in relation to digital media and infor-

mation technologies. Since the media-communication's technological development has had a profound influence on the readers, authors and publishers of popular literature, it is vital to collect data on regarding this and to determine what the main purpose of the new media is, in addition to changes in reading, writing and publishing popular literature.

Our anthropologically oriented study, which was based on ethnographic research and in-depth web or in person interviews, is interested in four main research topics: reading habits, readers' and fans' interpersonal communication, fan activities and book fandoms, construction of readers' and fans' identities.

Our survey sample consisted of 28 interviewees, and we chose only those that met at least four of the following criteria: 1) they read e-books; 2) they buy their books in online bookstores, or download books online; 3) they read books on online reading social network platforms; 4) they follow online book fan pages and book authors; 5) they follow different online social networks where they discuss or read about book related topics; 6) they engage in different online fan activities related to books and book characters.

The findings are based on around sixty hours of individual in-depth interviews on the internet or in person with 14 Slovenian and 14 foreign readers. The interviews were conducted with regular social network users who follow two of the biggest Slovenian social networks for book fans: Bralnica.si and Harry Potter Slovenija. Furthermore, they follow global social networks, such as Wattpad and Fanfiction.net, on which Slovenian readers often interact with foreign readers. Other Slovenian interviewees were recommended by the members of non-official student book clubs. Foreign interviewees follow sites, such as Wattpad, Tumblr and Pottermore, and they mostly come from English-speaking countries (USA, New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain, and Guam). Some of them come from other countries, for example Germany and Japan. Respondents are between 13 and 30 years of age. Most members of the aforementioned online book sites and book social networks are female. Only three interviewees were male: two Slovenian and one foreign; thus is noteworthy, since even the respondents themselves mentioned that they do not know any enthusiastic male readers or book fans. Simultaneously, in order to confirm or refute some of the social and cultural trends related to reading popular literature, we conducted a survey between May and June 2014 with 100 foreign and 100 Slovenian readers who follow the aforementioned book fan sites and social networks in order to test our ethnographic-based results. The results of the survey also show that only 7.32% of the Slovenian and 2.02% of the foreign survey audience were male. The data was also gathered with the textual analysis of reading social networks and portals that were mentioned by the interviewees: Bralnica.com,¹ Wattpad,² Harry Potter Slovenija³ with its subsection Bradavičarske pripovedke,⁴ Virtualna Bradavičarka,⁵ Facebook group

¹ <http://www.bralnica.com>

² <https://www.wattpad.com>

³ <https://sl-si.facebook.com/pages/Harry-Potter-Slovenija-Naj-se-čarovnija-nadaljuje/227727643925662>

⁴ Virtual Hogwarts – The Slovenian roleplaying social network for Harry Potter fans.

⁵ Hogwarts's Tales – Subsection for fan fiction writers on the webpage Harry Potter Slovenija. The Harry Potter Slovenija had four subsections: HPSlo message board, roleplaying social network Darkwarts and Hogwarts Tales. <http://bradavicarskepripovedke.blogspot.com>.

Bradavičarske Pripovedke, It changed our lives and now it's gone. R.I.P.<3, Fanfiction.net⁶ and Pottermore.⁷

The goal of the research is, therefore, to determine whether foreign and Slovenian readers are distinct from each other in the digital environment. In order to observe the kinds of cultural continuity that runs through technological changes (McLuhan 1994), we have to pay attention to the new age readers⁸ and to the established cultural forms and practices that are being extended and transformed through the use of new technologies. We asked the interviewees what their opinion was regarding the differences between foreign book readers and themselves. Interestingly, Slovenian and foreign readers agree that all readers are the same because they support the same books, authors and book characters. 'The only difference is the language and the words they use when they are fangirling' (Slovenian Interviewee 5, 1 March 2014). In contrast, Slovenian interviewees pointed out that foreign readers have different habits and are tilting more towards extremism, since they have the tendency to be more focused and spend exorbitant time and money on their fan activities:

Foreign fans are crazier and are always ahead of us. Especially Americans. They are surrounded with more fans, fan pages, fan merchandise. They have *Harry Potter Park*, where you can buy *Harry Potter* mugs, hats, even dolls (Slovenian Interviewee 5, 1 March 2014).

There is also a band that writes songs, which are inspired by *Harry Potter* books. We don't have things like that in Slovenia. It's not weird in the USA, if you decide to dress up as one of the *Harry Potter* characters. If one would wear *Gryffindor* skirt and tie in Slovenia, others would call him crazy (Slovenian Interviewee 6, 28 February 2014).

In order to investigate the topic more precisely, our research is based on the following theses: 1) Slovenian readers who strongly connect reading activities with the Internet have similar reading habits as foreign readers who use the Internet as a necessity; 2) New age digital readers prefer to communicate through different digital communication channels rather than in real life; 3) Slovenian readers who strongly connect reading activities with the Internet engage in the same fan activities as foreign fans do, and subsequently bring global fan activity trends to Slovenia; 4) Fan activities such as fan fiction⁹ and real person¹⁰ fiction erase the distinction between production and consumption; 5) The construction of an identity of a new age book fan is a result of different factors, such as fan interaction and membership in different online fan associations, online interactions with other fans and engaging in fan activities.

⁶ <https://www.fanfiction.net>

⁷ <https://www.pottermore.com>

⁸ The new age readers are those contemporary readers who use digital media to read popular literature.

⁹ Fan fiction – a story about characters written by fans of the original work.

¹⁰ Real person fiction – a type of fan fiction featuring celebrities.

This paper examines the transformations of readers of popular literature and their reading habits in the context of new digitalized and mediatized societies. Our aim is to show how popular literature, which is being transformed technologically and culturally in contemporary society, shapes the ways readers engage with books and with other readers, how they feel, act, communicate and how they self-represent and create their identities on digital social networks. This study is inspired by Radway's (1984) classic study *Reading the Romance*, which was conducted in a classic face-to-face environment; however, we upgraded it with reading experiences and habits in the digital context.

Reading habits: Game of Thrones – English – mobile – torrent – download

Media-communication technology and its rapid development have had a dramatic effect on the reading habits of readers and fans of popular literature (Pearson 2011; Liu 2005). The survey, interviews and textual analysis have revealed that Slovenian and foreign readers who use the World Wide Web for reading popular literature are very similar.

We can divide them into four main clusters: 1) Readers who read only e-books and strongly associate books with the Internet; 2) Readers who read e-books and traditional books; 3) Readers who read mostly traditional books, but need the World Wide Web for finding and buying books, as well as performing fan activities; 4) Readers who only read traditional books; however, they very often read stories on social networks dedicated to books, such as Wattpad and Fanfiction.net.

Slovenian and foreign interviewees agree they 'have always enjoyed reading books' (Slovenian Interviewee 5, 1 March 2014). Furthermore, there was a certain point in their lives when they became obsessed with books, usually because they became fans of a particular book or a series. According to them, that was the tipping point, at which they started reading similar books and other popular literature bestsellers. In addition, Slovenian interviewees became familiar with torrents, a technology used to distribute files over the Internet. 'That was the biggest and most important change in reading and buying habits, which happened because of e-books' (Slovenian Interviewee 1, 26 January 2014). On torrent websites readers use the torrent protocol to share pirated books and other copyrighted files with other torrent users. In fact, Slovenian readers use torrents in particular to distribute illegal copyrighted materials without paying for them. Therefore, more than half of the Slovenian interviewees have not bought a book in a very long time; moreover they often or very often download books illegally. 'I bought less than 1% of my e-books. I mostly get books on torrents. Sometimes even my dad downloads them for me' (Slovenian Interviewee 3, 5 February 2014). Most Slovenian interviewees agree that 'It's stupid to buy books, if you can get them for free' (Slovenian Interviewee 2, 28 January 2014). Or:

I've never searched for my books on Amazon or other online bookstores. I rather google: Torrent – Download – Hunger Games – Mobi. Sometimes I also get books on Project Gutenberg. I've never bought an e-book. I'm on a low budget, and I use my money to buy other things (Slovenian interviewee 2, 28 January 2014).

Along with the aforementioned attributes, torrents provide another great benefit: they give book fans an easy access to books that have leaked on the Internet before their official release date. Some of the leaked high-profile books mentioned by the interviewees include *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, and the *Twilight* spin-off *Midnight Sun*.

In contrast, foreign interviewees prefer to borrow books in libraries or buy them. In fact, less than 8% of them have download pirated books often or very often. It is important to understand and be aware of the cultural differences between Slovenians and foreigners:

I was talking with my foreign friends about downloading. They said they had never downloaded pirated books. After twenty minutes, one of them told us, that he had downloaded SOMETHING (!) ONCE (!??). You can guess I was quiet most of the time (Slovenian reader on Facebook 1, 1 February 2014).

Nevertheless, one of the foreign Facebook users strongly disagreed:

I am American and we illigaly [*sic*] download movies, music and books. It's just that most of us don't want to tell it to everyone, because it's illegal and embarrassing. We lie about it all the time (Foreign reader on Facebook 1, 1 February 2014).

In addition, interviewees suggested that feeling uncomfortable while talking about illegal downloads and book copyrights is a very common experience. Slovenian readers, in contrast, do not feel ashamed when talking about illegal downloading and are well aware of authors' intellectual properties and copyrights. Simultaneously, they only buy books that 'are worth it' (Slovenian Interviewee 5, 1 March 2014).

Slovenian and foreign readers prefer to buy traditional books; furthermore, they can collect and exhibit them and most importantly 'look at them all the time'. One of the interviewees compared books to music: 'Why would you buy a book, which you cannot hold. That's so weird. The same thing goes to music. I download things all the time, but if I respect an artist I buy a CD or a record. I've never bought music on iTunes and I've never bought e-books' (Slovenian interviewee 4, 14 February 2014). Even though they do not buy books often, interviewees 'adore libraries and bookstores'. 'I love traditional bookstores and libraries, because you can browse bookshelves and find new books. Amazon recommends only books similar to those you have already read' (Slovenian Interviewee 8, 3 March 2014). In the words of one interviewee:

There is no filter on *Amazon*. Everyone can publish a book and sell it online. In traditional bookstores there are usually better books, printed books, and someone had to believe in them to publish them in a traditional way ... I don't directly associate bookstores with reading (Slovenian Interviewee 1, 26 January 2014).

Another difference between Slovenian and most foreign readers is the acquisition of English as a second language. The consequences of individual differences in

the acquisition of literacy have strongly affected Slovenian readers and expanded their reading possibilities. Foreign interviewees always read in their own language, although 32% of foreign survey respondents sometimes read in other languages as well. Roughly 78% of Slovenian survey respondents who read pirated books indicated that they read in English often or very often: 'It's easier to read in English, because books are more accessible and you can find almost every book imaginable in a pirated version' (Slovenian Interviewee 8, 13 March 2014). According to the interviewees, it is easier to identify with the situation described in a book if it is not translated. Slovenian readers also argue that it's better to read in English, because translations can be 'horrible' and 'can completely change the story and author's style' (Slovenian Interviewee 2, 28 January 2014). Slovenian readers acquire English literacy at an early age – most of them in the beginning of middle school:

It was so much easier to read a book in English, than to wait for a translation. If I didn't understand something I googled it or asked my sister. You don't have to know all of the words and can still understand everything (Slovenian Interviewee 5, 1 March 2014).

Research (Yankelovitch 2006; National Endowment for the Arts 2002) shows that people read less than they did a decade ago and that teenagers in particular are not interested in fiction, narrative and storytelling, although there is some evidence that suggests otherwise. The only difference is that they do not read on paper, but on their smartphones or tablets, and they do not read traditional books, but stories shared on social networks. For instance, Wattpad has over 17 million users and 80% of their traffic is through mobile devices. Furthermore, 25% of stories are written on mobile devices. Teenagers who visit Wattpad spend three and a half hours a month being immersed in long form of narrative fiction on social networks (Mobile Storytelling 2013).

Book web communities' engagement is the closest thing to the ancient art of storytelling because its users read in a transactional manner. Teens do not read ordinary e-books, because they agree there is a lack of personal connection to the story and to the author. Moreover, as readers, they have no ability to influence the story and engage in it (Mobile Storytelling 2013). Writers of such platforms tell stories in a serial way. They publish their chapters on social network platforms so that their readers follow them and are notified every time a new chapter is published. However, this kind of storytelling is not new, since Charles Dickinson was the first to tell stories in a serial way. His audience suggested what should happen next, and that is exactly what is happening today, but in the transformed digital environment (Mobile Storytelling 2013). This kind of reading is almost as revolutionary as the printed book was.

Online readers read fictional stories written by amateur or "real" authors, and fan fiction or real person fiction, which is written especially by fans of popular books and celebrities. All interviewees, except one foreign and three Slovenian, read stories on social networks. More than 62% of foreign survey respondents read stories on social networks often or very often, in contrary to 28% of Slovenian respondents. A total of 59.4% Slovenian and more than 96% foreign survey respondents read fan fiction at least sometimes.

Every day I read fan fiction and fiction stories on Wattpad. I have an account and I save a lot of stories under favourites and every time I log in I can see updated chapters (Slovenian Interviewee 7, 1 March 2014).

I have discovered a new world with Wattpad. There are so many books and it's so hard to choose. Some of them are much better than the "real" books that can be bought in bookstores (Slovenian Interviewee 5, 1 March 2014).

Readers of stories inspired by celebrities (real person fiction) differ from other readers, since they 'don't care about other books' and they 'don't have the time to read other popular books'. They read 'real books' very rarely, in contrast to real person fiction, which they read every day. 'I like other books, it's just that I can't find time to read anything else, because reading and writing about One Direction takes all my free time' (Slovenian Interviewee 11, 31 March 2014). A foreign interviewee agrees:

I think mainly because the books are by people I can relate to One Direction wise ... I've never read any other genre of books on Wattpad. I think the thing that keeps me reading is my interest for One Direction. I tend to get bored of books so they kind of have to keep me hooked (Foreign Interviewee 5, 5 May 2014).

Foreign survey respondents sometimes read books on smartphones (41%), e-readers, such as Kindle or Nook (37.93%) and tablets (29.7%). Slovenian respondents sometimes use laptops (34.65%), smartphones (37%), e-readers (35.64%), and tablets (16%). According to the Slovenian interviewees, the use of e-readers and tablets is on the rise:

Almost every time I take a bus, I see at least one more person reading a book on Kindle. E-books are finally becoming popular in Slovenia. My friends ask me how much the Kindle costs. They would love to have it, but because they are students they don't have enough money to buy it (Slovenian Interviewee 2, 28 January 2014).

Slovenian interviewees suggest that:

Real book fans read e-books. Even, if they don't have Kindles or tablets. If you're a fan you want to have a book as quickly as possible and for free. I had to wait up to three weeks for books I ordered on Amazon. You can download e-books as soon as they are published, or even earlier. Or you can wait one day and get it for free on torrents (Slovenian interviewee 5, 1 March 2014).

Slovenian readers (80%) think that the author is the most important factor for choosing a book, as opposed to foreign readers (83%) who think book covers are important when choosing books. Furthermore, Slovenian and foreign respondents agree that friends' recommendations are also an important factor; however, Slovenians prefer interesting book titles. Some foreign (23%) and Slovenian (10%) interviewees decide on a

book often or very often because of online promotion, while 12% of foreign and 13% of Slovenian readers choose a book if they see some sort of promotion in printed media.

Readers of online stories choose stories of authors they know in person, or have met on social media platforms. 'I support them and then they may support me' (Foreign Interviewee 7, 3 May 2014). Some of them search for stories according to the number of readers and comments.

Interestingly, all of the interviewees use the term "real book", which they defined as a traditional paper book. Most of the foreign interviewees differentiate real books from e-books and Wattpad books, while Slovenian interviewees think of e-books as real books, but describe Wattpad books as online stories or fake books. The differentiation between real books and fake books shows how reading habits have changed to a revolutionary degree. The transformation of reading habits is not the only distinction though. Many differences are also present in interactions between readers and fans of popular literature.

Popular Literature and its Readers' Communication Practices: BTW HaRRy gives me feels, tWiLLiGht is a puke! :-) omg ijc lol

New technologies have strongly affected readers' and fans' private lives and as a result have an extreme impact on their actions, their way of thinking, and interactions with other people. The biggest difference in comparison to the past (Jenkins 2008), when there was no mass media and information technology or its access was limited, is connecting with other people. Digital social networks empower networking and interactions regardless of time and space. We understand them as space and as an audience, which are linked with technological networks such as the Internet, phones or mobile networks. Social network pages vary in the levels of privacy offered; their users' profiles can be public or private (Boyd 2008).

Readers' changed interactions, which are a result of the digitalization and mediatisation of Slovenian society, have brought wider cultural consequences. Changes in the communication practices of readers are especially noticeable in online social networks for popular book readers and fans. In the past, popular literature readers interacted in libraries and book clubs; today, they interact in online environments via their computers, tablets and smartphones.

According to 90.09% of foreign and 96% of Slovenian respondents, they sometimes talk about books with their friends. Communication on social networks, where interactions happen via a keyboard, have profoundly changed direct personal communication and physical relations (West & Turner 2009; Wellman & Gulia 1997; Shah et al. 2005; Juris 2008); therefore, reading enthusiasts are also moving their sometimes indirect interactions online; 92% of foreign and 66% of Slovenian respondents have discussed books online at least one. More than 39% of foreign readers often discuss books online and 22% of Slovenian readers do so very often.

Slovenian interviewees interact on the following web pages: the biggest Slovenian web page for Harry Potter fans, Bradavičarske pripovedke, different Facebook fan

pages and role-playing game networks. Some of the respondents also connect on Bralnica, the Slovenian social network for book fans, and the social network Igre123, which is targeted at teens. Furthermore, Wattpad and Fanfiction.net are two most frequently mentioned globally known web pages by both Slovenian and foreign respondents.

Two of the interviewees thought there are not enough Slovenian pages for book enthusiasts, so they have decided to make and manage their own social networks for book fans: one of them is the aforementioned Bralnica, and the other is a Harry Potter fan page called Njegovatemnastvar. Foreign interviewees agree that most popular sites for book fans are Wattpad and Fanfiction.net. Surveys showed that only 9.9% of Slovenian and 62.37% of foreign interviewees network on these pages; however, all of the Slovenian interviewees at least sometimes read fan fiction or other stories on Wattpad and on Fanfiction.net as well.

According to the Slovenian interviewees, Harry Potter fans are the most active book fans in Slovenia. The most popular web page mentioned by the interviewees is called Harry Potter Slovenija, with a subsection called Bradavičarske pripovedke. A social network for Twilight fans also exists, but according to interviewees Harry Potter fans were much more immersed in their fan world. The webpage was taken down, but the most enthusiastic fans are still connected: 'We created a Facebook group Hogwarts' Tales – It changed our life ... The members are fans who shared fan fiction on Hogwarts' Tales ... It has around a hundred members' (Slovenian Interviewee 2, 28 January 2014).

One of the interviewees has been constantly interacting on a social network aimed at younger women, where she discussed books with other literature fans in one of their topics. Also, she has been engaging with fans on other foreign social networks, such as Goodreads. She then decided to establish Bralnica. The main goal of the website was, she says, to connect book fans who mostly read popular literature in English (Slovenian Interviewee 8, 3 March 2014).

I studied mathematics and information systems. As a part of one of my studies I had to think of a problem, make a base and do research. I've always loved reading, so I decided to make a social network for book fans ... I talked to members on other social networks that I have been participating in and I told them about my new page. Also, I told my real life friends and they then told their friends and so on. We were a small society at first, now we are much bigger ... There are no earnings, but I would love to participate with different publishing companies. We had an agreement with one of the companies – they advertised on our page and then sponsored a contest. Unfortunately, other companies probably think our society is too small to be worth it (Slovenian Interviewee 8, 3 March 2014).

Slovenian interviewees communicate online not only with other Slovenians, but also with foreign readers. They mostly interact with Slovenians though, since they are closer with members on Slovenian social networks. Online friendships develop in stages. Firstly, readers communicate with others on a social network platform, where readers get to know each other; secondly, they start talking via private messages. The level of interac-

tions then increases, since they start following each other on other social networks, such as Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, and Goodreads. Readers mostly talk about books; however, they think of those interactions as a form of a friendship, because: ‘Even if we are not constantly together we talk a lot’ (Slovenian Interviewee 8, 3 March 2014).

I met my best friend on Bradavičarske pripovedke. We started talking and have become good friends since. That was a few years ago. We still talk every day and see each other very often (Slovenian Interviewee 6, 28 February 2014).

In general, the closest friendships are created, according to the interviewee, with One Direction fans (Slovenian Interviewee 11, 31 March 2014):

I’m engaged in one of the Facebook groups for One Direction fans, where I talk with my friends every day. We help each other out. You can really help others to, for example, stop cutting. Those friends are mostly foreigners, but I feel closer to them as to my real life friends, because foreigners are usually *Directioners* (i.e. the real fans) and Slovenian fans are usually *Directionators* (i.e. not the real fans).

On social networks, members mostly discuss books, series and movies inspired by books they read. They give constructive opinions and criticisms, and use interjections and emoticons. According to the interviewees, they act like they would in everyday life. ‘You can write anything you want on those networks. Nobody cares what you write, you just aren’t allowed to be too offensive’ (Slovenian Interviewee 9, 28 March 2014).

In the forms of communication, digital indirect communication is similar to interpersonal interactions; however, there are many meaningful differences between them. Walther and Parks (2002) agree that in digital indirect communication much of the information about partners’ characteristics, emotions and behaviour can be latent, which results in less social, relational, understandable, and effective communication (Derks et al. 2007; Derks et al. 2008):

Online relationship is similar to one we have in real life. The only difference is, that we only leave physical body somewhere else. We can’t kiss anyone and nobody can kick us in the face, but we can still do many other things (Rheingold 1993: 3).

Nevertheless, interviewees suggest interactions on the Internet are quite different than those in real life, since one is not able to see other users’ body language. Thus, users interact not only with words but also with emoticons and abbreviations. ‘I use abbreviations such as afsdkjkl... gjkl, which means away from my keyboard because it is so F-ing good. If you’re on a social network you are in a different mind set and you communicate weirdly’ (Slovenian Interviewee 2, 28 January 2014).

Furthermore, interviewees mostly express their feelings with emoticons and gifs. They use them to decline criticism in discussions, to break the ice, show emotions and make their discussions more personal. ‘It’s very important to use smiley faces and gifs, so

people can know what emotions you are showing. The same text can be read in a happy or in an angry tone' (Slovenian Interviewee 7, 1 March 2014). Or, as another interviewee explained: '... gifs replace body language and add a lot to a text' (Slovenian Interviewee 9, 28 March 2014). Correspondents agree that gifs and book summaries can be crucial in choosing a book, if they rouse certain emotions that they prefer when reading a book.

In general, readers use at least one social network. Slovenian readers mostly use Facebook, some of them also mentioned Twitter and Tumblr. With regard to books, the most popular social networks for Slovenian fans are Wattpad, Amazon, and Goodreads. Furthermore, two interviewees also mentioned the Internet Movie Database (IMDB). Foreign interviewees mostly use Tumblr, Twitter and Wattpad. When searching for information about books, they both use Goodreads for following books and authors, making online libraries from the books they read, and engaging in book evaluations and votes.

In contrast to Slovenian interviewees, foreign interviewees, even if they have a profile, rarely use Facebook:

Sometimes you see a message about books on one's wall ... Sometimes, I write something about books, for example on what page I am and if I like it ... Fans can create their own book library on Facebook and you can see what others added to their book list, so you can go and check out the book (Slovenian Interviewee 5, 3 March 2014).

However, Slovenian interviewees agree that fans mostly discuss books on private Facebook groups for book fans, or via private messages with people they know from real life.

Some interviewees suggest that Tumblr and Wattpad are somehow connected. 'I talk with foreigners on Tumblr and then they tell me they have an account on Wattpad. If they write books I go check them out and follow them for the support' (Slovenian Interviewee 7, 1 March 2014).

Among Slovenian interviewees, the most popular foreign network for book fans is Wattpad, where 'readers and writers can really get to know each other and can leave each other comments and votes' (Slovenian Interviewee 7, 1 March 2014).

Wattpad is the cosiest social network I have ever been a part of. Some members promote other, usually new members or share links of other authors' works on their wall. They are so nice and they make you feel so welcome (Slovenian Interviewee 7, 1 March 2014).

Slovenian users like to leave short comments, such as 'That book is awesome' or 'This chapter gives me feels,' and vote. Most active Slovenian readers and writers read and write about celebrities. However, they rarely share their stories on other social networks, such as Tumblr, Twitter and Facebook:

Fans of celebrities that write stories, are extremely supportive of each other. We leave comments and votes. Reading is not the only similarity, we are a fandom, a family. You support your family and help them. I think most fans who read, at one point start writing fan fiction in English or in Slovenian (Slovenian Interviewee 11, 31 March 2014).

Even stories written in the Slovenian language can have hundreds of readings, which is significant, considering that there are only two million Slovenians and that the most popular printed books in Slovenia sell only a few thousand copies.

Slovenian respondents suggested that their compatriot Wattpad users are also active on Tumblr. Slovenian interviewees agree that Tumblr is not popular within the Slovenian book fan sphere. In contrast, foreigners use it very often. 'Slovenians who use Tumblr are usually big fans of celebrities, movies, series, or books. Some of them don't have a profile, but they very often follow other bloggers' (Slovenian Interviewee 5, 1 March 2014):

There are many obsessed fans on Tumblr. It doesn't even matter what you search for. Even if you are searching for something totally different there are always thousands of hits of celebrities such as *Bieber* or *One Direction*, and popular books, such as *Twilight* or *50 Shades of Grey*. Crossovers like *50 Shades of Bieber* are extremely hilarious (Slovenian Interviewee 4, 28 February 2014).

Some readers use Tumblr fan pages to find book spoilers and teasers; however, most book fans despise book spoilers and agree that 'spoilers are one of the most terrible things one can do to a reader' (Slovenian Interviewee 2, 5 February 2014).

Foreign interviewees participate in all social networks that they follow, while Slovenians do just the opposite and do not participate in discussions, since they prefer to just read threads and follow other fans.

Only two of the Slovenian interviewees are members of unofficial book clubs and only one foreign interviewee is in a school book club. 'On the social network Bralnica, members have something similar to a book club. We read and collect points' (Slovenian Interviewee 8, 3 March 2014).

Interviewees mostly do not follow authors' blogs. Some of them follow authors on Twitter, Facebook and Goodreads, where authors only rarely communicate with their fans; however, fans can have certain advantages when following them. 'If I search for something specific about an author and I can't find the information, it is usually already on their official Facebook page' (Slovenian Interviewee 1, 26 January 2014). Most Slovenian and foreign interviewees follow authors such as J. K. Rowling, Richelle Mead, John Green and Cassandra Clark.

Interestingly, Slovenians have a specific writing style, when online. They like to use different English terms and even whole sentences, while they interact not only on foreign but also on Slovenian social networks. 'That happens because some things are easier to tell in English than in Slovenian. We don't have words for everything and in Slovenian you sometimes have to describe something in few words or few sentences. It's so much easier to just use an English word for it' (Slovenian interviewee 8, 3 March 2014). The use of English words was also very noticeable when interviewing Slovenian readers, who use terms such as *teaser*, *spoiler*, *review*, *e-book*, *cover*, *template*, *thread*, *reply*, *OMG*, *no way*, *bad*, *cool*, *gives me feels* etc. Interviewees suggest they spend too much time surrounded with foreign readers and foreign text on the web, and eventually they start using the same words, because it is easier than translating.

Fans and fan activities: Twilight - our own brand of heroin

A book fan is a person who, by sharing emotions and thoughts about books with other fans, transfers his reading to a cultural activity. A fan participates in fan associations, where they connect and interact with people that have similar interests to them (Jenkins 1992). Readers of popular literature emphasize support to fan books on different digital social networks, already mentioned in the previous chapter. The results of our analysis suggest that the use of social network platforms is increasing with Slovenian readers of popular literature.

A few years ago, book fans mostly discussed books with other fans in book clubs. Before the Internet, which made long distance fan interaction possible, communication between fans was limited. The Internet provides the long distance fan with all tools necessary to be as active and engaged as every other fan. It enables faster connections with fans, aids with meeting new fans and staying in contact, and in general makes communication and performing fan activities easier. Book discussions happen mostly online, where fan associations, which are constantly changing, are created. Their members competitively show their loyalty with different media practices (*Erzen 2012*). Fan associations like the Facebook group *Bradavičarske pripovedke*, It changed our lives and now it's gone. R.I.P.<3 show how engaging in fan activities can really change one's life. A similar example is a topic named *Twilight Our Own Brand of Heroin*, where Twilight fans discuss the *Twilight* saga. 'Things like that had convinced me to read all those books. The most important thing is, that a lot of people enthusiastically reply to topics about books' (Slovenian Interviewee 2, 28 January 2014). All the enthusiasm and frequent communication with other fans pushes fans to read books and become part of the fan dome.

The technological changes have altered not only fans' interaction but also their artistic creations (Hellekson & Busse 2006). The perfect example of artistic creation, which has also blurred the lines between a cultural circuit's actors, is fan fiction, i.e. a story about characters or settings written by fans for fans of the original work (Schwabach 2009; Bond and Michelson 2009; Brennan and Large 2014). According to Jenkins (1992), fan fiction is a reflection of a fan's desire to fill in the gaps of the commercially produced material. Interviewees read and write fan fiction on different fan web pages, Tumblr blogs and social networks such as Wattpad and Fanfiction.net.

More than half of the Slovenian interviewees write fan fiction or did so at one time. One Slovenian interviewee writes real person fiction in English and has two million readers on Wattpad. Most of them are foreign. Other Slovenian interviewees have been mostly writing in Slovenian, because they started writing when they were younger and at that time were not fluent in English, although some of them later tried writing in English. They prefer reading in English and writing in Slovenian. Furthermore, fan fiction written by Slovenians is shared mostly on Slovenian fan social networks. Nevertheless, interviewees also mentioned that they publish their real person fiction stories on Wattpad. Foreign interviewees, in contrast, mostly write in English. Only one of the respondents, who is a native English speaker, sometimes also writes in Spanish (Foreign interviewee

4, 3 May 2014).

Slovenian fans take fan fiction writing much more seriously than foreign fans do. That is especially true for *Harry Potter* fans:

We had votes and an editor also had to confirm that the story is grammatically correct and appropriate for readers under the age of 18 (Slovenian Interviewee 4, 13 February 2014).

We didn't fool around, we were there for writing ... Once we got a few new members – *Twilight* fans. We banned them, because we have our own rules. We didn't want to write. We have our own rules ... *Harry Potter* has a great plot line, *Twilight* only has a vampire and his love object. Whatever ... They thought that we will write that s**t. Our writing had quality standards, since we were and still are the real book lovers (Slovenian Interviewee 6, 28 February 2014).

Foreign interviewees, in contrast, write only for the fun of it and do not edit their work. Textual web analysis showed that members of social networks find other members who can provide proofreading, editing and translating services and give advice on the writing style and story itself for a symbolic payment, they want their 'consumers' to follow their story, comment and vote.

In Slovenia, writing fan fiction was at its peak when the *Harry Potter* books were first published. An analysis of Slovenian social networks (Smrklija 2014; Igre123 2014) showed that fan fiction stories still play a tremendous part in fan activities; however, book fan fiction is strongly overpowered by real person fiction. The most popular are stories about the musician Justin Bieber and members of the musical bands One Direction and 5 Seconds of Summer. According to Korobkova (2014), writing fan fiction is consequential to a fan's identity, as writing popular fan fiction also means being recognized as a legitimate member of the fan community or a fan family. Thus on the Slovenian social network Igre123 fans can find 17,296 topics with stories about the aforementioned celebrities.

One of the most popular cultural fan phenomena is reading fan fiction (Black 2002). Fans read fan fiction because they have an overactive imagination, and fan fiction brings potential real-life situations that have not actually happened to life. The main purpose for reading and writing fan fiction is that the fans do not agree with the ending of the work, they might want to read a sequel or a spinoff, or prefer another character in a love triangle. The genre of the original story is often changed. Love stories are the most popular stories in real person fiction (on both Slovenian and global webpages). Writers love to add drama, tragedies and psychological problems (foster care, cutting, rape). Usually the main female character has problems and a celebrity with the bad boy persona helps them. Some of the fans prefer crossovers. Crossovers are fan fiction stories in which several fandoms interact with one another.

The quality of fan fiction and real person fiction is however often questionable (Littleton 2011). The interviewees agreed that readers of real person stories are the least critical and usually only want to read about celebrities, while the quality of the story is not

really important. Slovenian interviewees particularly agree with this statement.

Slovenian and foreign interviewees also agree that fan fiction stories are mostly a good thing, because they make fans creative and they allow them to share their ideas and experiences with others.

Fans write fan fiction, because we want a part of that story. I would be honoured if someone would be so impressed with my book and decided to write a fan fiction inspired by it. Those who write are more impressed than normal fans ... But if someone would write a story based on my book and then sell it, I would feel betrayed (Foreign interviewee 8, 2 May 2014).

The most popular fan activities, beside writing and reading fan fiction are collecting posters, saving photos of favourite characters and celebrities on a computer, smartphone or tablet and then sharing them with friends, watching series and movies that were inspired by books, and performing fan activities in online environments (i.e. following fan blogs and authors on social networks, such as Twitter, Tumblr and Goodreads). Many foreign interviewees run a fan blog on Tumblr or Twitter and have a page dedicated to their favourite books and celebrities. The survey shows that 35.37% of Slovenian and 46.1% of foreign respondents buy book fan merchandise, mostly jewellery, mugs, T-shirts, posters, notebooks and other school supplies. Since merchandise is not always available in Slovenia, the important issue is that Slovenian fans are mostly too young to own a credit card, or have a limited access to it. More than 43.12% of Slovenian and 86.73% of foreign interviewees like to watch TV shows and movies inspired by books. Slovenian fans especially like to watch *Vampire Diaries*, some of them also like *Pretty Little Liars*, *True Blood* and *Game of Thrones*. Popular movies are *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Vampire Academy*, *Divergent*, and *The Mortal Instruments*. Watching the aforementioned movies in the cinema is not only a friendly outing, but also a fan activity: 'When you go to the movies you put a T-shirt with book quotes on. We did that for *Twilight*. Being a fan means that you do activities related to fan object and that takes your time' (Slovenian Interviewee 8, 3 March 2014).

Interviewees would wait for their favourite author's signature and are impressed with things such as fan conventions and with theme parks. However, they do think that there are many borderline fan activities occurring online, such as fans being self-destructive, because they want to have permanent scars inspired by books or celebrities, fans identifying themselves with book characters and celebrities, and book characters and celebrities' punk edits.

One of the fan activities that most Slovenian interviewees defined as especially unusual and peculiar is slash fan fiction and slash real person fiction, which is a genre that focuses on sexual relationships between fictional characters or celebrities of the same sex. Many researchers (Davies 2008; Tosenberger 2008) have explored the nature of slash fiction, which is the most popular fan fiction genre in a many different fandom. It is popular because usually, as the interviewees suggest, 'there is a bromance between two characters ... I think people read it because they favour the two male characters or celebrities equally' (Foreign interviewee 8, 2 May 2014). Interviewees compared gay fiction to lesbian

pornography. ‘Just like men like to watch pornography with two women, girls like to read about two handsome men’ (Slovenian Interviewee 2, 28 January 2014).

Fans like to read about gay characters because we actually believe that they’re gay, and reading fan fiction about them being gay, brings our hopes to life ... There are very few activities I find weird. I used to find Larry Stylinson¹¹ weird. I used to find smut¹² weird. I used to find punk edits weird. But eventually, you get used to it and nothing’s weird anymore (Foreign interviewee 3, 4 May 2014).

The web makes fan interactions and sharing information about idolized objects easier (Grossberg 1991). Even though some studies (McCutcheon et.al. 2003; Nash & Lahiti 1999) show that fans are isolated people without healthy relationships, fans say that being part of online fandom is a positive experience, because it provides an escape from stress and real life difficulties. It also makes them feel better about themselves and helps them meet other people with similar interests (Barber and Callaghan 2010, 5). Moreover, most interviewees are popular, have great social networks; however, some of them suggested that it is, in fact, hard to interact with fans from certain fandoms:

Some fans become obsessed and they talk only about *Twilight* or *One Direction* ... Even if you told them that you hate the books or a celebrity, they don’t listen. They talk on and on and on. The most horrible fans are usually fans of celebrities, not books. But the thing is that fans of celebrities read their fan fiction and that basically are books. So that actually means they too are obsessed with books (Slovenian Interviewee 10, 28 March 2014).

Fans have support from their friends and family; however, playful and friendly exchanges of teasing remarks is common, since especially family members usually do not understand their enthusiasm or obsession.

Fandom and identity construction: If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and looks like a duck, it’s a ... Book fan?!

Popular literature products have an impact on society and since they create identities (Nylund 2007); they affect especially younger readers. Research on consumer tribes (Cover 2012), which is grounded on a group of people who are not just simple consumers, but also share a belief around certain books, has shown that new age consumers go beyond simple consumerism, and are more likely to be attracted to social links and identities connected with consumed products. Consumer tribes are a weakly connected group of people who prefer to communicate via different digital communication channels rather than in real life. Digital communication satisfies their communication and entertainment needs, construct identity, belonging, interaction and relations with other consumers. In

¹¹ Larry Stylinson is a “shipname” for the bromance between two One Direction members - Harry Styles and Louis Tomlinson.

¹² A writing style that is sexually explicit and generally associated with females.

addition, these tribes are active on social networks, where they help others. Book fans also behave in a similar manner, as they socialize and interact with other fans and engage in fan activities. Consequently, distinctions between the storyline in popular books and its fans' activity no longer clear.

The construction of the identity of a book fan is a result of a few different factors, such as membership and cooperation in different online fan associations, online interactions with other fans, the consumption of side product merchandise, engaging in fan activities, which erase distinctions between production and consumption and thus proving their belonging to an extensive group of people with a similar tastes, or they can be members of bigger fan conventions.

Harry had a huge impact on me. I felt like him and I could run away and live in a different world. I've always wanted to attend *Hogwarts* ... I know I was a bit crazy. I am still a die-hard fan and a Potterhead and I would do anything in connection with *Harry Potter*. I realized I love writing when I found the webpage Bradavičarske pripovedke and started to write fan fiction (Slovenian Interviewee 4, 13 February 2014).

One of the interviewees clearly stated that her distinction between real life and books was blurred when she was younger. 'When I was 11, I was writing Harry Potter fan fiction every day. I truly was expecting a letter from Hogwarts and I cried when I didn't get it. I really expected a fan fiction to become real world' (Slovenian Interviewee 6, 28 February 2014). Foreign interviewees are often distinct from Slovenians, as they openly show their identities inspired by books, while the Slovenian interviewees are more careful and discrete.

Some fans go big and dress like characters to show others that they are the biggest fans. They get a huge tattoo or talk about Harry and think about books all day. They write characters' names on notebooks and have Facebook pages dedicated to them. That's crazy ... I am very proud that I was classified in a *Ravenclaw* on *Pottermore*. And if I would go to *Harry Potter Park* I would most definitely buy some *Ravenclaw* merch. Harry Potter changed my life and I know that without him I wouldn't be me ... I would have a small deadly hollow tattoo inspired by *Harry Potter* books. Nothing big and flashy. That's how you know real fans (Slovenian interviewee 4, 13 February 2014).

Fantasies and daydreams are extremely important for fans and considered as normal (Vermorel 2011). Fan fiction is just 'an extension of fans' daydreams', or a 'next logical step from talking about the characters or celebrities with other fans' (Slovenian Interviewee 5, 1 March 2014). One of the interviewees argues that: 'Daydreaming about heroes can show you if the fans are normal or mentally ill' (Slovenian Interviewee 6, 28 February 2014):

Some fans want to get just a little bit more than the books give them ... We go further than other readers – we write and read fan fiction, we google about books and read other literature related to our favourite books. But it's important to stop yourself from going too far ... I know some fans who went too far. They blurred the line ... They have subconsciously started to

live a world of their favourite characters. They are very emotional, talk about characters all the time, even their style is inspired by books ... I could have gone too far, if I hadn't had controlled myself ... There is this fan, that has a blog and she thinks she is *Harry Potter's* wife. She writes about talking to *Harry Potter* and has a diary of how she is falling in love with him. There are many Facebook pages, such as: *Being Edward Cullen's wife*, *Justin Bieber's wife*, *Harry Potter's wife*. That's crazy. Making fake profiles is crazy. Like the fake profile of *Valdemort*, just so fans can write on the wall and make their own reality and act like they are "fanfic" characters (Slovenian Interviewee 6, 28 February 2014).

More than 21% of Slovenian and 67.35% of foreign survey respondents want to be similar to their favourite book characters. All interviewees agree that they are very similar to their favourite book characters, especially with regards to their personalities:

I'm like Alice from the *Alice series*. I'm exactly like her. I'm also similar to Bella from *Twilight*. My personality is like Alice's. I think me and Bella could be sisters and me and Alice could be BFFs.¹³ I do not act like them. I already am like them. I want to have Alice's beauty and I would like Rosalie's, Sue's, Bella's, and Alice McKinley's personalities all mixed up. I don't dress like them, but I have a friend that does (Foreign interviewee 6, 5 May 2014).

One of the foreign interviewees suggests that the main reason she is similar to her favourite book characters is because she grew up with them: 'I'm similar to Hermione. I was always reading Harry Potter books when I was younger. I grew up with her. I became her. I didn't want to become like her, but she shares my ambitions, and it just happened' (Foreign Interviewee 1, 1 April 2013).

However, some interviewees disagree, since, in their opinion, their favourite characters are not similar to them, however they praise them because they like their personality and they respect their actions. 'I love them so much, because they have characteristics that I wish I had myself' (Foreign Interviewee 3, 4 May 2014). Interviewees often daydream of characters' actions, when in a certain situation.

Sometimes when somebody is obsessed with a celebrity or a book, like my friends are with Bieber, I remember how Rose from *Vampire Academy* would smack them in their faces. I know that's wrong so I don't act like that, but I still daydream about it (Slovenian Interviewee 10, 28 March 2014).

Interestingly, interviewees suggest they often identify with a character in a young adult literature. Even if they are not in their teen years anymore they still like teen books, because they are interesting, easy to read and spiritual (Slovenian Interviewee 2, 13 February 2014).

Maybe I don't want to grow up. I still love teen world, but just to a certain degree. I love if something happens in high school, or even better at the university, but the characters have to act grown up ... Even if the characters are younger, I think of them as if they are older. It's like if you are watching teen a TV series. They

¹³ Best friends forever.

always put older people, people in their twenties to play teenagers. It's a teen world with older people (Slovenian interviewee 5, 2014: 1 March 2014).

The identities that fans create on social networks expand to the real world and are present in real physical bodies. A young fan can, for example, change her eye colour by wearing coloured contact lenses to make her eyes look like that of a vampire, or have permanent or temporary tattoos inspired by their favourite books etc. High school dances are inspired by vampire or wizard themes (Erzen 2012). To borrow Durkheim's classic concept (1912), when discussing religion, he mentions a concept called 'collective effervescence', 'which means a communal, amplified reaction when a group of people experience something together that elevates them from the ordinary and moves them temporarily into a different space and time, where they momentarily transcend ordinary lives in the company of others. At that moment societal norms are transgressed and overturned' (Erzen 2012). This concept can be transferred to the book fan concept. Book fans visit cities that are described in books, and they talk about book characters as if they were real. In real life interactions, fans temporarily exceed rigid social expectations of their actions and behaviour. More than 51% of foreign and 21.43% of Slovenian respondents agree that books and book characters affect how they spend their free time. Moreover, 26.53% of foreign but only 5.95% of Slovenian respondents find style and fashion inspiration in books.

More than 30% of foreign but only 6.02% of Slovenian respondents agree that books have an impact on what they find important when choosing a love interest. More than 16% of Slovenian and 36.45% of foreign respondents want their partners to be similar to a book character. Some of the female interviewees are concerned about how younger teenage fans glorify some of the book characters.

Edward is your typical example of a recovering alcoholic or a drug addict. One moment they are full of promises, they love and would do anything for their woman. Then next moment they act totally different ... Edward also acts like a bipolar patient. He goes crazy and then he apologizes (Slovenian interviewee 6, 28 February 2014).

Those kinds of characters are especially popular in real person fiction, where celebrities are often portrayed negatively:

Fan girls are obsessed with fan fiction where One Direction members are portrayed like "bad boys". They cheat, drink, smoke, do drugs, are jealous and violent, but, because they are supposedly deeply in love with the main character, girls love to read about that. And then some of them want a guy and a relationship like that. It's funny because they are supposedly super nice in real life and fans love them for that, but in fan fiction readers and writers want them to be bad (Slovenian interviewee 5, 1 March 2014).

Moreover, 21% of foreign and 6% of Slovenian respondents agree that books have taught them about friendships:

Sometimes they remind me of my friends and people I like in real life. I think I would be friends with a lot of my favourite characters in real life. There

are exceptions, though, because I have a weakness for dark and brooding characters. But I wouldn't be friends with someone that is so brooding in real life (Foreign interviewee 3, 4 May 2014).

Books induce emotions in them and make them feel some of what the characters are experiencing. When reading, interviewees create reality out of fiction. Interviewees mostly do not feel like they are book characters when reading; however, they visualize the story and feel their emotions. In other words, it could be argued that readers feel like they are watching a movie. Interviewees agree that often their favourite characters' reactions remind them of themselves. 'It's easier to identify with a character you not read, but write about. If my main character is the same gender as I am, she reacts similarly as I would' (Slovenian Interviewee 5, 1 March 2014).

Much of fans' emotional involvement in fictional characters and stories is so extensive that they 'ship' them with other characters or real people or in other words desire for two people, fictional or real, to be in a romantic relationship. 'Usually there are at least two "fan ship teams" inspired by the book. An advocate of one team wants a book character in a romantic (heterosexual or gay) relationship with another book or celebrity character' (Slovenian interviewee 5, 1 March 2014).

A book crush is someone that I really like in a book. Sometimes I daydream about them. I think about them and write fan fiction, but only in my head. I am not quite sure, if that is really me starring in my daydreams, because sometimes I have a different personality and I act differently as I would in real life ... Probably that's because I have been in a relationship for quite a long time and I daydream to feel the feelings of the new love again. It's not that my relationship is bad, it's more that I think what others write when writing fan fiction. I don't talk about it with anyone. Maybe I should start writing fan fiction. It's just that I think, if it's in your head it's ok, but when you write it down it's bizarre. Especially if you write about celebrities and then put it online. Those are real people and it's horrible that they can read all that crap about themselves (Slovenian Interviewee 5, 1 March 2014).

Daydreaming about characters is not the only object of fans' daydreams. Some interviewees daydream about stories in general and they often hear discussions, engage in a situation or attend events that make them think about the story:

My school is gigantic and when we walk in the halls it is like being in Hogwarts and that is obviously from Harry Potter but it also reminds me of the institution of the Mortal Instruments. I'm bored (mostly at school) and I think of how it would be to be at Hogwarts and my best friend is always day dreaming about her fallen angel (Foreign Interviewee 4, 3 March 2014).

Readers in fact want life as it is described in books, some of them would even like to become book characters, but they are well aware that this is not possible, so they get a piece of fictional life through writing and reading fan fiction, which becomes their real life and the part of their identities.

Conclusion

The development of media communication technologies has affected the manifestation of reading habits of readers and fans of popular literature. The digitalization and mediatization of Slovenian society has resulted in changed interactions with readers and fans, and that brought many cultural consequences.

The research results have confirmed our theses. The analysis shows that Slovenian and foreign readers who strongly connect reading activities with the Internet, are in fact highly similar to each other. They read similar popular literature products and decide to read a certain book based on similar factors. Moreover, all of them like to read e-books, and they have a high opinion on printed books, which they view as collectors' items. Moreover, the changed communication habits have transported readers' interactions from real to virtual life, where readers are engaged in fan activities on social networks.

The population of e-book readers is growing rapidly in Slovenia. The move toward e-book reading coincides with an increase in ownership of e-reading devices and growth in tablets and smartphones used for reading. Furthermore, there are many fan fiction and especially real person fiction stories to be found on Slovenian social networks aimed at teens. Simultaneously, Slovenian readers like to use foreign social networks and interact with foreign fans. Subsequently they bring global fan activity trends, such as fan fiction, real person fiction, and fan edits to Slovenia. There is also a strong support for the identity construction thesis and we argue that readers construct their identities in consumer tribes.

The only significant difference between Slovenian and foreign readers is that Slovenians read mostly in English, as opposed to foreign readers, who are native in English and read only in their mother tongue. The next major difference is the access to books: Slovenians download pirated version of books, in contrast to foreigners who buy them or borrow them from a library. Even if there are many more foreign readers who read e-books, fan fiction and real person fiction, trends in Slovenia suggest that global trends are strongly influencing the Slovenian book market. Indeed, the target market for these digital reading trends are mostly teenage and young adult females who also identify themselves as book or celebrity fans. Since e-books and online readings are markedly more prevalent among younger generations, it remains to be seen whether the mentioned trends will survive and increase in Slovenia.

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Povzetek

Hiter razvoj medijskih in komunikacijskih tehnologij ima revolucionarne posledice za bralne navade bralcev in fanov popularne literature. Osrednja tema tega članka so "novodobni bralci", še posebej njihove bralne navade, interakcije, fanovske skupnosti in kreiranje njihovih identitet. Namen najinega članka je razkriti transformacije bralnih navad, ki jih prinašajo digitalni mediji in družbena omrežja. Zato sva opravili poglobljene intervjuje s slovenskimi in tujimi bralci, ki se zadržujejo v digitalnih okoljih in ki dojemajo internet kot absolutno nujnost za branje popularne literature. Analiza je pokazala, da slovenski bralci, ki svoje bralne aktivnosti tesno povezujejo z internetom, počasi prinašajo globalne trende fanovskih aktivnosti, kot so e-fanzini, tudi v Slovenijo. Najini podatki podpirajo konstruktivistično tezo o izgradnji identitete, prav tako pa so rezultati skladni s tezo o potrošniških plemenih, saj trdimo, da novodobni digitalni bralci konstruirajo svoje identitete v rahlo povezanih skupinah ljudi, ki raje komunicirajo prek različnih digitalnih komunikacijskih kanalov kot pa v resničnem življenju.

Ključne besede: bralne navade, popularna literatura, digitalni mediji, družbena omrežja, fanovske aktivnosti, konstrukcija identitete

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