

Synthetic imaginaries or “the world as I want it”? Revisiting transmedial world fandom practices in the light of GenerativeAI

It is nothing new that digital media have made it easier for fans of transmedial fictional worlds (Tosca & Klastrup 2019) such as the Harry Potter-world, Twilight and Star Wars to engage in various forms of fan productivity.

Applying Fiske’s conceptual vocabulary, Sandvoss as early as 2011 discussed how the internet has encouraged both semiotic (interpretative), enunciative (e.g. verbal) and textual (self-made) fan productivity. The access to fandom networks across the globe, frictionless publishing and an eager audience opens up for a wide range of participatory options. A fan can read, share and contribute to discussions of all things X on social media sites such as Reddit, Tumblr or Facebook and on sites such as An Archive of My Own, Wattpad or Fanfiction.net, they can publish their own fan fiction or rate that of others. YouTube also serves as a repository of fan-made films. However, web 2.0 also makes it difficult to make clearcut distinctions between these three types of productivity (Hills 2013).

Based on the long history of fan-made content and its “networked reception” (Klastrup and Tosca 2016), it is not surprising that fans of TMWs naturally also engage with generative AI tools as part of their fandom practices. The availability of free generative AI-tools which are now able to produce photo-realistic content with popular fictional characters and which you can use to “whip up” a fan fiction in no time has naturally lead to an “gold rush” (Stanfill 2025) of fan-made content and a further “democratization” (Zhang et al 2025) of fan’s textual productivity, since it allows fans who are not necessarily brilliant writers or decent visual artists to produce professionally looking content (see also Lamerichs 2023). However, to this day, very little research has examined *what kind of content, fans seem to produce with generative AI-tools and how we are to conceptualise this content*. As part of this paper, I will argue that within media studies we need a new vocabulary to adequately describe the type of “productivity” which take place, when fans produce transmedial world content *together* with an AI-tool. Using illustrative AI-generated content examples gathered from 2025 – 2026 on Facebook, Instagram and Reddit, I will try to make a tentative typology of fan+AI generated content and discuss some of the challenges and possibilities of using generative AI in fan practices from a productivity perspective. What my netnographic studies have so far revealed is, that people produce content which adds new but also non-canonical content to a TWM (such as a social-realistic “photo series” of characters from the original Harry Potter movies getting drunk at Harry and Ginny’s wedding) or tries to depict for instance favourite TMW characters as the same race as themselves (e.g. Bella and Edward as Afro-Americans). On one hand, this indicates that the use of generative AI-tools allows people to make the version of the TMW that they might have wanted to see for long time but have not had the resources to produce before. On the other hand, generative AI tools also impose restrictions on people’s visions for their content. The synthetic narrative imaginaries — be it visual or verbal - that for instance ChatGPT or Sora output, seem to reproduce (heterosexual) cultural stereotypes (Rettberg & Wigers 2025, Leaver & Srdarov 2025, Harding & Wagner 2025) and

adhere to a hegemonic and shallow understanding of what a narrative is (Rettberg & Wigers 2025, Khedr & Abbas 2026). Put in other words, the affordances of generative AI (Klastrup 2026, unpublished blogpost) such as co-creation and iteration might make it easy to be productive but also constrains this productivity in new ways. "Contained productivity" might be an apt way to discuss this new regime.

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