

Audience Research Project -Tumblr Study Group Research
“How do ‘Fandoms’ on Tumblr react to new media content?”

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Abstract

This paper looks at fan activity on the social networking site Tumblr. Many fan communities on Tumblr have dubbed themselves as 'Fandoms', resulting in the increased rate in which fan related content is produced. Fan related content ranges mainly from fan-fiction, fan-art, costume play, role-playing and the new concept of 'shipping' (the bonding of characters usually through hypothetical relationships). This has created a huge group of 'Prosumers', who consume related media content, then produce their own fan-created content to share with this online community. Drawing upon my own experiences as an avid Tumblr user, and witness to this trend, I investigated the way in which these Fandoms react to and consume related media content and analyzed the end result. My key findings showed that 100% of the people involved in the study had heard of and were part of at least one 'Fandom' on Tumblr. In addition to this, 90% of participants stated that they ran an active blog, which was at least 50% dominated with 'Fandom' related content.

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“How do ‘Fandoms’ on Tumblr react to new media content?”

In the ‘Approaches to Media’ module for my Media degree, we were asked to conduct an audience research project based on our own experience of being a member of the audience. The way in which I have determined the project is by creating a consecutive 48-hour media log and finding the source of the majority of my media consumption. The majority of my consumption is on the social networking site ‘Tumblr’, therefore; the topic I have chosen/the question that I have put forward is ‘How do Fandoms on Tumblr react to Media Content?’

The method I used to try and get both an accurate and wide range of responses/answers was to set up a focus group study. I did this because I knew that as I could ask certain blogs from my own Tumblr account that I follow if they would be interested. I already knew that a wide variety of blogs followed me and therefore if I could get them to engage in the study by simply filling out the application that I planned to set up, I could get a diverse yet concise set of results.

Media displayed on the Internet massively dominated my media log. Out of 47 entries into the media log, 78% (37) of them were seen on the Internet and out of these 37 online entries, 75% (28) were from Tumblr. Based on these findings alone, I knew that creating a research project based on Tumblr was the right direction to go, as media taken through Tumblr was where the majority of my media consumption originated. After discovering this factor, I then decided to create a separate part of the main media log based on what kind of media came through Tumblr. Out of a page worth of Tumblr posts (which adds up to 27), 60% (16 posts) were ‘fandom’ related. This was the kind of result I was expecting as I regularly check Tumblr and have seen that the majority of posts usually follow this trend. I also noticed that a lot of the posts contained gif sets, pictures, fan-fic etc. of newly released media, such as ‘Doctor Who 50th Anniversary’, ‘The Hunger Games – Catching Fire’, ‘Sherlock Lives’ and ‘Supernatural – Season 9’. However, there was some indication of newly created fan content of less-than-recent media, such as ‘Harry Potter’.

I wanted to find out how the people in the ‘Fandoms’ on Tumblr reacted to this influx of new content. I also wanted to find out whether this ‘influx’ exhibited an out-of-ordinary reaction to the social norm. I intended to ask the people who were following my blog and other people down ‘the blogging tree’, such as followers of followers and so on. I wanted to

ask these people as I knew some of them on a personal level and was hoping that they would be keen to both help me out and also to kind of actively-yet-passively participate in something fandom related. I also wanted to ask people as I have a genuine curiosity into some of these fandoms and I have not yet been able to get my head around how they work and converse with each other.

I decided that the method I would use to try and get people to participate in this focus group was to create a kind of application form to become part of the study group. I decided this, as it would be impossible to try and keep up with the amount of content that all the blogs I follow post/reblog, so by using an application form for a study group, I was therefore able to pick a certain group of people from certain fandoms whilst limiting the amount of participants. It was my understanding that this would enable me to get concise results and therefore receive a better outcome. 3 points that I came across, in regards to the ethical implications for which I had to take into consideration for my research, were;

“[A] Protecting users of the site from themselves or other users

[B] Limiting use of the data for research purposes and service delivery, and

[C] Making sure reported results do not breach confidentiality or cause embarrassment and/or unintentional harm to participants” (Flicker, Haans & Skinner, 2004)

Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson also write that it is “a cardinal fannish sin is to publicly link a real-life name with a pseudonymous identity - a point that ethical researchers must keep in mind.” (Busse and Hellekson, 2012)

Keeping this in mind, I drafted the front page of the application to inform the readers about what the research and focus group was going to be about and what would happen if they applied. I informed the reader that my research was designed to be non-intrusive and even anonymous if they so wished. I also informed them that all findings wouldn't be linked back to their blogs in the final report, and further urged them as a result of this, not to change their blogging pattern. By informing the reader of this, I was keeping in check with the ethics of both the conducting of the research and the report that both Ruth Deller (the module leader) and me discussed.

The downsides of using this method were that, at first, it was hard to get people interested and motivated enough to actually want to participate. This is due to the Tumblr-taboo and social stigma that these particular bloggers don't like to be treated as a 'social experiment'¹.

Another downside of using this method is that the results could be seen as partially biased as I have spoken to a number of the participants before. I attempted to counter this point by mentioning that the group was non-intrusive so I wouldn't contact them at all with any subject regarding the study other than to verify that it was them, and no one else, that had signed them up for the study.

The final downside that I could think of was the fact that some people might be worried that they are, in a way, being monitored. I immediately countered this by introducing a section at the start of the application mentioning that they could contact me on my student email at any time asking to see what data I had recorded from their blog/content, or to withdraw from the group.

I found out that;

- 26% of participants have more than one blog that included fandom related content
- 100% of participants would say they are 'part of a fandom'
- 100% of participants had heard of all the fandoms listed in the application form
- 3 of the Fandoms listed had no one stating they were part of that fandom
- 5% of participants rated 9 on a scale of 1-to-10 to show how much their blog was fandom content, 21% of participants rated 8 on a scale of 1-to-10 to show how much their blog was fandom content, 37% of participants rated 7 on a scale of 1-to-10 to show how much their blog was fandom content, 21% of participants rated 6 on a scale of 1-to-10 to show how much their blog was fandom content, 5% of participants rated 5 on a scale of 1-to-10 to show how much their blog was fandom content and 5% of participants rated 2 on a scale of 1-to-10 to show how much their blog was fandom content.

¹ The ex-Disney star 'Cole Sprouse' used Tumblr as an experiment for his sociology class and then deleted his account, prompting Tumblr users to feel like "Lab Rats" (See: <http://goo.gl/chnAnW>)

I created a new Tumblr account so that I could follow the blogs that had applied for the focus group and began looking at some of the content appearing on my dashboard. One thing that I noticed was the almost impossible speed in which fan related content was created after professionally published media was released. The new Hunger Games Movie, 'Catching Fire', had been out in cinemas for less than a day and yet blogs were making HD gif-sets of scenes in the movie that hadn't been released outside of the cinema and these were being shared thousands of times in the space of minutes between each other. I was under the impression that this was impossible as it had been in the cinema less than 24 hours and yet fans were somehow able to create this content instantaneously.

This was similar for another case. The fandom dubbed 'Phandom', a concoction of the names 'Phil', 'Dan' and 'fandom', were showing similar signs of instantaneous fan created content, this time from a live source. Dan and Phil are a pair of YouTubers who have recently become Radio 1 DJs and live-stream their radio show online every Sunday. Within minutes of a certain scene from their radio show, in this case the part of the show named 'Dan VS Phil', gif sets had been created, uploaded and shared hundreds of times. Each time you refreshed the post you could see the amount of notes increase. The quickly generated, almost-live content that is being produced in this instance is a prime example of 'fanadvertising' (Delmar and Santaolalla, 2013). Alongside the live tweeting of the event, members of the 'Phandom' were talking and sharing opinions of the radio show on Tumblr. This re-enforces the "compulsory trait of fanadvertising" that states – "the fan's need and desire of speaking" (Santaolalla, 2013).

I found doing this assignment both interesting and engaging. It was interesting in the sense that I was able to partially study the extent of fandoms and how quickly and aggressively they both create and share new content. It was engaging in the sense that I got to do what I love doing, which is blogging, talking to people, watching various media content that fandoms relate to and I was generally a lot more organized and prepared than I thought I would be in regards to creating the application.

One of the strengths in my research and findings was how I used 'Google Docs' to create the application form. This collected all of the applications, collated all of the data and displayed them in graph formats (where applicable) and allowed me to visually identify what kind of content I would be looking at and prepare myself for that.

One of the weaknesses of my research was the fact that I put some questions into the application form that didn't relate back to the original question as much as I hoped it would. One of these questions was 'Do you watch TV, if so, how much do you watch in a week?' I wanted to try and link this into some fandoms and find out where they see most the content, whether on TV or online on platforms such as Tumblr.

References

Busse, Kristina and Hellekson, Karen. (2012). " Identity, Ethics and Fan Privacy " in Larsen, Katherin and Zubernis, Lynn (eds.). *Fan culture: theory – practice*, Cambridge Scholars.

Delmar, Javier Lozano. Hernández-Santaolalla, Victor. Ramos, Marina. (2013). "Fandom-generated content: An approach to the concept of ‘fanadvertising’”. *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1

Flicker, S., Haans, D. & Skinner, H. 2004, "Ethical dilemmas in research on Internet communities", *Qualitative health research*, vol. 14, no. 1

Tables

Table 1: My Media Log

<u>Media Name</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Duration</u>	<u>Who With</u>	<u>Conversations?</u>	<u>Further Details</u>
WKD	Spotify Advert	12PM	30 Seconds	-	-	Advertising a night out courtesy of their product
Radio Show Clip	Lecture	10AM	10 Minutes	Philo Holland, Course mates	Audience Retention	Radio clip was of Chris Moyes and guest discussing a random topic
Tumblr	Mac	11AM	4 Hours	-	-	Scrolling through Various posts on Tumblr Dashboard (see Tumblr Media Log)
Twitter	Mac	11AM	4 Hours	-	-	Checking Tweets from Friends
Facebook	Mac	11AM	4 Hours	-	-	Checking updates from family back home
YouTube	Mac	11AM	4 Hours	-	-	Looking at various videos from both online news agencies to

						vloggers
Magazine	Kitchen	6PM	Glance	-	-	-
League Of Legends	My Room	10PM	3 Hours	Friends (Joey, James, Simon, Nick, Tom)	-	Multiplayer Online Battle Arena game with friends. Chatting through game about events of the day
The Story So Far	The Corporation (Venue)	7PM	2 ½ Hours	Joey	About Bands	Watched a gig for a Pop Punk band from California
Blood Donation Advert	Facebook	6PM	Glance	-	-	Embedded Facebook advert asking for people in 'my area' to donate blood
Random Music	Social Gathering	7PM	2 Hour	-	-	Before going out to watch the football, the flat had a few drinks and listened to music
Carlsberg Advert	The Leadmill (Club)	8PM	30 Seconds	-	-	Whilst watching the football, adverts played in-between

						halves
William Hill	The Leadmill	8PM	30 Seconds	-	-	Whilst watching the football, adverts played in-between halves
Free Shot Advert	The Leadmill	4PM	Glance	-	-	Advertisement on the door of Leadmill saying you can get a free shot
AIG	Football Shirt	7PM	Glance	-	-	-
DanIsNotOnFire	YouTube	7PM	5:35	-	-	Watched a Vlog
Radio 1 Show	Website	7PM	2 hours			Dan and Phil Radio Show
McDonalds Advert	Facebook	7PM	Glance	-	-	Embedded Facebook Advert
Hearthstone	Joeys House	11PM	1 Hour	Joey	About the Game	Online Strategy Game played online with other people
Deathnote	Joeys House	12AM	1 Hour	Joey	About Anime Series	Watching an Anime Series whilst eating
Black Butler	Joeys House	1AM	1 Hour	Joey	About Movie	Watching an Anime Series whilst eating

Pokémon	Joeys House	2AM	1 Hour	-	-	-
Bastion	Joeys House	8AM	1 Hour	Joey	About Game	Played indie game with Joey before getting out of bed
Pringles Advert	Joeys House	10AM	Glance	-	-	Advert selling mobile game on the side of Pringles pack
Facebook	Joeys House	11AM	10Minutes	-	-	Checking updates from back home
Tumblr	Joeys House	12PM	30 Minutes	Joey	-	Scrolling through Various posts on Tumblr Dashboard (see Tumblr Media Log
Civilization 5	Joeys House	1PM	2 Hours	Joey	About Game	Played strategy game with Joey
The Hobbit	Showroom Cinema	5PM	3 Hours	Joey	About Movie	Went to the Showroom Cinema to watch the newly released film
Princess Mononoke	Naomi's House	8PM	3 Hours	Joey, Tom Naomi	About Movie	Went round to Naomi's house for her

						birthday and watched the anime movie.
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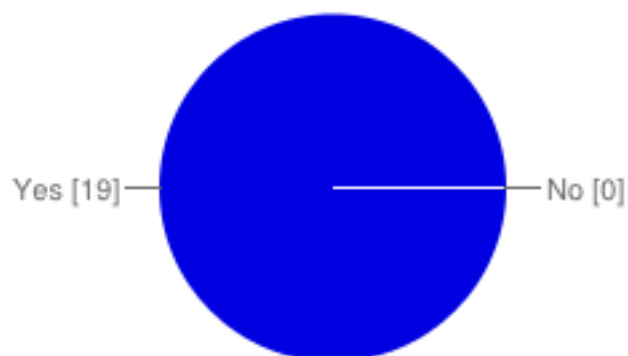
Table 2: My Tumblr media log

<u>Tumblr Media</u>	<u>Type of Media</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Conversations</u>
The Story So Far	Picture	Dashboard	4AM	None
Suicide Silence	Gif	Dashboard	4AM	About Band
The Story So Far	Gif	Dashboard	4AM	None
The Story So Far	Picture	Dashboard	4AM	None
Supernatural	Gif-set	Dashboard	4AM	Joke relating to Media
Supernatural	Fan Art	Dashboard	4AM	Role-play, Dialogue
Supernatural	Fan Art	Dashboard	4AM	Role-play, Dialogue
All Time Low	Picture	Dashboard	4AM	None
Supernatural	Fan Art	Dashboard	4AM	Dialogue
Supernatural	Fan Art	Dashboard	4AM	Dialogue
Doctor Who	Gif-set	Dashboard	4AM	Quote
A Day To Remember	Picture	Dashboard	4AM	Title
Doctor Who	Gif-set	Dashboard	4AM	Joke relating to Media
Tupac Shakur	Picture	Dashboard	4AM	Quote

Bring Me The Horizon	Picture	Dashboard	4AM	None
Doctor Who	Picture	Dashboard	4AM	None
Lana Del Ray	Gif-set	Dashboard	4AM	None
Philosophical Quote	Picture Set	Dashboard	4AM	Comment Relating To Media
American Horror Story	Gif-set	Dashboard	4AM	None
Bring Me The Horizon	Gif	Dashboard	4AM	None
letlive.	Picture	Dashboard	4AM	Title
Gay Rights Post	Picture	Dashboard	4AM	Dialogue
Doctor Who	Joke	Dashboard	4AM	Dialogue
Alex Gaskarth	Tweet	Dashboard	4AM	None
The Incredibles	Gif-set	Dashboard	4AM	Comment Relating To Media
Harry Potter	Gif	Dashboard	4AM	Comment Relating To Media
Joke	Gif Usage	Dashboard	4AM	Joke relating to Media

Figures

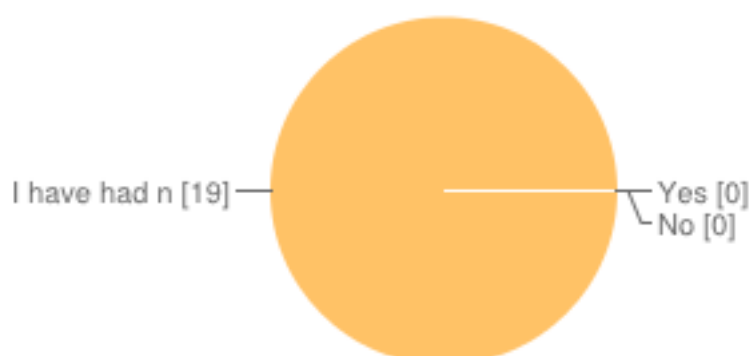
Research data;



Yes **19** 100%

No **0** 0%

Figure 1: Have you read and understood the information about this study?

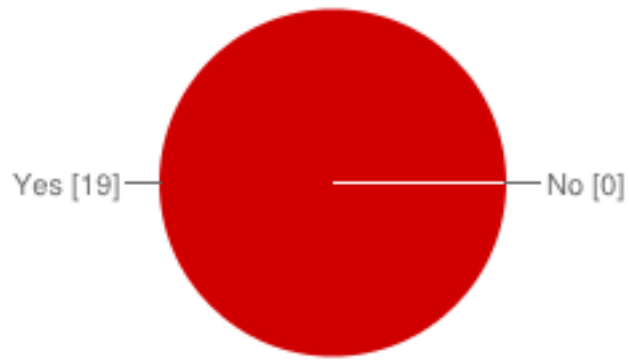


Yes **0** 0%

I have had no questions **19** 100%

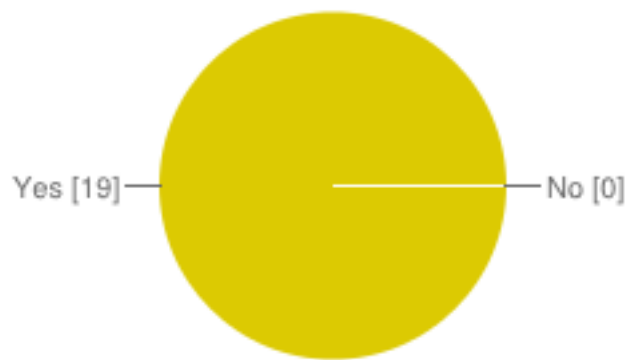
No **0** 0%

Figure 2: Have you been able to ask any questions you have had/currently have about this study?



Yes **19** 100%
No **0** 0%

Figure 3: Do you agree to take part in this study?



Yes **19** 100%
No **0** 0%

Figure 4: Do you give permission for your contribution to be used in my project?

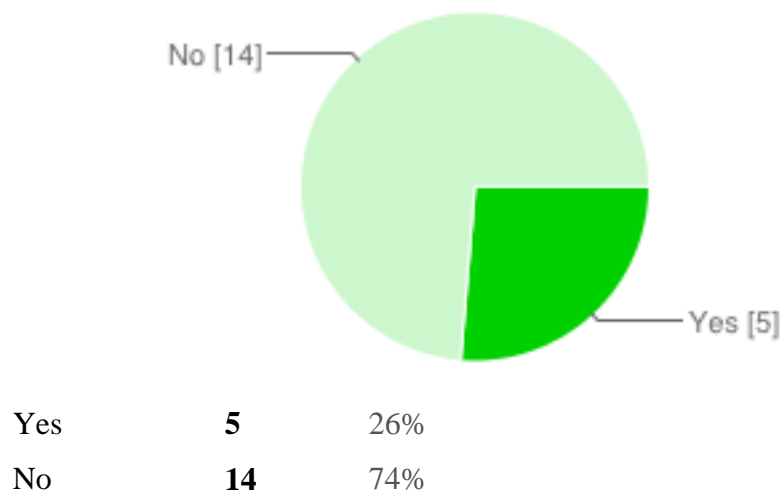


Figure 5: Do you have any other blogs that include Fandom related content?

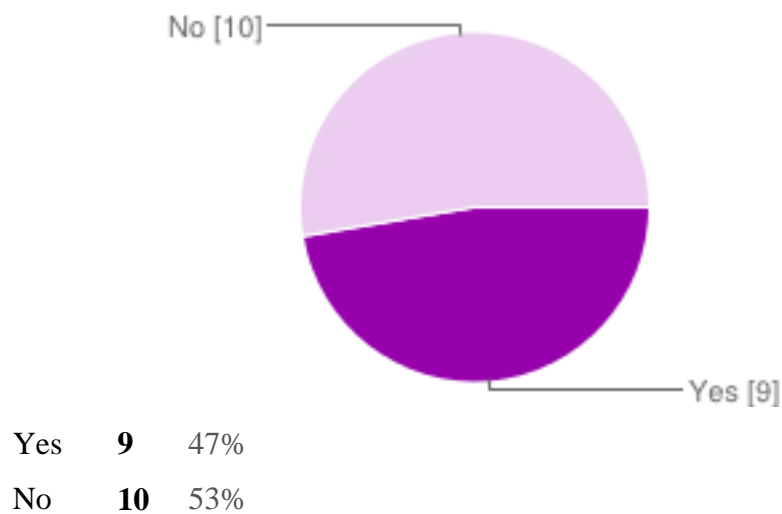
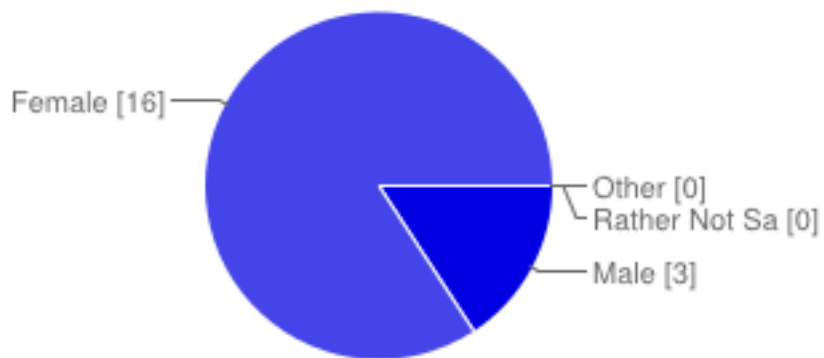


Figure 6: Do you agree for your name to be used in the Focus Group Study?

Syracuse	NY	Brighton	London	Knutsford	Florida	Lichfield
Northampton	England	Desoto	NY	NY	Bay City	

Figure 7: What city/town are you from?

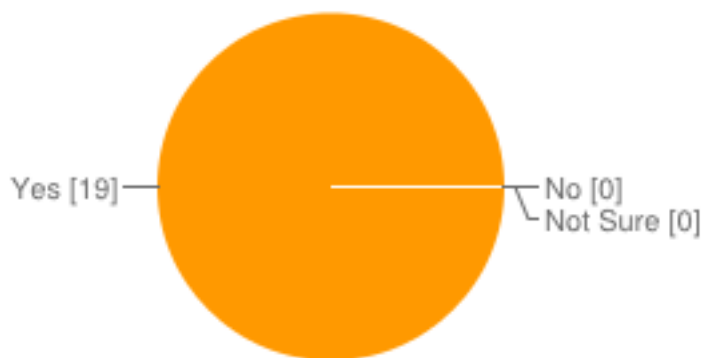


Male	3	16%
Female	16	84%
Other	0	0%
Rather Not Say	0	0%

Figure 8: Are you Male or Female?

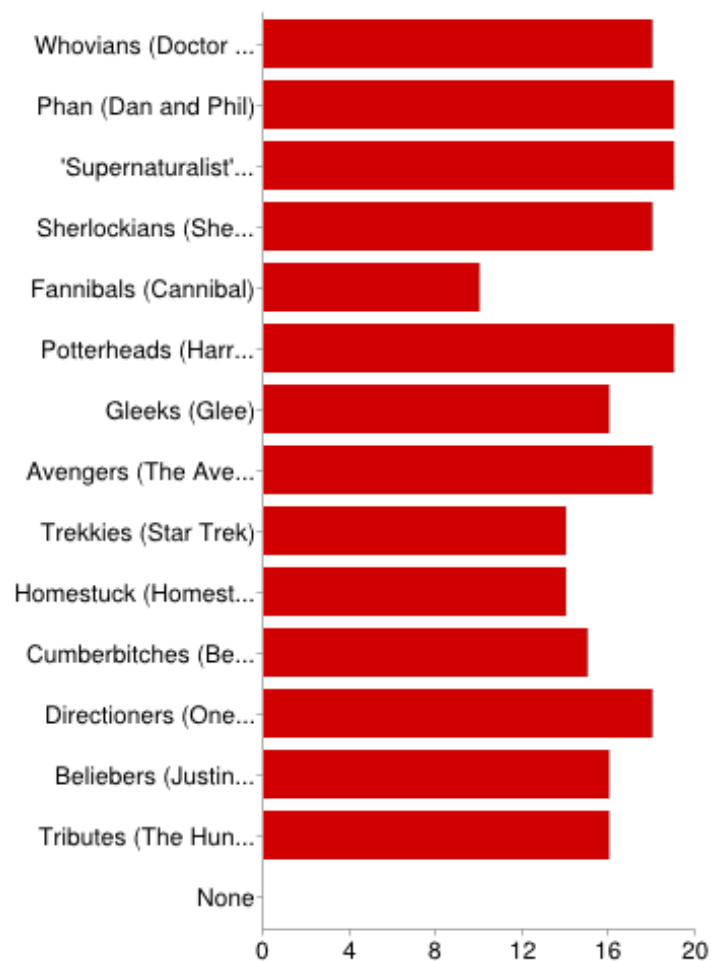
22	24	19	17	18	15	16
13	14	20				

Figure 9: How old are you?



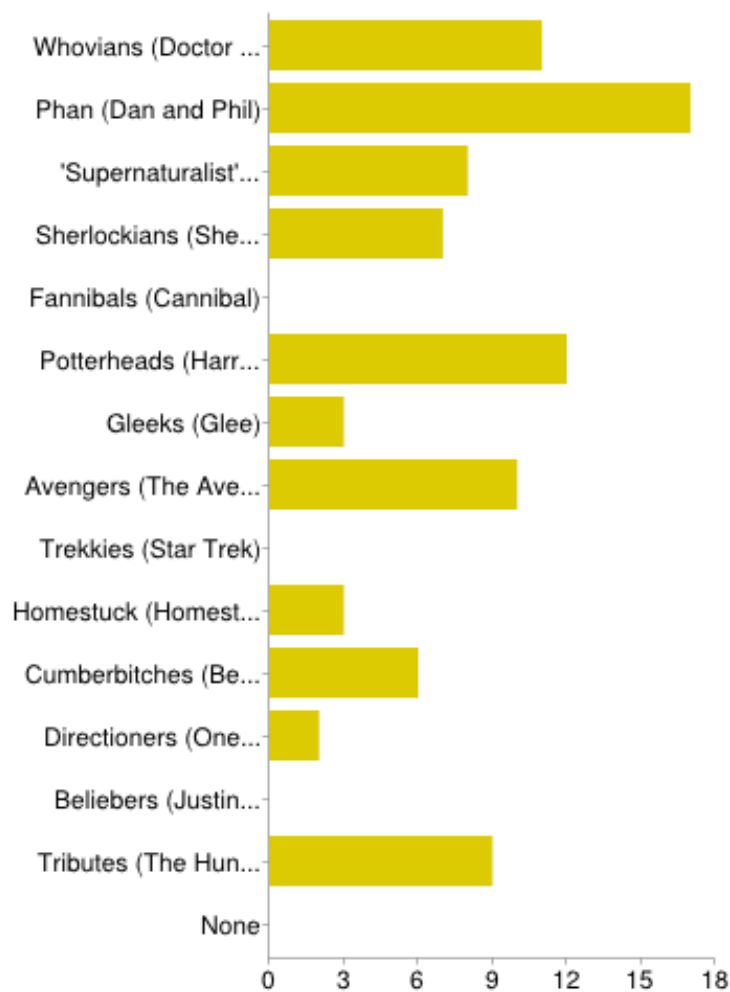
Yes	19	100%
No	0	0%
Not Sure	0	0%

Figure 10: Would you say you are part of any Fandoms?



Whovians (Doctor Who)	18	8%
Phan (Dan and Phil)	19	8%
'Supernaturalist' or 'SaltGunner' (Supernatural)	19	8%
Sherlockians (Sherlock)	18	8%
Fannibals (Cannibal)	10	4%
Potterheads (Harry Potter)	19	8%
Gleeks (Glee)	16	7%
Avengers (The Avengers)	18	8%
Trekkies (Star Trek)	14	6%
Homestuck (Homestuck)	14	6%
Cumberbitches (Benedict Cumberbatch)	15	7%
Directioners (One Direction)	18	8%
Beliebers (Justin Bieber)	16	7%
Tributes (The Hunger Games)	16	7%
None	0	0%

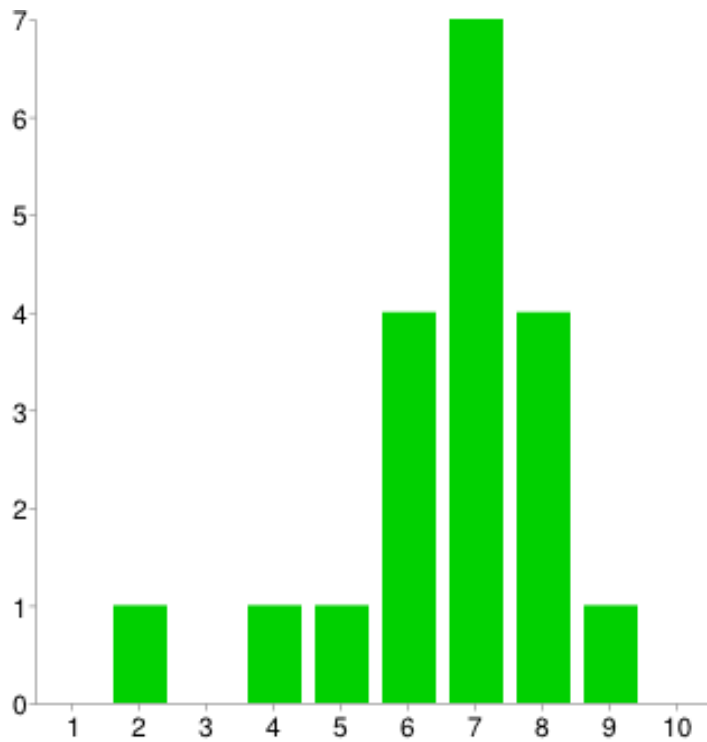
Figure 11: Which of the following Fandoms listed below have you heard of?



Whovians (Doctor Who)	11	13%
Phan (Dan and Phil)	17	19%
'Supernaturalist' or 'SaltGunner' (Supernatural)	8	9%
Sherlockians (Sherlock)	7	8%
Fannibals (Cannibal)	0	0%
Potterheads (Harry Potter)	12	14%
Gleeks (Glee)	3	3%
Avengers (The Avengers)	10	11%
Trekkies (Star Trek)	0	0%
Homestuck (Homestuck)	3	3%
Cumberbitches (Benedict Cumberbatch)	6	7%
Directioners (One Direction)	2	2%

Beliebers (Justin Bieber)	0	0%
Tributes (The Hunger Games)	9	10%
None	0	0%

Figure 12: Please indicate which one of these fandoms you would say you are a part of/affiliate with

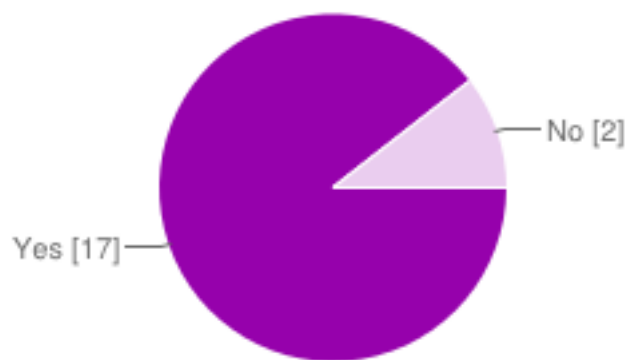


1	0	0%
2	1	5%
3	0	0%
4	1	5%
5	1	5%
6	4	21%
7	7	37%
8	4	21%
9	1	5%
10	0	0%

Figure 13: On a scale of One To Ten - How heavily would you say the content of your blog is fandom related?

40	24	28	30	4	19	15
16	12	21	20	90	10	44

Figure 14: How many hours a week would you say you use Tumblr?



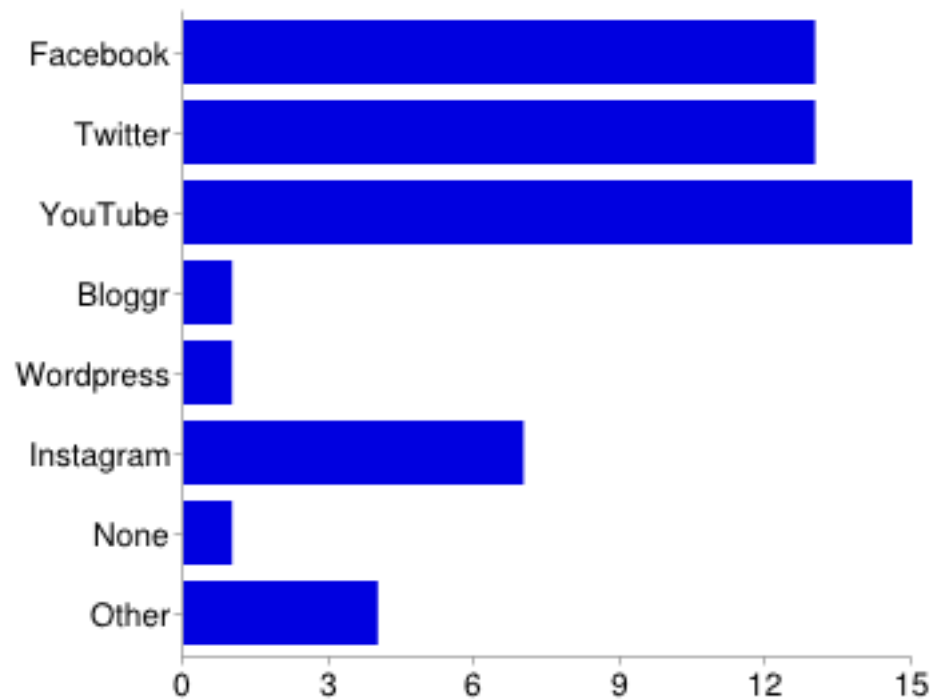
Yes **17** 89%

No **2** 11%

Figure 15: Do you watch TV at all?

3	2	7	6	5	4
15	21	20	10	2.5	

Figure 16: If yes, how many hours a week?



Facebook	13	24%
Twitter	13	24%
YouTube	15	27%
Blogger	1	2%
Wordpress	1	2%
Instagram	7	13%
None	1	2%
Other	4	7%

Figure 17: Which of these other social networking platforms do you use (if any)?