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# The Networked Fictional Narrative: Seriality and Adaptations in Popular Television and New Media.

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# Abstract

From creating elaborate fan-worlds to driving large amounts of revenue into the economy, popular culture has proved to be the motivation behind, as well a reflection of, large scale acquisitions of conglomerates that have governed popular interests since the mid-20th Century. If its movements across geographic space, time, and media can be traced, popular cultural production is an apt subject of research into how a cultural entity is conceptualised, transported and appropriated within another. In this study, adaptations of fictional products in the 20th and 21st Centuries are considered as manifestations of neobaroque forms of cultural production and consumption. Some key questions that drive this research are: what makes a product popular; what are the significant markers of its popularity; who is the audience, and how does the product reach its audience; how does a product evolve from the original to its adapted and vastly popular entity; and, what does this evolution entail? Online platforms like Wikidata.org and Reddit serve as resources for case studies in popular television, namely *Betty, la fea* and its adaptations, and the *Star Trek* franchise. Angela Ndalianis' neobaroque theories of seriality that have emerged from synergies of modern economics and cultural production form the theoretical base for my thesis. The evolution of a story into different cultures, media formats, and indeed, hybrid formations as a new type of narrative, are explored as the multiple ways adaptation and seriality occur. The gap between the producer and consumer of a cultural entity is seen to blur, with every instance of popular cultural production explored here.

## Keywords

Neobaroque. Seriality. Adaptation. Television. Film. New Media. *Star Trek*. *Yo soy Betty, la fea*. Reddit.

# Dedication

*To Lt. Gen. Harish Chandra Dutta, PVSM – stalwart of the Dutta family and loving Dada Ji*

*– who believed in my writing before I ever did. Thank you.*

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# Introduction

In 2003, I began watching *Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin*, a refreshing show about a young woman navigating her cultural and socio-economic background in a glamourous professional space that presented stark differences and intense challenges with every episode. What I remember most about that time was that everyone I knew was taken by the lead character's persona – presented as an anonymous everyday-woman who suddenly finds herself in a glamourous setting and never loses sight of her integrity or her heritage. We had never seen a less-than-glamourous lead -- and a woman, no less -- that was central to a daily show, who wasn't espousing the virtues of a self-sacrificing good Indian woman, 'bhāratiya nāri', often married into a traditional family. These tropes of the 'saas bahu' (mother-in-law daughter-in-law) shows that took over Indian television in the last 1990's and early 2000s quickly became the most popular formula across channels and languages in India, and as a teenager, held little relatability for me and my friends – other than perhaps indoctrinating us with the foreboding reality of what traditional married life might be. With Jassi, we could see our awkward selves clearly on screen; we related to her struggles of finding her place in a society that was so governed by outer appearances alone. It was a clear-cut formula with universal appeal – the ugly duckling was special all along – and the novelty of the idea ensured daily mandatory viewing in our household.

In 2006, in my first year of studying Hispanic culture at university, we would often discuss the similarities and differences in our cultures, as a way to better understand a group of people we had never interacted with before, in a language we were barely beginning to piece together. The American version, *Ugly Betty* had already been on air for a few months in

India by that time, and us naïve souls were falsely proud at the idea that perhaps it was 'copied' from our beloved and ground-breaking Jassi. It was interesting for me to see how similar themes had been tackled in this version – the cultural and socio-economic differences presented here between the Mexican-American Betty and her New York high class colleagues in fashion, presented similar challenges and plots as our Punjabi Jassi in a Mumbai office, with her snooty boss and devious coworkers. My professors then kindly informed me that the similarities were no accident, and that they were both 'copies' of a hugely popular Colombian TV show, *Yo Soy Betty, la fea* (1999). This remained nothing more than a curious piece of trivia for me until 2012.

I found myself discussing how linked my culture is to that of my colleagues at Western University, and brought up the three adaptations of *Betty*. My colleagues recognized a pattern that I perhaps was only interested in as a curiosity up until that point. I was encouraged to look into this further and develop the idea to investigate the dynamic that this adaptation presented – what I was used to calling a 'copy' until that point. At the time, the concept was known to be developed in over twenty separate shows, across languages and countries. What was initially a term paper became the starting point of my research into the various kinds of adaptations and discerning patterns that may be applicable to a large amount of my favourite TV shows and movies.

With the help of my colleagues at the Cultureplex Lab, I began looking into other widely popular TV shows and movies. For the purposes of this study I named these 'products'. I compiled a list of keywords and trawled through Wikipedia – the largest crowdsourced resource of information and perfect for this study. Some of the products with the highest number of articles about them were: *Star Wars, Star Trek, Harry Potter*, the

*Marvel* franchise, and many more. At the time, the most articles on Wikipedia were around the subject of *Star Trek*: actors and characters associated with *Star Trek*, individual episode and movie titles, video games, online spaces and much more. What was striking from the beginning was that these products were spread across multiple media and had a long-lasting popularity; the first *Star Trek* show, *Star Trek: The Original Series* ran from 1966 to 1969; the latest product included in this research, movie *Star Trek: Beyond* released in July 2016; and the most recent iterations of *Star Trek* adaptations are the TV show *Star Trek: Discovery* (2017 - present), and *Star Trek: Short Treks* (October 2018 – January 2019), a series of short films set between the events of seasons one and two of *Star Trek: Discovery,* and the brand new show *Star Trek Picard* (2020-).

I had found my case studies: the *Betty* adaptations across cultures and the *Star Trek* franchise that spanned multiple media. Both TV franchises are credited with having revolutionalised their industries and the cultural makeup of their audiences: *Betty* presented a viable story for multiple culturally distinct audiences; *Star Trek* was path breaking with its story and inclusive casting, as well as in creating the first instance of fan culture in the western world. I propose that these case studies are key examples of the structure of adaptation in the 20th and 21st Centuries, and help unravel the evolution that a story undergoes from its point of origin to the elaborate network it is seen as today. The aim of this research is to identify the evolving dynamic of cultural production, as the power of production shifts focus from the official producers to the consumers. In the following chapters I will elaborate on the multiple formulations that this shift undergoes, as the distance between the producer and consumer is seen to get shorter.

In Chapter 1, I identify the key theoretical aspects of adaptation in popular television, under the framework of the neobaroque and the narrative prototype theory of seriality as elaborated by Calabrese and Ndalianis. The literature review covers the evolution of conventional adaptation theory (Hutcheon), the adaptation trends across cultures (McCabe; Hilmes), and within the increasingly intermedial media ecology (Jenkins).

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of Betty as an applicable example of the prototype theory, as the narrative adapts from one cultural format to another, while keeping intact certain codes and norms of the original series. I discuss the characteristics of *Betty* in general, where this simple and universal story transforms into a global phenomenon. I then focus on four specific iterations of this story: *Yo Soy Betty, la fea* (1999), *Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin* (2003), *Ugly Betty* (2006), and *Betty en Ny* (2019). While the first, third and fourth versions deal with Hispanic life in Colombia, and in the US, respectively, the second version is completely culturally removed and yet presents similar narrative tropes to the other two. Here, I examine the underlying dynamic of adapting a TV show into TV show, i.e. adaptation within the same medium, together with formats and norms inherent to each TV and cultural audience. The period studied here is 1999 to 2019.

Chapter 3 explores another aspect of my research question – the evolution of narrative from one medium to another that suggests the existence of a multiplicity of narrative spaces, and that responds to the demand for certain kind of content, essentially shifting the cultural production process from the producers into the hands of the consumers. Taking the evolution of the vast *Star Trek* franchise into consideration, I study the products that are specific to different media, and present content to the audience in multiple ways. Here, the aim is to identify how the story evolves from one media and audience into another.

I examine how this story – innovative for its time -- begins from a fairly conventional TV format and ultimately finds an audience in unlikely spaces, like video games. This chapter explores the vast network of this narrative, and the many ways which highlight the reasons for its popularity and longevity in the collective popular culture. Data collection for this study was done in 2016, and the data encompasses the latest articles on Wikidata.org until July 2016.

Finally, chapter 4 highlights how this producer-consumer relationship entangles further. Through researching the *Star Trek* franchise across multiple media types, a curious formulation or hybrid narratives emerged that necessitated further research in order to provide a more exhaustive approach to Ndalianis' prototype theory. The *Star Trek* fictional narrative is now seen to extend to a highly non-fictional setting of Reddit, and fictional references are co-opted or appropriated for conversation or content creation that is largely non-fictional in nature. Users on Reddit frequently use references to *Star Trek* in common parlance online, and in message boards or subreddits that are increasingly unrelated to *Star Trek*. It is a demonstration of the extent to which the networked fictional narrative is entrenched in everyday life and interactions. It has also proved to be a most innovative and engaging example of the extent to which Ndalianis' prototypes could be explored and applied to newer fictional-nonfictional hybrid formulations in increasingly diverse media ecologies. The *Star Trek* franchise proved to be the ideal choice of study on Reddit since it presented a substantially larger dataset than any of our other choices in popular cultural products, at the time. Furthermore, we see evidences of the producers of the official *Star Trek* franchise realising, and attempting to capitalise on the purchasing potential of this space and the users. The producer-consumer dynamic is seen to definitively shift in favour of the consumer as now taking control of the content production and the official producers having to modify

their approach in order to appeal to a changing reality, where their longevity and success

depends on adopting strategies specific to a medium that was not originally theirs. This

chapter signals the creation of a hybrid narrative type, by way of memes, and a digital

community that ends up as a narrative space through the users interacting with a fictional

entity. Data collection for this study was also done in 2016, and the data encompasses the

latest comments on Reddit until August 2016.

Chapter 1

# 1     Neobaroque, Narrative, and Evolving Media Ecology

Popular cultural production is an indelible marker of current economic motivations and

progress worldwide. Popular culture not only pervades fan-worlds but also drives a large

amount of revenue into the economy. It has proved to be the motivation behind, as well a

reflection of, large scale acquisitions of conglomerates that have governed popular

interests since the mid-20th century. If its movements across geographic space, time, and

media can be traced, popular cultural production is an apt subject of research into how a

cultural entity is conceptualised, transported and appropriated within another space –

which is the driving idea behind this study. For this purpose, adaptations of fictional

products in the 20th and 21st centuries are considered a conduit through which this

transference may be mapped.

      This study explores adaptations as a neobaroque extension of a cultural entity,

wherein not only do the formal characteristics of the adaptation process of a fictional

narrative take place through neobaroque tendencies, the very formulation of adaptations

as an iteration of popular culture that finds consumers across media and geographies, and

is governed by increasingly changing power dynamics between the consumer and the

producer, is a neobaroque manifestation itself. The cultural products investigated in this

study include four adaptations of the *Betty* TV shows, the *Star Trek* franchise, and the

new media platform Reddit.com where the fictional and non-fictional worlds collide.

These case studies are ideal in order to explore the global baroque phenomenon, since

they each have a wide consumer base worldwide and have remained popular for many years. Throughout this study some key questions will drive the research: what makes a product popular; what are the significant markers of its popularity; how does a product evolve from the original to its adapted and vastly popular entity; and, what does this evolution entail? To attempt to answer these questions, we will look at online databases like Wikidata.org and Freebase that detail metadata on fictional products like novels, movies, videogames etc. The analyses of this information will be further developed in the following chapters.

To establish a theoretical framework for these cultural formulations, I look to the neobaroque theories of seriality that can be said to have emerged from synergies of modern economics and cultural production. I call on the work of scholars like Angela Ndalianis, Omar Calabrese, and José Antonio Maravall to contextualize the global patterns of economic, social, and cultural change that have marked the last four centuries in the Western world. The discussion around baroque and neobaroque, across centuries, is crucial to articulating the trans-temporal and global reach of phenomena that were first observed in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, and more so, are applicable to contemporary modes of cultural production and consumption. These theories may explain the overarching context of this study, but scholarship on exactly how adaptations are an increasingly more popular global phenomenon in entertainment needs to be further contextualized with previous work in narrative and adaptation theories: primarily through the work of John Fiske, Linda Hutcheon, Henry Jenkins, and Thomas Leitch. The process of adaptation from one media type to another, from one cultural context to another, the narrative structures within a text (original or adapted), new media and the changing

ecology of digital cultural production that has brought about an evolution in how a

product is now consumed, is elaborated in these works, albeit through the lens of North

American scholarship. My re-examination of the adaptation process through neobaroque

seriality in the propagation of a narrative (Calabrese; Focillon; Ndalianis) highlights the

reach of the neobaroque aesthetic in contemporary popular culture. Finally, the

introduction of hybrid forms of media production and consumption lead me to the study

of previously studied fan interactions in new media vis. fanfiction and online fan culture

(Jenkins). This section paves the way for further exploration on how fans may

appropriate storyworld[1]s out of the hands of the producers and create their own meaning

within the norms of their online environment.

## 1.1    Early Mass Culture and Popular Production

In order to reflect on the modern era of cultural production and consumption, it is

necessary to glimpse into the western world of the 1500s and the 1600s, which shows

radical changes in urban populations as migration from rural areas came to a rise. This

moment in history and scholarship is traditionally understood as the Baroque: a historical

response to the Renaissance, essentially, "ridiculous to the excess." For a large part of

scholarship in the 18th and 19th Centuries, it was imbued with negative connotations –

perceived as degeneration of the classical forms of the Renaissance (Ndalianis

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[1]  A shared universe in which characters, events and narratives co-exist. David Herman defines storyworlds as "mental models of the situations and events being recounted — of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why, and in what manner. Reciprocally, narrative artifacts (texts, films, etc.) provide blueprints for the creation and modification of such mentally configured story worlds" (Herman 72)

"NeoBaroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment", 7). From the late 1800

onwards, a reformulation of the term began. It was now considered an autonomous, valid

style, as opposed to a degeneration of Renaissance (Maravall 53). Scholars like Ndalianis

consider the baroque as a "transhistorical state that has wider historical repercussions"

and has transformed mass culture in ways that even affect the entertainment industry of

the late 20th and early 21st Centuries (5). The technological advances and economic

developments of the 1600s somewhat mirror the disruption in cultural production since

the 1980s.

Looking at historical epochs as a relationship between technological

advancements and global economic systems that give rise to modes of production and

consumption is at the centre of today's discussion of cultural production as well.

Maravall holds that this formulation of cultural production today follows the baroque

patterns that first emerged in the 16th and 17th centuries in Western Europe. He defines

the baroque public as urban, mass-oriented and socially guided. Folk culture morphed

into new forms of popular culture that quickly gave rise to consumerism widely adopted

in society (53). The term "baroque" itself was first used in the 18th century to define the

art and music of the 16th and 17th Centuries (Ndalianis, "NeoBaroque Aesthetics and

Contemporary Entertainment", 7; Maravall 53), and only formalized as a significant

artistic movement with its distinct qualities and functions in the 19th century by art critic

and historian, Heinrich Wolfflin– whose primary concern with the baroque was to limit it

to chronological periodization even as he identified formal characteristics that were seen

to exceed these limitations (Farago et. al. 43). The baroque excess denoted an

extravagance that was meant to affect the senses of the spectator or consumer. Ndalianis

calls on Henri Focillon's assertion that formal patterns in art (and by extension, cultural production) are not necessarily contained in specific time periods (9). The lasting impact of the 17th century baroque form is evident in 19th and 20th century movements like Romanticism, Impressionism, and Surrealism. Focillon's notion of the fluidity and stability of the baroque form indicates that these forms flow between various movements and media types (art, film, music), essentially undergoing metamorphoses in the 20th century to transform from a formal style to a cultural movement. This transformation sets the stage for this study's exploration of the baroque in the late 20th an early 21st centuries as it applies to some of the largest global economic cultural entities – the entertainment industry. This transformation also ultimately informs my study of the neobaroque and the formal concern with narratology in tracing the evolution of cultural entities and the associated consumer dynamics.

The mid and late 20th century saw the emergence of an urban and intellectual phenomenon where the stylistic baroque form transformed into a revolutionary neobaroque that was perceived as countering the dominant capitalism and socialism of the 20th century, particularly in the Latin American boom literature of the 1960s and 1970s, and trickled well into the postboom period of the 1980s. Baroque and neobaroque scholarship reflects the vibrancy of this era: Severo Sarduy publishes his 1972 essay "Baroque and Neobaroque"; After his 1974 publication Baroque Concerto, Alejo Carpentier's 1975 paper titled "Baroque and Magic Realism" is key in linking baroque to Boom literature; Omar Calabrese publishes *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of Our Times* in 1987; Gilles Deleuze publishes *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* in 1988 – the latter two being seminal in informing the narrative prototype theory (Kaup 136; Gamboa 7). The

illusions and crossing of boundaries that were hallmarks of the 17th century baroque were now seen as contesting the authority of dominant systems and "reality itself" (Ndalianis, "NeoBaroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment", 12). This was, essentially, an aesthetic and ideological re-appropriation and re-signification of the European model. To quote Augusto Salgado, "[t]o cross from the European baroque into the Latin American neobaroque is to move from a hegemonic, diffusionist, and acculturating conception of the term to an emancipating, autochthonous and transculturating one" (Cruikshank 17). There is a renewed tendency to look at cultural products in Latin America from the colonial era and afterwards as a rupture or deviation from, as opposed to an application of, European aesthetics.

For scholars like Severo Sarduy, the baroque in 17th and 18th century Latin America was a colonial extension of the Spanish baroque, and the neobaroque of the later centuries aimed to reclaim Latin American history "by appropriating a period often considered to the 'original' baroque, thereby rewriting the codes and 'truths' imposed on Latin America by its colonizers" (Ndalianis, "NeoBaroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment", 14). The robust "chaotic" forms of the baroque now appeared as complex labyrinthine literary concepts meant to denote the elusive nature of "fact", "history", and "reality itself". Open narrative forms emerge, genres and literary forms are more fluid, and the illusory nature of the world is explored. It must be noted that Spain too experienced a similar resurgence of the neobaroque in the 1960s and 1970s when Spanish literary form was influenced by Latin American boom writers, as it engaged with and reinterpreted 17th century literary works. The neobaroque in 20th century Spain was seen as a method to counteract the mainstream ideology of Franquismo – it was as much a

movement of revolution as in Latin America (Ndalianis, "NeoBaroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment", 25).

One of the earliest formal articulations of the phenomenon of cultural production today also come from Sarduy's unique contribution to the neobaroque – his idea of the 'retombée', a relapse or achronic causality, which is marked by the appearance of a crisis in our understanding of the universe and expressed through an art of irregular forms (Ndalianis, "NeoBaroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment", 27). To quote Sarduy - "un neobarroco en estallido en el que los signos giran y se escapan hacia los límites del soporte sin que ninguna fórmula permita trazar sus líneas o seguir los mecanismos de su producción" [an exploding neobaroque in which signs spin and escape toward the limits of the medium, without any formula that could trace its lines nor follow its production mechanisms] (Spadaccini and Martin-Estudillo xiii). Cultural entities are increasingly eschewing the boundaries of their medium and this study is an attempt at unraveling the underlying production mechanisms by way of mapping the expanse of two popular television phenomena, *Betty, la fea* and *Star Trek*.

During the late 20th century, the idea of the "baroque reason" emerged that would emphasize excess, plurality of views and corporality. It has recently become a crucial concept for a comprehensive understanding of Modernity: "[w]hile some Baroque and Neobaroque cultural products can be perceived as fighting a vacuum-related anxiety through an extreme or excessive formal density, other products point toward the same 'nothingness' by showing a resistance to that very same density." (Spadaccini and Martin-Estudillo xxviii). Therein lie the creative manifestations of the baroque and the neobaroque. We see that for several of these theorists, either in a historicist reflection or

in one of a geo-cultural character, the baroque is re-signified through interpretations that bind this aesthetic model to multiple levels: to formulations specific to the Americas, to the conforming bourgeois culture, or to the hybrid and fragmented identity. Moreover, what once was lauded as an avant-garde movement meant to counteract the mainstream in the early- and mid- 20$^{th}$ century – a deliberate effort on part of writers and artists -- later becomes a hallmark of mainstream culture where it is largely directed at mass audiences through various systemic and cultural transformations, much like the baroque of the 17$^{th}$ century (Ndalianis, "NeoBaroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment", 17).

In order to investigate the cultural production patterns from the 1960s to the early 21$^{st}$ century– which launch the case studies of TV shows and new media platforms in the following chapters – it is vital to note the parallels in the 17$^{th}$ century economically and socially dynamic baroque culture (Maravall 53) and the current technologically-innovative neobaroque conglomerate culture (Ndalianis, "NeoBaroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment", 18). While Maravall's concern with the baroque as a specific historical response initially helps situate this study, his assertion that baroque may surpass the confines of culture, geography and time periods is what helps align this study to the scholarship of Ndalianis and Calabrese on the contemporary manifestations of the neobaroque that deem it a formal property beyond the boundaries of periodization, the formal studies in the structure of a story (Fiske; Hutcheon; Jenkins), and ultimately, this study's contribution towards how a story evolves in relation to audience reception. The overwhelming eschewing of periodization in the baroque and neobaroque does bring about a challenge in theorizing the emergence or point of origin within these movements;

we've explored the characteristics of the baroque that may well place it outside of its European "origin" and the characteristics of the neobaroque that, through this study, may be applicable to largely non-Hispanic cultural entities of the last four decades. Here, the scholarship of Ndalianis and Kaup is vital in paving the way for a hybrid and networked articulation of the neobaroque – complex patterns are explored within dynamic systems that operate in a self-regulatory manner in different ranges of parameters (Kaup, quoted in Farago et al., 45).

Finally, the transcultural hallmark of the baroque and neobaroque calls for an interdisciplinary approach to examine their various manifestations and applications. Scholars Jens Baumgarten and Gabriela Siracusano highlight that in order to negotiate the complexity of a global baroque it is important that the Latin American baroque be juxtaposed against Asian contexts, for example (Farago et al., 50). To this end, Chapter 2 explores neobaroque sensibilities in the adaptation of TV serials within the context of the Global South as well as the US, where the tension between local contexts and the imposition of European models provides additional insight into what makes a cultural product viable in different contexts. A further approach proposed by Baumgarten and Siracusano, which perhaps exceeds the scope of this study but attests to the interdisciplinary nature of scholarship of the baroque, is to explore the creative appropriation of baroque aesthetics by indigenous communities in Latin America on their own terms, wherein the baroque is seen as yet another measure to counteract mainstream colonial ideologies, and where the flow of culture is a multidirectional network yet again.

## 1.2    Neobaroque Aesthetics and Popular Patterns of Consumerism

For the purposes of this study, my understanding of neobaroque formulations of the late 20$^{th}$ and early 21$^{st}$ centuries is heavily derived from the work of Ndalianis. In this section, after having contextualised the historical and cultural significance of the baroque and neobaroque, I move to a specific narratological focus with the aim to identify the kind of neobaroque cultural entity that is on the rise in this time period – adaptations in the entertainment industry – and the producer-consumer relations that are seen to be in flux across media and geographies. Popular cultural production depends and thrives upon synergies brought on by technological, industrial and economic transformations. These synergies manifest through two key strategies within the neobaroque: the serial and the spectacle. The serial constitutes various prototypes of open-ended or continuing narratives, while the spectacle is an intensification of the sensory experience wherein the consumers find themselves stepping beyond the text. This study's focus lies in the serial manifestation of the neobaroque. It is the 'something else' that places classical storytelling in the new context of digital technology, cross-media interactions, alternate modes of spectatorship and reception. Neobaroque entertainment is necessarily a (direct or indirect) product of conglomerate entertainment industries, multimedia interests, and spectacle that is most often reliant on digital technology. It combines the visual, the auditory, and the textual, and reflects an underlying current of transformed economic and social factors. There is a desire to evoke states of transcendence that amplify the viewer's experience of the illusion. Artifice is required to mitigate the crisis of the senses, and at

the same time dissipated in favour of 'thinning the veil' or bringing the consumer closer to the product.

While Calabrese was first in claiming that popular cultural production was a baroque manifestation (Ndalianis, "NeoBaroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment", 27), I follow Ndalianis's formal approach to identify the underlying complexity of the "chaotic" neobaroque through an analysis of the narrative seriality in popular cultural products. Ndalianis's formulation of the neobaroque also details the stark refusal to respect the limits of the frame that contains the illusion or the artifice. This manifests in the intense visual directness that comes with spectacles, which draw the gaze of the spectator to 'infinite depths'. Narrative spaces, too, begin to lose their conventions - continuity, linearity, beginnings and endings. There is perforation of the frame; hidden beginnings and ends appear. These neobaroque narratives draw the audience into infinite, multidirectional, labyrinthine loops. There is an increased complexity in the production of these cultural entities, and the patterns of their consumption.

The post-1950's entertainment landscape saw the emergence of conglomerate economic infrastructure. Industries chose to partner with and proliferate other media in order to compete at a global scale and maximize profit. This horizontal integration became a successful economic model in which investments were dispersed across multiple industry interests that also intersected wherever financially appropriate. This new economic formulation prompted a shift in audience reception: media literacy resulted in the production of works that relied heavily on intertextual logic. The comprehensive meaning of a given work became dependent on the audience's ability to traverse multiple texts full of intertextual references and allusions.

The spread of easily accessible audiovisual technology has facilitated the audience's ability to familiarize themselves with multiple samples of entertainment culture. This intertextuality serves to permeate the work with neobaroque folds, in a way that through these references, one work folds into another in a continued series of meaning production. The work becomes fluid. The case of video games is the most apt here, as digital technology has created multiple labyrinths for players to traverse, effectively making them multilinear and multiplicitous in meaning. While the neobaroque and baroque share the interpretative and visual motif of the multidirectional labyrinth, through technological rather than technical means (as in art), the neobaroque labyrinth is often literal. Video games attest to this transformation. In some instances, the player is interactively engaged with the system of the labyrinth quite literally (eg. the plot and layout of the videogame Doom II, 1994.) At the same time, the interactive possibilities of computer technology produce an illusion of higher degree of immersion into the labyrinth. Present day Role Playing Games (RPGs) further complicate this illusion - now, there are intricate maps, uncharted territories, aliases, and hidden plots that constantly immerse the gamer deeper within the virtual narrative.

Virtual forms recreate an immersive material space where the geographies and laws of physics apply. Here, the user navigates through the virtual space and this interaction occurs in real time. Navigational properties of cyberspace affects traditional notions of spectatorship when comparing filmic narrative with video games - the labyrinthine paths created by digital technologies offer multiple interpretative possibilities. These navigational possibilities have existed in other media: Cortazar's novel, *Rayuela* (1963), where the reader holds a higher degree of autonomy over the

narrative pace and direction; interactive video like video webcast of performances by Arcade fire and Beck (2014), where the user's camera acts as vantage point for the video, which manipulates the screen/scene according to the viewer's movements; and most recently, *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2019) where the viewer has more agency and chooses the narrative path of the web episode.

## 1.3     Popular fictive worlds: Television and Narrative

Since the 1950s, TV series have generally favoured an open narrative format: the narrative flows through multiple stories and traverses different episodes, and simultaneously, has the potential to exit a particular series and cross over to a spin-off (another increasingly popular trend in television). It is here that a distinction between televisual formats - particularly, the series and the serial - becomes necessary to arrive at a conceptualization of the dominant narrative format in popular fiction.

A series consists of a succession of self-contained narrative episodes that follow a sequence. Whereas, a serial is a succession of episodes whose narratives resist closure and continue into the rest of the episodes within the sequence. These traditional conventions are no longer valid as each form has increasingly collapsed into the other and become indistinguishable from it. According to Roger Hagedorn, the serial narrative tends to dominate a specific medium once competition from other media becomes more prominent. Most serials employ the use of the cliffhanger. Their aim is to delay closure within the narrative as the consumer is woven into multiple unresolved narrative threads.

In the end, the consumer returns for more. This has evidently proved to be a successful strategy where the audience, in the 21st century, has become accustomed to binging content and entertainment conglomerates are moving to monopolize on streaming platforms in addition to traditional channels.

These strategies in the aesthetics and form of TV reflect or are informed by cultural and socio-economic transformations. Since the 1980s, the conglomeration of the entertainment industry has brought about an industry that has multiple media interests. This has resulted in new convergences between diverse entertainment forms - comic books, video games, theme parks, TV shows. "The 'relationship between economics and aesthetics' [is] evident in the formal properties of entertainment media: economics gives rise to new aesthetics and to new formal patterns - evident, in this instance, in the shape of serial narrative formations" (Ndalianis, "NeoBaroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment" 33).

For Ndalianis, the multi-centred nature of economic infrastructures is reflected in narratives where their meaning is reliant on the audience's ability to traverse multiple texts in order to give coherence to an episode within a series. This constitutes an open structure, as explained by Umberto Eco and Omar Calabrese. The poetics of open work signifies serial thought which is open and polyvalent. It is characteristic of our times: the neobaroque era. Here, serial thought destabilizes the singular, linear paths - seen in Aristotelian narrative patterns - and resists closure. "Since the 1980's the distance between the avant-garde and the media has closed. We are no longer dealing with works and interpreters but with processes, flows and interpretative drifts that concern not single works, but the totality of messages that circulate in the area of communication (Eco)."

Taking into consideration the case studies of popular television franchises in the following chapters, we will explore how individual titles – "single works" – extend and transform the narrative of the overall TV franchise – "the totality of messages".

## 1.4    Conventional Scholarship on Adaptations

To arrive at an understanding of the networked fictional narrative we will include products within popular culture whose fictional world has extended significantly beyond the point of origin, spanning multiple media and geographies through varying strategies and modes of production. These adaptations of the original product may include various formats of products, and may be driven by varying parameters. In order for a product to be considered an adaptation, we must first determine these parameters. This calls for an elaboration of Ndalianis' configuration of the narrative prototypes, which have then been extended to the modes of production of said narratives.

For the purposes of this study, the definition of what constitutes an adaptation will include multiple formats that are present today in popular fiction - print, TV and film. One of the more direct adaptations is the cross-media adaptation: Book to Film or TV adaptations and vice versa; Film to TV adaptations and vice versa. They are officially termed as adaptations of an original product and are produced in a setting where the original producers have a role to play in their conception. A writer or producer of an original product may sell the rights to other production houses, or be actively involved in the creation of the following product.

Within this kind of adaptation, there are further mechanisms of adaptation at play. For example, a theatrical play, which is the original written product, may involve an intermediary level of adaptation: the published play that is to be read by audiences or readers; the script for the actors, stage directors, etc[2]. The published play may then be developed into a script fit for TV or Film. This script may pass through various adaptations as well: notes for the directors, actors scripts etc. The next step involves the adaptation across media where these scripts are used to modify the narrative so as to make it suitable for the visual medium. This is where the language of film comes into play: the *mise-en-scene*, the play of light and dark, the diegetic and nondiegetic sound, all play a part in accentuating the narrative in addition to the spoken dialogue. Adaptations that are not 'faithful' to the original may deviate from the original narrative - change of time period, location, characters, plot points etc. - but they may still be considered official adaptations.

Another formulation of adaptation that is very relevant today, and is particular to film, is the sequel and the prequel. These formulations serve to extend the original plot and are usually created after the original product. The sequel may serve to depict future events, and the prequel, past event. The adaptation here lies in the modification of the original narrative. New information and interpretation may arise in the prequels and sequels that shed light to plot points in the original and serve to create an overall hybrid series of products. A prominent example of this formulation is the *Star Wars* (1977 - ) series that eventually spanned three separate trilogies.

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[2] See Gaskell, on page 5 for an elaborate description of this adaptation process.

A second formulation within film that has been popular since the 90's is the reboot or remake. This is most common in comic book adaptations and science fiction. This kind of product departs from the original narrative in minor ways and then builds an entire narrative that is driven by these changes. It seeks to recreate the original narrative but with one or two different characters, or a different time period, or even an entirely alternative timeline. The recent *Star Trek* movies or the *Amazing Spiderman* movies are a great example of this.

A curious formulation within TV and Film is the spin-off, which has become increasingly popular and in-demand in the last two decades. This adaptation usually takes one aspect of the original and builds an entire narrative around it, while significantly deviating from the original. While the umbrella universe of the narrative may remain the same, the plot and characters are completely different, barring a few common aspects. The narrative is bound by the conventions set in the original storyworld, and new situations and characters create further content for the consumer. A few examples may include *Doctor Who* (1963 and 2005), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997) and the movie *Stargate* (1994) paving the way for spin-offs like *Torchwood* (2006), *Angel* (1999), and *SG-1/Stargate Atlantis/Stargate Universe*, respectively.

A further formulation of adaptation or extension of the original narrative may be the new media adaptation, where the producers of the original product actively encourage the involvement of the user or consumer base in the creation of these adaptations. For example, the author J.K. Rowling relied heavily on fan created websites to interact with users, before having her own online community 'Pottermore' created. Here she encourages users to create alternative stories and related media content. She also created

backstories and extra content keeping in mind the suggestions of the users. Here the consumer is seen to become an active producer as well and the lines between products created officially and unofficially is further blurred. A process of media convergence is at play in this kind of extension of the narrative, where "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (Jenkins, "Convergence Culture" 18). This overwhelmingly popular tendency in cultural production is a response to the audiences' behavior in search of experiences (Ortega Guzman 71), further aided by upcoming technological advances and rise in access to these technologies.

An underlying theory of what the process of adaptation entails is necessary to disentangle these formulations of adapted products. What follows is an overarching review of the major currents in the theory of adaptation, and how these issues may be extended to understanding present day motivations behind the different kinds of adapted products being created and consumed.

In most academic and journalistic debate surrounding popular adaptations, they have most often been deemed "secondary, derivative, 'belated, middlebrow, or culturally inferior'" (Hutcheon 2). She looks to with works of Louis Begley, Mcfarlane, Robert Stam, and Newman who use the following terms when they refer to film adaptations of literature: "tampering", "deformation, perversion, infidelity", and "willfully inferior form of cognition", respectively. It seems to be a generally acceptable and fairly well-received practice to develop literature into a respected high art form like ballet or opera, but not into a film or television production.

For film semiotician Christian Metz, cinema tells continuous stories; "it "says" things that could be conveyed also in the language of words; yet it says them differently. There is a reason for the possibility as well as for the necessity of adaptations" (Hutcheon 4). The same could be said of any form of conventional adaptation - musicals, opera, ballets or songs - where the product presents narratives in different ways that are specific to the medium. Considering even the tiniest processes involved in adapting a product, storytellers resort to commonly used strategies: "they actualize or concretize ideas; they make simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on. But the stories they relate are taken from elsewhere, not invented anew. ...[A]daptations have an overt and defining relationship to prior texts, usually revealingly called 'sources' ...[and they] openly announce this relationship" (6). It follows that this formulation could be extended to state that all products may essentially be adaptations – as is particularly evident in the first case study (Chapter 2), *Betty la Fea*, which critics argue is a retelling of the classic Ugly Duckling story.

While the hegemony of an original text may be up for debate, the first wave of adaptation theory deals in a traditional, one directional approach to the adaptation process (from written text to film). Thomas Leitch observes that most critics readily accept the premise that discussions of adaptation should focus on essential differences between literary and cinematic media. "Though novels and films may seem at any given moment in the history of narrative theory to have essentially distinctive properties, those properties are functions of their historical moments and not of the media themselves" (Leitch 150). This assertion could very well be extrapolated to state that different media

are, in and of themselves, a function of the historical moment they belong to, and that

they present their own set of characteristics. For example, even though the earliest 3D

movie can be traced back to 1922[3], mass produced 3D movies and games, and their large

audiences today are indicative of the viability of the technology, as well as it being

readily available both for the creators and the consumers. Movies are increasingly being

filmed exclusively in the 3D format; 3D television sets and glasses are easily available

for watching and gaming. Additionally, for Leitch, non-adapted, original films constantly

challenge this notion that literature and film may be mutually exclusive media types. He

too argues that they are necessarily adapted from text: screenplays (the processes of

which are detailed below). He proposes a hybrid, dialogic relationship between the

cinematic and the literary.

With respect to the medium of a product, N. Katherine Hayles has an alternative

assertion that "if the text is stored accurately on a second storage medium, the text

remains the same though the signs for it are different." The idea here is to focus less on

these signs and more on whether the cinematic edition of the text fulfils its intended

purpose. In essence, the original text and the adapted cinematic text may be considered

independent, autonomous products or entities. This assertion does away with the idea of

hierarchy or legitimacy of one form over the other, or whether the original literary text is

superior to the adapted film.

There is a further, more nuanced approach to looking at the adaptation process

from the written text to the visual version - be it enacted play, filmic product, or animated

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[3] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0013506/trivia

and virtually immersive product. When considering stage plays, textual critic Philip Gaskell states that a play passes through three stages during production. The first is the script which is the manuscript presented to the director. Next stage involves the performance text. These are essentially the words spoken by actors. It is this second stage that creates a malleable text through multiple influences - the audience, the actors, the director and writer. Finally, there is the reading text or the published version.

As a performance based medium, film too undergoes a similar process before arriving at a final text - the digital copy. In the case of an adaptation of a written text, however, the third stage appears first. The reading text is readily available to the audience much before the working script is in production. In the case of a popular adaptation, moreover, the text is "always already" known. The "transparent" textual shifts of the rehearsal seem hardly possible when a significant percentage of the audience possesses some knowledge of the "reading text" in advance. In essence, the textual space is surrounded by factions within the audience who assert the primacy of their experience of the reading text. The performance text of a film lacks the perceived stability represented by the reading text.

Moreover, certain "disconnections" commonly present in the performative text -- such as deletion or addition of characters, dialogue, and subplots – may not be as common in print media, especially when those media are regarded as 'literature'" (Greetham in Decker 142). Within this context, adaptations, by nature, blur the textual boundaries between film and written text, and must therefore confront preconceived notions of authorship. This inherent hegemony of print culture over oral or visual culture is apparent in most moviegoers' comments - "the book was much better."

Recent study in textual scholarship looks to a more socially collaborative methodology that takes into account not only the author's manuscript and changes but the complex history of publication, reception, and ideological variation as well. According to Decker, all published works are socially negotiated, and this assertion holds particular meaning in filmic adaptations. Besides infusing the performance text with their particular interpretation of the novel, directors also supervise or directly manage the editing of footage, selecting definitive takes from among many alternatives. "For an adaptation, film editing involves selection based on not simply objective criteria (e.g., continuity) but on subjective interpretations (superior aesthetic or ideological value) of subjective interpretations (choices made by actors, cinematographers, directors, etc.) of subjective interpretations (the screenwriter's script) of a subjective act (writing a novel) filtered through a series of subjective lenses (publishing decisions, audience reception, etc.)." The textual authority is effectively dissipated. While edits in a text or in its adaptation into another text may not appear starkly, a cinematic edition's space limitations intensify even subtle variations. A screenplay of a novel may delete hundreds of pages of text, and the performance and editing processes may eliminate even more substantial scenes. The resultant film, which may add characters, dialogue, or plot points for continuity, will thus offer its differences in more marked ways. Additionally, films that may maintain a close relationship to their source texts may find themselves critiqued for lacking suspense or wonder. 'The successful cinematic edition of a novel, as opposed to a successful print edition, must therefore, "remediate" its inevitable alterations while at the same time "eras[ing] all traces of remediation"' (Decker 142). The film must embrace its decisions and place them within a seamless context that, while not the novel, is both of the novel

and able to stand alone as a 'work of art'. Most critics believe that an adaptation should capture the dominant spirit of the novel.

To mediate the process of turning published text into filmic *mise-en-scene* and dialogue, two cinematic formulations may come into play: "transference", where elements of the book require little to no change in the filmic version; and "adaptation", where novelistic elements must find different equivalences in the cinematic medium. In essence, adaptations are manifested in a textual ambivalence that must form a middle ground between "a place inhabited only by a sole, creative author who unwillingly releases control to social transmission" and "a place constructed wholly out of social negotiations over transmission and reception" (143).

A major point of contention in the discussion around adaptations arises when considering the definitions of *who* the adapter is and why they adapt a particular product. In many instances, the creators of the original product may initiate its adaptations into different media. For example, John Irving's *Cider House Rules* (1985) was adapted into an award winning screenplay by him in 1999, as well. Other instances may not present this case in such a clear-cut way. As theorist Richard Corliss points out, often times it is the 'underrated screenwriter who "creates or (creatively adapts) a film's plot, characters, dialogue, and theme"' (Hutcheon 81). It is a common occurrence, especially in large scale productions, that scripts are reworked by multiple screenwriters, even directors or self-proclaimed auteurs, at different stages in the production of the cinematic text. Like Gaskell, Hutcheon too considers a further complication when arguing whether actors may be called adapters or not. As discussed above, actors do present a process of adaptation since they refer to a screenplay - an adapted text - and convert it into the performed text.

An adapted text, created by whomever, is a reservoir of instructions, diegetic and narrative, that the adapter can use or ignore. An adapter may be considered an interpreter first and then a creator (Gardies in Hutcheon 81). While the players in the adaptation process may present a complex hierarchy already, the process is further complicated when considering the position of an audience in this knowledge creation and sharing process – are they mere consumers, active participants, or potential creators?

Before problematizing this question, a pivotal consideration for this study - something that a number of critics have previously centred on - is where and why does the need for the creation of adaptations arise? As a starting point, Donald Larsson's study on the history of motivations and techniques of adaptations presents the obvious consideration of the economic impulse behind such productions. A previously successful product is further cashed-in on, and at times, the following adaptations may seldom share the same degree of success. For example, the *Tomb Raider* franchise rests on the initial success of the video games, which were later developed into multi-million dollar Hollywood productions in the late 1990s and early 2000s, that failed to garner as much revenue, and have since seen resurgence in the 2018 remake version. Still, this machinery ceases to give up. The marketing mechanisms surrounding the production of an adaptation ensure that the consumer is inundated with products related to the adaptation, thus keeping the adaptation ever-present in public memory. The *Marvel Universe* is an excellent example of this money-making mechanism. The movie adaptations of the original comics (first published in 1939) are accompanied with associated merchandise targeting their ideal audience - children and their parents at first, and continuously growing subcultures of fans today. "Comic books become live-action movies, televised

cartoons, videogames, and even action toys: 'the goal is to have the child watching a Batman video while wearing a Batman cape, eating a fast-food meal with a Batman promotional wrapper, and playing with a Batman toy. The goal is literally to engage all of the child's senses" (Bolter and Grusin in Hutcheon 68). As the large global fan-base witnesses the culmination of one part of the franchise with the Summer 2019 release of the final *Avengers* movie, there are already teasers of a follow up to the franchise with superhero movies with individual character arcs, crossover events, and prequels.

This begs further investigation into the motivations of the audience - why do they crave adaptations? Hutcheon suggests that the appeal of adaptations for audiences lies in their simultaneous mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty. There is comfort in familiarity and unexpected pleasure in difference. What adaptations from recent years have displayed is that reinvention is the key to success. Consider, for instance, the many 'reboots' of Spiderman: the central theme (Peter Parker's personality; the love angle; the leading love interest that changes from Mary Jane to Gwen Stacy; the changing origin stories of the villains) in the animated TV show from the 1980s is significantly different from the Hollywood trilogy of 2001-2006, the *Amazing Spiderman* series of movies from 2012 and 2014, and the latest installments in the franchise that seek to 'revisit' and 'reinvent' previous storylines in the comics – a curious case of the character dying in the most recent *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), while resurfacing in a prequel version later in 2019, and ultimately resurrecting for good in *Avengers Endgame* (2019). This of course, entails that the audience be aware of the fact that what they are reading or watching is a repetition or adaptation of a previous product. More often, if the audience is unfamiliar with the larger fictional universe, they may perceive the product as

a stand-alone autonomous narrative. In the case of conscious audience, more often known as the fans, there may arise a concern of their role in the final adapted product. It may not seem so, but most producers and directors have stated that the success of their adaptation of a beloved written work is largely dependent on if the fans perceive it to be faithful to the original - undeniably, an echo of the stoic critics of adaptations.

Fan culture may direct our attention to a more heterogenous process of adaptation, where fans respond to and elaborate on previous products. The process depends on their mode of production (independently funded and produced, home videos, produced in collaboration with the official producers), and the media platforms that they choose for their adaptations (online written forums and video platforms). This aspect of the adaptation process is considered especially subversive, by nature of the producer and the mode of production. For example, the pro-fiction[4] *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009, and adapted to film in 2016) brings together a classic and ever-beloved work of literature with perhaps one of the most popular filmic tropes of our time - zombies, that have historically symbolized the marginalised section of postmodern society and a symptom of consumerism.

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[4] A work of fanfiction that is later published and distributed as a mainstream work of fiction.

## 1.5    Neobaroque Seriality in Popular Television

Within the medium of television, which is the starting point of this study, the series is

seen to have transformed from a closed structural form to an open neobaroque form that

displays 'a loss of entirety, totality, and system in favour of instability,

polydimensionality, and change' (Ndalianis, "Television and the Neobaroque" 85).

Calabrese further develops the association of the neobaroque with open structures that

favour movement of the serial - the 'infinite work in progress' (Ndalianis, "Television

and the Neobaroque" 85). To study the evolution of the series within the context of TV,

Calabrese examines five neobaroque narrative prototypes, which Ndalianis further

elaborates on in her works. Each of these prototypes have evolved from the 1950s to the

1980s, and the underlying polycentrism becomes increasingly more evident by way of

multiple storylines woven into and moving beyond multiple episodes, until the series

gives way to the serial.

The first prototype constitutes distinct self-contained narrative episodes with

common characters but no overall series narrative; characteristic of TV in the 1950s and

1960s; eg. *Star Trek* (1966-69). Follows the classical narrative structure: a complete story

is enclosed by each episode; no serial effect is produced because no story has branched

beyond or revealed an awareness of plot points in previous episodes.



**Figure 1. The first prototype (Ndalianis)**

Seriality, here, is implied by the repetition of characters and narrative patterns or formulas beyond single episodes. This prototype can be understood as a series of distinct narratives (the circles) that multiply themselves as the series progresses. Each episode's connection to the series is represented by its partial containment in an open-ended rectangle that is ever-continuing as well. Examples from present day TV include action dramas like the *Law and Order* (1990 - ) series and the *CSI* (2000 - ) series.

In the second prototype, complete stories are contained within a single episode, while the entire series is constructed according to a single narrative progression leading to a final resolution. Here, the classical and the baroque begin to intersect: a serial narrative structure coexists with the open form of the neobaroque which is apparent in the self-contained narratives that are resolved at the end of each episode, and in the overall narrative goal of the series which implies eventual closure; the arrows denote that each episode is both enclosed and continuing.
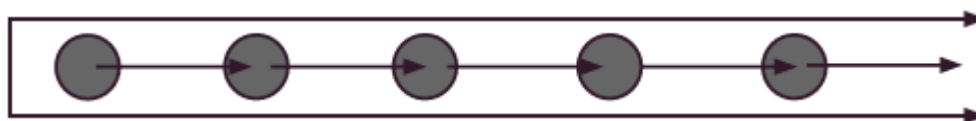


**Figure 2. The second prototype (Ndalianis)**

Some examples of this format include, *Gilligan's Island* (1964), *The Bachelor* (2001), *Monk* (2002). While in the earlier TV shows there is strict adherence to this prototype, its later counterparts present a dynamic mix of various prototypes.

The third prototype first emerged in the 1960s, when the series and serial structure opened up and moved away from self-contained episodes. Here, episodes are self-

contained in terms of time limitations. They exist within an expanding series time which is open with no narrative goal and presents an infinite timeframe. There is character progression throughout the series which is made possible due to an open narrated timeframe. There is also greater flow and dependence on preceding episodes, thus presenting features of the serial.



**Figure 3. The third prototype (Ndalianis)**

Here, the movement is from a dominant closed order, as seen in prototypes 1 and 2, which contains elements of the open neobaroque order, to a more dominant neobaroque order which contains elements of the classical. Examples of this prototype may include *Bonanza* (1959-73), the *Stargate* TV franchise (1997 onwards), *The Simpsons* (1989 - present).

The fourth prototype presents a series as a variation on a theme which produces a palimpsest effect. It relies on the personality of the main character, usually. There is no overall series story that closes the show's form and the show could essentially continue indefinitely. Although episodes follow the same narrative as established in previous episodes, there are slight variations in how the resolution is reached. In effect, the audience must be aware of plot points of previous episodes to identify the variations (eg. how a crime was solved in a previous episode as opposed to the current one.) Here the neobaroque patterns lie in the virtuosity and variation on the central theme: in addition to

repeating the theme, the virtuosity lies in outperforming the characterisations, narratives or performances of the preceding episodes.



**Figure 4. The fourth prototype. (Ndalianis)**

Character-driven investigative comedy-drama, *Columbo* (1971-93) first presented this prototype. Later shows like *Monk* also display characteristics of this prototype (eg., the protagonist gets closer to overcoming his OCD.)

The fifth prototype is considered the most dominant serial form in TV today, this prototype has also become a significant form in contemporary entertainment media in general. It presents dynamic narrative structures with multiple centres. The series is seen as a serial where the audience is involved in the changing storylines of multiple characters throughout the show. Essentially, the series retains historicity and progresses through the focus on characters.
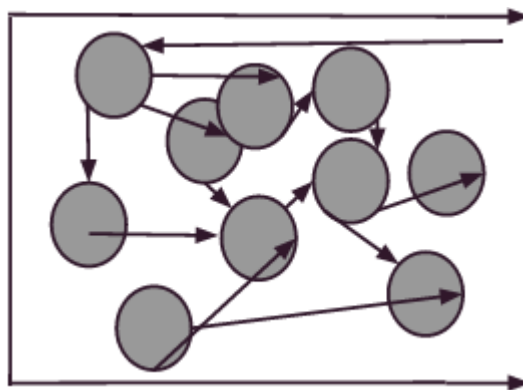


**Figure 5. The fifth prototype (Ndalianis)**

In this prototype, no stable, singular, linear framework dominates. Multiple narrative formations stress polycentrism within the series. While one story may be introduced and resolved within a single episode, other narratives may appear and extend the stories of multiple characters across the entire series. Examples of this prototype include *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *24* (2001-10) and *Alias* (2001-6). Examples of TV shows since the 1980s show that the episode fragment and the series as a whole co-exist and interact in ways that suggest complex neobaroque relationships. The boundaries of episodes and series are more readily ruptured. The audience is required to solve the puzzle or traverse the labyrinth. In order to understand the whole narrative it is necessary to piece together and understand the relevance of the multiple and divergent fragments.

Calabrese's explanation of the evolution of prototypes is seen to be sequential - one  prototype evolving into the next. Recent media products have displayed the re-emergence of previous prototypes that are dynamically interlinked with newer prototypes. The borders keep stretching as the series continue to redefine their parameters, resulting in a world of 'converging series' (Ndalianis; Jenkins) The converging series manifest in cross-media narratives as well, for example, TV shows transitioning to video games, comic books, fanfiction, theme parks, etc. These narratives can be understood to constitute various adaptations of the original cultural product. For example, the Michael Crichton novel*, Jurassic Park* (1990) has resulted in a series of movie adaptations, comics, video games and theme park rides. We see that the narrative has persisted beyond the original product, and has continually integrated emerging technologies and aesthetics to further itself.

It follows that adaptations constitute a multiplicity of forms, which is why Chapter 3 of this study will try to include formats such as the sequel, the prequel, the spin-off, and adaptation to a different format (print, film, video game, live and online spaces, etc.). What necessitates further investigation into adapted formats is the nature of this cultural production - who is the producer, how is the relationship between the producer and consumer evolving, and how is this a marker of significant cultural production? Furthermore, the observation of an entirely new hybrid narrative type in Chapter 4 results in the narrative prototype theory to fall short of articulating its creation and spread. Ndalianis's reinterpretation of the five prototypes may account for the narrative to extend in multidirectional ways, from TV, film, literary and artistic formats to live spaces like theme parks – all constituted within the confines of the fictional storyworld. The hybrid narrative is observed to become entirely devoid of its original context of the storyworld to which it previously belonged, and is now appropriated to serve as vernacular in a niche community where it is defined by the rules and norms of communication of that online space – the hybrid narrative refers to image macro memes that often originate as stills from the Star Trek universe and are appropriated to convey meanings that are specific to a community, or indeed a train of conversation within multiple communities. Here, a re-articulation of the fifth, and most commonly manifested prototype in contemporary media, or the creation of a new, sixth prototype is necessary to allow for the reinterpretation of the narrative formation, its boundaries, or the confines of the framework itself.

## 1.6    New Media, Convergence, and Cultural production

Increased access to and usage of the Internet has influenced the creation and reception of narratives in new media. The advent of Web 2.0 technologies in the late '90s has enabled users with relatively low technical skills to upload and manipulate text easily. The ability to harness the textual resources and networking capacities of the Web has been exploited by a proliferation of storytelling communities. Such communities within the popular sphere have emerged on social networking platforms to create a hybrid storytelling environment -  for example, image storytelling in Flikr and Instagram, user generated art in DevianArt and Pinterest, written and visual texts in Youtube, Tumblr and FanFiction.net. A look at traditional narratological scholarship may serve to contextualize these emerging forms of open and hybrid narratives, and set the theoretical parameters of my final case study where the narrative is extended from its storyworld into the vastly non-fictional medium of Reddit.

Classical Narratology, propounded by theorists like Barthes, Genette and Greimes, is a  structuralist approach that held the narrative as a transtextual project which is untethered by the particularities of media or culture. This conceptualization led to similar scholarship on texts far beyond the literary canon, including those that would appear in digital media. However, the focus on the underlying semiotic system of narrative resulted in more abstract models rather than an investigation into localized texts and contexts in which the processes of storytelling take place. By the late 1980s, the limitations of structuralist narratology had become clear, especially its problematic claims for universality. Nonetheless, the importance of the theoretical models emerging

from classical narratology proved to be valid when put to work in the actual study of narrative practices. They facilitate the study of narratives in digital media, the study of narrative temporality, and the rethinking of the nature of narrative grammar.

With structuralism, complementary narrative scholarship began to emerge in neighbouring fields of research: sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics. The focus shifted to conversational stories rather than literary texts, and work on narratives of personal experience redefined stories as a form of social interaction, grounded in particular contexts and performing significant interpersonal and identity work for groups of speakers (Watson 243).

Sustained study of face-to-face narratives, however, has remained in a parallel but separate domain from the literary theoretical study of storytelling. Online discourse is hybrid in nature, blending the written word with near-instantaneous communication, giving rise to 'secondary orality' (Ong quoted in Page and Thomas 4). Narratives that emerge in Web 2.0 environments where personal expression is interwoven with dialogue (for example, through the use of conversational metacommentary) require paradigms that account for both their interpersonal and expressive qualities; they link literary and linguistic scholarship.

Narrative fragments within computer mediated communication, such as e-mail exchanges and discussion forums – like Reddit – illustrate how the fragmented, process-oriented, and communal nature of these forms extend the definition of narrative.  One could argue that uses of virtual spaces are no more neutral than the appropriation of social or geographical spaces; the content created is dependent on and influenced by the

medium that supports it, to a large extent. The diversity of contemporary narratology is characterized by expansion beyond classical narratology's literary perspectives, specifically in the case of digital narratology. Integrating narrative and new media approaches has been considered "interdisciplinary, drawing on concepts from fields such as artificial intelligence and computer science and examining texts and practices that broaden the medial, generic, and modal range of data that might be considered storylike" (Page and Thomas 5). This augmentation of classical, structuralist narratology by critical perspectives from other fields has drawn attention to the political ramifications of narration and narrative theory. Digital narratology is closely linked to new media theory, which concerns itself less with the stylistic or textual characteristics of new narrative forms than with the environments and socio-cultural formations that produce and consume them. It locates discussions of specific practices and communities within broader debates surrounding globalization and cultural imperialism.

New media practices have received positive attention for the democratising potential of interactive or participatory media, as well as skepticism and suspicion of the economies of use that may marginalize and even exclude many social groupings. Increasingly, new media subcultures need to be studied in a light of hybridization rather than binary opposites - eg., mainstream vs. marginal. There is a shift to view text as a dynamic process rather than a static object. Meanwhile, key concepts such as those of convergence and remediation demonstrate the need to move beyond fixed categories and boundaries to respond to the ever-shifting and evolving practices and affordances facilitated by new technologies (Jenkins, "Convergence Culture" 17). Where new digital narratives explicitly intersect with questions of literariness (e.g., hypertext fiction,

fanfiction), it becomes necessary to evaluate and explore the cultural place of such practices and the extent of their affectiveness.

Media convergence is seen to occur when an emerging technology temporarily destabilizes the relations between existing media. The first novel can be said to have arisen as an amalgamation of previous forms in Gutenberg's era when mass publication first emerged. It can be seen as a means to bridge old and new technologies, formats and audiences. According to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, all media engage in complex and ongoing processes of remediation in which styles and content of rival media are mimicked, extended and critiqued. Earlier media have also refashioned one another: photography remediated painting, film remediated stage production and photography, and television remediated film, vaudeville, and radio.

Critics pointed to a central distinction between conventions of reading print narrative and reading stories told using the affordances of hypertext structures. Print narratives are typically read from a series of consecutive pages whose sequence is determined by the author. Digital fiction is navigated via a series of hyperlinked words or icons, the sequence of which is selected in part by the reader. There are always exceptions to the rule: a reader could always indulge in a spoiler and read the last pages of the story first. Conversely, digital fiction writers might be careful so that the segments of the story follow a strict chronological order. There are multiple instances of print narrative being complex in temporality, while digital narrative may not.

Deferred endings or the possibility of multiple endings may be typical of narrative genres in digital media and can be commonly seen in soap operas (as detailed above) and

postmodern fiction. Deferred endings are seen to serve multiple functions: for example, DVD add-ons facilitate an immediate affective response to the text. In the case of fanfiction, the capacity to endlessly update reworked stories is a source of readerly pleasure. For personal blogs, the open-endedness comes in the episodic blog posts and their comments. As digital narratology becomes more contextually aware, a single textual feature (here, open-endedness) might not necessarily signal a definitive relationship between form and function.

Narratives are not just sequences of events, those events are told by and about particular individuals. There is higher attention paid to the relationship between narrative and self-representation might be reworked in the context of online environments. Study of online representation is further complicated by debates about the relation between narrative, self-representation, and fictionality. On the one hand, the Internet presents an environment that enables apparently free identity play (eg., through adopting false and/or gender neutral pseudonyms, avatars, and other forms of role play). On the other hand, conventions of authenticity still prevail, with higher risks of hoaxes, and where actions in the virtual world have real consequences in the offline domain. These tendencies demand consideration of the various ways in which narrators and readers treat stories told in digital media as bridges between their online and offline experiences. This relationship between identity in online and offline contexts is a reminder that readers and writers are not abstract figures but actual individuals. Producing or processing narratives in digital media is an embodied experience wherein the producer or consumer may call on their immediate contexts (sociocultural or gender identity, for example) to find relevancy in a product, and thus engage with it. While the Reddit case study does perceive the patterns

in user activity that are particular to the kind of content created in the extension of a fictional narrative, identity politics and demography are not the focus here.

The communicative interplay between a storyteller, an audience, and the story is of heightened significance in relation to digital texts. Interactivity is repeatedly cited as the feature of digital media that most clearly distinguishes it from older, non-digital genres. The networking capabilities of digital technology mean that textual interactivity can be coupled with the interaction between users. In both fanfiction and blog writing, interaction takes place in a mediated form through the collaborative construction of a metacommentary. The interaction here is clearly a dialogue between users rather than the navigation or authorship of a particular text. Similar patterns of communication are observed in the Reddit comments, where the fictional entity becomes a conduit of sorts when a user responds to previous comments in new inventive ways.

## 1.7     Hybrid Narratives - Fan-created Content

A marker of a product's popularity and reach today entails a study of its online presence, particularly its interactions with the user base. To see the original narrative evolve and extend into the digital space, by the hands of the users instead of media conglomerates, research into fan-created products and fan communities serves as another suitable target area for this project.

One such popular manifestation is fanfiction, or fanfic, which refers to stories produced by fans based on plot lines and characters from a single source text or a

"canon" of works. These fan-created narratives usually, intentionally, deviate from the pre-existing storyworld. For fans, writing stories derived from source texts has long been the most popular way of concretizing and disseminating their passion for a particular fictional universe. Fanfiction's origins have been traced back to science fiction magazines in the US in the 1920s and 1930s. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), the prequel to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847), is a great example of profic or traditionally published fanfiction.

A fairly underground and marginalized activity, fanfic has become far more prominent with the advent of digital technologies and the World Wide Web. Fans can now easily access communities with shared interest, publish their content and get instant feedback, all the while taking the original stories further, challenging boundaries of author and reader. For this reason, extensive academic enquiry has been prompted, especially in the fields of narratology, queer studies, feminism, cultural studies, among others.

The study of fanfic has largely been constricted to media and cultural studies, gradually moving into psychoanalysis and anthropology. Here, the idea that the fanfic writer is not abstract holds most meaning, and there is wide consensus that their practices must be studied in a socially contextualized manner. Some critics have deemed fanculture as democritizing and fanfic as "sophisticated and resonant with postmodern textuality" (Hellekson and Busse, 129).

The first wave of theory about fanfic and fanculture in general was fairly Marxist, in that it considered fans to be powerless, opposing the large corporations that owned the

rights to characters and stories that the fans responded to (Fiske; Jenkins). Jenkins writes about fans "not as dupes of dominant ideologies but as renegades and subversives able to undermine commodification and corporatization through their collective power" (Thomas 17).

There is a general tendency to contest the stereotype of the fan as a socially isolated "weirdo". For Jenkins, this kind of participatory culture offers new models of cultural production. However, there lie sweeping limitations as well: its tendency to homogenize the audience, as opposed to it being an amalgam of conflicting and competing positions and voices.

Beginning with the second wave, theories take on a more complex look at power relations. It responds to the emergence of new media forms that facilitated new possibilities and interactions between fans, where fan activity moved into the mainstream. Instead of operating outside of social hierarchies, fans were now seen as "participating in the construction and maintenance of the uneven distribution of power" (Thomas 17).

The third wave is influenced by Poststructuralism, where there is a heightened self-reflexivity regarding the theorist's relation to their subject of study, particularly in how they engage with fan culture. Instead of fans being seen as isolated or marginal, their activities are treated as a fundamental aspect of everyday life. There is critique of existing terminology for fan studies and also the practices of fans. Many contest divisions between "high" and "low" culture by exploring "fans" of Bach or Chekhov alongside Trekkies or Potterheads, for example. Renewed scholarship into fan-tagonisms identifies

the dynamics among various fandoms and how these relations manifest outside of the fan-space (for example, *Star Wars* vs. *Star Trek*, and *Harry Potter* vs. *Twilight*.)

Studies on fanfic reiterate the fact that it challenges the notion of texts as static, isolated objects. Instead it is seen as storyworlds that are generated and experienced within specific social and cultural environments that are subject to constant change. In online environments where accessibility and participation are greatly facilitated, fanfic becomes more than the writing and reading of stories. Fans are seen to engage in all kinds of social networking and community building, not only within the terms set by specific sites but also beyond these, as when fans set up their own subcultures and special interest groups. For example, merchandise associated to a fandom, created by a fan, may be frequently purchased by the larger community, as in the case of *Doctor Who* "Keep Calm and Don't Blink" T-shirts and mugs.

In traditional literary criticism the "reader" is discussed as a monolithic entity, and assumptions about their responses are driven by the critic's own interpretation of the text. Fanfic, on the other hand, has the potential to reveal why certain kinds of readers are drawn to certain kinds of texts. Its study reveals the motivations and behaviours of the writers/creators. Some common threads of scholarship investigate: why many women and young girls write and read slash fiction; fanfic based on constructing same-sex relationships between characters; why fans enjoy returning to familiar storyworlds and characters time after time (Thomas 17).

Commenting on the complex and even contradictory motivations of fans, some argue that they are torn between fascination and frustration. Others claim that fans want

both "more of" and "more from" the fictional worlds that they endlessly revisit. Fans are no longer passive consumers. Their large numbers and activities have the potential in motivating franchises to cater to their demands. For example, continuing the narrative of cult TV shows like *Firefly* (2000) and *Arrested Development* (2003) and bringing them back in film or online episodic viewership. This dynamic of producers attempting to gauge the demands of their potential audiences if further discussed in Chapter 4.

Fanfic has been hailed as a transgressive force because of the immense transformative power afforded to readers. It offers a voice for marginalized groups and reveals the subversive potential of seemingly safe or familiar storyworlds. The sense of transgression may be felt even more powerfully where the source text is a "canon" (a series or a franchise) as extensive as *Harry Potter*.

The conventions employed by fanfic communities deviate from the narrative norm: PWP = Plot, What Plot?; Ships = pairings or relationships between unlikely partners (Dumbledore-Snape); Alternate Universe, for example, Hermione as the protagonist, or James Potter's life at Hogwarts; Crossovers, like *Harry Potter + Pride and Prejudice*. Fans display little regard for boundaries when it comes to medium. A "canon" may encompass film adaptations of a text, interviews with the author or cast, and even merchandising and marketing.

For fanfic authors, characters take on the personalities and physical characteristics of the actors that have portrayed them. Scenes that have appeared in filmic adaptations of books, despite not being part of the original story, are curiously solidified in fanfic. Reddit is a popular virtual space for the media producers/creators to interact with their

public outside of the fictional space. Fanfic also breaks down the boundaries between authors and readers. people who post stories also comment on and review stories posted by others. it is quite common for fans to progress from reading and reviewing fanfic to writing it themselves.

> While fans debate and even police elements of the canon, for example by complaining that a story is OOC (Out of Character), the term fanon is used to refer to the process whereby over time certain plot or character elements become established within the fan community—even when those elements never appeared in the source text, or radically depart from it (Thomas 18).

For Linda Hutcheon, readers "are forced to acknowledge the artifice of what they are reading, while at the same time becoming active co-creators of the meaning of the work." Fans readily enjoy the artificiality and surreality of their stories while also being engaged and immersed in the fictional worlds that they help to flesh out and concretize. On the other hand, there still exists a hierarchical structure to their communities. Moderators hold themselves as the guardians of the fandom. Content that deviates too much from the current is deemed unacceptable, and users denied access.

Fanfic makes visible the process of creation and reception as authors and their readers engage in ongoing interactions about their stories. It is usually considered a work-in-progress. FanFiction.net features stories in chapters or series. Readers can track when the stories are updated. Many stories are left unfinished as either reader interest shifts to other stories, or it demands extended 'middles'. While fans might urge each other to bring a story to its climax, ultimately continuity is preferred over closure.

The relationship between the source text and the fanfic is dialogic, as opposed to unidirectional. Authors such as J. K. Rowling and Neil Gaiman have maintained a close relationship with their fans through contributing interviews and setting up competitions. Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) clearly owes a debt to the cross-over genre of fanfiction.

Storytelling environments are built within and around the textual space. Text, on paper and online, manifests in the physical world by way of fan gatherings, merchandise, fan-created content. The artifice of the textual worlds evolves and takes over real space. Neobaroque seriality here manifests as an extension of the storyworld, where fans/creators deviate from different parts of the narrative to create their own as a way to engage with and appropriate the text. These examples and their popularity serve as testament to the evolving nature of cultural production and how digital advances have necessitated and at the same time, facilitated newer forms, strategies and synergies in media today.

While user activity and fan-created content on Reddit may reflect an extension of the fictional narrative of the *Star Trek* storyworld, it is essentially bound by the conventions of an online message board. As such, a majority of the content created is less fiction, more an engagement with events in the real world or online. The "front page of the internet" may prove an unlikely, albeit, interesting source for investigating how a fictional storyworld is embodied in a largely non-fictional mode of meaning-creation.

The subsequent chapters deal with case studies in popular culture where the networked nature of adaptations or indeed the evolution of a cultural entity informs the

crux of the analysis. The dynamic relationship between the consumer and the producer

builds on the neobaroque characteristics of contemporary cultural production. While the

context of previous scholarship on narratology and adaptation theory (Hutcheon; Fiske;

Thomas) situates the metrics by which I focus my analysis on the narrative evolution of a

cultural product – in this case, popular TV shows adapted in different media and cultures

– this study largely aims to build on the foundations of Ndalianis, Calabrese, and Kaup's

scholarship on the contemporary manifestations of the neobaroque as a robust networked

open form of cultural production and consumption, hopefully, reiterating the potential for

neobaroque theories as a framework in mainstream popular culture scholarship and/or

media studies. The three case studies presented in the following chapters will illustrate

the cross-cultural and cross-media reach of the neobaroque, and ultimately present the

case for a reimagined formulation of the neobaroque narrative prototype, as a new hybrid

narrative entity is observed in new media.

Chapter 2

## 2 The Neobaroque Within A Cross-cultural Adaptation: The Case Of *Betty*

A brief introduction is suggested here. A fresh, callow face adorned with little
make-up. Dishevelled hair, unruly eyebrows, red-rimmed spectacles framing a
wide-eyed look. She appears less than comfortable. As she nervously bites her lip,
a flash of metal can be seen inside her mouth. The kitsch title of 'Ugly Betty' in
bold red and yellow flashes on the screen. Returning to Betty, something has
caught her eye. She beams. And we have our first glimpse of her big, metallic
smile, heavy 'train-track' stainless-steel braces on her top and lower teeth. All the
while musical motifs [...] add texture to the visual. A whimsical, quirky tempo: a
lyrical violin evoking a certain old-world charm slightly out of step with the
staccato percussion rhythms with its distinctive Latin beat. Immediately, in less
than 12 seconds in fact, the US Betty brand is established. (McCabe 1)

So begins the first chapter of a Mccabe's book titled, *TV's Betty Goes Global*, a
study into the worldwide phenomenon that is the *Betty, la Fea* universe. Since 1999, the
TV show has been produced and broadcast in around 180 countries (El Pais[5]) , has over
30 official international adaptations, not counting the many unofficial copies, sequels,
prequels, spin offs, and animated series, and is even a Guinness world record holder for
the TV show with most international adaptations. Its popularity, that has also prompted a

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[5] https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/02/05/colombia/1549403872_796887.html

wide array of academic investigation, has made it an unavoidable artefact of popular culture. Although simple in its plot and execution, it denotes a certain neobaroque complexity that would be characteristic of such an internationally successful product. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate these instances of the neobaroque as presented through four versions of the show - the widely successful original Colombian show *Yo Soy Betty, la fea* (RCN, 1999-2001), the first official *adaptation Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin* (SET, 2003-2006), the globally recognized US version, *Ugly Betty* (2006-2010), and the latest version for the Spanish-speaking US audience, *Betty en NY* (2019-). While detailing some of the current scholarship around the Betty franchise, this chapter will try to reflect the ways in which a TV show builds a storyworld and invites the audience to navigate this storyworld through their lived cultural experience. This evolution may be visible through how the original audience received the Colombian show – both in Colombia and in countries where the show was exported as is; how the idea for the show was exported to interested producers worldwide and how this idea was modified as per the target audiences – for example, in India and the US; and finally, how the same geographical audience experienced more than one iteration of the show at different times – for example, the US audience first saw the exported Colombian show *Betty, la Fea*, the English adaptation, *Ugly Betty*, and finally a renewed millennial-centric bilingual adaptation set in the US, *Betty en NY*.

## 2.1     The Worlds of Betty

What is interesting about the expanse of the *Betty* storyworld in the global television market is how the story has been adapted in different formats that are specific to the countries being studied here. Its transition from a telenovela to becoming a viable product for the North American soap opera dramedy audience, and the Indian daily soap audience, requires an insight into what makes the telenovela format an ideal cultural product for export. In the late 1930's, the radionovela in Cuba brought about the popularity of telenovelas throughout Latin America. This cross-cultural relationship was further beneficial in the coming decades as Cuba provided actors, stories, and producers to Latin America, and until the 1960's the US maintained control over the growth of the telenovela by way of advertising and conglomerate studios. The late 1960's proved a turning point in the format and the Latin American TV industries, as local producers took charge of screenwriting with a focus on sociocultural messages for the local audiences. As the telenovela gained larger traction among audiences, it is important to note that while there is a common history to the format in the larger region, the format quickly evolved to incorporate different themes, producers, cultural influences, and narrative styles that were specific to each country (Adriaens and Biltereyst 3).

Telenovelas have always been inhabited by strong female characters, and the Colombian original series, *Betty, la fea* (RCN, 1999-2001)[6], sparked a global phenomenon at a time in television history when the telenovela format was gaining traction outside of Latin

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[6] Beyond this mention, the 1999 Colombian TV show, *Yo soy Betty, la Fea*, is referred to as *Betty, la fea.*

America. This was a time when Spanish language content had achieved an audience in the wider North American, European markets and Asian markets (Hilmes 29). The adaptation of the telenovela to other TV formats is an indicator of its high demand, and the creation of niche ethnic markets, especially among the US audiences.

The actress portraying Betty in the Colombian original, Ana María Orozco, has talked of the telenovela as a narrative "turning-point" in the country. "In Colombia, a country battered by infighting, this telenovela is an escape from reality in a nation overwhelmed. Betty does not speak of guerrillas and drug trafficking. It is a parallel world to everything else that happens in the country. I think that this is a way to make people forget reality, while we laugh a little over half an hour or an hour a day" (El Universal 2005, in Murillo and Escala 101). Internationally, it quickly became a product which allowed audiences from various cultures to identify with Betty and her story. Her interactions with other characters always detailed the social reality Colombia at the time – as a common trope in the telenovela was to address social mobility to drive the plot – which other cultures invariably mirrored at the time.  Narrative conflicts arising from socio-economic differences, racial-ethnic differences, or education and gender differences, were readily believable to international audiences and contributed to the show's global success at various stages of its evolution.

Considering that US TV shows account for global cultural capital, a key reason why international markets are hesitant to acquire and adapt US shows for local audiences, is their open-ended format in comparison to the structured telenovela. For Abhijit Roy, while the US serials provide "a large pool of episodes for buyer selection, with long-running, domestically successful products, the text literally becomes unwieldy to export.

The shorter length of the telenovela becomes increasingly compatible with multinational capitalism in its portability, its compliance with the logic of obsolescence, its non-dependence on long-spanning audience loyalty in the age of sharp competition within the media industry" (Roy 36). Within this architecture, it is curious to see how the telenovela finds a home in the US serial system of multiple seasons, and the Indian soaps where the TV show is even more open-ended.



**Figure 6 International adaptations of Betty, la Fea, in 23 languages and 25 countries, between the years 2001 to 2019. See appendices 1, 2 and 3 for detailed maps for the American, European and South Asian regions, respectively.**

Television writer Fernando Gaitán wrote the script to *Betty, la fea*, which has seen unprecedented success on a global scale. As of 2019, the series is known to have been

reproduced to 29 adapted series in 25 countries. A simple re-fashioning of the ugly duckling trope, what began as a universally appealing idea was successfully packaged in variations of the soap opera and telenovela format in languages and cultures far removed from the original production in Colombia.

The show was produced by Radio Cadena Nacional (RCN) and gained 72 percent market share at its height, attracting over 3.3 million viewers. It was equally popular in the rest of Latin America in early 2001, reaching ratings of 58.9 percent audience share in Ecuador, 56.5 percent in Panamá and 41.5 percent in Venezuela. Its reruns continue to this day, as much in Colombia as in the rest of the Americas, and it has even found a home on online streaming services like Netflix. It was initially broadcast - in the original language or dubbed - in 22 countries, including Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and Spain.

The show narrates the story of Beatriz Aurora 'Betty' Pinzón Solano, an unconventional-looking but brilliant accountant at the fictional fashion empire, EcoModa. Throughout the series, she experiences trials and sacrifices, and eventually gets ahead in her career, falls in love with her boss, Armando, and finally undergoes a transformation that culminates in her achieving success in work and love. The appeal of the show lies in the fact that the protagonist is not the usual attractive blonde leading lady of the telenovelas, but intelligent, unattractive, and of strong character who is absorbed into the very same superficial environment and who ultimately survives against all odds. Each episode is imbued with conflicts of class and beauty which drive the plot forward. It is her lack of beauty that marginalizes her in the office, and pushes her towards an unconventional circle of friends - the cuartel de las feas. Her dressing style and value

system suggest a middle class upbringing, one which she adheres to for most of the series.

According to Murillo and Escala, the way this story unfolds is nothing new for the Colombian audience, since a common plot device in various melodramas saw a man in love with a materialistic woman, who then seeks the company of a socially maladjusted woman, who he ultimately falls in love with. Murillo and Escala note that a significant difference here is that the focus is shifted from male suffering while bringing to the forefront the female experience. In this sense, Betty embodies the feminine ideal of sacrifice for love: she is not conventionally attractive, but loving and conservative. "This is how Betty is accepted as a reality 'model' by society, since it makes the transformation of ugliness to beauty plausible (not only aesthetic, but of her own set of values)." (Murillo and Escala 101). This universality of character and story also indicates the local acceptance of a globally present product. Television markets have the flexibility in incorporating local content into globally viable ideas.

As indicated earlier, the international market for *Betty, la fea*, was hugely welcoming of the concept. While Figure 1 elucidates the international reach of Betty by way of autonomous adaptations of the show, the original series was subtitled or dubbed and broadcast in countries all over the world. Within Colombia, the show proved so successful that it spawned a sequel, *Ecomoda* (2001-2002), that takes the events *of Betty, la fea* further: Betty successfully runs Ecomoda and the audience gets a glimpse into her romance with Armando, while new characters and conflicts are introduced.

The audience for *Betty, la fea* in the US is of particular interest for this study. Firstly, it was one of the largest markets for the original series. Telecast in the US on Telemundo in 2001 and later on TeleFutura in 2009, its appeal within the Hispanic audience was capitalized by and went hand in hand with the production of the US version, titled *Ugly Betty*. This move ensured that the concept of Betty was no longer directed at a minority market. The protagonist here, Betty Suarez is originally Mexican, lives in Queens, New York, and works for the Mode fashion magazine as the assistant to one of the senior partners and future heirs to the fashion empire, Daniel Meade. As with the Colombian version, here too Betty Suarez is an accomplice to Daniel's strategies and schemes, always helping him fight professional and personal rivals. Perhaps as an alternative to the cuartel de las feas, she has a Scottish stylist as a confidant at the workplace, and her older sister at home to confide in. A point of difference in this version, however, is the reluctance of the character to fall in love with her womanizer boss, as is the case with the Colombian and the Indian versions.

The concept of Betty was brought to US television through the efforts of actress, producer and co-star on the show, Salma Hayek, who had herself started her career in Mexican telenovelas like *Teresa* (1989-1991), and Ben Silverman, who bought the rights and scripts for the Colombian version in 2001. Advertising for *Ugly Betty* began with Salma advocating for the series: "Two big reasons to watch next week's Ugly Betty: America and Salma! Mas caliente! Tan grande!" (Donoghue 21) Their experience in the industry, and the understanding of programming trends in both the Hispanic and the US cultural contexts, informed and guided the acquisition of *Betty* to non-Spanish US networks. Hayek has said, "We've been trying to bring the Latino experience to television

for many years. I was a big fan of Betty, la fea because it was different - it was very

funny. So we thought this would be the perfect bridge where we could bring something

that all Latino community would feel is theirs into American culture" (McCabe 8). This is

the second impetus for focusing the study on the US market; the US television industry is

long considered the mainstream in entertainment media and the point of interest for this

study arises not from the perceived "legitimization" of an international product into the

US viewership, but the decentralizing of this cultural production mechanism, where

arguably the most robust cultural producers are looking outward to harness concepts and

markets in order to stay relevant. The latter half of the 1990s and the early 2000s saw a

variety of imported formats that the US purchased and produced, mostly, game and

reality shows, sitcoms and dramas. Telenovela adaptations have historically not enjoyed

much success in the US, outside of Ugly Betty (Donoghue 21).

> Access to 'generalist' television occurs through four channels that compete for the
>
> Hispanic audience in the United States: Univisión, Telemundo, Azteca América
>
> and TeleFutura. According to Prado and Delgado (2007), the oldest and which has
>
> greater audience among the Hispanic audience is Univisión, which reaches 99%
>
> percent of Hispanic population (in its capacity as the country's largest ethnic and
>
> racial minority). Telemundo reaches 93% percent of this population and also
>
> belongs to the NBC group, while Azteca América reaches 88% of the Hispanic
>
> population. Without a doubt, Anglophone networks had to assess how to get part
>
> of that 45.5 million Hispanics market. This explains why some networks have
>
> dedicated to making adaptations of Latin telenovelas with English versions, and

why the ABC network (which ranks fifth within the most viewed networks by

Hispanics) incorporated this version in English. (Murillo and Escala 102)

*Ugly Betty* presented an environment where Hispanic immigrants coexisted in a

White protestant space, and where there was an attempt to problematize the binary of

beauty and ugliness. US networks were seen to be paying attention and investing heavily

on content for Hispanics, and at the same time attempting to identify which genres from

this market were attractive to diverse audiences in the region. The audiences on their part

are seeking innovative content through which to view their world in a global perspective.

The most recent iteration of the *Betty* storyworld in the American television

landscape is the Spanish-English bilingual show, *Betty en NY* (2019-). The plot is similar

to the original Colombian version – the brilliant economics graduate, Betty, fails to nab

the jobs she wants because employers find her too unattractive, so she chooses to accept a

job beneath her qualifications based on a chance encounter with her potential boss and

eventual love interest, Armando. Airing in January 2019, the media has been more than

favourable of this evergreen story with a twist. "Her style is unique; She's in over her

head at a New York company where everyone is perfectly polished, and she's

unknowingly a feminist force to be reckoned with" (Giannotta "Ugly Betty Is Back").

The prominence of social media and technology is a current addition to the story, and the

script takes efforts to reflect the socio-political atmostphere of the times. In the socially

conscious era of "Me Too" this show attempts at decentralizing western ideals of beauty

– is has effectively done away with "ugly" in the title of the show. The plot too drives

this point home – there is no overt makeover for Betty in this iteration, but rather a

recognition and acceptance of her inner fortitude, and realizing her true potential and

identity in the face of detractors at her workplace and in society. This comes in stark contrast to other versions discussed here, viz. the ideals of feminine beauty and belonging: the original Colombian show reflects the normalization of aesthetic plastic surgery; *Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin* (There is Nobody Like Jassi henceforth abbreviated as *JJKN*) allows for an abrupt makeover while maintaining the conservative Indian ideal, since plastic surgery is somewhat taboo in the public sphere; *Ugly Betty* tries to do away with the "corrective" makeover almost entirely and opts for the lead character to lose her braces or change her hair and clothes. The lead actress of *Betty en NY*, Elyfer Torres, says, "This story is totally timeless. For women who are Latina, and a woman who doesn't go with the beauty standards, the fact that she achieved everything she wants, not just professionally but in love too, it's so inspiring" (Giannotta "Ugly Betty Is Back").

Produced and aired by Telemundo, the production house continues to create family-friendly programming for its large multigenerational and bilingual audience, and the show has proved remarkably successful already (Ayala "Betty en NY is a Riotous Reboot"; Giannotta "Ugly Betty Is Back"). "Crafting a new way to tell an entertaining story for the whole family like Betty's was an exciting challenge as the world has changed much since her debut," said Marcos Santana, president of Telemundo Global Studios in Miami, FL. "The best part about bringing this character back is that Betty remains a role model that never goes out of style" (Miami Herald – Madeleine Marr). Its premiere was the most-viewed show on a primetime Spanish-language network. According to Telemundo, the show also drove the network ahead of mainstream English-language networks like ABC among 18-34, and the CW among 18-49. It also

outperformed Univision's *Mi Marido Tiene Más Familia* in both key demographics (RapidTVNews).

It must also be noted that this transition of *Betty* from the original Colombian context to the US context seems organic and inevitable, firstly, given the geographic proximity and the shared culture and language. Secondly, since Colombia was soon becoming the top producer of innovative and comedic telenovelas, after Mexico's realistic and dramatic telenovelas that have been most popular. The first international adaptation of *Betty* to take place, however, was in India in 2003 and is our next focus of investigation since this adaptation rests in a target culture far-removed from the original. Additionally, the process of adapting or "copying" cultural products in India most commonly entailed lifting ideas and dialogues from US and British films, facilitated by the linguistic proximity.

*JJKN* ran continuously for three years from 2003 to 2006, with five episodes a week of 22 minutes each. It presented a young, intelligent, middle class Punjabi North-Indian girl who struggles to get a job due to her looks, and applies instead, to be the secretary of a womanizing boss at the Gulmohar fashion house. Her traditional, middle class value system is at odds with the rest of the westernized and 'modern' employees. This series closely follows the plot of the original *Betty, la fea*. What sets it apart is its radically different cultural context and the rapidity with which it was acquired and adapted for the Indian audiences, despite the distance and the language barriers with regards to the original version. An especially interesting aspect of this adaptation that may be lost through the prism of hindsight, is that this version came directly after the Colombian version, without any intervention from the usual North American English-

speaking market. The official Sony Entertainment Television network website had this to say about the show:

> 'Jassi Jaissi Koi Nahin' is the story of a sweet, simple and less-than ordinary looking girl with a heart of gold and a persevering nature. Born to ordinary middle class parents, Jassi's simplicity and clumsy ways make everyone fall in love with her. Like millions of middle class Indian girls Jassi too aspires to make a mark for herself with her never say die attitude yet gullible nature. The show brings out the eternal conflicts between the middle class and the high society; simplicity and glamour; artificial facades and true inner beauty. 'Jassi Jaissi Koi Nahin' has all the ingredients to make it connect well with its viewers—a contemporary setting, a metrosexual male and fashionable socialites contrasting with a plain, ordinary girl aspiring to be accepted in high society and determined to make it big one day. The show is sure to click with the Indian viewers, as most of them with similar values will strongly relate to Jassi, her aspirations, her attitude and her never-say-die spirit. (Roy 24)

The case of *Betty* advocates for the existence of autonomous adapted versions as opposed to presenting a subtitled or dubbed version to a different cultural audience. Cross-cultural borrowing of concepts has also emerged as a key cost-effective method to innovate within multiple television industries.

> In becoming local, adaptations must hold localized appeal. This reflects research that shows audiences, given the choice, tend to prefer local programming or that which appeals to cultural similarities or proximities. Universal themes combined

with discernable local elements that resonate with a national audience allow for

identification[...] (McCabe 10)

In *JJKN* as well, Jassi struggles with the prejudice directed at her because of her

appearance, a heightened reaction due to the fact that she works within the fashion

industry in an urban setting that is obsessed with outwardly westernization and glamour.

She falls in love with her boss, Armaan, only to realise later that his intentions were not

what they had originally seemed to her; there is conflict in the plot and finally she

undergoes a transformation after which they marry.

The show's appeal was multifold, but its most striking feature was that it was

different from the rest of the melodramatic soaps that had monopolised TV programming

since 1998. Before this moment in the history of television in India, TV shows were

mainly state programming of mythological and religious concepts, civic and moral duty,

news programming, and telecast of popular movies. With the 1990s came the

privatization of the television industry, and North American and South East Asian media

conglomerates began looking into the Indian market (Sahu 206). Reruns of popular US

shows took over the broadcast and the Indian television industry was competing for

airtime. Within this context of increasingly westernized cultural consumption, Balaji

Telefilms came up with a uniquely traditional concept for a TV show: *Kyuki Saas Bhi*

*Kabhi Bahu Thi* (Because the Mother-in-law was once the Daughter-in-law, 2000-2008)

set the tone for a post-feminist patriarchal formula that monopolizes Indian television to

this day, and is popularly known as the saas-bahu formula. Within the year of its premier,

other channels scrambled to co-opt the formula, after discovering its success and

overwhelming popularity among the largely female middle-class viewership in India.

Viewers identified with the traditional set up of life after marriage and what it meant to

be a "good Indian woman" – the notions of the "selfless/self-sacrificing woman",

"respecting elders above all else", "religion is paramount" are central to this formula and

realign the social didactism from that of the state-sponsored TV shows in the 1980s and

early 90s. This formula also incorporated classic soap-opera tropes in order to create

conflict in the narrative:  unrealistic deaths and return of characters, a previously

unknown identical twin, characters represented by different actors after undergoing facial

plastic surgery for nefarious or live-saving reasons, and so on.

It is important to note that *Jassi/Betty* was not the first Latin-American import in

Indian television. Within the context of state-run television, the first wave of

commercialization in TV in the 1980's came with an impetus on balancing melodrama

and progressive narratives in an attempt to negotiate a new emerging global market. A

striking example of this is *Hum Log*, which was modelled on the Mexican 'progressive

melodrama' format, and was a resounding success heralding a slew of similarly themed

shows on the state-run channel, Doordarshan. In contrast, *JJKN* emerged as a response to

the market forces of a rapidly evolving global economic landscape. The end of the 1980's

was a moment of transnationalization and largescale export of the telenovela outside of

Latin America. It is important to note that Latin-American imports at pivotal moments in

Indian television history have proved enormously successful, and essentially form the

thread of this study where the Global South is seen to be intricately connected – at least,

in the case of the *Betty* adaptations, the similar socio-economic concerns of Latin

America and India when confronting Eurocentric ideals of beauty, wealth, gender roles,

domestic and professional life, provide conflict in the plot, in addition to explaining to a large extent the shows' appeal for the audiences.

Given this historical setting of the Indian TV landscape, the emergence of *JJKN* was a breath of fresh air, especially for young audiences who did not particularly identify with the trials and tribulations of married women. It was reminiscent of older TV shows like *Shanti – A Woman's Story* (1994), the rags-to-riches drama that dealt with the life of a professional woman and aspiring journalist embroiled in the underbelly of the Indian Film Industry, who struggles through the pitfalls of her career and faces society head-on in her life-choices. *JJKN* juxtaposes the ideologies of feminism and femininity, as seen in Shanti, albeit in the highly consumerist setting of high fashion and advertising. It attempts to realign the post-feminist narrative in Indian television in the early 2000s, thereby achieving high viewership.

It was with this intent that the network SET acquired the rights of this popular Latin American show they had heard about, to bring something new and different to the table that had already been tried and proven to be successful (McMillin 146). In the later episodes, *JJKN* does conform to the saas-bahu format to a certain degree, but this is mitigated by her also taking the reins and running Gulmohar. Overall, *JJKN* is largely presented as an innovative idea that tackles social discrimination based on appearance and class, all the while presented in melodramatic and comedic tones.

According to Abhijit Roy, however, within the context of the two phases of Indian shows, the 'progressive melodrama' and the saas–bahu soaps, *JJKN* is still aligning to the traditional value system, albeit in a new language. For him, *JJKN* "claims

exclusivity, but of an emergent framework of representation that claims to be novel while trying to keep ideological ties with 'tradition' somewhat intact." In the context of the Indian version, it is Roy's assertion that the concept of the 'makeover' can be extended to a change in 'image' in the public domain, but not a change in ideology, especially in relation to the institutions of Indian patriarchy like family – upholding tradition is still paramount (Roy 37). Sudhansubala Sahu is also of the opinion that this so called 'paradigm shift' in the representation of women as 'progressive' female characters was nothing more than a smokescreen for similarly patriarchal roles upheld through clever reimagining. Throughout the 1980's female characters were meant as tools of social instruction and emancipation of women in the domestic and public space:

> The role of women in television programmes needs to be reappraised, male chauvinism eradicated, and women as equals, with an assured, dignified, honoured role in society must be promoted. Two aspects of television programmes for women were stressed.

> 1. To create among them awareness of their role and responsibility as social beings with a status equal to men.

> 2. The specific interest of a large majority of women and of their role in the existing social and family structure. (Sahu 210)

This progressive attitude quickly diluted as emerging market forces dictated an easy-to-replicate format that followed successful formula soaps. Sahu cites Jyoti Punwani in detailing the representation of women in Indian television in the 1990's:

1. An overwhelming majority of them are home-based, whether married or unmarried.

2. Working women are always shown to be so, through circumstances, not choice, that too, unhappy circumstances. Also rarely are they happy in their jobs.

3. Marriage is seen as natural state for woman, if single, the woman is working towards achieving that state; if widowed/divorced, she is rarely happy. She may be making a success of her life, but underlying that is her sadness at her single and lonely state.

4. In their relationship with men, the ideal women are supportive and dependent; those who are aggressive or independent minded, are not considered desirable role models.

5. Women who try to break out of their traditional place in society and family, do not meet with happy end. At best, they have to compromise to some extent, but by far the commonest fate reserved for them is failure (Sahu 211).

The state-run apparatus of social instruction via television with the aim of emancipation of women was largely unsuccessful. With *JJKN* in the satellite television era of the 2000s, a seemingly progressive woman took over the small screen. For the first time, a non-glamourous lead character with traditional Indian values operated in a largely masculine world. For Sahu, this progressive label was short lived as *JJKN* ultimately perpetuated the same patriarchal portrayal of women: Jassi is intelligent, but her overwhelming emotions overshadow her intelligence and land her in sticky situations.

(212) The success of *JJKN*, though short lived, marked a unique moment in Indian television history as it was poised between older, closed formats of state-run TV, and newer, more widely produced and telecast TV shows on satellite run channels. The paradigm shift that *JJKN* made possible was a more unique storytelling of women-centric shows, before a new wave of TV shows centred on the daughter-figure arose, and continue to this day.

In addition to the class difference as a crux to the social mobility aspect of the story (as in the other adaptations as well), *JJKN* juxtaposes tradition with the emerging ideologies and social implications of a globalized world. Here, tradition is seen to drive the motivations of the characters and the story within the globalized, modern context. In essence, the framework of patriarchal tradition is upheld, while outwardly modern ethics are challenged. This further problematizes how equating the west with modern is negotiated within the postcolonial global south. While attempting to display the indianness viz. Hindu tradition as if to combat the scourge of western ideals, we see the germ of promoting conservative 'national' values as a reaction to the radical destabilizing movements of the previous generation. Not only are Hindu rituals picturized for driving the plot, but the very conceptualization of the female characters in a show like *JJKN* further upholds this superficial progressive outlook. The plot is centred on Jassi identity as a professional woman, negotiating a space outside of the domestic sphere in a largely male-dominated industry, but the expression of her identity is still limited by male patriarchal standards. She is successful in finding a job, only after her to-be-boss notices how she comes to his rescue outside of the parameters of the job. She is successful in finding love only after she is transformed   in accordance with Indian ideals of beauty and

being a 'good Indian woman' – which brings up back to the hegemony of beauty as social currency and self-worth that is presented in varying degrees in the other adaptations as well.

> We would see that *JJKN* and some of the new serials inspired by it, featuring for the first time in a major way the 'young woman in the workplace' and apparently providing a relief from the typical saas–bahu sagas of the family soaps, don't deviate much from the familiar moral boundaries of the earlier form of soaps and especially from a certain trope of the familial that so canonically defines the genre. In *JJKN*, we see a middle class educated woman, Jassi, moving out of the confines of a protective home and caring family to join a fashion house. The complexities of interpersonal relationships in the corporate office look quite similar to the saas–bahu hostilities in the family soaps; Jassi and Mallika play the sisters-in-law; Armaan and Raj the brothers like Ram and Laxman [protagonists in Hindu mythology, the Ramayan]; the head of the fashion-house, 'Gulmohar', is cast in the role of the grand patriarch of the family. The crucial turns in the narrative also centre around Jassi's 'romantic' relationship with her boss, Armaan, and around the broader question of inheritance of the family business and property through heterosexual couple formation. (Roy 37)

While saas-bahu serials typically present the 'work' space is an extension of the traditional 'home' setting, or tried to limit the plot to women fighting for their rights while only occasionally occupying the public sphere, *JJKN* takes the narrative head on by depicting a middle-class woman (albeit initially) whose sole aim is to make a space for herself in the public, professional sphere.

The *Betty* adaptations are tied together with their interpretation of the universal theme of Cinderella or the Ugly Duckling. In each case, the true nature and beauty of Betty/Jassi is recognized by people around her in varying instances - the various alternatives of the cuartel de las feas and the best friend are immediately accepting of her; the boss is instantly trusting of her despite having reservations about her appearance, he seems to appreciate her financial acumen; her transformation takes place in a true Cinderella-like moment, when Betty works at the Miss Colombia pageant and is given a makeover by her female boss, or in keeping with the fairy tale trope, her 'fairy godmother'.

> Structures of myth and universal storytelling help explain the programming flow of the *Yo Soy Betty, la fea* format into territories as diverse as Russia, the Czech republic, India, Israel and even China that seems to contradict and even thwart the strict logic of 'cultural proximity' [...] Any discussion must take place 'within the context of an ongoing hybridization of television genres, which implies an underlying hybridization amongst their appeals to their audiences as well'. Some genres are more amenable to exchange than others and ... the telenovela has had a long history of being shared across diverse cultures. An essential ingredient in its popularity is its short run and daily scheduling 'which serves to capture and maintain a steadfast and transfixed audience' Another is the 'basic rags-to-riches Cinderella storyline on which the telenovela is based, with protagonists achieving love and success against the odds'. (McCabe 17)

McCabe, Roy, and Murillo and Escala, all rely on Joseph Straubhaar's analysis of the show to arrive at the conclusion that cultural proximity is cultural shareability, where

exist common values, images, archetypes and themes across cultures that enable the flow of programs across cultural boundaries. One of these common themes, is that of the underdog, that of upward mobility in a world of gender-, ethnicity- and class-based social bias; a theme inherent in these four versions of *Betty*. In addition to this, there are certain characteristics that the program conforms to which denote a pattern of cultural dissimulation as prescribed in the neobaroque seriality model.

## 2.2 The Neobaroque-ness of *Betty*

There are various examples which detail patterns of cultural transference similar to the case of *Betty*. These transfers are based in the patterns of the global economic world systems, wherein the movement of a cultural product is governed by modern financial trends and at the same time, is closely linked to socio-cultural markers of a geopolitical space. These patterns, as formulated in Chapter 1, have been consistently observed from the sixteenth century onwards. The Baroque period of globalized networks of transference possessed certain characteristics and strategies that were particular to the time, but also propagated through the centuries. A similar set of strategies is evident in the case of present day cultural transferences.

Especially, in the case of *Betty*, the patterns are present in other similar products of the popular realm - successful TV shows like *LOST*, science fiction enterprises like the *Matrix* trilogy and the *Star Wars* franchise, the *Harry Potter* universe, the proliferation of *Don Quijote* in modern day popular culture and language, to name a few instances. A

common characteristic, that has been elaborated above, is the global reach of these cultural products - where the product is produced or received with its own set of cultural modifications to suit the target audience. The other characteristic that is pivotal to this case is the merging of realms - the real world with the fictional product - particularly present in the marketing of the product and the audience-product relationship. The neobaroque characteristic that contextualizes all these strategies is that the product is never autonomous and that the boundaries between creator-product-consumer are often transgressed, wherein the product occupies a space that enables the consumer to be as involved as possible in the realm of the product, or the storyworld.

The abovementioned examples may be considered largely ubiquitous as they are present and easily recognizable in different cultural contexts. However, *Betty* presents a contrary case at first glance - the show, though immensely popular in many countries – either as a local TV show, or as a well-known Spanish-language show where it has been telecast – it is not immediately associated with the original Colombian version, and not many know of exactly how successful and far-reaching its adaptations have been. Nonetheless, the choice of this show as the case study of neobaroque aesthetics rests in the fact that the multiplicity of forms is seen in the dynamic nature of these adaptations.

## 2.3　　Marketing and the Audience

A particular neobaroque tendency is that of the proliferation of the fictional into the real world context, where the 'veil' is employed to provide the illusion of reality to the viewer.

For example, in the case of *JJKN* and the 'Who is Jassi?' campaign, there is a creating of fact out of fiction that is apparent in the initial marketing strategy of the show. Aired in 2003, the show was first publicised through a series of billboards and TV advertisements demonstrating people and characters of other TV shows reacting to the character of Jassi; no one has seen her but they have heard tales of how she is kind-hearted, intelligent and always looking on the bright side. The billboards appeared with a dark silhouette of her character. The day the show aired for the first time, it was preceded by a mockumentary about Jassi's life and how this show would be her opportunity to tell people her story. It presented interviews with Jassi, her family and her coworkers - all in character. The ploy was successful in generating interest, as well as mild confusion on part of the audience who were not familiar with these advertising strategies at that moment in Indian television. The fact that throughout the run of the show, the lead actor was required by her production house to appear at award shows in character, solidified the illusion that this in fact was Jassi and not a separate entity. The actor playing Jassi, Mona Singh, has said in interviews that she would have trouble finding her own identity after the show wrapped up, since she had spent so much time playing the character in real life, always presenting herself as Jassi in interviews and public events. Her visibility as herself only became possible when her character underwent a makeover. In addition to this, the characters often had cameos on other shows on the network as themselves. This was augmented by the calls for audience participation at the moment; each pivotal moment in the life of Jassi - and each episode that ended in a cliffhanger - prompted a series of multiple choice questions on how the audience perceived her life to be; 'should she trust Armaan and give in to his overtures? vote and find out what happens next episode.' The

widely popular reception of the show was further capitalized on, by way of books like

*Jassi's 7 Steps to Success* and *My Jassi Colouring Book,* (Popular Prakashan, Mumbai),

and early mobile game-learning opportunities where situations from the show were

simulated for the viewer-gamer, who would come up with solutions for Jassi's

predicament. Further instances include, the 'Jassi Pals' online club, 'Jassi Dekho Zen

Jeeto' [watch Jassi and win a Maruti Zen car] contest, and PR opportunities like Jassi

video-conferencing with fans from 13 cities while also promoting Reliance

Telecommunications. For Roy, the success of *JJKN* in India, "has to be measured more in

terms of advertising sales, product placement, brand equity and the ability to trigger

vibrant debates in the public domain, than in terms of the number of people consistently

watching the serial" (Roy 44).

This kind of proliferation of the fictional into the real is apparent in the case of

*Ugly Betty* as well. The production of 'The Betty' Coca Cola in the UK, and the

publication of an *Ugly Betty* magazine by Random House, which included pictures and

mock ads, and seemed like it had been created by Betty herself. Such strategies are

complemented by the narrative devices employed in television storytelling. On the one

hand are the thematic genres of melodrama and the traits particular to telenovelas, like,

the short duration of episodes, each ending in a cliffhanger, and the limited longevity of

the series itself - usually telenovelas run for two year periods. On the other hand are

strategies in the structure and transfer of the show.

The newest iteration of the *Betty* story, *Betty en NY* (2019) also presents similar instances where the televisual narrative seeps into the real. As part of pre-release promotions, the lead actress appeared in interviews and print media as her character[7]. Social media takeovers – which are increasingly a norm to harness arguably the largest population with purchasing power for media content, the Millennials and Generation Z – were used by Betty herself to interact with her potential audience and present a slice-of-life perspective in anticipation of the show, as well as during its run.

The driving force of innovatively marketing fictional shows like these comes at the heels of: 1. The domestic economic recessions and declining profits as in the case of *Jassi*. In order to combat reduced advertising and overall profits, novel products were sought at about the same time that Latin American products were being pushed into the global market. 2. Appealing to a growing niche-ethnic market that is increasingly in competition with the mainstream English-language market, as in the case of *Ugly Betty* and *Betty en NY*. In the former case, there is a need to capitalize on the Hispanic population by way of co-opting an original Latin product for the larger American audience while maintaining the loyal Latin fan base, and in the latter case, there is an attempt to appeal to the 'woke generation' of Hispanic American youth while renewing viewership among longtime fans of the story through a socially forward retelling of *Betty*.

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[7] https://www.forbes.com/sites/rosycordero/2019/01/09/elyfer-torres-gets-into-character-to-discuss-betty-en-ny-debuts-first-official-photo/#2d7ed44a5c05

## 2.4        Serialization and mass production

To arrive at an understanding of how seriality manifests within the Betty adaptations, it is necessary to first unpack the discussion around adaptations in television. While Chapter 1 details the many processes at play when a product is adapted from one medium to another, this section will first highlight the different types of adaptations present in television. According to Hilmes, there are four kinds of adaptations that can be discerned in popular television. It must be noted that this understanding of adaptations can be extended to other fictional and narrative formats.

The **imported series** is a programme sold internationally as a filmed commodity, in that, it is produced in one national context and broadcast 'as is' in another. For example, *Betty, la fea* was initially broadcast in its original format -- either in the original language, dubbed or subtitled. It reached multiple geographies like most of Latin America, Spain, Bulgaria, China, Hungary, Philippines, Turkey, US, among many others. While its circulation is global, its production is national, and this fact acts as a potentially disruptive force within dominant media – in that it destabilised US produced shows aimed at the Spanish-speaking market. Even though TV produces a permeable text and authorship lies within many hands, the TV industry creates its own legal copyright fictions, especially to monitor local profits.

**Reality formats** constitute a transnational programme designed to be adapted in a way that changes every element except for the central organising concept. It usually consists of game shows, quiz shows, makeovers and contests. Notions of text and authorship are somewhat irrelevant as ideas cannot be copyrighted. Fully produced shows

with their accompanying trademarks, however, can be copyrighted. Popular examples of this are the competitive cooking program, *Masterchef*, the variations on *The Bachelor*, *Dancing with the Stars*, and *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*.

When it comes to transnational adaptations there are two further sub-categorizations within the adapted series. **Creative adaptation** occurs when the secondary version becomes more popular than the original in a given geo-cultural setting. The adapting company pays for the rights to an international programme, changes what it needs to ensure the success of the adaptation over the original. For example, *The Office* (US, 2005-2014) vs. *The Office* (UK, 2001-2003). This kind of adaptation is especially relevant when discussing the case of *Yo Soy Betty, la Fea*, *Betty en NY*, and *Ugly Betty*, all within the context of the US viewership.

In a **controlled adaptation**, the production company of the original show plays a strong role in overseeing the development of the international versions of its product. Despite the ownership and copyright lying within one national context, the production is transnational, in that specific textual references stem from the target culture. For example, *Law & Order* franchise led by TV producer Dick Wolf and the NBC network.

Further kinds of adaptations include the **format fiction**: a fictional programme whose authorship is not as controlled and that provides larger scope for reworking within a variety of settings while still maintaining an attachment to the parent series. It seems to lie between an adapted series and a reality format.

If the controlled adaptation moves closer to the authorial and textual closure of the imported series, the format fiction moves closer to the textual openness of the reality

format. Its multiple variations from the original text still retain key elements of the original, while every single element has been changed to fit a different context, thus creating a 'palimpsest of forms and meanings' (Hilmes 34).

The serial narrative makes clear the processes involved in transforming a story, that has been created keeping in mind a specific cultural context, into a marketable cultural product that is viable in other cultural contexts. There are different models of the sale and consumption of such a product: the export of an original product to be broadcast in a different culture, like *Betty, la fea's* continuing internationally dubbed broadcast; local adaptation where the original product is recreated to suit the target audience, as in all the versions addressed in this study; and the import of an adapted product for a completely different culture, for example, *Ugly Betty* reruns in India, or the Mexican version *La fea más bella*, broadcast in Spain. The second process forms the basis of this study on the basis of which I attempt to address the various formulations of seriality that the process of adapting these shows presents. To quote Murillo and Escala:

> [A]daptation allows us to visualize the forms adopted by the translation of cultural elements, the disposition of possible worlds designed for heterogeneous or multicultural audiences. Betty, as a global character, is accepted as a "model" of reality, because she makes plausible the transformation of ugliness into beauty (in all versions); but, in addition, she makes credible the transformation or conservation of a positive set of values. Such possible world and its events refer us to states of things, or sequences of states of real things, but cultural in their construction, for example, the condition of Mexican and Latin American

immigrants and their descendants in the United States. Betty is an individual who was endowed with features pertaining to a world recognizable by the reader. (101)

It follows that adaptations constitute a multiplicity of forms, which is why the case studies in the following two chapters will examine the adaptation to a different format (print, film, video game, live spaces, etc.). What necessitates further investigation into adapted formats here is the nature of this cultural production - who is the producer, how is the relationship between the producer and consumer evolving, and how is this a marker of significant cultural production? To dive into the processes of adaptation via seriality, I look to Ndalinis' body of work to contextualize seriality demonstrated in each show studied here, as well as in the larger mechanism of adapting the Colombian *Betty, la Fea* to its one Indian and two American counterparts.

> The term 'seriality' serves a twofold function. First, it relates to the copy that seeks to reproduce, multiply, or allude to versions of an 'original'. Second, it suggests the general movement of open (neo-)baroque form. The articulation of the latter form of seriality - especially since the twentieth century - encompasses the series, serial and sequel... the distinctions between them have progressively blurred, highlighting a neo-baroque polycentrism. (Ndalianis, "NeoBaroque Aesthetics" 33)

The first instance of seriality that Ndalianis mentions is explained through the strategies of adaptation. The two kinds of adaptations that are most apparent in today's television are the controlled adaptation and the creative adaptation. As mentioned above, controlled adaptation refers to an exact copying of a particular format, as in the case of

reality shows like *Survivor* and *Master Chef*. Creative adaptations on the other hand account for a measure of freedom in the format, to mould the content in accordance with the target audience, often changing the product to such an extent that it ends up becoming more popular than the original. Another example would be the 1990's movie, *Mariachi* by Robert Rodriguez, which was later recreated as *Desperado*, aimed at an English speaking audience and which in turn spawned its own collection of sequels after its resounding success. These adaptations or copies are indicative of globalised market forces. In this sense, the seriality of *Betty* is not only confined to the different adaptations but also to the many instances of taking the product outside of the boundaries of its fictionality, as explained above. *Betty's* presence in the real world is perhaps a response to the economic forces that are necessary to negotiate, so as to drive the product forward and bring profit.

A curious characteristic in *Ugly Betty* is the appearance of the fictional telenovela that Betty's family watch regularly. "Contained and uncredited in the small-screen, the fictional world of *Vidas de Fuego*, avidly consumed by Ignacio, are Mexican television stars such as Sebastián Rulli and Eduardo Rodrigues in recurring cameo roles" (McCabe, 7). This kind of creative adaptation gives space for intertextuality and referencing the original format of telenovelas with the purpose of providing a glimpse into the Mexican lifestyle that Betty´s family left behind when they migrated to the US. The fact that her nephew at once abhors all things Spanish, but also expresses ease at watching the Spanish language show without subtitles or dubbing, highlights the dichotomy of characters or concepts presented as both fighting and flaunting their being Latino. This back and forth

between a mock original which is nested within the adaptation of the original is a
characteristic neobaroque 'veil'.

The second kind of seriality that Ndalianis refers to can be applied to the structure
of each individual episode within the show, as well as to the replication and extension of
the narrative from one adaptation to another. Ndalianis looks to Omar Calabrese's
theories on television narrative and his prototypes of seriality.

> Neo-baroque narratives draw the audience into potentially infinite or at least
> multiple directions that rhythmically recall what Focillon labels the 'system of the
> series', or the 'system of the labyrinth'. While the porosity of narrative form that is
> the result of seriality has been present throughout television's history, it was not
> until the 1950s and especially the 1960s that the serial became more prominent as
> a narrative system within popular culture. (Ndalianis, "Television and the Neo-
> Baroque" 87)

The first prototype that she mentions is one that has distinct episodes with
common characters but no overall series narrative, for example *Star Trek* (1966-69). The
second prototype has self-contained episodes where the entire series has a single narrative
goal. An apt example would be *Gilligan's Island* (1964-67). The prototype under which
Betty seems to be categorized is one with continuing episodes and multiple narrative
formations. Since the 1970s this has been the most common narrative seriality, where the
"episode borders of these series remain in continual states of flux encompassing aspects
of all prior prototypes. They are the series as serial, in that throughout the entire series the

viewer becomes embroiled in the changing lives and stories of multiple characters"
(Ndalianis, "Television and the Neo-Baroque" 96).

In the case of *Betty*, especially the Colombian and the Indian versions, this
seriality adheres to the conventions of the telenovela and the Indian soap opera formats
for the most part. The episodes are centred on the protagonist's experiences; they are
aired almost every day; they end in a cliffhanger, ensuring continued viewership. The US
version, *Ugly Betty*, is seen to deviate from this structure and adhere to a more typical US
television format - one hour long weekly episodes, sometimes ending in a cliffhanger and
sometimes not. In either case, the show's mass appeal is ensured in its structure and its
themes.

The two earlier versions present similar themes of discrimination that the
protagonists face due to their appearance and their good nature, at once garnering
sympathy from the audience and making them identify with the characters. Jassi is
perceived as a kind, simple girl whose physical non-conformity is seen to be
compensated by her intelligence, but only after suffering humiliation in every subplot.
She is the ideal, traditional looking girl that adheres to conservative ideologies of the
Indian public, while at the same time; she seems to be an independent force of nature
striving for success - an appeal to the young professional women audience. Plot points
resting on wardrobe fiascos, or at her humble origins are central to most of the earlier
episodes, while she ultimately triumphs in a professional crisis with her ingenuity.

In the US English-language version, Betty faces similar discrimination, only this
time, heightened by her camp villainous co-workers. Their reaction to her ethnicity and

her open, unabashed nature prompts them to marginalise her throughout the show. From the first episode onwards, where she appears in a colourful 'Guadalajara' poncho, she experiences an othering, and finds companionship in side characters that have also been othered for a variety of reasons. Her friendship with the Scottish stylist is precisely because the stylist is a loud drunk, overweight lady who is shunned by the models and photographers alike, but because of her indispensability to them, she functions as a bridge between Betty and the glamorous life that is inaccessible to her. Her other relationship that is present for a few seasons is with her boyfriend, who is an accountant and whom she had met at Mode Magazine. He is presented as an awkward nerdy accountant, his physical appearance almost identical to Betty's - thus presenting the idea of their belonging together in their shared experience on the social margins in this storyworld.

While the Colombian and Indian versions centre on the conflict that arises from Betty/Jassi's humble background, *Ugly Betty* further capitalizes on the immigrant perspective. One the one hand, the intention is to make the Hispanic American experience more mainstream, and on the other, it is done through severe stereotyping instances that are only mildly commented in an effort of reconciliation. For example, when Betty comes home still wearing her poncho, beaten by a rough work day, her fashion savvy nephew comments on her poor choice in clothing. As a crucial point of difference, however, *Betty en NY* tries its best to do away with equating Betty's othering with non-acceptance: her ethnic features are increasingly not 'ugly' as the show progresses; the impulse is not on her outward makeover but confidence in herself and coming into her own identity as a bright Mexican American professional woman. Both the Bettys' transformations are subtle, more of inwardly confidence than of outwardly

beauty. These hints at racial, class or gender disparity and their subsequent 'reconciliation' or 'resolution' are what make this show a show with mass appeal.

>'*Betty* confirms that one has to make telenovelas of one's own country, with its own particular humor' and later added that 'one has to be clear in that the success of the telenovela depends on the degree of the collective's identification with the characters' [...] Producers point out that because of this, it is highly risky to homogenize products when thinking of potential export markets. (Roy 44)

Series issues are presented superficially and are seen to be tackled insufficiently or melodramatically, thus presenting the illusion of resolution of conflict, while at the same time upholding the mainstream values it originally set out against. The fact that Betty/Jassi have to undergo a physical transformation in order to get recognition and respect blatantly disregards the original crux of the show, but this realisation remains hidden since the transformation is presented as arriving after a series of injustices borne on the heroine due to her physical shortcoming.

The narrative prototype theory is reinterpreted by Ndalianis to include narrative forms that may present characteristics of multiple prototypes at the same time.  Her assertion is that no one prototype exists within strict boundaries and rules, but is instead a dominant feature when it comes to defining the structure of a particular series. These three TV shows may individually present characteristics of the third prototype: each episode lends to an open form where the narrative is bound by the same characters that drive the story forward toward a collective goal. That is to say, the story here is not self-contained in each episode, but a series of episodes where the story evolves from one

episode to the next. The strict one-year timeline of the telenovela fits this format perfectly, where the open form within each episode paves the way for a well-formed narrative with a clear opening and closing act. The US and Indian versions adopt this format to their target formats. The US version opts for the seasonal structure where a major plot drives each season, upon the conclusion of which a cliffhanger drives the seriality to open the next season. The Indian format relies on story lines that may not be contained in single episode: the same spatial-temporal and narrative setting may continue for multiple episodes and the concept of seasonal breaks is absent. Although they differ in structure and are bound by the norms of TV formats and conventions of their target audiences, they essentially conform to the third prototype still. As a whole, the phenomenon of the adaptation of Betty into various international version may constitute a seriality that aligns with Hilmes' formulation of the adapted series (Chapter 1).



**Figure 7 Similar styling of the protagonist in adaptations of *Betty* across cultures.**

The adapted series, according to Hilmes, concerns itself with translating a concept to better fit the target audience, while still adhering to the original visual text or concept. Hence the ownership of the concept still lies with the original producers, while there is a tendency to adapt and modify aspects of the overlying concept. In a typical international licensing process, "local producers pay for the format bible, which may include specific story arcs, characters, scripts, and promotional materials" (Donoghue 22). In the case of Betty, the original creator Fernando Gaitan was actively involved in the adaptation process: he served as a writer on the Mexican and Spanish versions, and as a producer on the 2005 US version. The agency of creating these modifications lie with the official producers, as does the overarching concept. The modifications are governed by the target audience and culture, and drive the complexity of the narrative.

So, while the overall concept remains intact -- for example, the characterization of Betty includes thick glasses, unattractive hairstyles and frumpy clothing – certain modifications are made for the character to appear native to the target audience. Colombian Betty wears frumpy clothes that are not suited for the workplace, US Betty shows up in the first episode in a colourful poncho signalling her 'othering' in a swanky New York office, Indian Jassi goes to work in ill-fitting indian clothes in dull colours that are a complete contract to the glitzy western attire of her glamourous coworkers. The motivation of this difference remains uniform across the series – the marginalization of the lead character is apparent from the get go.

## 2.5    Conclusion

With the benefit of hindsight, a show such as this may seem ordinary and like many other TV shows, but at the time of its arrival it marked an innovative entry that changed genre television for good. Latin American and Indian television saw the production of shows with unconventional protagonists like *Mi Gorda Bella* and its Indian adaptation, *Dekho Magar Pyaar Se*.  It sparked a trend that not only puts front and center the disenfranchised professional woman, but also, outside of the fictional bounds of the show, the very nature of Hispanic television that to this day receives recognition worldwide for its innovative popular production.

Betty may not seem a typically neobaroque example of modern day trends in the entertainment media landscape, but it is through its transnational and continued proliferation that merits an in depth look into the strategies at play. It is an appropriate example of mass produced cultural artefacts (TV show adaptations) aimed at the masses (through generic restraints) and provides a key to the success of such a product on a large-scale global platform. Betty is exemplary of the telenovela format as "not just a program, it is a platform upon which to develop other businesses" (Carugati and Alvarado). Moving beyond Hilmes' characterization of the Betty universe as an adapted series, I conclude that the larger pattern of adapting such a show in multiple cultures – by keeping the central characterisitics intact and modifying cultural codes in accordance to the target audience – aligns with Ndalianis' reformulation of the fourth narrative prototype. Though the structure of each individual series presents an open, continuing, traditional narrative format, when I rearticulate the completed series as a single product,

being extended by way of adapting or replicating it for the purpose of continuing the

narrative in a different cultural-temporal setting, this group of TV series constitutes a

palimpsest of forms. The newest iteration of the *Betty* story, *Betty en NY,* is only the first

of many iterations this year. While its audience resides among the Spanish speaking US

population, and throughout Latin America as a bilingual audience, the Indian audience

has something to look forward to as well. In early 2019, an entirely new remake to *Jassi*

was announced*, Jassi Laut ke Aayi* [Jassi Returns]. The producers hint at reimagining the

original characters and the story, while maintaining the original arc. With only the title as

the basis of what is to come, it seems to suggest that the makers are counting on the

audience's collective memory and fan loyalty of the original show. It remains to be seen

how this iteration fares in a dramatically transformed Indian media landscape, just as

*Betty en NY* has been able to harness a strong fan following in the US.

Chapter 3

# 3 Transmedia Adaptations as NeoBaroque Seriality: The Franchise and Phenomenon of *Star Trek*:

While I have established the transcultural extent of TV adaptations in the previous chapter, there is the ever-growing phenomenon of transmedia adaptations that brings to attention the longevity of certain media products. The *Star Trek* franchise is a particularly popular media product that has stood the test of time and found its way into the collective consciousness around the world through a variety of strategies in production and audience engagement, most often not initiated by the official product itself.

## 3.1 *Star Trek*: the Franchise and the Phenomenon

A US science fiction franchise spanning multiple decades, the *Star Trek* universe began with *Star Trek: The Original Series (TOS),* which ran from 1966 to 1969 and was created by Gene Roddenberry. Its intellectual property rights currently belong to CBC and Paramount Pictures, though the original series first ran on NBC.

The universe is composed of nine television series (as of 2020), six out of which have seen regular run time on US and various international TV networks, and the remaining two were either never produced beyond the pipeline or have been scheduled for release in the near future. There have been intermittent movies releases, eleven in total, that extend the original narrative by ways of providing prequel-sequel value, or

deviating entirely from the original plotline while keeping the central elements and characters true to the original narrative. Perhaps the largest number of texts within the *Star Trek* extended universe are the book and comic magazine titles that number more than 500 individual works in total. In addition to these official media productions there are also several videogames produced to extend the official script that perhaps provide an increasingly immersive experience for the consumer, arguably granting them heightened agency in the narrative-building process.  This agency is further enhanced in online spaces where fans/consumers build their own, entirely independent narratives via fan fiction, reaction memes, and interacting with members of the official product. In chapter 4, this meaning-making process and online interactions between official producers and the lay-consumer are studied via the message board site, Reddit.

*Star Trek*'s narrative text and the commercial images that have been built around it for the last 40 years have become a pervasive part of the cultural environment, so much so that they have become part of the identity of millions of people who watch, read and consume the films, television episodes, network specials, novelizations, and fan stories.

Rick Berman, the man who took over the production of *Star Trek* and its image following Roddenberry's death in 1991, explains that rules were in place to keep *Star Trek* on course with its mission to promote liberal humanism in an entertaining fashion. For *Star Trek*, mythology is a narrative tool with which it can illustrate stories about correcting historical indiscretions, frame many of its episodes and plotlines, and create hope for the future. At the same time this enables the fans to believe wholeheartedly that *Star Trek*'s reality has existed, still exists, and will continue to exist far beyond their lifetimes.

For some scholars, *Star Trek* has the greatest formula to ensure its success: travelling to many galaxies "offers thousands of stories to explore" (Spiner 6). For others, however, this statement is only partly true. Spiner believes that *Star Trek* is so popular because the exact opposite is true: "it offers only a handful of stories through which the audience can explore the universe, and, at the same time, explore themselves" (Geraghty 15). It was also believed that if *Star Trek* "dealt with racial tensions and tried to preach to the masses, the masses would not watch [it]." However, placing those issues on a science fiction drama set in the future extinguishes its didacticism and allows "a storyteller, be you a writer or director, the opportunity of telling a story that has something to say" (Geraghty 16).

In order to come to a clearer understanding of the *Star Trek* phenomenon, it serves us to review the trajectory of the franchise. Since the original series came about in 1966, the subsequent versions have been released intermittently. The release of the movies and sequel-like TV shows saw between 5 and 12 years, generally speaking. However, the largest known contributor to the emergence of the *Star Trek* fan culture has undoubtedly been the gap of 12 years between *TOS* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (*TNG*). This gaping lack of activity or material to drive the viewership of the show gave space for fans to articulate their own way of creating activity in response to the show. As detailed below, this was perhaps the first instance of fans writing and creating narratives related to a TV show to fill the void left behind due to the cancellation of the original series. Additionally, fans reached out to and interacted with each other in order to seek their community. This subsequently morphed into spaces and events created solely for like-minded fans to seek each other out and be immersed in their universe of choice. The

first *Star Trek* 'con' or fan convention, organized in 1972, provided a unique space for fans and followers of the original series to express their chosen identities, as well as interacting one on one with the official producers of the show. This fan activity has since morphed into a larger, more diverse beast, where the con has moved from a fan-only festival to a space where they are continuously mitigating commercial aspects of the product.

In light of this activity, a curious formulation emerged with the widespread adoption of the internet within the *Star Trek* fandom. The internet now provided a far more personalised space for fan expression, as well as a farther reach and acceptance of this expression with increasing accessibility. A need to contemplate the longevity of this franchise, notwithstanding its narrative and economic triumphs and downfalls, requires inquiry of the extent of the official productions and their reach into the general consumer base, as well as its morphed articulation in alternative spaces of fan expression.

## 3.2     The subculture of *Star Trek*

The commercial and cultural impact of *Star Trek* demonstrates the important role that mass media images, objects, and texts play in contemporary cultural life (see, e.g., Hirschman and Thompson 43; Kellner 20). It is also widely accepted that subcultures provide influential meanings and practices that structure consumers' identities, actions, and relationships (Hebdige 1979; Schouten and McAlexander 56; Thornton 1997). Previously, consumer researchers have studied mass media texts and influences

(Hirschman and Thompson 45) cultural consumption meanings and practices and consumption-related subcultures (e.g., Schouten and McAlexander 57).

Just as "central imagery of many subcultures…often relies on mass media representations for its mythical icons, places, [and] times," Schouten and McAlexander (57) note that key consumer images in subcultures, in this case the Harley Davidson subculture, were formed as new bikers engaged with dramatis personae drawn from mass media images of outlaw bikers as well as other archetypes such as the cowboy. Holt also speculates that these bikers partake in the masculine characteristics "inscribed historically in Harleys through intertextual linkages to working-class rebellion in film and other mass-cultural texts" (Holt 345).

The consumption culture around *Star Trek* as a text encompassing multiple media formats does, in fact, illicit a largescale mass media response when it comes to legitimizing the subculture of *Star Trek*. It may stand out as a fairly unprecedented subculture in its acceptance and scale – at least, when it first came about in the early 1970's – examples throughout this study will illustrate the largescale media strategies that were employed by both the official producers and the fans that have led to *Star Trek* becoming the global sci-fi phenomenon it is today – and has been for the last few decades. Understanding the interrelationship of mass media consumption, subcultures, and wider cultural practices enhances our knowledge of these important elements of contemporary consumer behavior.

Schouten and McAlexander (43) have coined the term "subculture of consumption" to refer to this phenomenon, defining it as "a distinctive subgroup of

society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class,

brand, or consumption activity." This is rendered almost de facto in the case of the *Star*

*Trek* subculture, since the fandom has always asserted itself as unabashedly loyal to the

product, especially in the face of its public image in the media – the figure of the 'geeky'

Trekkie as portrayed in a myriad of TV shows and movies comes to mind.

## 3.3    Criticism of the term subculture in connection with

## *Star Trek*

Thornton (4) is of the opinion that "the prefix 'sub,' which ascribes a lower or secondary

rank to the entity it modifies, gives us a clue to one of the main assumptions of the

subcultures' tradition of scholarship— namely, that the social groups investigated in the

name of 'subcultures' are subordinate, subaltern or subterranean" or "deviant,"

"debased," illegitimate, or of lower socioeconomic status. Transnational anthropologist

Ulf Hannerz asserts that the term "sub" introduces a range of ambiguities. Is a subculture

"simply a segment of a larger culture, or is it something subordinate to a dominant

culture, or is it something subterranean and rebellious, or is it substandard, qualitatively

inferior? While the first of these alternatives is undoubtedly the most solidly established

in academic discourse, all the others have a way of sneaking into at least more popular

usage, and at least as overtones, with a great potential for confusing issues" (Hannerz 69).

Others warn against the free attribution of the term subculture to something that

may essentially be "American leisure activities" (Kozinets 68). The theorization of the

interplay of mass media–influenced consumption meanings and practices between subcultures and wider (or macro) culture requires an examination of the following three points raised by critics of the subcultures literature:

1.      The study deliberately covers American leisure activities, which may or may not constitute a subculture, and help in articulating a streamlined definition of subculture that may be applicable in a larger context.

2.      The **conceptualization** of subculture as deviant behaviour is instrumental in clarifying the moral order that is being subverted.

3.      A shared consumption of the same object and/or text expresses a commonly shared identity. A new **articulation** of this concept may reveal heterogeneity in a structure that is otherwise considered homogenous.

Conceptualizing the boundaries between the science fiction subculture and the wider fan population, Tulloch and Jenkins distinguished between fans as "active participants within fandom as a social, cultural and interpretive institution" and followers as "audience members who regularly watch and enjoy media science fiction programs but who claim no larger social identity on the basis of this consumption," although Tulloch and Jenkins acknowledge that "the boundary between the two groups remains fluid and ultimately somewhat arbitrary" (Tulloch and Jenkins 23).

Articulation Theory forms a part of Cultural Studies, whose focal point of inquiry is the intersection of culture and mass media, or subculture and popular culture. Scrutinizing everyday culture, cultural studies eschews socially exclusive definitions of

culture, preferring instead to inhabit the intersections between intellectual, aesthetic high culture, and the so-called popular culture of mundane everyday life. "Although cultural studies cannot (and should not) be reduced to the study of popular culture [i.e., entertainment and media products], it is certainly the case that the study of popular culture is central to the project of cultural studies" (Storey 2). Cultural Studies has endeavoured to "transform existing structures of power" (Kozinets 70).

Articulation theory, within cultural studies, acts in two capacities: it refers to the act of speech (an articulated discourse) and the act of linking different elements (social forces). "Articulations are discursive-ideological links between social concepts such as a particular social class and a particular race or cultural belief" (Kozinets 70). In the case of *Star Trek*, articulation theory highlights the socially enacted connections or articulations among products of consumption like visual or written texts, and meanings, identities and practices of consumption. The theory also works around a disarticulation or breaking away of preconceived connections and their active re-articulation or recombination into new factors of social interactions and forces. It contextually conceptualizes "the dynamic connection, disconnection, and reconnection of social meaning and practice to the *Star Trek* culture of consumption by various social actors and institutions" (Kozinets 71).

This theory is crucial to understanding the formulations of fan-created activities surrounding *Star Trek*. Its status as a utopian and almost religious enterprise strikes a particular aggrandizing colour to the subculture and provides a glimpse into its longevity and robustness. For the extent of the original show even, the producers were motivated to include dialogue or 'easter eggs' (usually, hidden references and dialogue to engage the 'true' fan) into the narrative that hinted at or openly marketed merchandise associated

with *Star Trek*. Examples like these are far more common in the later versions and productions within the franchise. What comes across as an obvious capitalization of fan interest drive the increased commercialization of the franchise, also presents a curious contradiction on part of the fans. Most fans who follow the narrative closely grant a near-religious status to the narrative which could hint at two reactions: first, they thereby grant a similarly mythical attachment to these physical artefacts (thus driving up the commercial value of limited edition merchandise and status of the commodity in the subculture); second, they see this intermixing of ideals of mythicizing and commercialism as opposing one another, and that the promotion of merchandise within the narrative may take away from the sacredness and 'other worldliness' of the narrative universe (Kozinets 71). This disarticulation and re-articulation of fan expression around *Star Trek* leads us to look upon recent fan activity in the online sphere, as it has evolved from early online forums and websites to a largely horizontal and highly interconnected community. Hence, it is with this vein that we look to the Reddit dataset in the following chapter, where we map varying reactions and formulations of fan behaviour.

## 3.4     The fandom of *Star Trek* - "The Mother of All Fandoms"

Henry Jenkins explains that a fan or a follower of any cultural entity is named so after 'fanatic', thus encapsulating the essence of the word and the culture it exemplifies (Jenkins 10). He says it is akin to 'unrestrained religious' fervour and expression. Fan culture surrounding science fiction has its roots in the underground readers and followers

of comic books, and by the 1930's was already well established. What makes *Star Trek* exemplary in its following is that its 'fandom' has not only persisted throughout decades but also brought about activities and practices that have given rise to new consumption and production patterns.

Perhaps the largest artefact of their fandom is the convention or 'con'. It is a live event spanning several hours or days centred around activities celebrating the narrative world of *Star Trek*. There may be several off-shoots of a single con, each with their own reputation and set of events. What started as a space for the fans to articulate their expression of the extended narrative -- be it through costumes, re-enactments, readings and panel discussions, fan works of extended fiction and art, fan created merchandise -- in recent years, it has transitioned into a space for the production houses to interact with their consumer base one-on-one. What were once fan-run conventions where like-minded fans would first encounter their community, are now the commercial 'cons' which mostly sell merchandise associated with the fictional product and have visits from the touring cast and crew which largely prompts the most attendance.

According to Bacon-Smith (60) and Drushel (5), fan conventions have seen a dwindling attendance in recent decades, mostly because of the opportunities that the internet provides for fan expression and connection with the official producers of their favourite fictional product. This is a growing phenomenon that can be observed in a large number of science fiction and fantasy fandoms, whose origins can unequivocally be attributed to the forums and fan-created web resources about *Star Trek*.

This form of fan expression and immersion into the world of *Star Trek* began with contributions in early fan magazines and paperbacks that provided an outlet for periods where the official products were inactive, especially immediately after the original *Star Trek* (1966-1969) was discontinued (Chansanchai 37). The first instance of fans sharing their experiences as fans of *Star Trek* and building a community where their interests were recognized and reciprocated was through traditional mail (Green et al., 17). With increased access to the World Wide Web especially during and after the run of *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001) an extensive online fan community grew. "Two years after its debut in 1995, the series had over ninety websites dedicated to it, comprising well over a thousand fanfiction stories, as well as a 1275-word encyclopedia of *Star Trek* jargon" (Drushel 5).

While the use of technology to build and drive the fan community of *Star Trek* has been substantial, the relationship between fans and the media remains a contentious one. According to Cheryl Harris, the fans may resist this culture to insert a meaning and purpose to the product that largely aligns with their own interpretation of it. This act in turn provides them with recognition, pleasure and empowerment at having participated in the popular culture surrounding their 'allegiance' of choice. For Drushel (6), a popular source of legitimacy and pleasure for fans comes from the fact that they are making and sharing artefacts of meaning in response to the media texts they experience collectively. This entails a discussion of the efforts to move fan culture and its expression from traditional spaces like convention halls and magazines to new, personal worlds of cyberspace and the city park. The figure of the fan comes front and centre in this

discussion as well, especially in light of how fans negotiate personal online spaces and more interpersonal venues.

Three aspects about the *Star Trek* fan culture seem to be recurrent throughout the study of this phenomenon, especially in Drushel's volume. Primarily, *Star Trek* fans are loyal to the franchise in spite of NBC cancelling the original series, while enduring the uneven quality of the eleven theatrical releases that followed, declining viewership for the TV series that followed, and continual mockery of the fandom in the popular media, for example, films like *Galaxy Quest* (Dean Parisot, 1999). Secondly, *Star Trek* fans are an incredibly diverse group that reflect the inclusivity of the original cast. Currently, many fans are younger, especially following the release of the reboot film franchise by filmmaker J.J. Abrams where older versions of original characters appear with younger faces that may be more familiar to them. However, many are also older; *Enterprise* (2001-05) saw the oldest audience of any primetime broadcast network series in the US. The fan base comprises of both men and women, where the female population is most striking since a large part of the earlier female characters on the show served little purpose than that of eye-candy -- aside from prominent characters such as Uhura portrayed by African American actress Nichelle Nichols. Fans are seen to self-identify as both straight and queer, another fact that is interesting considering that the producers of the franchise have steadfastly refused to include openly queer characters in the narrative, until the very recent show in the franchise, *Star Trek Discovery* (2017). In terms of cultural demographics, fans comprise multiple ethnicities, and nationalities a feat rarely achieved so unanimously by any other fandom centred around a genre product from the US (Drushel 8). And finally, contrary to the public perception of them as "isolated and

detached from society" *Star Trek* fans interact with and impact mainstream culture (as is detailed in the following chapter as well). "Apart from being exemplars to other fan groups, including those of sports teams, pop music performers, television series and video games, their commitment and persistence moves government agencies, media conglomerates, the scientific community, entrepreneurs and the popular imagination" (Drushel 9).

The nature of this widespread recognition and devotion for the *Star Trek* franchise is a glimpse into the intricate dynamic of the official producers and the role that its consumers hold. The original producers of *Star Trek* - Viacom/Paramount - have largely profited from encouraging fan activity around their product. Loyal fans require little continued investment in keeping their interest in the product alive over large periods of time. It is this assertion that we attempt to test through our analysis of activity around *Star Trek* on Reddit in the next chapter. Their continued "level of consumption, and increased meaning-making is a sign of engagement and marketing success." (Drushel 6) In the past, when fan activities, products, and merchandise attempted to derive profit, the original producers drew the line at this level of fan engagement since it threatened the commercial value of the product. The original producers also attempted to divert the fans' vigour towards official merchandise -- DVDs, memorabilia from cons, etc. -- thus essentially disempowering their agency in this dynamic of cultural production and consumption.

In this case study we can clearly discern a shift in the dynamic, whereby the consumers influence the official meaning-making process to a large extent. According to Anne Cranny-Francis in her 1997 article for Science Fiction Studies, science fiction

writers often derive inspiration from fanfiction writers who were in turn responding to the official products. There is enough evidence to show that sci-fi writers are acutely aware of what fans write. Many fan fiction writers have gone on to become involved in the official productions as well.

The effects of these fan efforts are not only limited to narrative involvement, but also advocacy. Before the original *Star Trek* series, production houses and networks were notoriously unreceptive to fan letters and campaigns. In 1968, an orchestrated deluge of mail from *Star Trek* aficionados [famously] saved the series from its first encounter with cancellation. A similar campaign prompted NASA to name its shuttle Enterprise in order to honour the franchise's legacy. In recent years, this tendency has created new pathways for development in science and technology, and society in general, and is most notably explored in the 2017 documentary, *The Truth is in the Stars*, where the *Star Trek* imaginary has found lasting impact in Western technological advances and political theory, for example.

The primary line of inquiry surrounding the *Star Trek* phenomenon is thus twofold. On the one hand, there are the multiple inter-medial formulations of the narrative. The response or impact of each product, be it a TV episode, movie, book, or videogame title, on another over varying media brings about an intricate network of a narrative that transcends multiple formats over time. With this in mind, this study proposes a networked model of all titles that are comprised within the *Star Trek* universe, which not only include products created under the banner of the official producers but also fan-created products that have garnered recognition within the community. Our interest lies in mapping the degree with which each title (nested under its media type; for

example an episode as part of a TV series) makes space for the subsequent title. We

endeavour to analyse a 'half-life' pattern to these productions, i.e., for how long is

interest still alive in a particular title before the release and consumption of a newer title

begins. This prompts a discussion into the type of media that has proved most successful,

either in terms of its ratings or revenue, or the multiple formats it has spawned.

## 3.5 *Star Trek*: A networked fictional narrative

We aim to showcase how the *Star Trek* universe is a narrative that extends beyond the

original product, in this case, *TOS*. The franchise displays various kinds of media

formats responding the dynamic economic climate - most notably moving on from the

TV format specific to the 1960s American audiences, to the global film audiences, to the

ever-growing reader and gaming community. Through our analysis of the franchise we

find that it largely conforms to seriality. Seriality can be gleaned in most cultural

products today by way of adaptations in popular culture (see chapter 1). We further

elaborate on this formulation of seriality by asserting that the entire franchise is an

extended version of a series.

### 3.5.1 Methodology

In order to map these transformations of the narrative within the universe of *Star Trek*,

we initially used an extensive data set from WikiData.org, which is a structured online

repository of all Wikipedia and Wikimedia articles. The first step in the process of

mapping the fictional products was to clean the data, downloaded in .json format from

WikiData.org, and create a separate data set of the metadata for articles about fictional

products like books, comics, TV shows, films, and so on -- all surrounding the keywords

related to *Star Trek*. (See Appendix 4 for full list of keywords)

Once we had this substantially streamlined dataset, we imported it into the graph

database management system, SylvaDB in order to further organize the entities and

relationships. SylvaDB allowed us to glean the product titles and associated information

as separate nodes and edges. We have an intricate and robust data schema to organize this

information further as a network of fictional products and the media that they are created

in, with incoming and outgoing relationships to, for example, the country of their origin,

the language of original production, the dates of production, and most importantly for this

study, to other product titles that follow them or that are based on them.

Although the *Star Trek* database on SylvaDB used information collected from

Wikidata.org, the information has been further verified and corroborated from

Freebase.org - another online structured repository. In the end, the entire *Star Trek*

database comprises of 1096 nodes and 4941 relationships. The data was structured in a

schema [Figure 9] which included individual types for information such as title,

production location, publication date etc. for each media type available in the database –

episode, TV show, animated series, film, book, comic and many more. The incoming and

outgoing relationships among these data types are represented as – 'follows', 'followed

by', 'created by', 'based on', and so on [Figure 10].
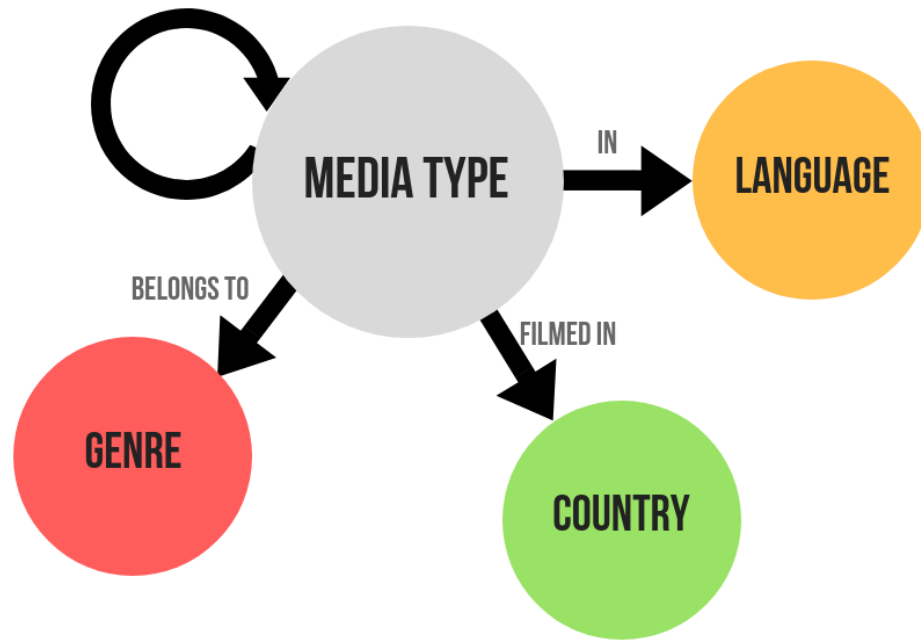
**Figure 8 Data schema of the *Star Trek* franchise on SylvaDB, based on the structured data in Wikidata.org. For detailed schema as it appears on SylvaDB, see Appendix 5**
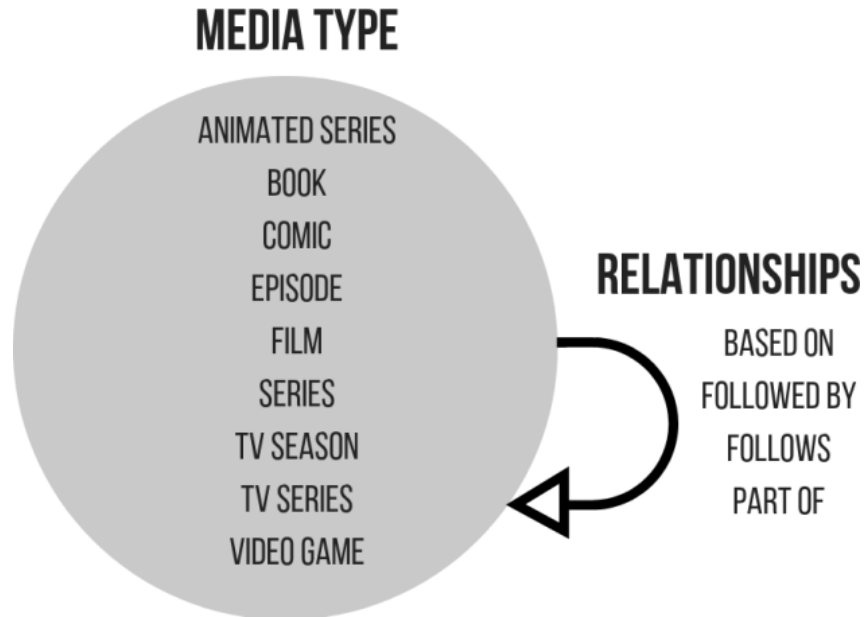
**Figure 9 Media in the database includes multiple formats of media types, where the seriality is denoted by virtue of the relationship one media title presents with another media title.**

These relationships provide us with a clearer way to demonstrate the seriality present in the network. The 'follows' and 'followed by' edges, for example, denote sequels and prequels in some cases, and the 'based on' edge is especially crucial to our study as it denotes the extension of the narrative as we view it – one media type based on another is where we perceive adaptation in its conventional sense.

## 3.5.2    Analysis and Discussion

In visualizing this data that is structured on this data schema, we see robust connections that are formed by the data types [Figure 11]. Once the nodes have been sized for total

degree – meaning, all the incoming and outgoing edges linked to the node --, the most visible data types are 'English', the language of all episodes, books, movies etc; 'United States of America', the country of production and filming of these products; 'Science fiction on television', the genre that is common to all episodes and the TV shows that these belong to.
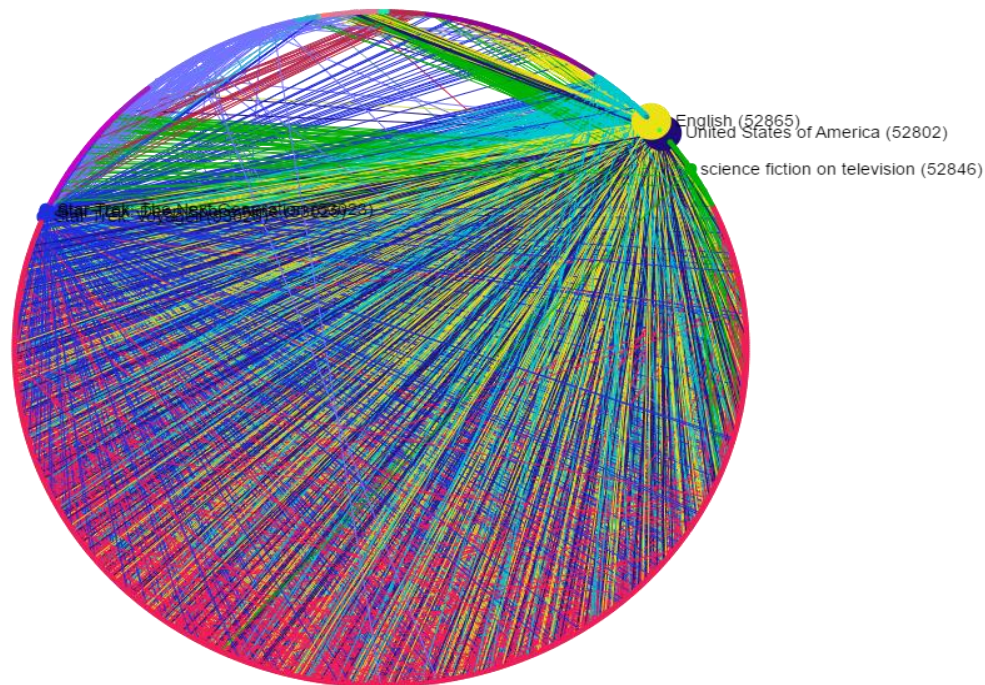


**Figure 10 Visualization of all nodes and edges. The most prominent data types being language ("English"), country ("USA"), title ("*Star Trek*: the Original Series") and genre ("science fiction on television")**

For a clearer understanding of the network, as it appears on SylvaDB, we viewed the graph in the Force Atlas 2 format [Figure 12] to better extrapolate the edges that made certain nodes stand out more than others, and also to manipulate the graph so that we may run a variety of analyses with different data types.
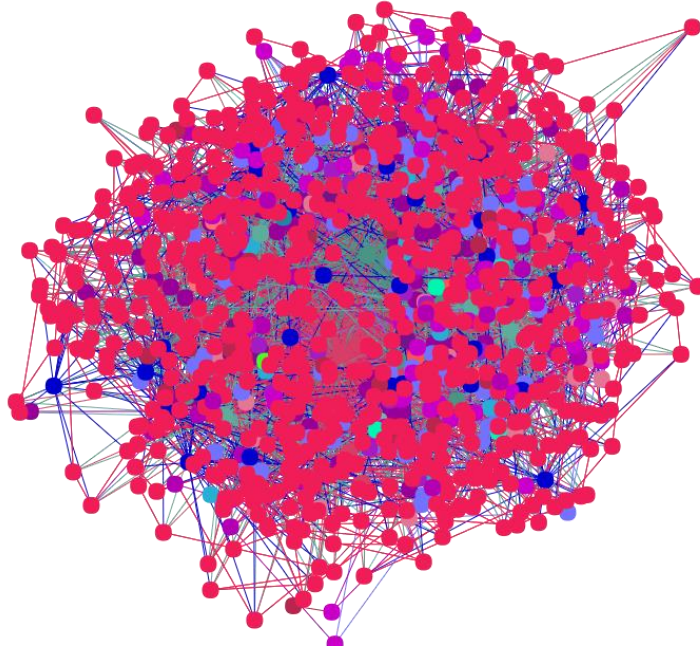
**Figure 11 Visualization of the graph in ForceAtlas2. The nodes and edges for language and country are absent here in order to visualize the media types and the relationships they present within media types.**

The complete graph of the *Star Trek* universe on SylvaDB as pictured in Fig 4 displays the following data types: 'TV Series', 'TV Season' (both of which are similarly coloured for the purposes of visually representing their close narrative and serial relationship), 'Episode' (the pink nodes are the highest number of nodes representing a single data type), 'Film', 'Miniseries', 'Book', and 'Video Game'.

The following sections of this chapter will discuss in detail the networks of these individual data types, primarily to observe seriality within the data type, and secondly, how it relates to other data types, thereby displaying an extension in the narrative across media. In exploring the networks around the TV shows, we observe seriality in its more conventional form – the first narrative prototype that Ndalianis considers to morph into a

more complex neo-baroque structure already. Episodes are nested under individual TV

seasons [Figure 13]. These TV seasons belong to TV series that are in turn based on or

followed by other TV series.
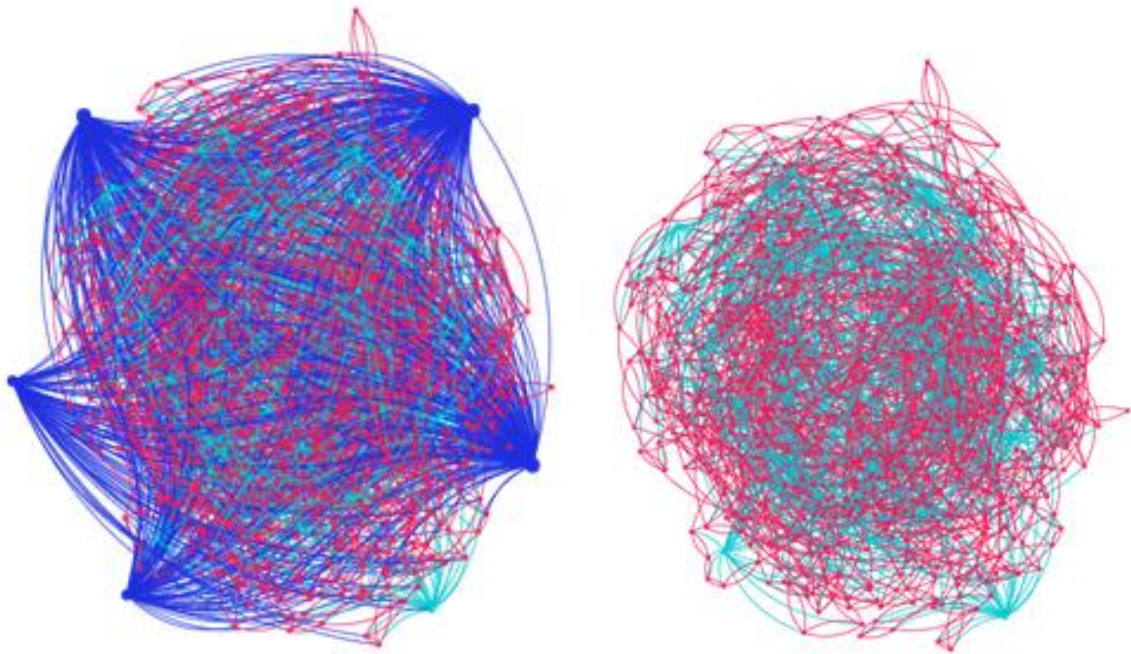


**Figure 12 The entire TV network with the dark blue nodes depicting each of the five
'TV series' (left). The same network without the TV series nodes (right) depicts the
intricate seriality within each 'TV series' – episodes (pink) follow other episodes and
belong to seasons (light blue) that follow other seasons.**

Considering the complexity of these nodes and relationships, we view the TV

network after removing all 'episode' nodes and relationships [Figure 14]. The six 'TV

series' media types, in dark blue, present incoming 'followed by' and outgoing 'follows'

relationships – thus representing the overall seriality in these products. After removing the light blue 'TV season' nodes, we see these relationships clearly.
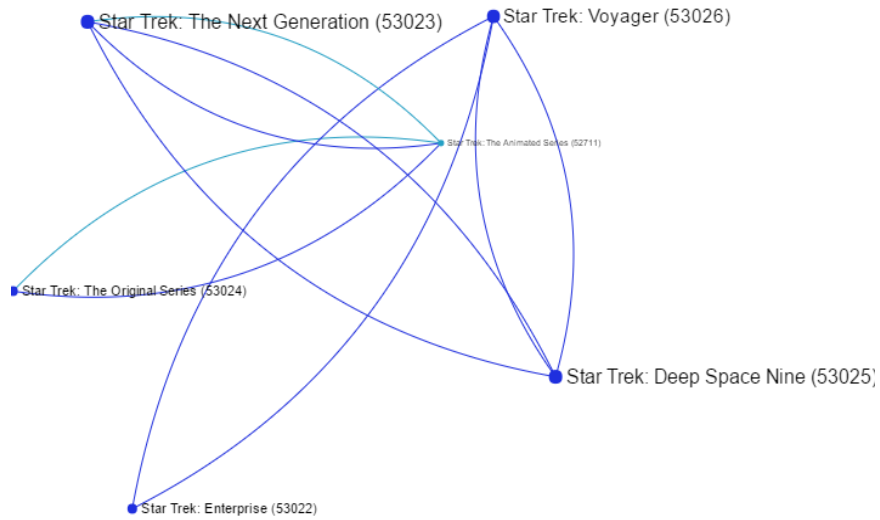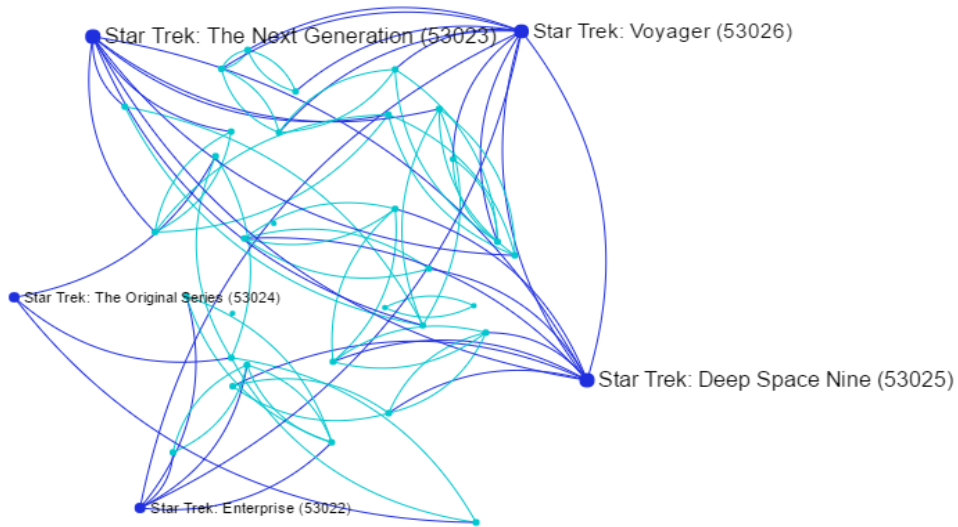


**Figure 13 TV shows and the seasons nested under them. The visualization on the right depicts the serial relationship between TV series.**

In Figure 14, the 'TV series' nodes follow each other to depict a chronology, that is indicated in the larger size of some of the nodes. Shows like *TOS* (3 seasons) are the starting point, and so have one outgoing connection to the TV show that followed it: The Animated series consisting of 2 seasons, depicted here in light blue (Figure 14, on the right). Similarly, *Enterprise* (4 seasons) is a smaller node since one incoming relationship connects it to the preceding series: *Voyager*. The number of seasons associated with each series is an important factor in considering how the robust the network is within the same medium. The 3 more prominently represented TV series, *TNG*, *DS9* and *Voyager*, each have 7 seasons.

It is interesting to see how the narrative evolves from one series to the next. *TOS* is where it all begins. Each new adventure of the Enterprise crew in their 5 year mission is perfectly encapsulated in episode after episode – in accordance with the first narrative prototype. For 3 seasons, the main characters highlight their core characteristics, as per the formula, and each journey helps them evolve through the series. The character development, especially in Kirk and Spock, highlights the ongoing evolution of the first prototype, where the story is still moving forward with each episode and is not necessarily presented in complete and unrelated story-worlds. *The Animated Series* continues the narrative format, albeit in a different stylistic setting in a bid to appeal to a wider audience and be part of regular family programming.

With *TNG*, the narrative jumps to almost 100 years in the future with a whole new set of characters aboard the *Enterprise*, also taking on new adventures with each episode. Additionally, there exists an overarching plot device, that of the omnipotent character 'Q' which is a threat from the first episode of season 1 onwards and is only resolved in the

finale of season 7. A single overarching goal drives the entire series towards a fixed conclusion, while individual episodic arcs also resort to autonomous, self-contained narrative. At first glance, this series resembles the second narrative prototype, where each episode is both closed and continuing into the next one.

The TV series that follow truly demonstrate the dynamic neobaroque formulation of seriality in television. Now the serial structure opens up further, following a distinct movement away from self-contained episodes, to episodes where the stories bleed into subsequent episodes, across the entire series. There is now a shift from a dominant closed order (prototypes 1 and 2), which contains elements of a more open, neobaroque, to a dominant neo-baroque order, which contains elements of the classical. As *TNG* neared its conclusion, *DS9* overlapped during its last season and the narrative spaces converged as these two storylines ran concurrently: the *TNG* crew aboard the Enterprise and the *DS9* crew aboard the Star Fleet Space Station, with their own independent narratives as well. The complexity of this narrative increases as the last 3 years of *DS9* overlap with the original run of *Voyager*. Each of these three series hosts different central characters and plots while inhabiting an intersecting narrative space and the viewer is more or less required to be well-versed in each of these series to fully enjoy them. Episode and series borders rupture and blend into each other. The narrative begins to hint at a non-linear, polycentric structure as the viewer focusses on multiple stories to piece together the entire series. The fifth narrative prototype is known for such polycentrism, where one story may be introduced and resolved in a single episode, or across a series of episodes, other narrative situations may open up, extending the stories of multiple characters beyond a single episode and across the entire series.

[E]pisode stories continue into other episodes and across series, prototypes merge

their rules with those of other prototypes, distinct television shows intersect their

storylines with other television shows, and characters from one show traverse

their series boundaries by travelling to other television series spaces, sometimes

returning home or, sometimes, continuing on new journeys within an alternate

narrative reality. All the while, the borders keep stretching as the series and serial

continue to redefine their parameters. (Ndalianis, "Television and the Neo-

Baroque" 97)

In the case of the *Star Trek* franchise, this polycentrism is visible in how the

narrative extends, not only from episode to episode or series to series, but also from one

medium to another, and thus tests the boundaries of conventional narrative to the

extreme. Here lies the larger evidence of neobaroque aesthetics in contemporary visual

media. Ndalianis points out the need for revisiting the prototype theory in relation to

serialization in television, in light of increased cross media production. The realignment

of this theory is suggested in the main thesis of this study, the polycentric nature of the

entire franchise as displaying seriality, not just the individual TV series. The next few

pages will details how the narrative extends into other media, as evidenced by the data.

Upon studying the episode-only graph [Figure 15], we observe that certain

episodes appear to be more prominent than others, for example, "Space Seed" (*TOS*,

Season 2), "A Matter of Honor" (*TNG*, Season 2), and "Cogenitor" (*Enterprise*, Season

2). These episodes either present more relationships with other media types. For example,

video games or fan-created films based on a certain episode further the narrative of that

episode. Or, they are tagged with more than the usual number of genres, suggesting that

the producers may have aimed to reach a wider audience by opening up the narrative. For

example, some episodes also list 'family' as a genre, perhaps in an attempt to generate

appeal and present the shows as family friendly.
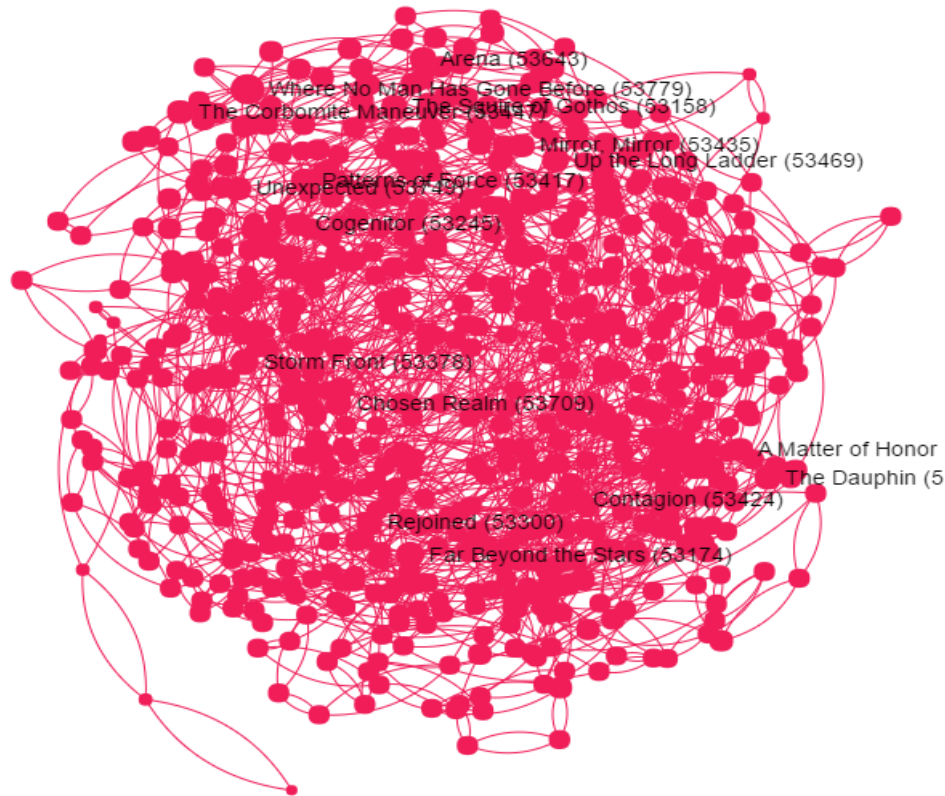


**Figure 14 All episodes display a sequence as well. The most prominent nodes (with labels) suggest that these episodes seem to have other media types based on them, or belong to more than the usual number of genres.**

Looking into media beyond television, seriality is observed between different

formats and data types. Films, as with other data types discussed below, are based on TV

shows – specifically *TOS*, since that is the starting point of all storylines. Films also

present seriality within the medium, since a few of them appear as a film series, for

example, the *Star Trek* reboot trilogy from 2009 to 2016. The graph below not only

denotes these connections but also the chronology of films, by way of the 'follows' relationship.
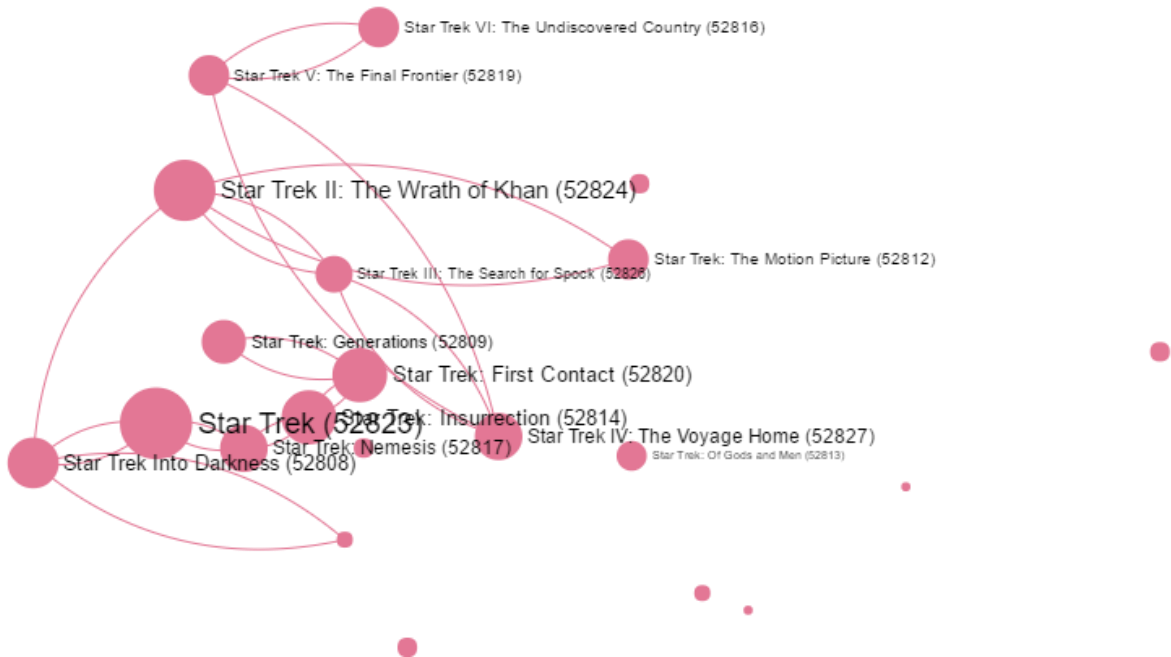


**Figure 15 Film titles with connections to sequels within the same film series, and other films based on these titles.**

According to the Wikidata dataset, seventeen films are adapted from four of the five TV Series. Among the adaptations that come from TOS, six are official *Star Trek* films: *Star Trek The Motion Picture* (1979), *Star Trek II The Wrath of Khan* (1982), *Star Trek III Search for Spock* (1984), *Star Trek IV The Voyage Home* (1986), *Star Trek V The Final Frontier* (1989), and *Star Trek VI The Undiscovered Country* (1991). These movies star the lead cast from TOS, and feature the main characters like Captain Kirk, Spock, Scotty, Uhura, and Sulu, and follows their adventures through space, introducing new characters to continue the storyline. The narrative moves forward in similar ways to the individual episodes of *TOS*, and is modified for the format of film. This means to say, the

original 40 minute TV format is now expanded to a one-off approx. 120 minute format for the big screen.

Considering the narrative prototypes in film series is not as straightforward as in TV series. Starting with the first film adaptation in the official franchise, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979), most of these until 1991 followed the events of *TOS*, and introduced new characters along the way, such as Khan Noonien Singh, the main antagonist of *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982). While this may suggest a seriality akin to the second prototype, my assertion is that all film adaptations here represent the complexity of the fifth prototype.
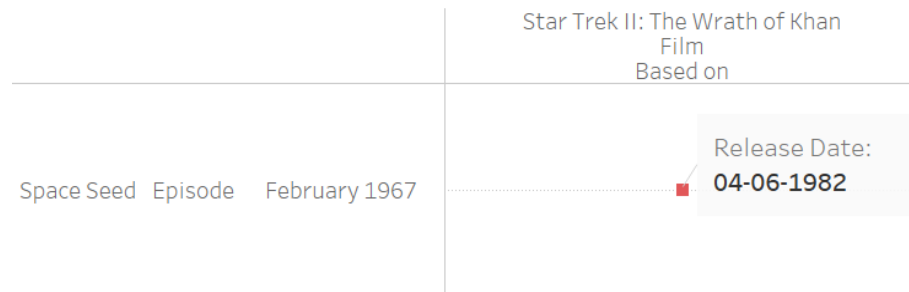


**Figure 16 Film based on TV episode**

According to the dataset, the 1982 film is seen to follow the plot from the *TOS* episode, "Space Seed", where the character of Khan first appears and the episode serves as his origin-story. The film is where the events from this episode develop further, into the character providing the main conflict for the entire narrative. Now, considering the 2009 reboot series, which is essentially packaged as an alternative-reality spin-off of *TOS*. The first film, *Star Trek*, depicts events just before the events of *TOS*, where the fates of the main characters intersect in unlikely ways and provide a refreshing

introduction to the universe for fans and new audiences alike. This suggests the existence of an unseen narrative space that seems to exist outside of the viewers' cognisance. The second film in this particular trilogy, *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (2013) re-imagines the character of Khan and extends the narrative from the 1982 film, while at the same time constructing a brand new, alternative narrative. This labyrinthine intersection of storylines is what defines the fifth prototype in televisual narrative, and is seen to apply to the film series here as well.

**Table 1 Chart depicting Films based on TV series in chronological order.[8]**

| Release Date | The Original Series | The Next Generation | Deep Space Nine | Voyager |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01-01-1973 | A-mer The Tourist in *Star Trek* | | | |
| 06-12-1979 | *Star Trek*: The Motion Picture | | | |
| 04-06-1982 | *Star Trek* II: The Wrath of Khan | | | |
| 01-06-1984 | *Star Trek* III: The Search for Spock | | | |
| 26-11-1986 | *Star Trek* IV: The Voyage Home | | | |
| 09-06-1989 | *Star Trek* V: The Final Frontier | | | |
| 03-12-1991 | *Star Trek* VI: The Undiscovered Country | | | |
| 18-11-1996 | | *Star Trek*: First Contact | | |
| 10-12-1998 | | *Star Trek*: Insurrection | | |
| 01-09-2000 | | | *Star Trek*: Hidden Frontier | *Star Trek*: Hidden Frontier |
| 09-12-2002 | | *Star Trek* Generations | | |
| 09-12-2002 | | *Star Trek*: Nemesis | | |
| 21-12-2007 | *Star Trek*: Of Gods and Men | | | |
| 30-04-2008 | | *Star Trek*: Chains of Betrayal | | |
| 01-01-2013 | Pilgrim of Eternity | | | |
| 26-07-2014 | Prelude to Axanar | | | |

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[8] The information presented in Table format has been listed according to SylvaDB graphs which proved difficult to read. Here the connections and adaptations are visible clearly.

Taking into account the adaptations listed in Table 1, most films are seen to be adapted from *TOS*, as the same central characters and storylines appear in these. Beginning in 1996, we see a dispersed chronology of films that are based on one of the other TV series, or indeed, multiple series at the same time, for example*, Star Trek: Hidden Frontier* (2000). This film details the extension of the narrative as it intersects from *DS9* and *Voyager*. The viewer must now follow along the two series and this film to incorporate the whole narrative – the narrative is now non-linear and multidirectional and without a single focus.

It is necessary to note that some films in Table 1 present a curious adaptation. Some are unofficial fan creations, like *Pilgrim of Eternity* (2013) and *Prelude to Axanar* (2014) that aim to continue the narrative from TOS designed to fill the gap in the story between *TOS* and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. The 2007 fan created film series, *Star Trek: Of Gods and Men*, is an interesting case in the blurring of boundaries between producers and consumers of creative content. This 40th anniversary celebration of the franchise was shot on sets of another fan series, and garnered the support of the official cast and producers: iconic characters such as Uhura and Chekhov from *TOS* make an appearance. Characters and stories from multiple official series and films intersect and inhabit the same narrative space in this fan film, and who power of production changes hands from the official producers to the fan-consumer-turned-producer. The last outlier in this data set is *Omer the Tourist in Star Trek* (1973), a film in the popular Omer the Tourist series from Turkey in the 1960s and 70s, where the kooky protagonist Omer finds himself beamed aboard the Enterprise and interacts with "Kirk" and other main characters. An unofficial international adaptation, this film is a testament to the

popularity of *TOS* (despite its cancellation in 1969) at a time when the show was largely syndicated and had little circulation outside of the English-speaking world. The staying power of the concept and the characters coincides with another international popular icon; Omer was himself a secondary character that spawned his own comedy-drama film series (spanning 8 films) in 1964 in Turkey.

The fifth prototype is seen to extend to media that are far removed from the visual altogether – the book adaptations of *Star Trek*. The data suggests that the *Star Trek* books, official or unofficial adaptations, are derived from the TV series. All book titles listed in Table 2, can be said to extend the original storylines of the shows – thus manifesting cross-media seriality -- as well as present seriality within the medium.

**Table 2 Chart depicting 'Book' titles based on TV Series, in chronological order.**

| Publishing date | The Original Series | *Star Trek*: The Next Generation | Deep Space Nine | Voyager | *Star Trek*: Enterprise |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01-01-1979 | Trek to Madworld | | | | |
| 01-01-1983 | Battlestations! | | | | |
| 01-05-1985 | Ishmael | | | | |
| 01-07-1986 | Demons | | | | |
| 01-03-1987 | Deep Domain | | | | |
| 01-05-1987 | Dreams Of The Raven | | | | |
| 01-02-1989 | Vulcan's Glory | | | | |
| 01-03-1989 | | Strike Zone | | | |
| 01-04-1989 | Double, Double | | | | |
| 01-10-1989 | The Cry of the Onlies | | | | |
| 01-04-1990 | The Pandora Principle | | | | |
| 01-01-1994 | | Balance Of Power | | | |
| 01-05-1994 | | | Betrayal | | |
| 01-09-1996 | | | | Mosaic | |
| 01-01-1999 | | | The 34th Rule Book | | |

| Date | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01-10-1999 | Across The Universe | | | |
| 01-06-2000 | Wagon Train to the Stars | | | |
| 01-07-2000 | The Flaming Arrow | | | |
| 02-01-2001 | | | | By The Book |
| 01-06-2001 | | Rogue | | |
| 01-06-2001 | | | Shadow | |
| 01-07-2001 | Cloak (*Star Trek*) | | | |
| 29-10-2002 | | | | What Price Honor? |
| 01-01-2003 | | | The Farther Shore | |
| 01-12-2003 | | | | Daedalus |
| 01-01-2004 | | ***Star Trek*: A Time To…** | | |
| 01-12-2004 | Ex Machina | | | |
| 01-06-2007 | Reap The Whirlwind | | | |

For example, the 2004 series, *Star Trek: A Time To…* encapsulates 4 book titles that take off from *TNG*. Their narrative essentially reintroduces characters from *TNG*, while presenting new adventures for the crew. The book series harken to the older science fiction seriality from the early 20th century where fans would read installments of these products in magazines. Each "episode" or book is a self-contained narrative, much like the second prototype, barring the first book which borrows its narrative boundaries from *TNG*.

| | | | Demons (Star Trek novel)<br>Book<br>Based on | Ex Machina (Star Trek)<br>Book<br>Based on | Star Trek (novel)<br>Book<br>Based on |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Star Trek: The Motion Picture | Film | December 1979 | ■ Publish Date<br>01-07-1986 | | ■ Publish Date<br>01-12-2004 |
| Star Trek (film) | Film | April 2009 | | | Publish Date<br>01-05-2009 ■ |

**Figure 17 Books based on Films**

Book titles like *Demons* (1986) and *Ex Machina* (2004) present even more robust complexity. They overlap with *TOS* and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979), which suggests firstly that despite the fairly substantial gap in publishing dates of these books, they aim to fill the gap between the storylines of these two visual products; and secondly, this is perhaps the most direct proof of the *Star Trek* network where most adaptations ultimately lead to *TOS*, the point of origin.

Ndalianis' assertion that no prototype is faithfully independent of the other is evidenced here as well, in perhaps the most conventional serial medium. The fact that narrative transcends media is further indication of the increased complexity of seriality. Furthermore, the fact that this visual-to-written narrative adaptation is increasingly common in contemporary popular culture is an answer to the growing need for filling the gaps in the narrative of the official production, much like the *Star Trek* fanfiction from the 1960s and 70s.
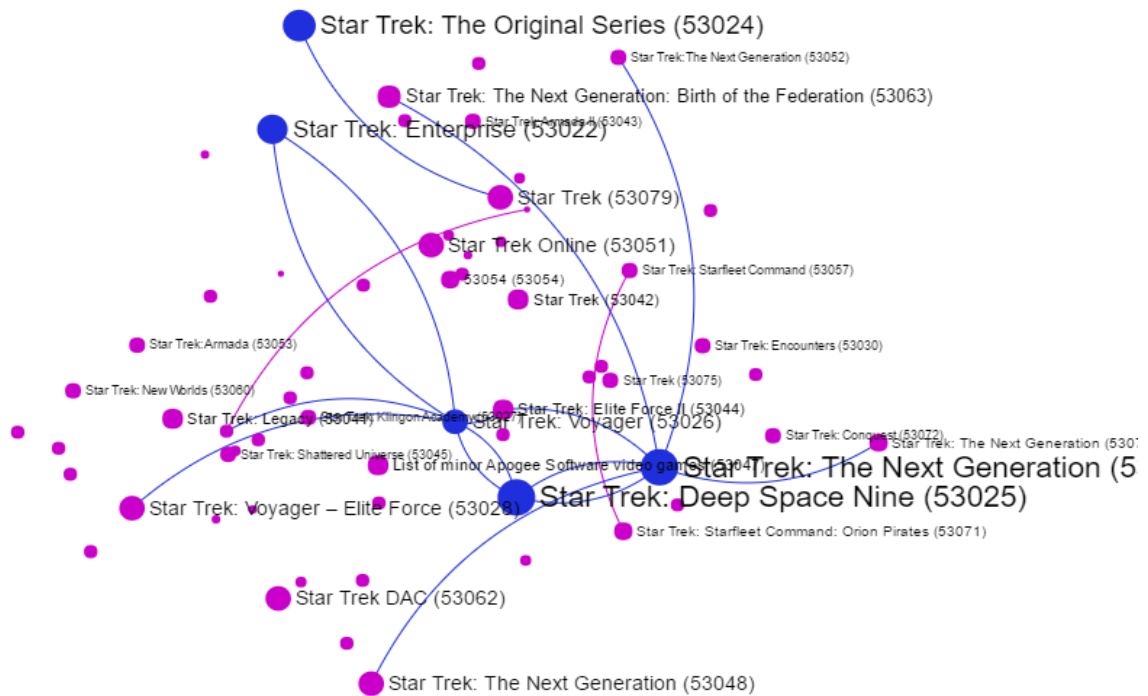
**Figure 18 Graph representation of TV Series titles and all video game titles on SylvaDb**

The last cross media adaptation presented in the dataset is that of the narrative extending from TV series (and by extension, the films) to video games. While the 57 video games as seen in Figure 19, can be said to be adapted from the TV Series, specifically *TOS* as the point of origin of all *Star Trek* narrative, a few titles have more direct connections.

| | | Star Trek (arcade game) Game Based on | Star Trek: The Next Generation (pinball) Game Based on | Star Trek: The Next Generation (video game) Game Based on |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Star Trek: The Original Series | TV Series January 1995 | Release Date: 01-01-1983 | | |
| | | | | Release Date: 01-09-1994 |
| Star Trek: The Next Generation | TV Series September 1987 | | Release Date: 01-11-1993 | Release Date: 01-09-1993 |

**Figure 19 Video games based on TV series**

*TNG* is the point of initiation of 2 video games: *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1993) (Video and pinball game) and its sequel *Star Trek The Next Generation: Birth of the Federation* (1994). Ndalianis' investigation into physical immersive spaces and video games highlight the increasingly common extension of the fictional narrative into a space where the consumer is an active participant in driving the fiction forward – a key aspect of video games.

Over the last decade, cinema has vied with many media competitors for attention and the more overt physical and sensory responses required of theme park attractions and video games, in particular, have served to throw into sharp relief the major gap that had been present in film scholarship: the lack of acknowledgment of the significance of the sensorium and the network of relations it triggers in the body's experience and interpretation of entertainment media, ranging from the perceptual and cognitive to the corporeal and sensory. (Ndalianis 2012)

The *Star Trek* consumer is immersed in the storyworld through these video games and through their corporeality and perception; they navigate the narrative in a space that

is further enmeshed with the fiction. While consuming visual media like film and TV transports an audience emotionally and affectively into the storyworld, video games engage additional sensory experiences like the sense of touch, creating a responsive interface between the real world and the storyworld – thus lending weight to the neobaroque aesthetic of heightened artifice in storytelling. In a move that is increasingly more common in recent years, the melding together of the video game and the film-TV industries is a response to the increased interest in and the purchasing power of consumers of these products. *TNG* was by far the most directly prolific product in the *Star Trek* franchise, when it comes to off-shoots in different media.
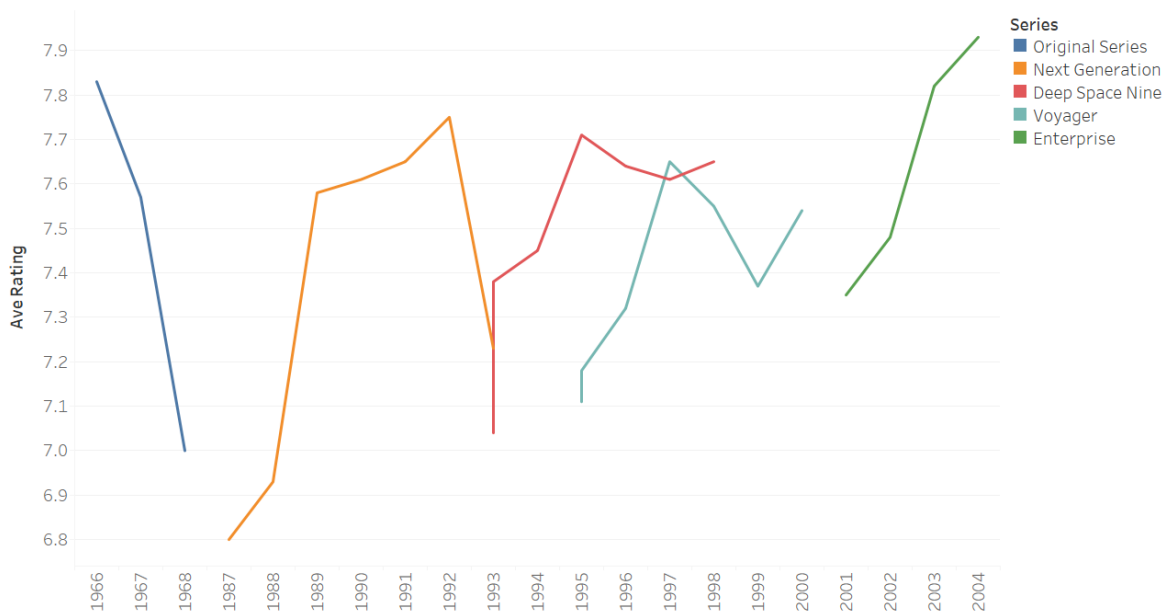


**Figure 20 Ratings of TV series**
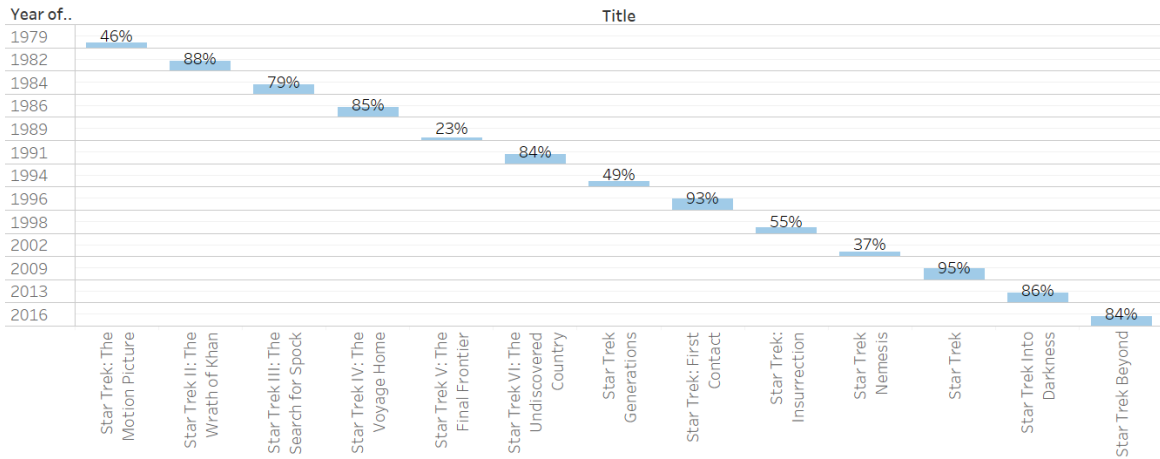
**Figure 21 Ratings of Films**

While the intricate network of media types that *Star Trek* transcends is an indicator of where the audience for this content lies, their response to the content is an equally relevant marker of the enduring popularity of the product. It's easy to see why *TOS* was canceled: the dwindling ratings hint at the producers scrambling to revive the story to maintain their audience and viewership [Figure 21]. The large gap between *TOS* and *TNG* is filled with a variety of film and book titles [Appendix 6]. The rollercoaster trend in the ratings of the subsequent series are not surprising, as storylines are reworked and intermittently peppered in with poorly-rated films, paving the way for a surprisingly highly rated *Enterprise*. The late 1980s was a time when science fiction saw a boom in TV and film, and *Star Trek* was competing with another giant franchise, Star Wars (1977). The success of the Enterprise perhaps allows for a regrouping of the franchise 5 years later with the reboot film series in 2009, which are among the highest rated products in the franchise.

## 3.6    Conclusion

The longevity of the *Star Trek* franchise lies, not only in its simple and easily adaptable concept of adventure after adventure, but also in the serial nature of the product. Ndalinis' reinterpretation of the narrative prototypes provides a sufficient framework to study the dynamics of seriality within the products in this franchise. On the one hand, the classic narrative structure (first prototype) of the *TOS* and *TNG* gives way to a far more multidirectional and polycentric structure (fifth prototype) of the remaining TV series, and the autonomous film and book series. On the other hand, none of these are completely devoid of the original narrative and there is constant bleeding-over of narratives. The narrative boundaries according to the conventions of each medium give way to a neobaroque network of linked media, where the narrative is fluid and changes ownership from official producers to consumers.

The consumer is increasingly more immersed in the storyworld of *Star Trek*, first with the continuing narrative of the TV series, then with the extension of the narrative in Films and Books, and finally gaining heightened immersion in the video game iteration of the storyworld. The interaction with the official product is seen to increase in sensory experiences. The narrative evolves to include intertextuality from other media and products, where it becomes necessary for the consumer to be wholly aware of the entire storyworld, in order to follow along with the newly generated adaptation.

Lastly, the boundaries between producer and consumer of this product are seen to blur, and the consumer now becomes the producer with fan adaptations of *Star Trek*, where members of the official production participate in a storyworld created by

consumers. This last notion of the extension of the narrative in unlikely ways and in the hands of unlikely producers is further examined in the next chapter. From its conceptualization as a repetitive adventure program, to being transported across different media with their own audiences and conventions of consumption, to ultimately being modified and appropriated in new spaces through the autonomy of the resident consumer, *Star Trek* provides an insight into the complexities of transmedia storytelling, decades before the phenomenon took over the entertainment industry.

Chapter 4

# 4     Reel/real/virtual worlds: The case of Reddit and the *Star Trek* franchise

The evolution of the fictional *Star Trek* franchise into the online sphere, particularly on message boards and fanfiction sites, through adaptations both fan-created and officially produced, is a marker of the changing formulation in cultural production and the contemporary media landscape. In an effort to trace this transfer of power of cultural production from official production houses to consumers who create their own extended narrative and essentially appropriate fictional worlds in their own meaning-making process, I endeavour to study users' interaction with and around the *Star Trek* franchise on popular message board and the "front page of the internet" -- Reddit.com. The following section will detail, in brief, the landscape of Reddit as a participatory digital space, and the evolution of meaning creation through digital communication. It will also sketch the rough history of the meme as a concept within the current media landscape in order to then examine the exact dynamic of these memes, and by extension, any packaging of information, as it relates to the *Star Trek* franchise on the social media platform.

## 4.1     Popular Culture and the Virtual Space

The proliferation of technologically advanced portable computers, smartphones and tablets, has resulted in increased online connectivity: around one-in-five Americans

report using the internet "almost constantly" (Perrin). Scholars have long anticipated our reliance on digital communication. As early as 1992, sociologist and network scholar Barry Wellman had tried to draw attention to the unprecedented potential of networked communication, suggesting that the future of digital communication "is in understanding that computer networks support the kinds of social networks in which people usually live and often work. […] Moreover, people don't just relate to each other online, they incorporate their computer-mediated communication into their full range of interaction" (Wellman as cited in Peck 34).

Internet meme scholar and ethnographer, Andrew Peck, considers that in the relationship between technology and society no single entity is dominant, and each is continually influenced by the other. Communication scholar Nancy Baym calls this process the "social shaping of technology" (Peck 34). It follows that technologies may surpass their intended use, and that users may adapt technologies according to their needs.

For Peck, everyday digital communication has four essential aspects in the 21st century: connected, participatory, visual, and visible. Digital communication is largely networked and current technologies offer the possibility where interpersonal connection is not dependent on geography. Individuals or groups connect and form digital communities based on similar interests or shared identities. These communities present themselves in autonomous web spaces or as niche communities on larger websites. According to Henry Jenkins, this form of communication is more rapid and frequent than in the pre-digital era, and may intensify the social connections among users in the community (Jenkins, "Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers"). Digital communication scholar

Ashley Hinck touches upon the fluid aspect of online communication where, "the agent

chooses and constructs his/her own lifeworld from the vast array of options available in

an increasingly globalized information society" (Peck 37). These communities function

well because users assert their social identities that are largely consistent with the

expectations and the social parameters set by the group. When a user's post receives no

response, it is largely a reflection on the quality of the post, and as such proves to be

instruction on the inherent guidelines of the community.

     The digital community is seen to be **participatory**, in that the users can

collaborate, and repurpose messages to express themselves online. Multiple users may

come together in the process of meaning creation, as they contribute pieces of the larger

entity. For example, Wikipedia may be the largest repository of such an extensive

collaborative meaning creation effort across the globe. When it comes to creating

meaning in multiple formats and with multiple iterations, however, the collaborative

process problematizes issues of authorship and belonging. A previous rendition may hold

different meaning for a specific digital community while future iterations may turn this

meaning on its head in order to align with a different digital community. For example,

'Pepe the frog' meme that started as a humourous online meme was rapidly coopted into

becoming a ubiquitous symbol of the Alt-Right movement. The participatory and

collaborative aspect of digital communication renders cultural meaning to be constant

flux, within the online space. According to Jenkins, participatory culture can be defined

as "a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement,

strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship

whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices" (Jenkins "Fans,

Bloggers, and Gamers"). This collaborative model also changes the relationship the

relationship between media producers and fans of their products. For *Star Trek* fans, pre-

internet era live events like conventions provided the space for expressing their interests

and their desire to build a community of like-minded people. Through a mass

collaborative effort of creating and sharing fan fiction, addressing concerns and providing

feedback to official producers, and paving the way for future creative work, they were

perhaps the first western community to build a culture of reciprocity and a collective

identity of this subculture. With the advent of online communities, boundaries between

fans, producers, and cultural products have increasingly blurred, and the space to connect

with their communities has become more ubiquitous.

Digital communication is also highly **visual**, where newer platforms make it

easier for users to capture images and videos in order to express themselves and share

within their online communities. Image-sharing website and sister-website of Reddit,

Imgur, emerged in response to the community's need for easier and more accessible

image sharing for their Reddit community, so much so that Imgur's increasingly

sophisticated updates cater to image, video and audio demands of their users. The visual

aspect of digital communication also manifests in the users' collaborative remixing of

their everyday visual communication. "A social media user can post a GIF from a

television show in order to express frustration over a bad day at work. Everyday visual

expression online comes in a wide variety of forms, ranging from photographs, images,

and videos to GIFS, image macros, photoshops, drawings, remixed videos, or emojis"

(Peck 37). This transformative aspect of digital culture is central to this study, as the

following sections will show the variety of content created, remixed, and appropriated by

the Reddit userbase. The visual aspect of digital communication may also constitute users communicating with an amalgamation of textual, verbal, and visual formats. A remediation of traditional formats of communication is observed, as a result of which a new vernacular emerges, which is specific to these online communities.

Digital communication is highly **visible**, where most actions of the user take place in a public online space. The visibility of everyday communication creates a legitimizing effect, where niche communities may be brought into the mainstream. The year 2018 alone witnessed a slew of online public displays that were shared across communities and turned into global fads, sometimes resulting in life-threatening situations; for example, the Tide Pod challenge, the Kiki challenge, or the brief re-emergence of planking. Other online behaviour and meaning creation may become more persistent over time, as in the case of *Star Trek* memes on Reddit. Another visible characteristic of digital communication is that oftentimes these social interactions are stored and catalogues in online repositories, wherein newcomers or observers of these communities may learn about the rules and the evolution of communication of their community. With visibility comes the attention of institutional and official producers, corporate and political entities, which may try to capitalize on these fringe communities. "Visibility, then, should be construed as a mixed blessing. It can give everyday users some influence over institutional narratives, but it also creates new opportunities for institutional influence and appropriation of everyday communication" (Peck 38). To punctuate this further, I look to Xavier Gamboa's juxtaposition of the internet culture with the 17th century baroque models of cultural dissemination. While Maravall highlights the power dynamic behind the golden age of theatre, where social instruction as imbibed through theatre and mass

culture, Gamboa draws parallels with the age of social networking in the 21$^{st}$ century.

"[I]t can be argued that social networking websites provide a form of entertainment with the ulterior motive to tacitly monitor and distract the masses from nonconformist ideologies; but also that they provide a venue to capitalize from the invaluable information provided, on those sites, without the need of the users to fill a survey online" (170). The adage that if a service is free to use, then you - the user - are the ultimate product, seems ubiquitous these days. Online services like social networking sites may present the illusion of control to the user by way of their sheer presence in number, but Gamboa assures this illusion may well be the result of a sophisticated neobaroque product which delineates the website's true purpose through zero-transparency with the users.

> For Maravall, the baroque as a culture of entertainment provides an effective mechanism of social control to manipulate and direct the urban crowds. Facebook parallels such effectiveness in persuading the virtual masses of the 21$^{st}$ century to remain users and customers of its services; after all, users pay with the newest form of capital today—information[…] A theater where the virtual global masses act simultaneously as spectators and producers; it is also digital public space, where they perceive power as consumers.  Notwithstanding, this perception of empowerment provides a virtual illusion, a neobaroque reverie.  (Gamboa 174)

The subject of this study is the digital community of Reddit, which is in turn constituted with individual communities, where users have the agency and fluidity to move within multiple communities, interact with and create collaborative content, and share their everyday communication in a variety of ways: news, latest trends, ask for advice, create

humourous content and generate discussion on topics of similar interests. In the case of

Reddit, Gamboa's assertion translates to the users providing invaluable data and insight

into purchasing power and market trends for conglomerates to successfully monitor

consumer demands and attempt to close the gap between consumers and producers.

Reddit helps maintain the illusion that user is king, through their frequent response to

user feedback and by supplying what users demand, for example, the AMA features, the

new ranking systems, the ability to create subreddits, creating Imgur: a whole new

website to host images, videos  and memes that users can upload. While users provide the

impetus for these technological and social changes, it is the platform that ultimately

stands to gain through a crowdsourced development cycle. The following sections of this

chapter will detail the nature of this power struggle between the users and the producers

when it comes to creation and consumption of content.

As of 2018, Alexa rates Reddit at number 21 of the top 500 websites. A simple

online message board that began in 2005, Reddit has seen exponential popularity as a

platform for user-generated and user-curated content. It is essentially a community made

up of multiple communities: Reddit is currently known to have at least 1.2 million

subreddits or messaging communities divided by specific topics. Users can create

accounts to subscribe to their subreddits of choice and curate their feed, while creating or

responding to content that may disappear or end up on the "front" page. To elaborate,

users can upvote comments or material that they find highly interesting, or downvote

comments that they find irrelevant or disagreeable. Highly upvoted comments and links

appear higher on the front page of the site and garner attention from users that may not be

native to the subreddit of the original post. Each post is accompanied by a score (total

number of upvotes subtracted by the total number of downvotes) that denotes the user's

karma point and serves as a measure of reliability and ranking within the community

(Hannay "Reddit"). Characteristics like the element of play in interactions, the overt

absence of real identities of the users, the overwhelming abundance of conversation

spaces around fandoms and technical know-how, are what set Reddit apart from other

contemporary social media platforms (Massanari "Gamergate"; Marantz "Reddit and the

Struggle"). Since Reddit has gained a reputation for being the centre of geek culture, and

*Star Trek* is considered the de facto driving force of geekdom since its conception, the

intersection of these two entities was inevitable -- as will be detailed in this study.

In order to examine this intersection of the fictional world of *Star Trek* on the

online platform, it is necessary to first identify the nature of the most widely used format

of communication that inhabits Reddit – viral content and internet memes. This study is

concerned with how the collaborative process of meaning creation and re-appropriating

fictional content from *Star Trek* enables users to communicate with Internet memes as a

dominant form of everyday argument. Soon, the mass-reach and persistence of memes

creates a shared "common sense" among the regular users of said meme, and the larger

community where they deploy it. "[T]he digital age has widely expanded the potential for

users to create (and legitimate) their own forms of non-institutional knowledge and

authority. Posting a meme, then, serves as one of the quintessential ways in which

everyday argument is being extended by the affordances available in the digital age"

(Peck 40). For Shifman, the meme is not only a tool for understanding rapidly occurring

cultural trends but it largely epitomizes the essence of the Web 2.0 era.

The abundance of "spreadable media", as termed by Henry Jenkins in 2007, or memes on Reddit is driven by users remixing and reiterating messages in order to continue a conversation within a participatory digital culture (Wiggins and Bowers 6). Richard Dawkins' 1976 book The Selfish Gene first defines the meme as a genetic response to cultural evolution. In other words, the meme signaled the propagation of cultural information to further human evolution, like the gene was discovered to drive biological evolution. Memes are synonymous with ideas for Dawkins, and he postulates that they are virulent in nature, competing to infect individual minds and use those minds as vehicles for replication; essentially theorizing the survival of the fittest idea. Memes include examples like slogans, catch phrases, fashion, learned skills, and during the 1980s and 90s, began to compete for inclusion in the ubiquity of the radio, television and print industries (Hofstadter 21). It is at this moment, that the formulation of the meme is intrinsically tied to linguistics, psychology and philosophy.

The meme as a form of digital communication differs from viral content, or a cultural product that may be transmitted rapidly and widely, while remaining largely unchanged, because memes are often deliberately and creatively modified as they are shared. Jenkins goes beyond Dawkins' definition and highlights the importance of agency in the memetic spread. Shifman also notes, "I wish to stress that human agency should be an integral part of our conceptualization of memes by describing them as dynamic entities that spread in response to technological, cultural and social choices made by people. As a result, memes should not be treated as isolated, discrete units; instead, memes should be viewed as the building blocks of complex cultures, intertwining and interacting with each other" (Peck 38). She further problematizes the contemporary text-

centric formulation of the internet meme, and sees memetic communication as a practice of repetitively generating a series of artifacts, not the artifact itself (Shifman 190).

The contemporary understanding of the meme is quite different, especially in the context of the digital space. Spread "virally" across social media platforms in large volumes, memes present a unique opportunity for scholarship, simply by virtue of the high activity and the new language that they have become. They are now seen as a "prism for shedding light on aspects of contemporary digital culture" (Shifman 190). Further studies focus on the distribution, replication and propagation of information in digital networks where human agency is seen as an integral aspect of how a meme is conceptualized and spread in response to stimuli by people (Milner, 2012; Shifman, 2012, 2013). Richard Dawkins further explains the evolution of the meme, as exemplary of the very characteristic of human evolution that it represents:

> [T]he very idea of the meme, has itself mutated and evolved in a new direction. An internet meme is a hijacking of the original idea. Instead of mutating by random chance, before spreading by a form of Darwinian selection, internet memes are altered deliberately by human creativity. In the hijacked version, mutations are designed—not random—with the full knowledge of the person doing the mutating. (Dawkins in Wiggins and Bowers 6)

This repackaging and hijacking of meaning is central to this study, where the fictional world of *Star Trek* is translated into a digital space where its new meaning is devoid of its original narrative characteristics. According to Dawkins, an idea with critical mass propagates itself. Here the meme exists in alterity to the official production

and increasingly belongs to the Reddit community members, who create their own vernacular of modified meaning that is widely shared and accepted within the community (Peck 7). My assertion is that the emergence of *Star Trek* memes into discussions or contexts where they don't originally belong, is one of the key examples of human agency, in that, this new formulation is completely outside of the control of creators of the official product. The participatory nature of conversation on Reddit is conducive to such meaning creation, since there are relatively low barriers to expression and engagement among users. Reddit's inbuilt awards system (upvotes, downvotes, guilded status, appearance on the front page) acts as feedback and mentorship for newcomers in this meaning creation process.

The application of the meme concept as a form of adaptation is explored in Iain Robert Smith's scholarship on fictional works, namely films, travelling within different cultural contexts as they spread and evolve.

> Stories travel around the world and are adapted to their new environments through processes of mutation in ways analogous to genes, with some dying out and others flourishing. Breaking us away from the stranglehold of fidelity discourse which still dominates much scholarship on adaptations, the concept of the 'meme' allows us a way to consider how and why films are adapted and reworked in contexts far removed from their source. (2017)

For Smith, the comparison of genes with memes is not limiting as it may be for Jenkins. "[C]ulture is not self-replicating and it has a reliance on people to borrow, rework and maintain it." Smith does agree with Jenkins' assessment that consumers show agency in 'spreading' cultural information, as opposed to just being 'carriers' of viral

information. In fact, he goes even further to emphasize the mutation and adaptation

aspect of a meme. Ideas spread beyond conventional limits and adapt and evolve along

the way. This evolutionary aspect of spread of information is at the heart of this study.

The virality of memes, which encompasses repackaging of information over an

undefined period of time, goes hand-in-hand with the notion of media virality -- a form of

spreadable media that may enjoy immense popularity for a short period of time. The

perfect example of this duality is the hugely popular Dos Equis video commercials which

transformed into the image macro[9] meme, The Most Interesting Man in the World

(Knowyourmeme.com).

Within the context of *Star Trek* related activity on Reddit, this media virality is

visible in the surge in popularity of Reddit AMAs and specific comments tied to

corresponding activity within the franchise, such as the release of new films or events

like the 50th anniversary of the franchise. Through this activity, image macro memes

gain popularity and are more enduring in digital participatory conversation (as discussed

in section 4.3).

## 4.2    The Study

The Reddit dataset (in .JSON format) ranges from October 2007 to August 2016, with a

total of 2.5 billion comments – mostly, text-based or with hypertexts linking to websites

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[9] An Image macro meme is a captioned image with a witty message or catchphrase, whose format is repeated and repackaged.

other than Reddit. We determined a list of key phrases surrounding the *Star Trek*

franchise and fandom -- which included commonly used memes and phrases such as

"Live Long and Prosper" and "Khaaan!", character names and other fictional terminology

(Appendix 4). Through a series of filter-by-keyword processes we now have a dataset

containing 2.6 million comments that make references to *Star Trek* in various ways.

This paper discusses user activity throughout this time period in order to find a

similar peaks and troughs of activity between the official production cycles of the

franchise -- specifically the reboot movie franchise from 2009, the 50th anniversary of

*Star Trek: The Original Series*, the announcement of the latest TV series in the franchise

(*Star Trek: Discovery*), among others. The aim here is to determine the fan reaction to all

the activity in the franchise. How do consumers tackle a fictional entity in a virtual non-

fiction world? Following from that, I also examine if there is any discernible effort on

part of the official producers to harness this fan response into the production cycle of the

official franchise.

The dataset is structured to provide information such as username, body of the

comment, upvotes and downvotes, parent comment, subreddit, and timestamp of the

comment. The study was conducted by sorting through the text-based comments which

often linked to website outside of Reddit – since Reddit did not allow for image or video

hosting, or indeed any communication other than text or hypertext. Parsing through the

text-based comments, results showed peaks in user activity that corresponded events in

the *Star Trek* franchise, opinions that users had about the developments in the franchise

or its fictional content, as well as the interesting use of franchise related content

repurposed as image-macro memes that were linked through Imgur, the image-hosting

sister website of Reddit. Initial results show that references not only span *Star Trek* specific subreddits -- for example, r/startrek, r/voyager, r/TNG and so on -- but also unlikely subreddits like r/Politics, r/Programming, r/AdviceAnimals, among others. This branching of a fictional entity into a largely non-fiction online space is the other focus of this project. In light of exponential technological advancement, one cultural product finds expression in another dominant cultural product, where the producers tap into the user-base.

## 4.3    Analysis and discussion

Of the 2.5 billion comments on Reddit, 2.7 million comments are contained in the reduced, *Star Trek* specific, dataset. In Figure 23, we see the general trend in heightened user activity on Reddit. The year 2008 marks the beginning of multiple subreddits being submitted for creation by individual users or Redditors. The first jump in the number of comments seen here in 2010 corresponds with explosive traffic growth. By 2012, Reddit had moved to the Amazon Web Services and tripled its user-base, which is indicated in the increased activity and the exponential rise in the number of comments.

Evolution of number of comments on Reddit by month
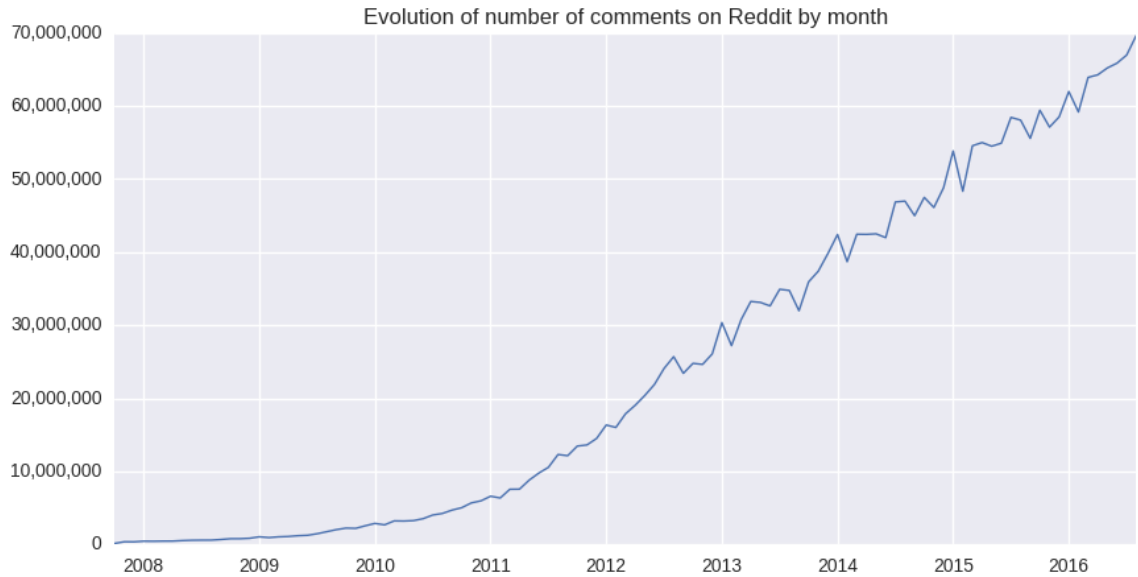
**Figure 22 Increasing number of total comments on Reddit during the time period 2007-2016.**

This was also the time period where another Reddit feature gained massive popularity – the AMA or Ask-Me-Anything interview format (Madrigal 2014). Although, it gained its own dedicated subreddit (r/IamA) in 2009 users would allow questions about their lives or jobs from interested community members, it was after celebrities like Stephen Colbert did an invited AMA in 2010 that the format took off, and more and more celebrities initiated contact with Reddit to reach out to their fan-base. Another significant feature was Reddit including Bitcoin as cryptocurrency on its platform to drive ad sales, which opened up the platform to further popular engagement. Reddit comments have since reflected changes in the company as well – the initiation and dismissal of key members of the team; popular cultural moments that were founded on Reddit like #Gamergate which initiated conversation on online trolling, the US elections in 2008, 2012 and 2016; moments of social activism like the Stop Online Privacy Act blackout in the US and Europe.
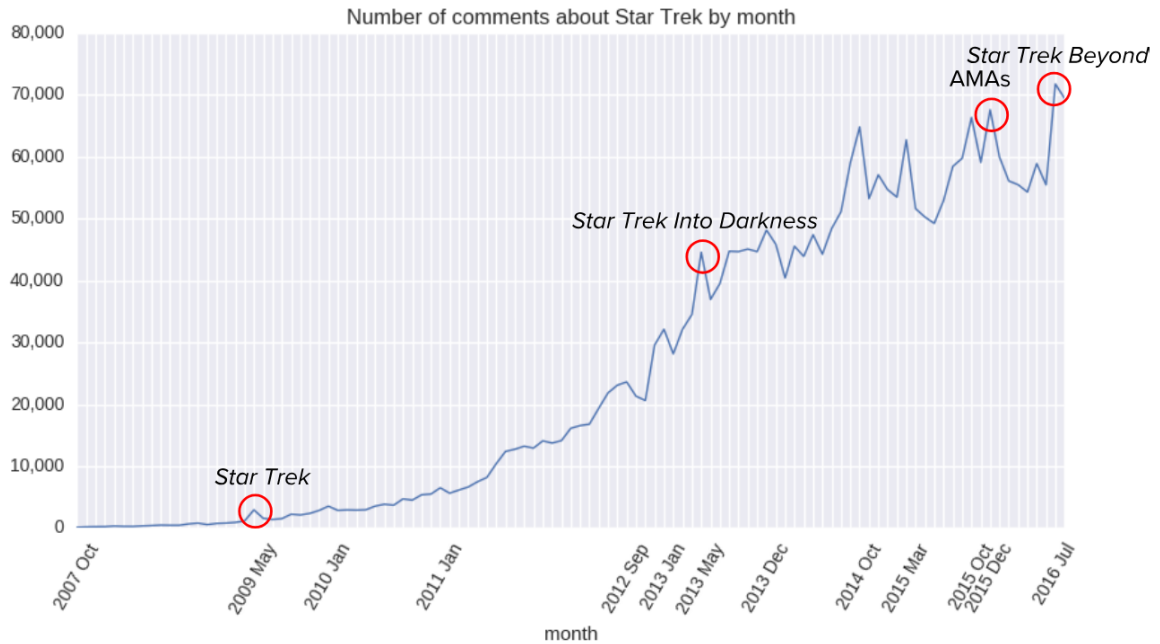
**Figure 23 Corresponding increase in activity for comments mentioning keywords around the *Star Trek* franchise. The peaks highlighted in red are discussed in the following sections.**

Considering the dataset specific to *Star Trek*, there is a corresponding rising trend in activity in the 2.5 million comments. Some of the peaks in Figure 24 are highlighted in red to denote specific moments in the production cycle of the *Star Trek* franchise. For example, since Reddit opened the creation of topic-specific subreddits to general users, subreddits about *Star Trek* appear in 2009. This corresponds with the buzz around and the release of the first *Star Trek* production since the conclusion of TV show, Enterprise in 2005. What sets this product apart is that it features a reimagining of the events of the original story and features new actors as beloved characters. Meant as an alternative timeline reboot, this movie initiates an intriguing intersection of narrative, as described in chapter 3, where the well-known version of Spock, played by Leonard Nimoy, appears with the new version of Spock, played by Zachary Quinto.

The proportion of comments containing *Star Trek* references on May 2009 stands out in comparison to total comments on Reddit, as seen in Figure 25. This provides an interesting point of investigation. The data suggests that at that given moment, with the total activity on Reddit, users activity revolved around *Star Trek*, possibly responding to the news and release of J.J. Abrams' *Star Trek* (2009).
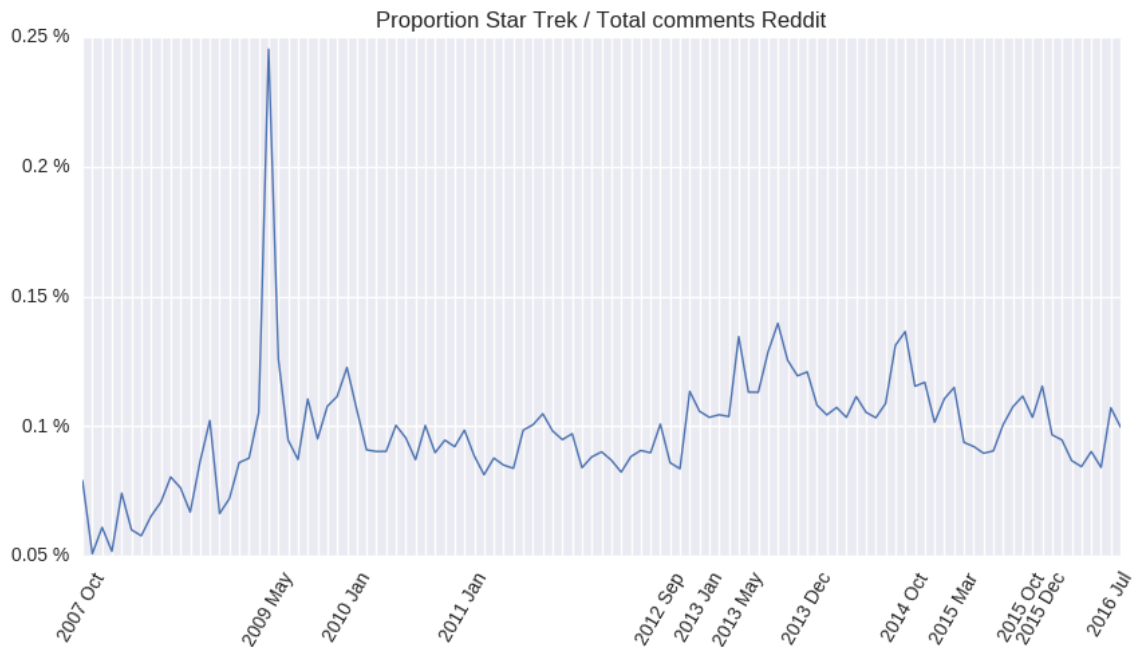


**Figure 24 Proportion of comments mentioning *Star Trek* vs. all comments on Reddit.**

This activity is the first discernible expression of *Star Trek* fan following on Reddit, and is only compounded in the years that follow. Figures 26 and 27 display the trend in the frequency of terms from *Star Trek*, like the "Vulcan Salute" first popularized by actor Leonard Nimoy as Spock, and dialogues like "Khan!" uttered by a furious William Shatner as Captain Kirk after being bested by the antagonist Khan Noonien Singh.

Khaaan! comments by month
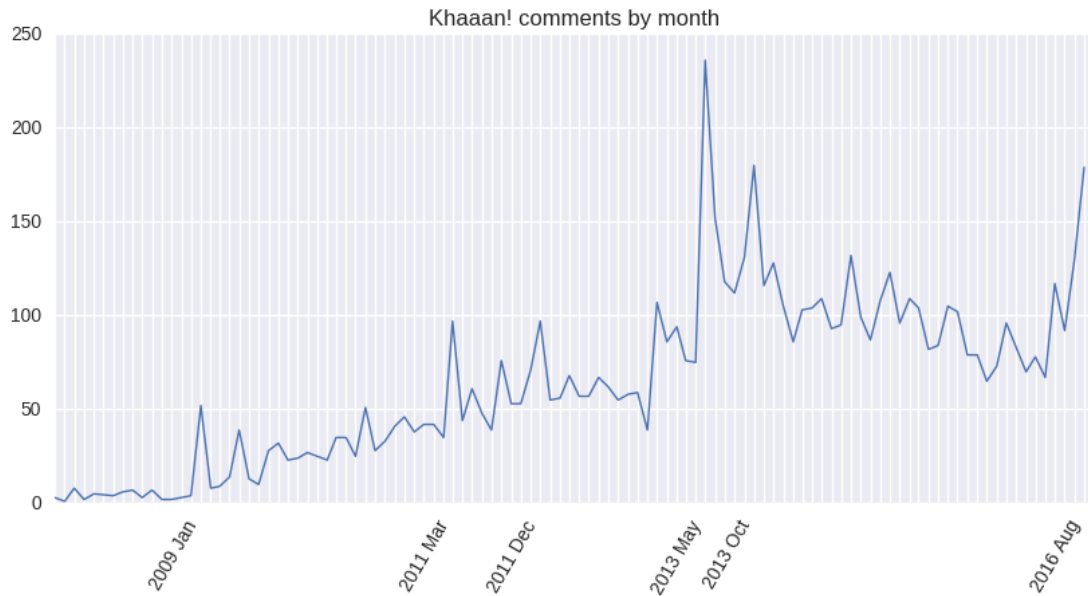
**Figure 25 Various permutations of the exclamation "Khan!" by the character Kirk were used in this time period across subreddits. This keyword was visible in either the text of comments or in the URL of links to reaction images within the *Star Trek* subset.**

The peaks in activity in 2013 correspond to multiple events within the *Star Trek* franchise. The news of release of the second installment in the reboot series, *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013) is a big draw for attention and a huge subject of conversation. Comments of "Khan!" refer to the recurrence of the antagonist for the first time after the 1982 film *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. Interestingly, the period just before the release of this movie also denotes increased frequency of this term. A possible reason is the first ever Reddit AMA by a member of the official *Star Trek* franchise, William Shatner, which was held in February 2013. Users respond to the interview and interaction with Shatner, days later, by referencing the popular meme.

Vulcan salute comments by month
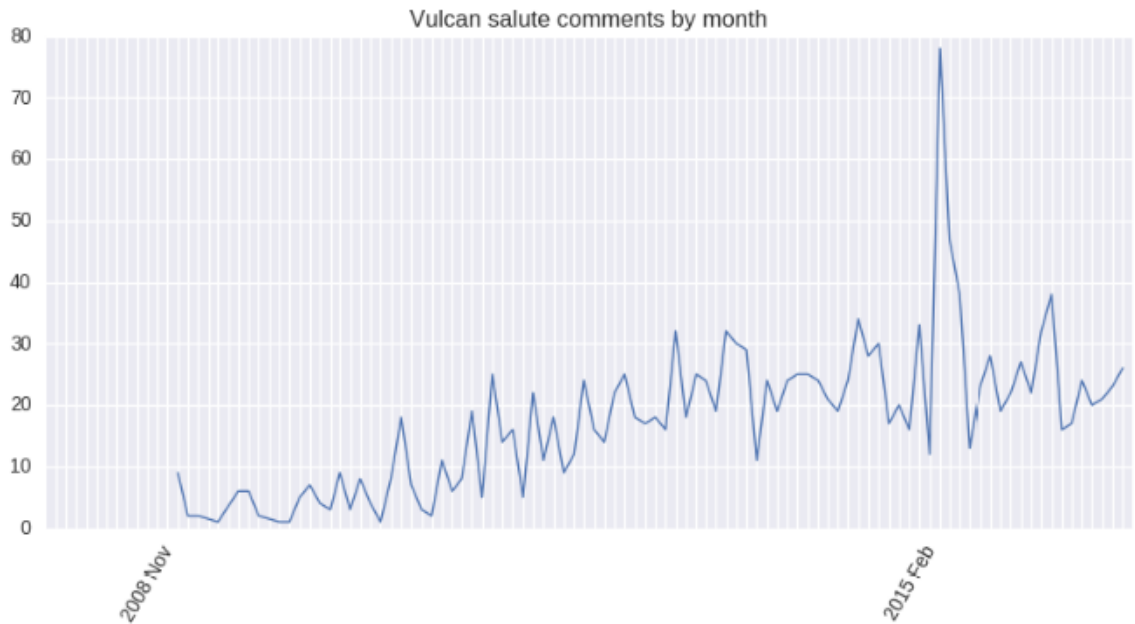
**Figure 26 Keyword "Vulcan Salute" was used most frequently during this time period across subreddits. This keyword was visible in either the text of comments or in the URL of links to reaction images within the *Star Trek* subset.**

The term "Vulcan Salute" appears in its highest frequency in February 2015 (Figure 27), upon the passing of actor Leonard Nimoy, who was well-known in having an active role in interacting with his fan base since the days of *TOS*. The Vulcan salute is accompanied by the slogan "Live Long and Prosper" or "LLAP" and is shared either in comment text, or as links to image macro of Nimoy and/or Spock. March 2015 sees an even more significant jump in activity, as other stars from the franchise interact with the user-base: Reddit hosts AMAs with Nichelle Nichols, who played Uhura in *TOS* and Sir Patrick Stewart, who played Captain Picard in *TNG*. The term popularized by Nimoy is frequently used in reference to him and his character in this time period as well.

Continued activity in response to AMAs is seen in the latter half of 2015 (Figure 24). October 2015 features AMA with Michael Dorn. The peak in December 2015

coincides with extensive promotions for *Star Trek Beyond* (2016), the final installment of

the reboot series. With the announcement the latest TV series in the franchise, *Star Trek*

*Discovery* (2017), to begin filming in 2016, also comes the AMA with George Takei,

Sulu in *TOS* and active internet celebrity and theatre performer. The release of *Star Trek*

*Beyond* in July 2016 coincides with AMAs with director Justin Lin and star John Cho,

who plays the new version of Sulu. The increasingly popular trend of directly interacting

with the Reddit user base through AMAs is significant in understanding this shift in

advertising a commodity of entertainment directly to its market. The AMAs are

intrinsically part of the realm of Reddit that have taken on a new meaning and a

potentially successful marketing tool for producers. A user base that notoriously prides

itself in getting rid of social conventions, Redditors rarely suffer fools, and up until 2012,

any promoted advertising was faced with backlash. The AMAs function as a removal of

the façade, and blur the boundaries between the producers and the consumer, thus

granting agency to the consumer. As per the norms of the AMA, the interviewee must be

open to answer any questions from the users, no holds barred. The interviewee, in

exchange, essentially gets to test the waters with their latest product. The AMAs provide

some of the most immediate and organic market research and testing. Where once

celebrities were perceived to surprise their audiences on Reddit a propos of nothing, we

quickly see that each of the AMAs listed above, while still delightful in content and

impact, correspond closely with significant events within the franchise, and function

more as a marketing tool. The digital community, although created by fans/users, rapidly

draws the attention of institutional entities and official producers, who try to co-opt their

interests for potential capital gain.

**Figure 27 A majority of the comments were hyperlinks to these websites. The largest nodes represent the most frequently linked website.**

The interactive nature of Reddit activity is also seen in the large number of comments which use hyperlinks to websites (see Tables 3,4,5), and which necessitates further research into the websites and the possible outcomes of these hyperlinks. Users refer to other comments on Reddit itself, post images on the Reddit's sister website Imgur or link to reaction images from QKME or Quickmeme, put up links to videos from Youtube. The frequent use of websites like IMDB, Wikia, Memory-Alpha suggests these act like resources that users draw conversation about *Star Trek* from. Linking to social media networks like Twitter suggests users interacting to content created by the official producers; before Facebook launched its Live video feature in August 2015, open only to celebrities at first, Twitter was the primary social networking site for celebrities and

production houses for announcements and interacting with their market-base directly.

There also appear to be false-positives for *Star Trek* related keywords, since the links to

websites like PC Part Picker, Amazon, and Github came from users discussing technical

issues: the keyword "data" provide false results as it was meant to refer to the popular

character Data from *TNG*.

## 4.4    Subreddits

An investigation into specific subreddits lends further weight to activity around *Star Trek*

that is increasingly removed from the fictional storyworld and entrenched as a new kind

of conversation in the digital space. Of the 24,076 subreddits that mention any comments

related to *Star Trek*, the ones in Table 1 display the highest frequency of these comments.

The entries in red denote subreddits dedicated specifically to the fiction world of *Star*

*Trek*, where users would discuss plots, characters, and theories related to the franchise.

The entries in black denote subreddits with varying topics. For example, the top two of

these, r/AdviceAnimals (216848 unique comments), and r/AskReddit (179550 unique

comments), deal with users asking for advice or suggestions, or even making generally

humourous comments and sharing memes. These message boards are not overtly meant

for talking about *Star Trek*, yet there are significant mentions of *Star Trek*, as will be

detailed below.

**Table 3 Top subreddits with the highest frequency of comments related to *Star Trek*.
The subreddits in red serve as a message board to discuss the fictional world of *Star
Trek* specifically.**

| Subreddit | # of Comments |
|---|---|
| AdviceAnimals | 216848 |
| startrek | 182534 |
| AskReddit | 179550 |
| fantasyfootball | 92045 |
| movies | 65545 |
| nfl | 62410 |
| Smite | 58973 |
| DaystromInstitute | 57314 |
| sto | 44103 |
| funny | 37788 |

Examining r/startrek is of highest relevance since it allows us a window into
activity around the fictional entity, where we can clearly observe how the fictional
narrative manifests outside of the fictional world, while still retaining elements of its
fictionality. That means to say, that the users commenting on *Star Trek* here are bound by
the storyworld of *Star Trek*, and are interacting with the fictional narrative indirectly,
while propagating the narrative further with their own fan fictions, alternative theories,
and critiques of the various products and plots.
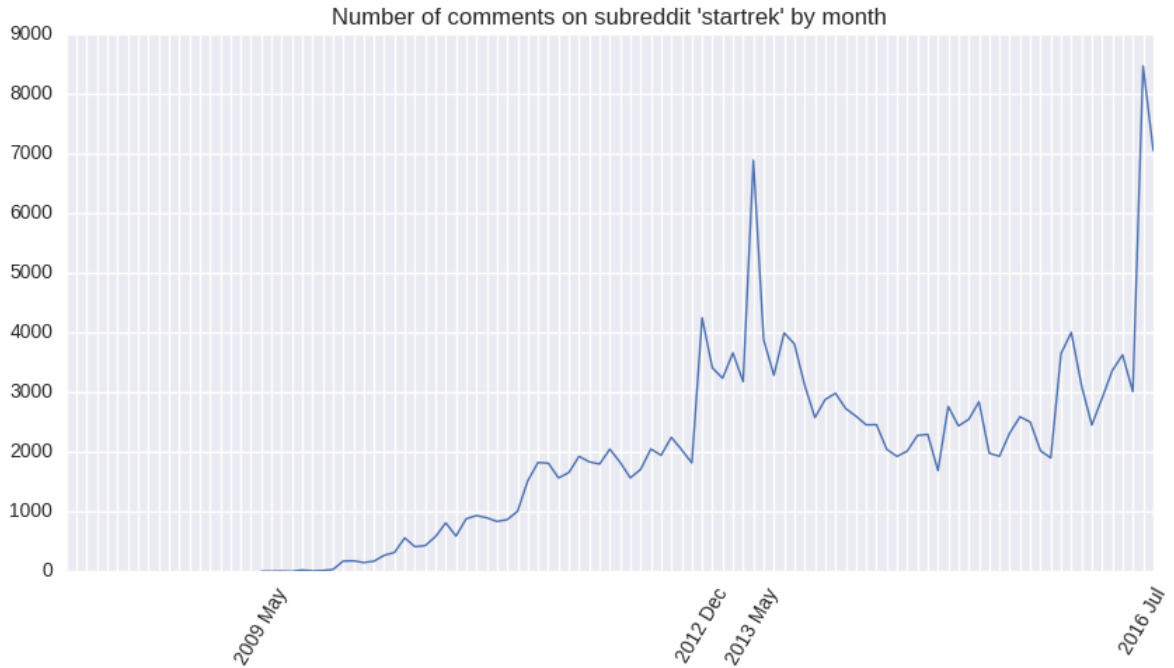
**Figure 28 Comments on r/startrek. The peaks correspond largely with AMAs held on reddit, and the release of the reboot movies.**

The graph in Figure 29 begins in 2009, when subreddit was created. The first significant jumps correspond with the release of rebooted *Star Trek* in the summer of 2009, the announcement of the sequel in 2012, William Shatner's AMA and the release of *Star Trek Into Darkness* in 2013, other significant moments like the passing of Nimoy and the AMAs with Nichelle Nichols, in 2015, and George Takei, in 2016.

**Table 4 A list of the most common words and their frequency on three given peaks in Fig 6, accompanied by a simple sentiment analysis of the top words in r/startrek.**

| December 2012 (4250) | | | May 2013 (6900) | | | Jul 2016 (8460) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Most Common words** | | | **Most Common words** | | | **Most Common words** | | |
| 'star trek', | 3197 | | 'trek', | 5068 | | 'trek', | 7215 | |
| 'kirk', | 1162 | | 'star', | 4477 | | 'star', | 6367 | |
| 'series', | 788 | | 'movie', | 3856 | | 'movie', | 2863 | |
| 'spock', | 768 | | 'spock', | 2243 | | 'kirk', | 2077 | |
| 'movie', | 751 | | 'khan', | 1679 | | 'time' | 1604 | |
| 'tng', | 684 | | 'time', | 1127 | | 'ship', | 1401 | |
| 'picard', | 647 | | 'enterprise', | 1111 | | 'spock', | 1392 | |
| 'enterprise', | 628 | | 'tng', | 781 | | 'show', | 1317 | |
| 'tos', | 567 | | 'picard', | 706 | | 'enterprise', | 1174 | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| **+ve** | | **-ve** | **+ve** | | **-ve** | **+ve** | | **-ve** |
| star trek 240 | | star trek 241 | star trek 388 | | star trek 367 | Star trek 565 | | star trek 509 |
| kirk 72 | | kirk 94 | kirk 152 | | kirk 188 | kirk 153 | | kirk 190 |
| picard 61 | | spock 57 | spock 114 | | spock 186 | movie 120 | | spock 129 |
| spock 43 | | picard 44 | movie 104 | | movie 140 | Spock 90 | | movie 118 |
| | | | Khan 70 | | Khan 111 | Sulu 77 | | picard 79 |

Users in r/startrek were found to be referring most frequently to the franchise itself: the most mentioned term in the given dates in 2012, 2013, and 2016, is a variation on "*Star Trek*"; "series", "show", and "movie" suggesting a comparison with the characters as they appear in the TV series versus the rebooted films; mentions of specific characters like "Kirk", "Spock", and "Khan" accompanied by congratulatory sentiments as well as criticisms of their portrayal in the new films. Interestingly "Picard" is mentioned with increasing frequency, while there is no significant presence of the character in the franchise at this moment. This leads us to believe that either the users are interacting with older products, as evidenced by the high frequency of "tng" in 2013 as well. Or there could be an additional usage of "picard", that is highlighted in the following sections as well.

It must be noted that while a sentiment analysis was conducted on all comments, it proved less useful in determining how users felt about a certain character or element of the narrative without leading to false results – mostly because sarcasm and irony feature heavily in these comments and as of now cannot be definitely determined as either positive or negative. That being said, certain keywords and the sentiment associated with them does hint towards the existence of agreeableness or critique of narrative elements. Some of the directly positive examples were "enterprise and voyager are the best *Star Trek*.", and "both times Picard gave awesome courtroom speeches[...]". Some examples of negative comments were, "christopher lloyd was the worst klingon ever[...]" and "JJ ruined my *Star Trek* :( [...]". For other examples, we may not be able to say with high accuracy how users felt about the portrayal of Kirk, but we can discern that it was a topic of conversation with varying degrees of sentiment. We can derive that the character portrayed did draw out substantial debate and the users are negotiating this narrative element on their own terms. Users here are immersing themselves in the narrative world through their own agency and reacting to or creating their own extension of this narrative by way of critiques and debates.

The results get particularly interesting when we analyse comments in r/AdviceAnimals and r/AskReddit. These are online spaces far removed from fictional territory and yet there is significant presence of *Star Trek* related activity. Before diving into the results, a quick history of Advice Animals and image macros is required. In 2006, a Nintendo fan site user put up a message asking other users for advice about a school play. The encouraging responses included one user sharing a photoshopped image of a puppy with a rainbow background with an assuring message for the original poster.

Soon, users began sharing this image on other websites like 4Chan, where users modified

the original image to include text superimposed on it, thus further creating a generic rule

for this meme. Users not only photoshopped text onto the image, but also kept it brief and

placed around the image, not on it. The top/bottom text placement became a visual-

textual vernacular, similar to the setup/punchline format of a joke. This meaning creation

was obvious to those within the community and who could learn how to use image

macros for their communication. By 2010, Reddit created an entire subreddit dedicated to

advice animals where thousands of users would communicate largely in image macros as

responses to original comments in the subforum, with the content frequently reaching the

front page. Soon the advice animals image macros moved to include people with distinct

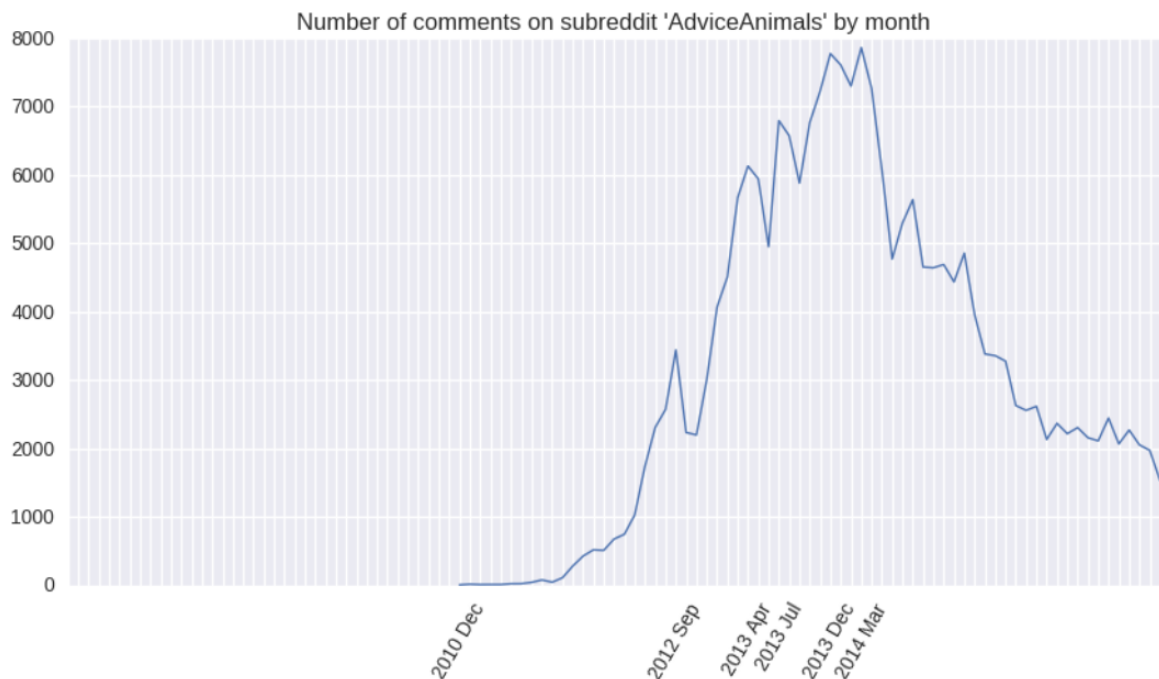expressions, and each image macro had an inherent meaning and usage (Peck 70).



**Figure 29 Trend of comments related to *Star Trek* in r/AdviceAnimals**

Of the ~217,000 comments that mention *Star Trek* on r/AdviceAnimals, the peaks in Figure 30, are investigated further in Table 5. Advice Animals is the realm of miscellaneous comments by users looking for suggestions or creating humorous scenarios through memes and text in search of upvotes and popularity within the community. It follows that the most common words in these peaks also relate to websites ("http", "quickmeme", "reddit", "linked") where the users may have directed their counterparts.

**Table 5 A list of the most common words and their frequency on three given peaks in Fig 7, accompanied by a simple sentiment analysis of the top words in r/AdviceAnimals.**

| September 2012 (3440) | | April 2013 (6100) | | Jul 2013 (6800) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Most Common words** | | **Most Common words** | | **Most Common words** | |
| 'http', | 7181 | 'http', | 3134 | 'http', | 2880 |
| 'quickmeme', | 2782 | 'fuck', | 767 | 'meme', | 2030 |
| 'people', | 1837 | 'people', | 713 | 'picard', | 1722 |
| 'picard', | 1616 | 'picard', | 574 | 'fuck', | 1475 |
| 'fuck', | 1557 | 'meme', | 521 | 'annoyed' | 1269 |
| 'first', | 1476 | 'ama', | 388 | 'linked', | 939 |
| 'meme', | 1476 | 'info', | 383 | 'why', | 674 |
| 'found', | 1417 | 'quickmeme', | 382 | 'reddit', | 204 |
| 'ama', | 1411 | 'reddit', | 242 | 'trek', | 183 |

| +ve | | -ve | | +ve | | -ve | | +ve | | -ve | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| picard | 28 | http | 145 | http | 24 | http | 160 | http | 150 | http | 398 |
| star | 18 | picard | 67 | reddit | 20 | picard | 119 | picard | 142 | fuck | 339 |
| trek | 16 | annoyed | 34 | picard | 18 | annoyed | 101 | meme | 124 | annoyed | 310 |
|  |  | ama | 26 | trek | 16 | ama | 26 |  |  | picard | 290 |

We also see specific mention of "picard", "fuck", "meme", "annoyed", "why" which leads to one of the most popular memes originating from the *Star Trek* universe – The Annoyed Picard or Captain Picard WTF as seen in Figure 31. The meme was first used in 2012 and quickly gained popularity across social media in contexts that necessitated an incredulous response or a rhetorical question (Knowyourmeme.com).

**Figure 30 Image macro meme using this screenshot of the character "Picard" is the most referenced image, or appears in most comments, in r/AdviceAnimals.**

The meme is appropriated from the 1990 episode of *TNG*, "Ménage à Troi" in which Captain Picard originally recites Shakespeare sonnets. As is characteristic of the repackaging and hijacking nature of the meme, this image imposed with text is not usually used in a Shakespearean context. The original image is appropriated and modified in meaning by Redditors, and used in turn, as a reaction image to express frustration in conversations in their communities. This is an iconic example of the fictional world being introduced in a non-fictional realm, completely devoid of its original narrative bounds.

Another instance of the fictional *Star Trek* bleeding into this message board is the frequent mention of "ama" – mentions that correspond with previously stated AMAs by *Star Trek* personalities. While the AMA resides in a dedicated subreddit of its own, links to the reddit ama thread are posted here as well, to direct users to the original interview. This brings us to a closer approximation of the popularity and ubiquity of the *Star Trek*

fictional world – fans interact with content related to the official narrative not only in spaces that encourages engaging with the narrative but also bring attention to it in unlikely spaces.

The final subject of this study is r/AskReddit where similar activity is observed. While comments around *Star Trek* appear well before the release of the first reboot installment or the creation of the *Star Trek* specific subreddit (Figure 32), there is a similar exponential growth between then and 2012, with ever-increasing activity around the fictional world. The peaks after June 2013 were found to coincide with the peaks in the previous two subreddits, so this part of the study focusses on the dynamic between 2009 and 2013.
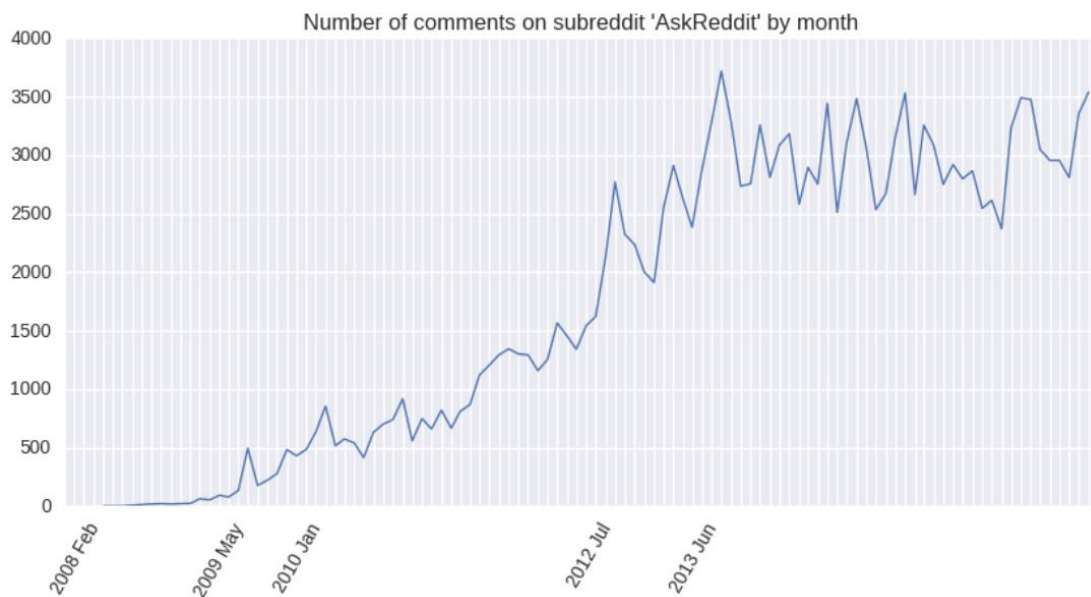


**Figure 31 Trend of comments related to *Star Trek* in r/AskReddit**

**Table 6 A list of most frequent words during the most active periods in r/ AskReddit**

| May 2009 (495) | | July 2012 (2771) | | June 2013 (3719) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Most Common words** | | **Most Common words** | | **Most Common words** | |
| 'star trek', | 319 | 'star', | 1085 | 'star', | 2326 |
| 'movie', | 167 | 'trek', | 981 | 'trek', | 2181 |
| 'kirk', | 120 | 'Resistance is futile', | 674 | 'kirk', | 513 |
| 'spock', | 113 | 'borg', | 671 | 'time', | 504 |
| 'first', | 86 | 'http', | 271 | 'people', | 499 |
| 'series', | 65 | 'picard', | 253 | 'spock', | 397 |
| 'enterprise', | 55 | 'kirk', | 195 | 'movie', | 379 |
| | | 'spock', | 173 | 'Khan', | 237 |

| +ve | | -ve | | +ve | | -ve | | +ve | | -ve | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| star trek | 38 | star trek | 28 | star trek | 151 | star trek | 137 | Star trek | 261 | star trek | 223 |
| movie | 12 | kirk | 10 | picard | 35 | picard | 34 | kirk | 38 | kirk | 41 |
| http | 12 | spock | 7 | kirk | 33 | kirk | 26 | original | 36 | http | 40 |
| spock | 43 | vulcan | 5 | spock | 24 | spock | 21 | Picard | 25 | spock | 36 |

Three of the peaks in Figure 32 are detailed in Table 6 and the most common words here pertain to the fictional world again, and to a less degree to hypertextual activity like linking to other websites ("http" only appears 271 times in 2012). This could be a result of the time period being studied where not a lot of activity took place across websites for this message board. AskReddit is meant to be a discussion forum for thought provoking questions and answers, according to the description on the subreddit. Here, memes are used natively, most iconic and frequent of which is "resistance is futile", or the Locutor of Borg meme (Figure 33), as evidenced in the list of most common words parsed in July 2012 in Table 6.

**Figure 32 An example of the usage of the "Resistance is Futile" meme.**

Originally sourced from the episode "Best of Both Worlds" in *TNG*, the phrase

"Resistance is Futile" is uttered by the colonizing alien race, the Borg, upon defiance

expressed by Picard. The image associated with this fictional entity has been extended via

memes to any face with an eye ornament or eye patch. What is truly indicative of the

fluid neobaroque-ness of *Star Trek* memes is how they intersect with other memes of

non-fictional origin. Figure 34 is an example of one such intersection, where the popular

Joseph Ducreux/Archaic Rap meme is modified to reference the *Star Trek* "Borg".

**Figure 33 Joseph Ducreux/Archaic Rap meme**

The meme is originally based on the artist's self-portrait from the 18th century, which modifies contemporary hip hop lyrics to Old English and quickly became a part of the "Classical Art memes". In Figure 34, it is seen as referencing a dialogue from TNG.

Running sentiment analysis on other notable words in Table 6 gives us some positive comments ("simon pegg as scotty was perfect[...]"; "screw 4th of july, happy picard day[...]"; "*Star Trek* tng is so amazing[...]".) and some negative comments ("khan was evil[...]"; "zoe saldana was so terrible[...]"; "damn your cold vulcan logic!") Aside from the continued commentary on the fictional universe, akin to the activity in r/startrek, the  last example also hints at a textual reference to the fictional world used in a context outside of its narrative bounds. While the rest of the sentences completely engage with the franchise, whether it is critiquing or counting the merits of the actors or the product, the sentence "damn your cold vulcan logic!" addresses the underlying intertextuality of

meme culture. It is a direct reference to dialogue directed at Spock, expressing frustration at his often calculating way of problem-solving, highlighting his non-human tendency to not be swayed by emotion. In this context, the user seems to attribute similar characteristics to their interlocutor in their online conversation. An intricate meaning-making process is undertaken, where all members of this conversation must be aware of the original context, and in this repetition of the reference, assign new meaning to their current conversation. The fictional world finds a space in a non-fictional setting with non-fictional agents, and the narrative extends to a space that it was not intended for.

## 4.5    Conclusion

Users on Reddit engage with the fictional product online to express their interest in it in a multitude of ways. It serves as a home for their fandom and enables them to generate communities of like-minded people with similar interests. First, users may interact with each other to comment on fictional aspects of the storyworld, current events related to the franchise, or may be incorporated to interact with members of the franchise. Most of the activity on *Star Trek* related subreddits concerns the fictional universe, and users are increasingly brought in closer contact with the official product. Second, users incorporate fictional references into their regular everyday communication, either through textual references, or by sharing images and links to image macro memes. Most memes studied here were derived from the fictional world of *Star Trek* and appropriated with varying meanings into the larger internet culture. The meme is a shared entity, a set of behaviours that are imitated until they become the norm: the entire r/adviceanimals community knows exactly how and in what context to use the Annoyed Picard image macro. A

fictional symbol is given a new metaphor or meaning that has nothing to do with its original fictional context, and the entirely new meaning has been created by members of a community that is in direct alterity to the official institutional entity, despite the fact that the copyright of the original image still lies with Paramount, and not the meme generators.

This further adaptation, that originates in a fictional production by a media conglomerate and transitions into a package of information that is completely devoid of its original meaning but is extensively used to denote a new meaning, is an extension of Ndalianis' reinterpretation of the seriality that has formed the basis of this thesis. Memes are seen as cultural and social artifacts, as they are produced and reproduced within a participatory environment essentially transform this social structure (Wiggins and Bowers 16). The participatory aspect of meaning creation enables an even more polycentric flow of information which completely destabilizes the traditional formulations of narrative prototypes. Here, the interaction with fiction –as a direct response to fictional activity, or as a coopting of fictional forms for everyday digital communication – is seen as an unlikely but undeniable extension of the fictional narrative. This new cultural format of communication necessitates a re-examination of Ndalinis' prototypes. Although, decentralized and multi-directional, this flow demands a modification of what constitutes the fifth prototype, specifically, what kind of content falls under the parameters of this prototype.

Another aspect of the neobaroque seriality is observed in the accompanying shift of authority between the producers and the consumers of a cultural product. Typically in digital communities, the official producers adopt users' mode of communication to

engage with them and generate interest in their product, via AMAs. What was once meant as a no-holds-barred insight into users' lives is seen to become a marketing vehicle for new products in large media franchises. The activity related to AMAs by *Star Trek* personalities coincides with the release of their latest films or TV series. Mass culture brings rise to a shift in the power of cultural production, as official producers resort to modify their strategies of appealing to consumers and coopt the consumers' spaces. The fictional product and the narrative essentially go through a series of changes in ownership: from the official stories to an appropriated meme, back to a modified response to the official product that brings the attention of the official producers to a previously unharnessed consumer-base.

As an evidence of online dissemination of culture, the meme can be termed a neobaroque phenomenon by way of its inherent virality and excess. It is without boundaries, either self-perpetuated or replicated and evolved through human agency, non-linear, and dynamic in terms of who the producer or consumer is. The meme, either in text format by way of references, or as image macros, that derive from the *Star Trek* storyworld into decidedly non-fictional contexts is a further manifestation of the neobaroque, and the primary assertion of this study. A fictional entity finds an audience and another robust cycle of production and consumption in a hitherto non-conventional space, made possible through the relative democratization of technology. This adaptation of a fictional entity into a diverse form of communication in the virtual space is a further extension of Ndalianis' neobaroque prototypes in need of a further formal articulation.

# 5    Conclusion

The driving question in this thesis is how the evolution of a narrative can be traced

through a multiplicity of forms and processes. While neobaroque seriality forms the crux

of the argument of how and why a narrative is adapted to suit the demands of a target

audience, we see that perhaps a reimagining of its parameters is needed to accommodate

newer innovative forms of narrative – which may in turn bring rise to arguments about

the legitimacy of hybrid formats as a narrative. This thesis presents an approximation of

the seriality model in three distinct formulations, and presents further opportunities of

research. Although data driven research presents challenges where tackling unclean data

can be a hurdle, and the data itself may be limiting in scope, it is of utmost importance to

acknowledge the human within the digital. Using Wikipedia and Reddit as sources for

these case studies was deliberate since they are both user generated repositories of

information – the expression of agency, either in cataloguing information or creating and

remediating information, was paramount to this research. User agency as an indication of

the increasingly destabilizing shift in authority in the process of cultural production from

institutional entities and producers to regular consumers is a hallmark of the neobarque.

Reading about our favourite shows from like-minded people and connecting with

strangers on the internet through shared experiences perhaps holds more cultural value

today – a more sophisticated word-of-mouth. The shows and communities selected in this

research coincidentally dealt with themes of othering and edging our way in from the

periphery in order to make space for ourselves within the mainstream, ultimately

revelling in the widespread acceptance, popularity, and legitimacy of our choices and identities. Operating in alterity with the mainstream norm made these cultural entities more approachable to large audiences and users. *Betty/Jassi* highlighted the struggles of existing in a Eurocentric model of occupying public space as a woman; *Star Trek* came about at a conservative moment in Western history with the aim of creating a racial and gender inclusive space; Reddit brought the outliers of mainstream culture to a safe space in which to express their identities and interests, while building a larger community for themselves. The expanse of these entities through a multiplicity of forms and processes of adaptation only reaffirms the demand for such content in a variety of spaces.

The neobaroque concern with open form and reproducibility is not only increasingly present in contemporary media and cultural products, but it manifests in higher levels of complexity. In the case of *Betty*, the narrative form is seen to extend to multiple cultural realities and the open form is noted in the translatable nature of the adapted series. The process of adaptation occurs when the original product is modified to suit the cultural parameters and market forces of a target audience. Changes are primarily made to characters, plot, and format, in accordance with the socio-cultural sensibilities of the target audience, and are seen to be a product of the time in which the adapted show was first broadcast. While individual series may display dominant characteristics of more classic narrative forms -- like the third prototype where the narrative continues along multiple episodes -- the entire process of serialization of the adaptation across cultures that *Betty* presents may constitute a more open and neobaroque structure. The modifications that coincide with the serial "copying" from one adapted product (TV series) to the other suggest the existence of a palimpsest of narrative forms – an

approximation of the fourth prototype. Each of these TV series is a complete self-contained entity that propagates the narrative further by replicating its most central characteristics for different target audiences. With these replications, each series is almost perfectly stacked with the other, and displays a multiplicity of form in this way.

In the case of the *Star Trek* franchise, the neobaroque open form manifests with increasingly more complexity, since adaptations take place over multiple media, often at the same time in the narrative and in real-time. Individual TV series present the classic seriality of the first and second prototypes, as was the case with most products from the 1960s and 1980s. With the intermittent emergence of film adaptations along with the TV series, an intricate network of the narrative emerges: story lines from the TV series flow into the films and back into TV series. The fluidity of narrative is multidirectional where some story lines flow back and forth between products co-existing at the same time. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999) is a great example of this tendency where the narrative overlaps with its preceding series, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994) and the subsequent series, *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001). The overlap is not only discernible in their chronology within the franchise but also in the trajectory of narrative or storyline. The evolution of the story from one series to the other, the appearance of characters from one series into another, cross-references with the narrative in the companion films – all under the guise of plot devices of the spin-offs, sequels and reboots -- function as vehicles for the neobaroque seriality in the narrative. Essentially, a set of characters and circumstances first viewed in *TNG*, for example, prompt the creation of their own spin-off series – *DS9*, and these characters and fictional events reappear in *Voyager* where an entirely new set of characters and events are already underway. Since

the collection and analysis of the Wikidata dataset, two new shows have been announced, produced, and telecast, as of early 2020: *Star Trek Discovery* (2017-2019) which embarked on an entirely new narrative, and *Star Trek Picard* (2020-) which brings back old favourites Jean Luc Picard, Data, Seven of Nine and other characters from the *TNG* storyworld.

The network becomes increasingly robust with further evidences of narrative intertextuality. Traditional forms of narrative intersect with the more diverse, visual forms. The consumer's interest is rekindled in a format that is arguable less sensory than Film and TV, but where the narrative is allowed more room to breathe. The creators on the *Star Trek* books began as fan fiction writers and are seen here with far more agency and far less restrictions in the production of this content. The freedom to fill the gaps in the visual narrative provides a unique opportunity to further complicate the network: this time, entire series of books reimagine the official narrative and take over the cultural production process. A return to a more sensorial and complex consumer experience is seen as the narrative transitions into the realm of video games. The gaming narrative is bound by the same story lines as the TV and film products, but differs in the reception and engagement for the consumer. In this narrative space, the consumer is granted the opportunity to immerse themselves within the storyworld, with a higher degree of agency to drive the narrative with virtual re-enactments. The worlds of the consumer and the producer are seen to meld together with each iteration of the fictional product. The process of adaptation here seeks to modify the format of the fictional product from one medium to another, to capitalize on a growing market in each of these media.

While the dynamic of the consumer and producer plays out within these narrative formulations, my assertion is that the entire fictional narrative of the *Star Trek* universe adheres to the open structure postulated by Ndalianis in the fifth prototype. The dizzying multidirectional flow of the narrative, combined with the official cultural production process changing hands between the producer and the consumer, all herald the current formulation of contemporary entertainment media. The *Star Trek* study could be seen as a prototype of a system of serial systems.

This formulation of seriality in the context of cross-culture and cross-media adaptation in the two case studies mentioned above, lead the way for a curious new adaptation process of remediated meaning creation. The Reddit case study identifies the existence of narrative spaces outside of the official fictional storyworld and the hybridity that the narrative takes on within such a space. This chapter researches further complexity in the narrative of *Star Trek*, where elements of the fictional storyworld are frequently present in an increasingly non fictional context. An iconic cultural product is seen to intersect with another iconic online media phenomenon – Reddit. This particular digital space is governed by rules unlike those of the narrative space of the written or visual medium, and yet is seen to be highly conducive for the extension of the *Star Trek* fictional narrative. The digital space makes it possible for users to express themselves as part of a shared community of like-minded individuals driven by common interests. The norms and demands of the community bring rise to technological solutions and innovations that may further the users' creativity in such a vibrant space. Users communicate with each other through a connected, highly collaborative model, using technology to redefine formats of communication that exist outside of the traditional

parameters of textual/visual/audio content that results in and becomes their own

rearticulated vernacular, specific to this digital space. This new textual-visual memetic

language is replicated and modified as a vital form of communication, and belongs to an

increasingly large community that shares this knowledge-creation process. Newcomers to

the community are made aware of the norms of such a hybrid language, and its codes and

history, and the communal meaning is articulated (in this case study) either in response to

fictional products that have long been a common interest for members of subgroups in

this community, or generated using fictional references that create new metaphors to be

used in everyday digital communication.

 Redditors frequently respond to, react to and interact with fictional content by

way of discussing plot points, the merits of certain actors and characters over others, and

directly communicating with representatives of the official productions. That last aspect

of the users' activity is another key marker of the neobaroque blurring of boundaries

between consumers and producers, in relation to a cultural product. Producers initiate

direct contact with users to gauge the motivations of their consumer base and generate

interest in their latest product. No longer are consumers engaging with content uni-

directionally, but are active participants in the cultural production process, by virtue of

their immediate feedback for the producers, and the fact that it is the producers that

approach them in their own space.

 This neobaroque formulation is observed to get even more complex with the

emergence and increasing popularity of a somewhat hybrid narrative: the meme. Within

the context of *Star Trek*, a fictional product, and the digital social network platform,

Reddit, the conventions that drive communication and information intersect and adapt to

each of these. The fictional narrative may find a place within this online space as a reference to an image or a link to a video posted by a user, or indeed an entire subreddit dedicated to it. This fictional reference is rapidly appropriated to create new meaning, as per the dynamics of communication specific to Reddit. This meme -- a combination of a fictional reference that is made devoid of its original context of the storyworld it belongs to and of its new meaning as a response or a reaction which is perfectly encapsulated in a pithy catchphrase – essentially becomes a hybrid of fiction – non-fiction – heightened/exaggerated form of communication. The process of adaptation at play here dramatically alters the original product to suit the target audience, within the framework of the digital medium they occupy.

Ndalianis has previously talked about the meme as a re-articulation of meaning creation using ubiquitous symbols. "[T]he most powerful memes do four things: they generate new metaphors, they readily invade new cultural arenas, they morph to adapt to different environments, and they eventually detach themselves from their origins" (Ndalianis and Henry 24). It just so happens that the origins of the memes studied in Chapter 4 are fictional and the end result is largely non fictional, thereby creating new metaphors for these references associated with the fictional entity. This transformation of the narrative from fictional to non-fictional exists outside the parameters of Ndalianis' prototypes, since the boundaries of her seriality don't apply. My assertion is that these parameters need to be broadened to include such an expression of fictional references in a non-fictional space, since they do perpetuate the fictional storyworld, albeit in an unconventional way. Using fictional motifs to conduct conversation may not necessarily reside in the fictional realm, but there is an implied reliance on this collective knowledge-

having that makes this kind of communication possible. The meme is considered viral,

precisely because there are no confines to its movement or proliferation within the

cultural landscape of the internet; it is governed only by ephemeral parameters decided

upon by its community in that moment. However, the fact that this hybrid narrative

undergoes transformations as it adapts, first, from one meme to the next and then, at least

in the case of *Star Trek*, from a fictional form to a non-fictional metaphor as it originates

from a strictly structured fictional serial narrative, presents an opportunity for either

modifying the existing definition and application of the fifth prototype, or the formulation

of an entirely new prototype to examine this increasingly popular media type.

The multiplicity of forms that this thesis investigates, within the confines of the

fictional narrative, are meant to highlight the neobaroque tendencies of production and

consumption of popular culture. Each case study presents a unique instance of adaptation,

and although they are unrelated case studies, the exploration of seriality in one brings

about greater understanding of the next. The fairly straightforward serial prototypes in the

case of *Betty* transition into a more robust, multidirectional system of series if *the Star*

*Trek* franchise, which seems to be the most exhaustive formulation of seriality by

Ndalianis. This calls for the identification of the phenomena detailed in the Reddit case

study and the extrapolation of Ndalianis' prototypes.

The narrative overtly retains its basic elements from the point of origin of the

fictional world until the creation of the hybrid narrative where it is essentially stripped of

its original meaning and assigned a new one that may or may not refer to the fictional

world it came from. This extension of Ndalianis' models to such hybrid narrative is

perhaps the most vital contribution of this thesis. This multiplicity and polycentrism in

contemporary cultural production is ever more present and this thesis is an approximation

of the reason for their popularity and longevity, by identifying such cultural products, and

their underlying production and consumption mechanisms.

All forms of cultural production discussed in these case studies are symbiotically

entangled with technological advances that play a vital role in their ubiquity and

longevity in the collective consumer. Online platforms such as Wattpad and Tumblr

allow to create the space for user-generated fanfiction at an unprecedented rate and

volume – a growing field of study that was out of the scope of this research, but that may

present interesting insights into the incorporation of fan-created content into official

productions that plays a huge role in keeping the collective memory of a product alive in

the audiences.

Additionally, *Betty*, in all its iterations discussed here, is available to stream on

Youtube, Netflix, and AppleTV. *Star Trek* is available to stream on Netflix and various

streaming services, with new TV shows already in production and being broadcast – as of

2020*, Star Trek Discovery* has aired new episodes in serial format every week on TV

networks as well as Netflix, and *Star Trek Picard* has begun production and aired its first

few episodes. With ease of use, competitive prices and additional features, online

streaming services have enabled a distinct format of viewership – binge watching (Lee et

al 20). Media convergence by way of making the digital, cloud-stored media available on

TV and home video formats through increase in ease in consumption have transformed

the consumer's demands. Repeat consumption, regardless of device or platform, take

primacy over the official linear relationship of producers providing content for

consumption (Ulin 331). Current market forces dictate that subscription streaming

services like Netflix, Youtube, and AppleTV offer compelling original content in order to retain their viewership and compete with other services. For example, this disruptive media ecology of the late 2010's has allowed for production houses like Disney to pull their content from Netflix in order to create their own subscription-only platform, Disney+, in addition to creating their original content. Another example is Youtube, which has begun creating original content (not user-generated) to critical acclaim and hosted on their subscription only service, Youtube Originals. This dynamic cultural production and prolonged, repeat viewing of content on part of the consumer presents opportunity for further research, given that new content is continuing to be produced within the two TV show franchises studied here. Accounting for the newer ways in which audiences consume cultural products and how they transform the cultural production cycle, the producer-consumer relationship, and the agency of the consumer, would provide interesting avenues for research into the increasingly complex neobaroque system of cultural production and dissemination.

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# Appendices

**Appendix 1 International adaptations of Betty, la fea in the Americas, namely, United States, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Bolivia and Ecuador**
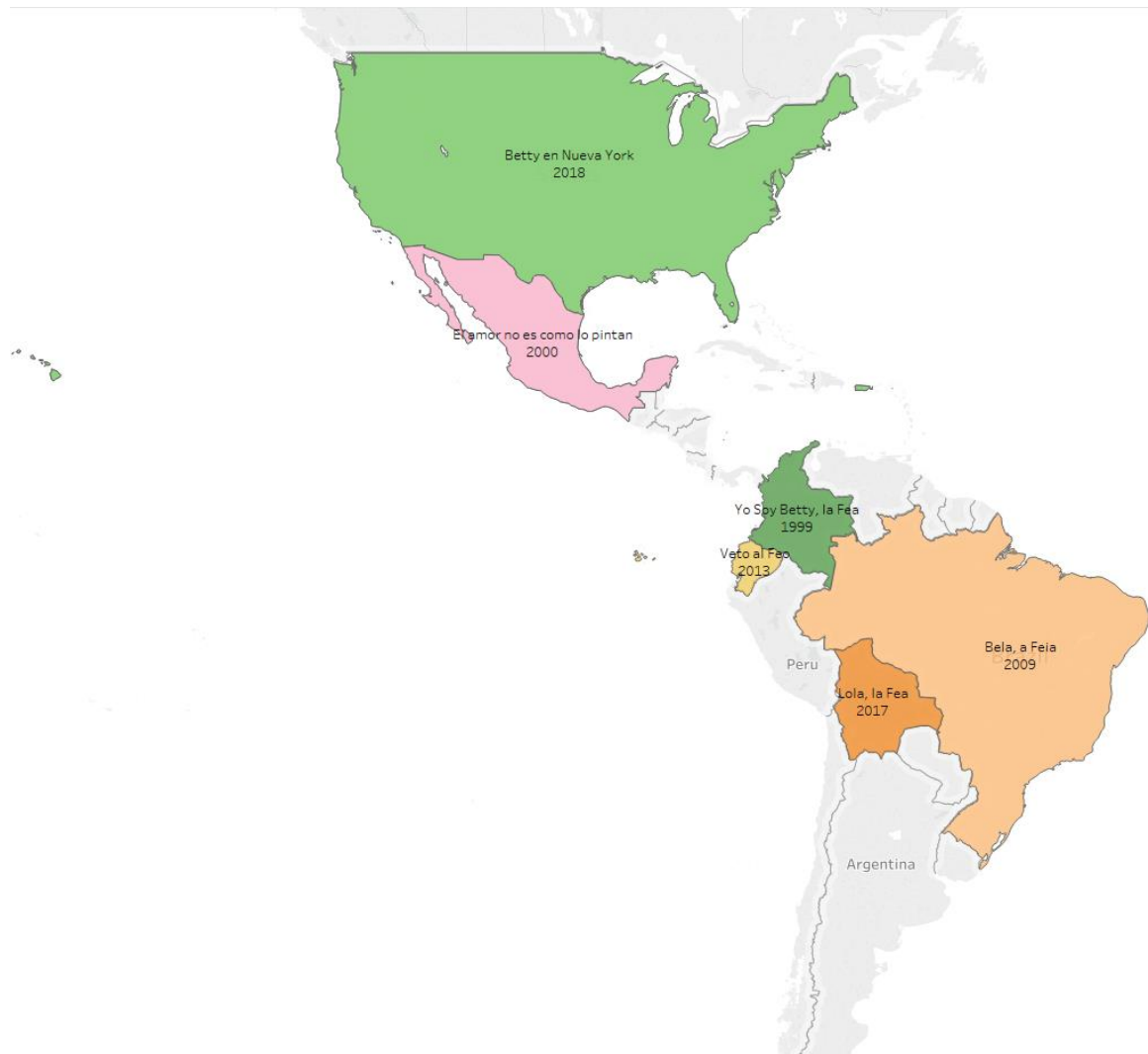
**Appendix 2 International adaptations of Betty, la Fea in Europe and the Middle East, namely, Spain, Germany, Albania, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Egypt, Georgia, Greece, Israel, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Serbia and Turkey.**
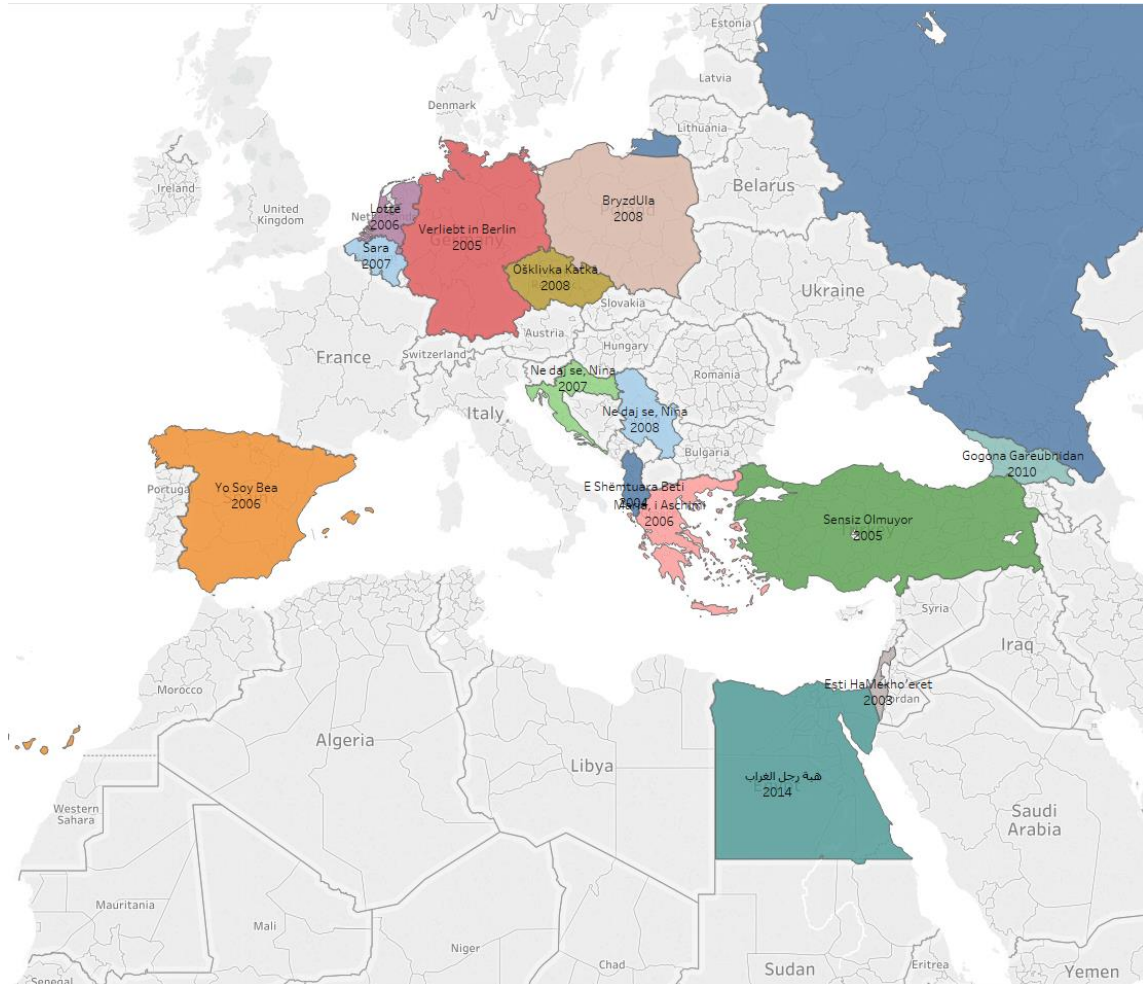
**Appendix 3 International adaptations of Betty, la Fea in South Asia, namely, India, People's Republic of China, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam.**
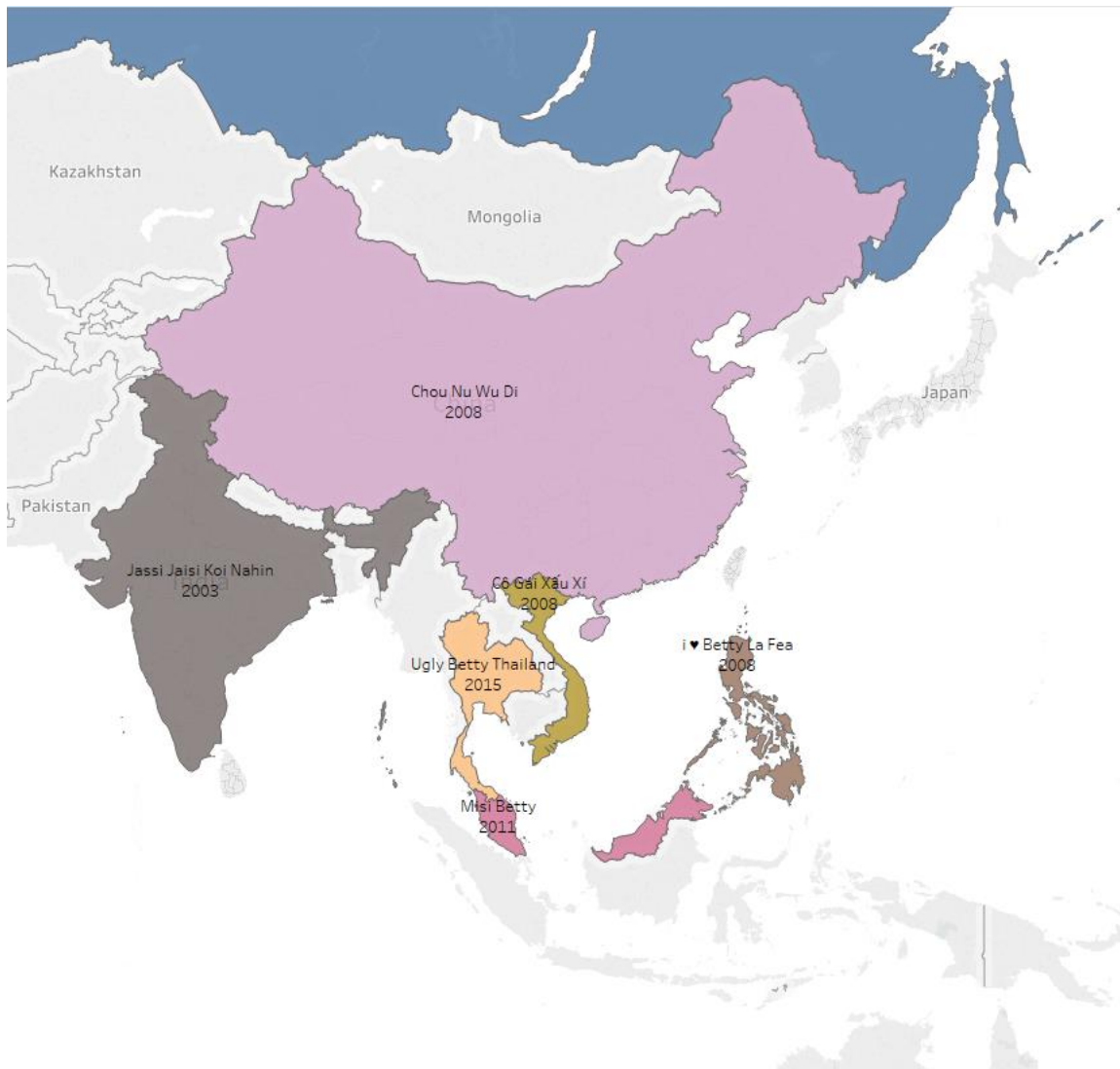
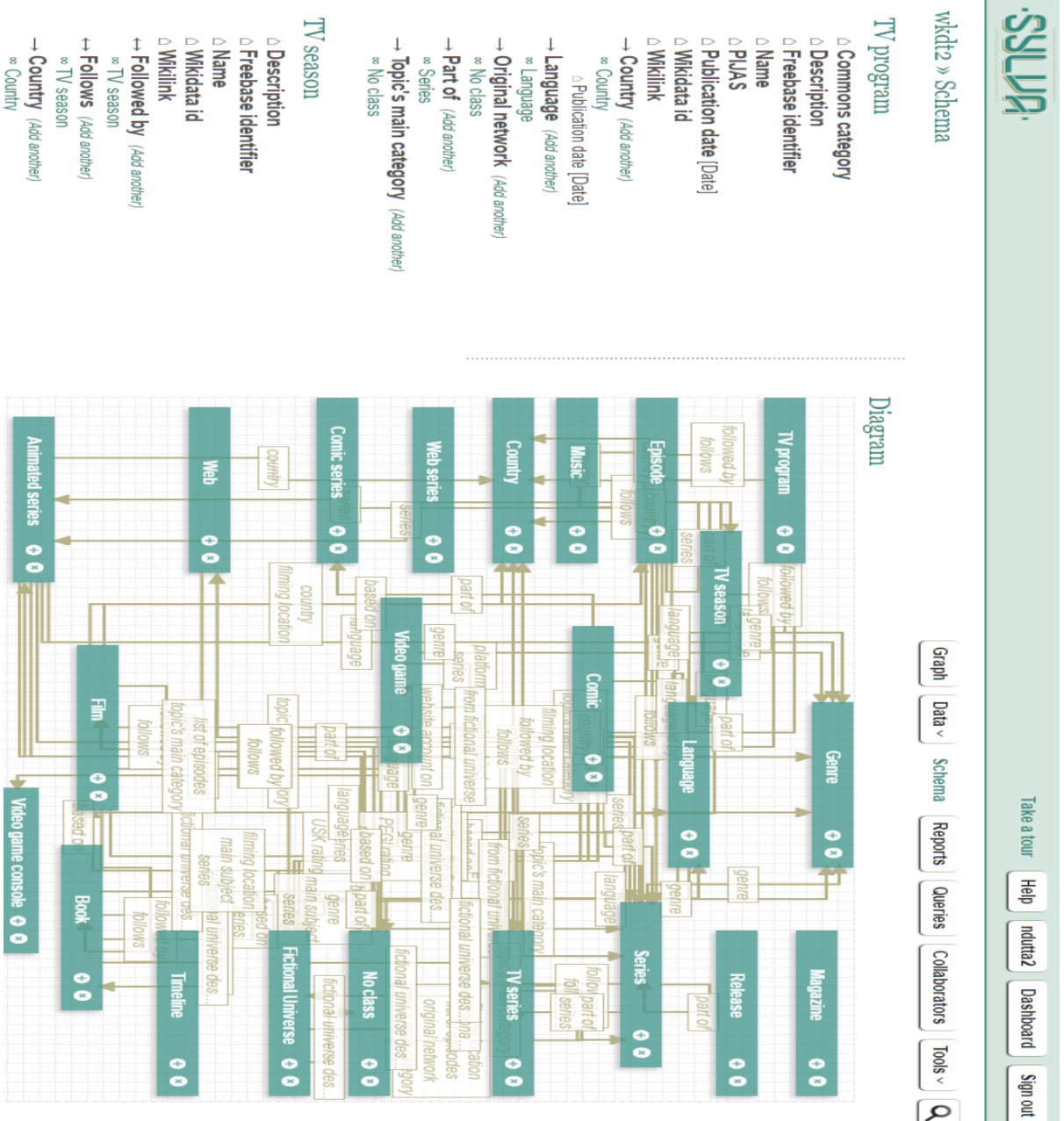**Appendix 4 List of keywords associated with *Star Trek* used to derive all articles on Wikidata and Freebase for the dataset used for this study.**

'Picard', 'Kirk', 'Sulu', 'Uhura', 'Spock', 'McCoy', 'Bones', 'Scotty', 'Chekhov', 'Crusher', 'Nurse Chapel', 'Sarek', 'Nero', 'Khan', 'Data', 'Pike', '*Star Trek*', 'Klingon', 'Vulcan', 'Romulan', 'Star fleet', 'Starship Enterprise', 'Delta Vega', 'Earth', 'Orion', 'Romulan Narada', 'Stardate', 'Transporter beam', 'Beam me up,\\? Scotty', 'Kobayashi Maru', 'Space,\\? The Final Frontier', 'Energize', 'Vulcan Salute', 'Prime Directive', 'Live long and prosper', 'LLAP', "I'm a doctor,\\? not a", 'KHAAA\\+N', 'When you eliminate the impossible,\\? whatever remains,\\? however improbable,\\? must be the truth', 'Without followers,\\? evil cannot spread', 'The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few', 'Highly illogical', 'to boldly go where no man has gone before', "I'm giving her all she's got,\\? Captain", 'Nuclear wessels', 'Set phasers to stun', 'Resistance is futile', 'I have been and always shall be your friend'

Accounting for Ambiguous Keywords: 'Bones',  'Khan', 'Data', 'Earth', 'Energize'

**Appendix 5 A detailed schema on SylvaDB of all nodes and edges according to which the Wikidata dataset was structured. This schema was created using the pre-existing relationships on Wikidata, and the entries were modified on SylvaDB.**

SYLVA·

wkdt2 » Schema

Take a tour | Help | ndutta2 | Dashboard | Sign out

Graph | Data ˅ | Schema | Reports | Queries | Collaborators | Tools ˅ | 🔍

TV program
△ Commons category
▷ Description
▷ Freebase identifier
▷ Name
▷ PUAS
▷ Publication date [Date]
▷ Wikidata id
▷ Wikilink
↳ Country *(Add another)*
  ∞ Country
↳ Language *(Add another)*
  ∞ Language
  △ Publication date [Date]
↳ Original network *(Add another)*
  ∞ No class
↳ Part of *(Add another)*
  ∞ Series
↳ Topic's main category *(Add another)*
  ∞ No class

TV season
▷ Description
▷ Freebase identifier
▷ Name
▷ Wikidata id
▷ Wikilink
↳ Followed by *(Add another)*
  ∞ TV season
↳ Follows *(Add another)*
  ∞ TV season
↳ Country *(Add another)*
  ∞ Country

Diagram

[Schema diagram showing nodes: TV program, Episode, Music, Country, Web series, Comic series, Web, Animated series, Film, Video game, Comic, TV season, Language, Genre, Series, Release, Magazine, TV series, No class, Fictional Universe, Timeline, Book, Video game console, with edges labeled: followed by, follows, part of, series, country, language, genre, based on, filming location, original network, topic's main category, etc.]

**Appendix 6 Timeline of all *Star Trek* products across different media.**

**Appendix 7 Keyword list used to source comments related to the *Star Trek* franchise on the Reddit dataset.**
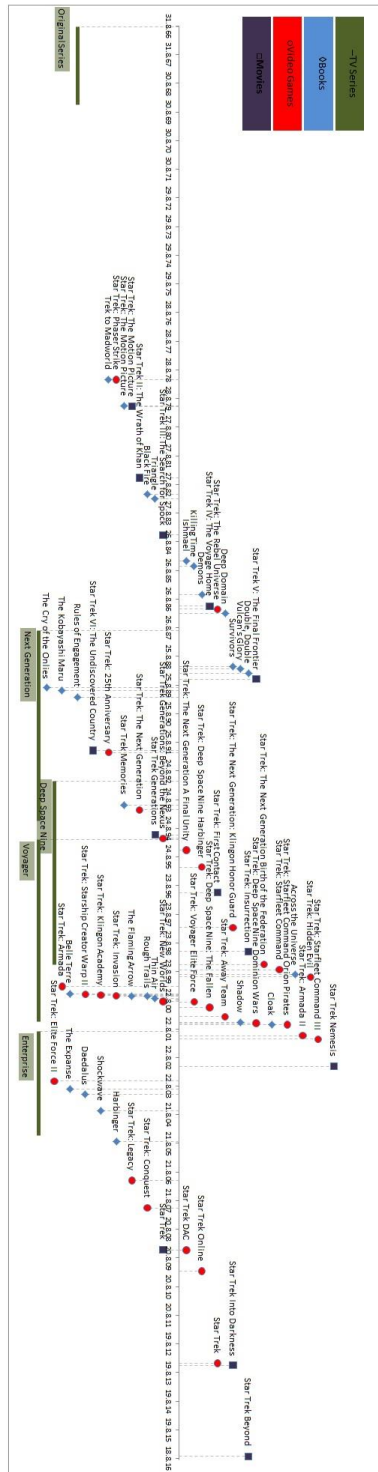
'Picard', 'Kirk', 'Sulu', 'Uhura', 'Spock', 'McCoy', 'Bones', 'Scotty', 'Chekhov', 'Crusher', 'Nurse Chapel', 'Sarek', 'Nero', 'Khan', 'Data', 'Pike', '*Star Trek*', 'Klingon', 'Vulcan', 'Romulan', 'Star fleet', 'Starship Enterprise', 'Delta Vega', 'Earth', 'Orion', 'Romulan Narada', 'Stardate', 'Transporter beam', 'Beam me up,\\? Scotty', 'Kobayashi Maru', 'Space,\\? The Final Frontier', 'Energize', 'Vulcan Salute', 'Prime Directive', 'Live long and prosper', 'LLAP', "I'm a doctor,\\? not a", 'KHAAA\\+N', 'When you eliminate the impossible,\\? whatever remains,\\? however improbable,\\? must be the truth', 'Without followers,\\? evil cannot spread', 'The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few', 'Highly illogical', 'to boldly go where no man has gone before', "I'm giving her all she's got,\\? Captain", 'Nuclear wessels', 'Set phasers to stun', 'Resistance is futile', 'I have been and always shall be your friend'

Accounting for Ambiguous Keywords: 'Bones', 'Khan', 'Data', 'Earth', 'Energize',

# Curriculum Vitae

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University Grants Commission, India
2011

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Faculty of Arts, University of Delhi, India
2011

Provost's Entrance Scholarship
Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Western University, Canada
2012

Digital Humanities Summer Institute Scholarship
University of Victoria, Canada
2013

Graduate Student Travel Grants
Hispanic Studies, Western University, Canada
2013 - 2015

Western Graduate Research Scholarship
Western University, Canada
2012 – 2016

Research Assistant Scholarship
The CulturePlex Lab, Western University, Canada
2012 – 2016

Marketing and Intern Manager
Forest City Film Festival
2017-Present

**Related Work Experience**    Teaching Assistant, Spanish 1030
The University of Western Ontario
2012-2014

Teaching Assistant, Digital Humanities
The University of Western Ontario
2014-2016

Teaching Assistant, Spanish 1030-2200
The University of Western Ontario
2016

Research Assistant, CulturePlex Lab
The University of Western Ontario
2012-2016

**Publications:**
De la Rosa, Javier, Natalia Caldas, Nandita Dutta and Juan Luis Suárez. (2014) Decline of Perceived Beauty: Facial Representations between the 18th and 20th century in Western Art. 4th Global Conference on Beauty.

Dutta, Nandita and Itziri Moreno Villamar. (2015) Editorial. Entrehojas: Revista de Estudios Hispánicos: Vol. 5: Iss. 1.

Dutta, Nandita et. al. (2016) The Business of Culture, a Single-Subject Community: Lessons from The Culturist. Digital Studies/ Le Champ Numerique.