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Online Fandom Communities

Fandom communities are groups of people considered ‘fanatics’ of a certain topic. The word fandom comes from a combination of the words “fanatic” and “domain.” A few decades ago, these communities were only connected through discussions in magazines and meet ups at conventions. With the rise of the internet, connecting with people across the globe has become an everyday occurrence and fandom communities have used this opportunity to connect with one another through websites, forums, and chat rooms. What makes online fandom communities so important is that they allow people to connect with others who have similar interests online when they might not be able to find others who share these interests in real life. “Apart from meeting and making friends at fan conventions, only 26% of the survey respondents reported knowing other fans within their local communities with whom they could interact” (Manifold, p. 174). It’s hard for some people to imagine not being able to talk to those around you about your favorite sports team or the newest episode of your favorite television show. But for people who cannot do this for their specific interests, online fandom communities have become the popular source for interacting and discussing with peers over a common interest. People will often build social connections with one another online just as you would in face to face conversation, creating a close knit group of friends in these vast online communities. “Advocates of this view claim that people who participate in on-line social networking sites feel a strong sense of connection to the group, may participate for years, and care passionately about their on-line group” (Delacruz, p. 3).

In 2002, I became bed ridden due to a hip disability, and instead of attending middle school with my peers I made friends online through kid friendly websites and chat rooms. The people I met through these sites lived scattered across the United States and as far off as Europe, but were around my age and had the same fandom interests. I have constantly heard it said from those older than me that turning to the virtual world during these vital years of growing and social learning as an adolescent might make a child become reclusive later on in life and be detrimental to their social skills. To the contrary, I think that had it not been for this online

family helping me through the toughest time in my life I would have been socially stunted, still stuck in the mentality of a middle schooler with the extra baggage of my ordeal. Instead, when I entered high school I was still socially apt. I still made friends, joined clubs, and participated in school events. Eleven years later, I still participate in online culture and fandoms. I know people all over the world with different beliefs, religions, backgrounds, and yet we are all part of the same family because of our shared fandoms. I still know and keep in touch with the friends I made in 2002 and am constantly making new friends online and at fandom conventions throughout Florida.

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