"The real Goncharov was the fandom we made along the way": Goncharov (1973) as information creation

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper explores the information creation process of the fictional Scorsese movie, *Goncharov (1973)*, on the social media platform Tumblr.

Design/methodology/approach – Mixed methods were employed – a literature review, and a semi-structured questionnaire with quantitative and qualitative components. Data was analysed using thematic analysis~~Thematic analysis was employed~~, and Campbell-Meier and Krtalić's (2022) tattoo information creation framework ~~archival information continuum models were~~ was used as a framework.

Findings – Five information-related phases were identified, which participants engaged in – information encountering, information seeking, communication, transformation and pluralising. From this a fan information creation framework was developed. The information creation processes of *Goncharov* fans were shown to be complex, creative, and digitally social.

Research limitations/implications – The study focused on the *Goncharov* phenomenon on Tumblr, and did not collect demographic data. For a more holistic view of the *Goncharov* phenomenon, further research on how it manifested on other social media platforms, as well as the demographic impacts of participants, is recommended. The fan information ~~continuum model~~creation framework developed from this research should also be tested in further studies.

Originality/value – This paper is the first to explore *Goncharov* – a unique phenomenon where a fictional piece of media was collaboratively-created by online fans – from an information science perspective. ~~A fan information creation framework is presented based on the research findings.~~

Keywords Fandom, *Goncharov (1973)*, Fan information behaviour, Tumblr, Information creation

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

What is Tumblr?

In 2007, David Karp founded Tumblr, a multimedia microblogging social media platform, which allows for the posting of content 'blocks' (text, images, videos, audio, weblinks, chat transcripts, and quotes). Familiar functions include indexing via hashtags, which is the basis of the site's search system; 'notes', which include likes, replies and reblogs; direct messaging and chat; a 'dash', which is similar to a timeline, and can be curated by the user; and building a social network by following other blogs (Attu and Terras, 2017). Tumblr's uniqueness comes in two main aspects: its flexible user interface (UI), which allows users to customise the design of their account; and its reblogging function, where other people's posts can be remixed, recontextualised and expanded on, with reblog 'chains' effectively being created in a dialogic manner by multiple users. Its tagging system is also noteworthy, as it is often used not merely as an organisational tool or finding aid, but as a medium through which to engage in dialogue with and commentary on other posts and users (Price and Robinson, 2021).

Tumblr is also known for its user base; McCracken *et al* (2020) note it as a place of 'counterpublics', attracting groups as diverse as political activists, the queer community, sex workers and the

disabled. One of the main groups that has a large presence on Tumblr is the fan community; and one such community is that of Goncharov, a (fake) Martin Scorsese film.

What is Goncharov?

In November 2022, a photo of a misprinted boot label went viral on Tumblr. The boot is, now believed to be knock-off merchandise for the film *Gomorrah (2008)*, directed by Matteo Garrone and presented by Martin Scorsese. The label misspelt 'Gomorrah' as 'Goncharov', and Garrone's surname as 'JWHJ0715'. The original post was published on Tumblr in 2015 and expressed confusion at the label, which advertised a film that did not exist. Eventually, this was reposted with a screenshot of a Tumblr user abandonedambition's reply to the original picture: "this idiot hasn't seen goncharov" (Figure 1). On 18 November 2022, a hypothetical poster of the film by Alex Korotchuk (Tumblr user beelzeebub) also went viral on Tumblr which featured cast, crew and character names (Figure 2); and the reblogged version of the boot post started rapidly circulating Tumblr.

[Figure 1: Screenshot of the knock-off boot, with abandonedambition's reply.]

[Figure 2: Fake poster for *Goncharov (1973)* by Alex Korotchuk (reproduced with permission).]

Tumblr users began discussing the non-existent cinematic masterpiece, imitating real fandom discourse. The film was widely claimed to be lost and no longer existing in any studio, public, or private archive. Fanart, fanfiction, and other forms of fanwork, started to circulate on social media, based upon the fake film. By the 21 November 2022, only four days after the film's inception, over 450 stories had been posted on Archive of Our Own (AO3), a non-commercial archive for fanfiction (trickstertime, 2022). Some Tumblr users began to express confusion, assuming that the film was real. Subsequently, a large proportion of users began including the hashtag '#unreality' began to be used on Goncharov works to warn other users that the content was fake.

This exploratory study, based on a Masters dissertation by the first author (REDACTED, 2023), assumes a holistic sensemaking approach to information (Harviainen and Melkko, 2022), examining the discursive process underlying information creation within the *Goncharov* phenomenon, how information creation fills in information gaps, and the ways in which other information-related activities contribute to this process. This research is the first to discuss fan information creation specifically.

Aims and objectivesResearch questions

The aim of this paper is to work towards a clearer understanding ofWe investigate information creation in the case of Goncharov, and its objectives are as follows through the following research questions:

1. To investigate howHow do fan-producers of *Goncharov* create information; particularly to conceptualise *Goncharov* as product of an information continuum process.?

2. To explore the factors which motivated *Goncharov*'s fan-producers to create information. Why do they create information, and how do they seek and share it?

3. Do their information creation activities give them a sense of ownership over the wider *Goncharov* phenomenon?

3. To consider the importance of information seeking to *Goncharov*'s fan-producers.

4. To consider the importance of information sharing to *Goncharov*'s fan-producers.

5. To investigate fan perceptions of ownership.

6. To explore if, and in what ways, the findings might contribute to an understanding of information creation within fan communities.

Scope

The research focuses on the *Goncharov* phenomenon on the Tumblr social media platform; therefore, findings should not be generalised to the phenomenon as it presented on other platforms. *Goncharov*'s status as a communally co-created 'unfiction' means it is impossible to account for all aspects of its spontaneous formation through collective fan action. This leaves the phenomenon open for further study.

Methods

The theoretical framework for this study is based upon the information continuum models of archival and LIS studies, particularly Campbell-Meier and Krtalić's (2022) information creation model for tattoo acquisition. Mixed methods were employed – a literature review, and a semi-structured questionnaire with quantitative and qualitative components. The literature review aimed to synthesise research on information creation, particularly pertaining to collaborative online storytelling, from the perspective of both LIS and other domains. The questionnaire aimed to engage individual fans in the process(es) they undertook to create the *Goncharov* phenomenon.

For the literature review, searches were carried out on the [institution] library database, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Emerald Insight using the keywords 'Goncharov', 'fandom', 'participatory culture', 'information behaviour', and 'information creation'. A search strategy was developed, composed of Boolean queries and advanced query operators. Results were only considered if they were in English.

A semi-structured questionnaire was then developed, to gather systematic information on related topics, while providing room for exploration and new themes to emerge (Adams, 2015). Quantitative (through closed questions) and qualitative (through semi-structured and open-ended questions) data were generated. Most questions were open-ended; this method was felt appropriate as the participants could offer richer, in-depth data concerning their efforts to collaboratively create and document a fake film, and their motivations for doing so.

Thematic analysis was then applied to the open-ended survey responses. Thematic analysis in this case was used to tease out the most prevalent themes from the qualitative data, capturing the richness of the responses. Analysis took the form of manual researcher coding of the data. Using the results of the thematic analysis, and information continuum models as a framework, particularly that of Campbell-Meier and Krtalić (2022), this paper then presents a model to demonstrate how fans created information to produce the *Goncharov* corpus.

Rationale

While Library and Information Science (LIS) has considered fan information behaviour in regard to already-existing fictional worlds (e.g. Forcier, 2019), there as yet has not been any LIS research into a communally and collaboratively co-created social media 'unfiction' such as *Goncharov*. It is also not clear from extant literature how and why social media users choose to collaboratively produce unfiction on a scale as large as *Goncharov*'s. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore this gap in the literature, and shed light on a unique fannish social media phenomenon. It also answers Koh's (2013)

call to "explore the processes and patterns of the information-creating behavior of youth" (p. 1835) on various social media websites. This paper also aims to present a fan information creation framework based upon the research findings, for use in further study.

Literature review

Fandom and LIS studies

The intersection between fandom and information science is a relatively nascent one, but is of especial interest as this study is situated within that intersection. While fan scholar Henry Jenkins notes that fans were "early adopters of digital technologies" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 138), and De Kosnik acknowledges their proficiency as archivists, preservationists and cultural memory workers (2016), LIS has had little to say on the matter. Perhaps the first academic paper on the intersection between fandom and LIS, written from an LIS perspective, Hart et al (1999) opine that "there is prejudice against fans and fan information among librarians. Fans are often viewed as 'different to us', indulging in activities that are at best deviant or at worst dangerous" (p. 82). Until very recently, fan behaviour was seen as trivial and throwaway. It is perhaps due in part to these preconceptions that LIS has had little interest in studying fan communities.

Nevertheless, over the past decade or so, work in this area has been increasing, highlighting, for example, the information organisation work that fans undertake on fanfiction repositories (Bullard, 2017); the sharing of information resources through informal and sometimes intimate networks (Hirsh, 2021); and even the building of digital fanfiction archives (Fiesler et al, 2016). In general, fan information behaviour (IB) can be characterised as generous, participatory, informal, playful; ambivalent towards copyright and traditional bibliographic authority, and encouraging of mentorship and peer learning (Price, 2017, p. 320). Regarding fan activities as they take place specifically on social media – of which the Goncharov phenomenon is representative – studies demonstrate fans engaging in participatory, collaborative and networked information behaviour (Jiang, 2022), "unruly and endlessly creative [...] activities that rely on co-opting and adapting mediums [sic] to their benefit" (Das, 2022, p. 2). In addition, there is often a distinct element of fantasy and roleplay, a sense of ludic pleasure, where stories are told and are brought to life (Jeewa and Wade, 2015; Forcier, 2019).

These are aspects which are evidenced by the Goncharov phenomenon on Tumblr - what isn't accounted for in the literature, however, are instances where fans are both fans of and co-creators of the source text. In the case of Goncharov, they are not simply 'textual poachers' of other intellectual properties, as Jenkins conceives of fan productivity. While they are certainly poaching from the text of myriad media and literary sources – and from one another – they are poaching to create a unique, new source text – that of *Goncharov*, a movie that only exists through their collective efforts. Our study seeks to fill in this gap.

The internet has made fannish, transformative activities far more accessible (Jenkins, 2006; De Kosnik, 2016; Price and Robinson, 2017), such as fanfiction, which boasts dedicated archives like AO3, FanFiction.net, and LiveJournal (Mackey and Mcclay, 2018). Pearson (2010) states: "The digital revolution has had a profound impact upon fandom, empowering and disempowering, blurring the lines between producers and consumers, creating symbiotic relationships between powerful corporations and individual fans, and giving rise to new forms of cultural production" (p. 84). This is particularly significant in the case of *Goncharov*, where its existence went beyond online fan communities (OFCs); it was picked up by several well-known news outlets and celebrities on various social media sites, such as Lynda Carter and Scorsese himself.

Fan communities have been called by Jenkins ([1992] 2013) 'participatory cultures'; Larsen and Zubernis (2012) suggest that fans "have often been categorized in terms of their modes of participation, with that participation often usually defined in terms of production" (p. 16). Price and Robinson (2017) have also noted the ways in which fan communities participate to generate both information and creative works (or as 'fanworks'), contributing to media using interactive communication technologies. However, not all fan participatory activities are creative in terms of production, but also in terms of collection, organisation, indexing, storage, and retrieval. As such, fan production can be broadly categorised into two groups: affirmative, such as the creation of tools like wikis or more complex visualisations such as the LOTR Project; or transformative, such as the creation of fanfiction and fanart.

There has been increasing interest in fan production within LIS, which studies how individuals use, share, and interact with information (or their information behaviour (IB)). IB research has progressed from exploring traditional contexts, to exploring more diverse groups, new forms of information/media, and human interactions with more complex technologies (Ford, 2018; Gorichanaz and Venkatagiri, 2022). More recently, IB within 'serious leisure' (Stebbins, 2001) contexts has been explored within LIS (Hartel *et al*, 2016; Mansourian, 2021). This has extended to fandom contexts, with Forcier (2019) researching *Game of Thrones* fans, and Price (2021) researching X-Men fans.

Goncharov studies

As *Goncharov* is a recent phenomenon, little research has been conducted into the subject; certainly, little work has been done as relates to LIS and IB, although other research does show some overlap with what we discuss here. Turner's (2023) Masters dissertation explores the creation of *Goncharov* as a transmedia participatory storytelling practice. This posits *Goncharov* as akin to an alternate reality game (ARG), where players are "*performing* belief, rather than actually believing in the permeability of the game-reality boundary" (p. 17) – creation is enacted by the desire for the virtual to be real. Turner conceptualises the creative activities of *Goncharov* as a cycle of "narrative transportation" (p. 22) that fans engage in once they encounter the creative activities of other fans, effectively 'playing the game' of affirming each other's ideas. Lantagne's (2024) paper looks at *Goncharov* through the lens of copyright law, and how it is currently not capacious enough to cover distributed online creation such as the *Goncharov* phenomenon. Lastly, Ward (2024) combines the conceptual research paper with the model of the social media archive/repository, discussing Tumblr's queer culture and content through a series of posts that challenge the status quo of queer, digital (sub)cultural self-archiving, and how the *Goncharov* phenomenon relates to this.

While these studies are not expressly from an LIS perspective, Turner's dissertation in particular echoes the findings of Jeewa and Wade (2015) and Forcier (2019), where play and performance are at the heart of fan information behaviour on social media. Turner's cyclical mode of 'narrative transportation' gives important insight into how the *Goncharov* story is created and propagated not through linear information flows, but through circular processes that terminate either when the person "completely disengages from any interaction with Goncharov media, or until they learn that Goncharov is made up" (Turner, p.49).

Information creation

Information creation is the first stage in the information communication chain – creation, organisation, management, dissemination, and use of recorded information (Robinson, 2009). Harviainen and Melkko (2022) note that a succinct definition of information creation is elusive

because related terms have slightly different meanings. For instance, Huvila *et al* (2022) understand information *production* as distinct from *creation/making*, the former being a purposeful behaviour to meet an information need and the latter being a non-structured process. ~~Information itself has several overlapping concepts such as data, facts, documents, patterns, channels, and context (Forcier, 2022). Each term has been given various definitions, and the extent to which scholars treat them as synonyms varies drastically (Harviainen and Melkko, 2022).~~ Broadly, information creation is "when a person applies some information to create new information." (Gorichanaz, 2019, p. 999)~~has been explained as "information use that may lead to information" (Gorichanaz, 2018, p. 3)~~, a process that results in some type of artefact (Harlan, 2014) or document, and that fulfils an information need (Koh, 2013)

Nonaka (1987) perceived information creation as tacit, with innovation deriving from interpersonal interaction. Fulton (2017), although not specifically defining information creation, considers it as user-generated content in her study of urban explorers, where secrecy and selective sharing of information was paramount. Thus, the process of sharing and its subsequent use affect what information *is* created.

~~LIS research on information creation as a concept in its own right is scarce (Campbell-Meier and Krtalić, 2022; Huvila *et al*, 2022); although it is of interest to communication studies, human-computer interaction studies (Koh, 2013), and the business sciences (Harviainen and Melkko, 2022). (Huvila *et al*, 2022) list four aspects of information creation:~~

~~1.   The creation of documents, knowledge, and artefacts;~~

~~2.   The actions surrounding creation;~~

~~3.   The actors/creators;~~

~~4.   The contexts in which information is being created.~~

LIS research on information creation as a concept in its own right is scarce (Campbell-Meier and Krtalić, 2022; Huvila *et al*, 2022); although it is of interest to communication studies, human-computer interaction studies (Koh, 2013), and the business sciences (Harviainen and Melkko, 2022). Traditionally, information creation research has focused on information needs within formal or professional contexts – for example, in school settings (Trace, 2007), in the workplace (Suorsa *et al*, 2021), and for archaeological reports (Huvila *et al*, 2022). In fan or hobbyist contexts, i~~nformation created for hobbies or serious leisure~~creation is understood to be a more casual process, intended to engender satisfaction or fun (see for example Fulton 2017 and Cox and Blake, 2011).~~. Interestingly, many hobbyists or fans do not think of themselves as creating information but 'content'. Both Fulton's (2017) study of urban explorers and Cox and Blake's (2011) examination of food bloggers reflect this.~~ Price and Robinson (2017), in their work on fan information behaviour, posit fans as creative individuals who undertake affirmative and transformative activities to fulfil information needs and wants, engaging in information creation as a purposeful, often collective, pleasure-seeking activity, enriching other fans' information seeking and finding practices, e.g. through the creation of tags and wikis. However, ~~Fan studies and LIS scholars have identified information creation as an aspect of community engagement (Jenkins, [1992] 2013; Price and Robinson, 2017); however,~~ few scholars have focused solely on information creation within fandom as an isolated concept.

Nevertheless, there are points of interest in what might be considered fandom-adjacent research. Of particular interest is Koh's 2013 study of youth information creation in digital environments, which

highlights "visualizing, remixing, tinkering, and gaining a sense of empowerment" (p. 1826) as part of their information creation processes. This gives insight into how Goncharov fans on Tumblr behave when creating content. Koh's study highlights the multi-dimensional aspects of information creation on digital platforms. The concept of the information communication chain is simplistic in that it fails to account for these multi-dimensional aspects. It is perhaps more appropriate to consider information creation as part of a cycle that has no set beginning or end point. Koh's model is simple yet reflects this.

It in is archival studies that we find models where information creation is most pertinently described as an iterative, recurrent and contextual process, not merely a single point at the beginning of a chain. These models are not linear, instead representing circular and sometimes unpredictable information flows. McKemmish conceives of this as the records continuum (Figure 1), wherein the "record is always in the process of becoming" (McKemmish 1994, p. 200). The continuum perspective "takes a multi-dimensional view of the creation of documents in the context of social and organisational activity" (McKemmish, 2001, p. 335), preventing "disembedding" (p. 336) information from the context of its creation, ensuring that records remain meaningful. This is relevant because *Goncharov*, as part of a Tumblr-centred, fan-driven "social and organisational activity", is a story "always in the process of becoming". The continuum perspective "takes a multi-dimensional view of the creation of documents in the context of social and organisational activity" (McKemmish, 2001, p. 335), preventing "disembedding" (p. 336) information from the context of its creation, ensuring and to ensure that records remain meaningful. This is relevant because *Goncharov*, as part of a Tumblr-centred, fan-driven "social and organisational activity", is a story "always in the process of becoming".

In contrast, archival studies have focused on the contexts in which documents are created, and it is context which is invaluable in developing a sense of how documents should be used, managed and preserved to meet future needs (Huvila *et al*, 2022). Similarly, archival practice recognises that proactive intervention at the information creation stage is needed to ensure that digital materials can be preserved (Kelleher, 2017). Indeed archival information continuum models depict creation as the first of four dimensions that are affected by actors, actions, documents, and representation (Figures 3 and 4). These models are not linear, instead representing circular and sometimes unpredictable information flows. The continuum perspective "takes a multi-dimensional view of the creation of documents in the context of social and organisational activity" (McKemmish, 2001, p. 335), preventing "disembedding" (p. 336) information from the context of its creation and to ensure that records remain meaningful.

[Figure 31: The records continuum model (McKemmish, 2001).]

While information records continuum models were proposed to conceptualise the process of documentation in recordkeeping, more recently they are being used in relation to information creation (Huvila *et al*, 2022). These models have been used to organise and 'sense-make' how information is born into and used in spacetime. LIS interpretations have focused on the creative dimension of archiving models, examining practice beyond the archive. An example of one such model is Campbell-Meier and Krtalić (2022)'s framework, whiche synthesisesd the process of getting a tattoo into four key phases: conceptualising (thinking about the creation), verbalising (talking through/about it), visualising (conceptualising through images), and pluralising (sharing the creation with others). These stages were anchored by the participant's feelings of anticipation, identification, ideation, and creation (Figure 42). This presents a multi-dimensional and holistic approach to information creation, and its emphasis on artistic endeavours makes it appropriate to studying the *Goncharov* phenomenon.

IB as it relates to fandom is often examined from the angle of creative endeavours and practices, but rarely from the angle of creation itself. Fans are creative individuals who undertake affirmative and transformative activities to fulfil information needs and wants. Fan IB frames information creation as a *purposeful* pleasure-seeking activity, often collective, and enriching other fans' information seeking and finding practices, such as through the creation of tags and wikis (Price and Robinson, 2017).

[Figure 42: Tattoo information creation framework (Campbell-Meier & Krtalić, 2022)Model for information-creating behaviour (Koh, 2013).]

Here, it is worth discussing information creation in the separate contexts of information behaviour and information practice. Information behaviour is, in essence, "triggered by an individual's needs and goals" (Ford, 2015, p.35); information practice is "a set of socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use, and share the information available in various sources" (Savolainen, 2008, p.2). While in this paper the behaviour of individual actors is considered, the emphasis is on communal creation, and therefore we explore how these individuals follow a set of community-driven information practices, which are unique to "the digital environment of media convergence, where multiple media systems coexist and content flows fluidly across them" (Koh, 2013, p. 1834).

Methodology

Theoretical background

Broadly speaking, this study takes a social constructivist view. According to Crotty (1998), constructivism assumes that "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality […], is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). *Goncharov* is co-created through the information practices of many participants whose actions are directed by the norms and customs of Tumblr's digital community. How *Goncharov* becomes (un)reality is contingent upon the interactions between these individual content creators within this networked, digital world. These interactions and processes are the elements of the phenomenon under investigation.

We are guided in part by Campbell-Meier and Krtalić's framework, as it accounts for several aspects of the *Goncharov* phenomenon: 1) the act of creating *Goncharov* is multi-dimensional and generative; 2) the creation of *Goncharov* is a creative/artistic act; 3) the creation of *Goncharov* is a social and cultural act. We also follow Hairviainen and Melkko's (2022) holistic sensemaking approach to information.

Research methods

Mixed methods were employed – a literature review, and a semi-structured, chiefly qualitative questionnaire. The literature review aimed to synthesise research on information creation, particularly pertaining to collaborative online storytelling, from the perspective of both LIS and other domains. The questionnaire aimed to engage individual fans in the process(es) they undertook to create *Goncharov* content.

The questionnaire was then developed, to gather systematic information on related topics, while providing room for exploration and new themes to emerge (Adams, 2015). Quantitative (through closed questions) and qualitative (through semi-structured and open-ended questions) data were generated. Most questions were open-ended, so participants could offer richer, in-depth data

concerning their efforts to collaboratively create and document a fake film, and their motivations for doing so.

Thematic analysis was then applied to the open-ended survey responses, to tease out the most prevalent themes from the qualitative data, capturing the richness of the responses. Analysis took the form of manual researcher coding of the data. Using the results of the thematic analysis, and Campbell-Meier and Krtalić (2022) concepts of conceptualising, verbalising, visualising, and pluralising as a guide, this paper then presents a framework to demonstrate how fans created information to produce the *Goncharov* corpus.

~~Questionnaire~~Data collection and analysis

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was delivered using Qualtrics. As the number of Tumblr users who created content for *Goncharov* is unknown, it was not possible to survey the entire population. Tumblr posts can also disappear if a blog is deleted or URL/username is amended; and ~~lastly,~~ time and resource constraints meant that probability sampling was neither possible nor appropriate. Therefore, snowball sampling was employed. A list of *Goncharov* creators was approached, having been identified from the posts with the highest number of likes and reblogs tagged with the following: 'Goncharov', 'Gonchposting', 'Goncharov (1973)', and 'Unreality'. Participants were asked to share the questionnaire on their own blogs and social media. The questionnaire was also promoted on the first author's ~~own~~ Tumblr blog. All participants were required to be Tumblr users that had made at least one post about Goncharov. ~~The sampling methodology is therefore a mixture of purposive and snowball.~~

A pilot was distributed among seven people known to the first author – four were Tumblr users, and all were familiar with *Goncharov*. Based on their feedback, several questions were removed, or wording ~~was~~ amended. The pilot responses were not included in the overall study. Initial survey questions were intended to confirm qualifying information about the participants, i.e. participant consent, and whether the participant had created Goncharov content. Demographic information was not collected. The remaining 22 questions centred on the participants' involvement in creating *Goncharov* content. These were a mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions, and can be viewed in Appendix 4 of [reference redacted].

The final questionnaire ran between the 31 July and the 31 August 2023~~, gathering 132 responses.~~.

It is worth noting here the limitations of snowball sampling. Like other forms of convenience sampling, there is the risk of selection bias (Parker et al, 2019). As initial participants were approached by the first author, who knew of and contacted popular posters of *Goncharov* content, sampling may have been skewed towards those already in the initial participants' networks, and risked losing a more representative sample. Because of this, the results of this study should not be taken as generalisable to the wider fandom community, but as an exploratory study which can be used as foregrounding for further research.

Ethics

All participants were over eighteen; therefore, the study did not have any significant ethical concerns. Consent forms were filled in before undertaking the survey, and information about the study was presented on the questionnaire's landing page. All participants were informed that they were able to withdraw from the study at any point, were over eighteen, and were given contact details for the institution's Research Ethics Committee Secretary in the case of any queries or complaints. All questionnaire data was stored securely on Qualtrics and Microsoft Excel, on a password-protected device. No identifying data was collected.

Special attention had to be given to the participants, who were members of the fan community, whose practices (e.g. writing homoerotic fanfiction) have been labelled as deviant or shameful. Thus, many in the community, while posting on public forums, expect a certain level of privacy (Busse and Hellekson, 2012). We thus follow Busse and Hellekson's 'fans first' guidelines: 1) giving each participant a numerical/alphabetic identifier; 2) when citing a fanwork, a URL is not given; 3) in screenshots, any identifying information is obscured. In this paper, participants are designated the letter 'P', followed by a numeral (e.g. P31).

Thematic aAnalysis

The questionnaire yielded responses from 132 participants. There were 34 incomplete responses that failed to address the primary research aims, so were not included in the analysis. Most of these responses were from participants who had made only one post, suggesting that they did not feel it appropriate for them to complete the entire survey, having produced fewer fanworks. Overall, there were 98 full responses.

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The data was converted into a CVC file for thematic coding in Microsoft Excel coding. Complete coding was chosen over selective coding, as the aim of this process was not to reduce the data immediately, but to address everything which related to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

A six-step process for treating data, suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), was adopted. Transcripts of the open-ended questions were inductively coded. This process was intended to break down the data to compare themes, and to identify patterns in the data. The initial coding was intended to develop as many codes as possible, based on the semantic meaning in the data. As proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013), this process facilitates mirroring participant language rather than putting an interpretative frame around their words. Additionally, the intention of this method is to identify processes as well as themes. This stems from a social interactionalist orientation that "human beings [are] active agents in their lives" (Charmaz, 2013, p. 7).

In the intermediate round of coding, core theoretical data saturation was reached. Basic codes were developed into themes. By spending time with the responses, it was possible to identify how some of the codes were connected. In line with Braun and Clarke (2006) and Hall et al (2012), it was critical at this stage to establish "internal homogeneity–external heterogeneity" (p. 142). Extracting quotations from the open-ended questions which could fit under two themes presented the opportunity to identify and generate a new theme. This stage is represented in Table I.

[Table I: Thematic mapping of initial codes, following the six-step process.]

~~Analysis~~Findings

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The first question determined how many posts each participant had created. Most of the sample (82%) had only made 1-5 posts (Figure ~~5~~3). Responses suggested that the minority, who contributed more than 5 posts, most likely kept the story 'alive' by regularly posting content, and exhibited more control over the narrative. In contrast, the majority posted one or a few posts about *Goncharov*. This corroborates the Pareto Principle, where around 80% of consequences derive from approximately 20% of the cause.

[Figure ~~5~~3: Number of *Goncharov* posts per participant]

The next (multiple-choice) question asked what forms of content participants had created – text-based, image-based, other, or a combination. Results showed the largest format was text-based (58%), followed by image-based (35%). Nine participants (8%) answered that they had made 'other' content types, which included audio content in the form of podfics and musical scores (5%), and hyperlink-focused text-posts (3%). Figure ~~6~~4 shows the specific content types posted.

[Figure ~~6~~4: Format types of *Goncharov* content]

Subsequent questions were a combination of ~~closed~~ multiple-choice and open-ended questions, and sought to examine information seeking, information sharing, perceptions of ownership, and general aspects of the information creation process. Thematic analysis identified five phases in the information creation process: information encountering, information seeking, communication, transformation, and pluralising. The following sections ~~provide an analysis of~~describe findings in each of these phases.

Phase 1: Information Encountering

Before producing ~~fanworks for~~ *Goncharov* content, each participant went through a stage of information encountering which enabled them to gain familiarity with the types of works being posted, and community norms. During this process, several participants described their excitement in discovering that the film was fake and that other Tumblr users were replicating fandom discourse about the film. For example, P~~articipant~~ 68 stated: "It was insane how the entire online community had come together to create something new, exciting, and completely fake. The concept of it being unreality added to the themes in a way that suggested a[n] inability to fully grasp".

Mutuals

Figure ~~7~~5 depicts motivating factors for initial *Goncharov* content creation. The largest motivating factor was encountering *Goncharov* through mutual blogs posting content about the film (71

participants). This suggests that engagement with *Goncharov* occurred rapidly because of two of Tumblr's unique affordances. ~~Firstly, rather than user-centred interactions, sociality on Tumblr is expressed through content-based interaction, such as 'reblogging' or 'liking' other's posts (Seko and Lewis, 2018). Reblogging is a core element of Tumblr's unique ecosystem, where users copy posts onto their own dashboards. Thus, "Reblogged content, original uploads, and entries posted on the blogs a user follows are all congregated into the user's dashboard, [and] displayed together in juxtaposition" (Seko and Lewis, 2018). Followers of each blog are then exposed to a personal gallery of posts for their own social curation.~~ – reblogging (already described in the Introduction), and mutuals. ~~i~~If two blogs follow each other, they become 'mutuals'. This is described by Cho (2015): "Your posts show up in each other's dashboard feed, and you wind up getting little zaps of affinity and kinship when you get notified that they like or reblog one of your posts" (p. 2). Mutuals tend to have the same fandoms/interests, and thus form networks that disperse information quickly~~, fostering instant feedback loops between two or more blogs.~~. This point was emphasised by ~~Participant~~ P3, who wrote: "I learned about Goncharov through my *Pathologic* mutuals. I was initially completely fooled, because this was not the first time I had seen people discussing films with Russian names […], and [I was] already interested because I trusted the media [recommendations] of these mutuals and they were all discussing themes I liked".

[Figure ~~7~~5: Responses to the multiple-choice question: "What inspired you to publish your post(s)?".]

~~Secondly, if two blogs follow each other, they become 'mutuals'. This is described by Cho (2015): "Your posts show up in each other's dashboard feed, and you wind up getting little zaps of affinity and kinship when you get notified that they like or reblog one of your posts.~~ It is a palpable, barely spoken reinforcement. Someone […] is in tune with you" (p. 2). ~~Mutuals tend to have the same fandoms/interests, and thus form networks that disperse information quickly, fostering instant feedback loops between two or more blogs. This point was emphasised by Participant 3, who wrote: "I learned about Goncharov through my *Pathologic* mutuals. I was initially completely fooled, because this was not the first time I had seen people discussing films with Russian names […], and [I was] already interested because I trusted the media [recommendations] of these mutuals and they were all discussing themes I liked".~~

Text and Image Posts

The second and third highest factors in information encountering were participants finding other text-based content (69 participants) and image-based content (61 participants). This is unsurprising, as image and text-based posts dominate all other content blocks ~~(i.e. quote, link, chat, audio, and video)~~, accounting for 92% of all Tumblr content (Chang *et al*, 2014). Some participants described being inspired to create a particular type of text or image-based post, having seen others post something similar. For example, ~~Participant~~ P14 stated:

> "[I] didn't decide to participate until I saw the first musical piece appear on my dash. The theme was so evocative that I borrowed heavily from it in crafting Katya's theme, inverting the motifs and underscoring it with a slightly different chord progression to set it apart but still make it feel cohesive […] I think many people drew inspiration from the Goncharov theme track when composing their own music."

Multiple participants similarly described encountering a text-based post and feeling inspired to create digital artwork that explored the specific scene, relationships (a.k.a. 'ships' in fandom spaces), characters, or theme. Others experienced this same process, but for audio posts. ~~Participant~~ P27 explained: "[T]here was a LOT of posts on the opening credits and [Katya] walking in front of the

church with her scarf - someone even posted music for it - and it was so inspiring!! [I]t was really similar to when you've seen a really important scene in a film and just have to make artwork for it."

The decision to move to a more active phase was not as obviously described by some participants, but seemed to derive from the feeling of excitement. Some of the participants described being hesitant to move to a more active phase because they thought their content would not receive a lot of attention. This concern was usually resolved when locating similar work.

Phase 2: Information Seeking

Information seeking varied from serendipitous to strategic, although the former ~~seemed to be~~was more common. Some participants ~~explained that they~~ produced content within an hour of seeing other *Goncharov* posts, while others ~~mentioned that they~~ initially had no intention of creating content until ~~they found~~ another post ~~which~~ inspired them: "I enjoyed reblogging and reading [G]oncharov content, but had no plans to make my own. But I heard the piano main theme and loved it, and decided to make a full orchestral arrangement for it" (~~Participant ~~P35).

The most common form of research was looking through ~~the~~ *Goncharov*-related tags on Tumblr, which 86% of participants confirmed that they had done. ~~Exploring the tags was also used by participants to access more information on *Goncharov* if their mutual networks were not involved.~~ This was explained by ~~Participant ~~P31: "If I hadn't looked at the Goncharov tag, I would have been unable to compile the lore to make some of my posts. The tags were the main source of plot and character information to me". The content types participants searched for most was "Tumblr posts depicting the same thing" (see Figure ~~8~~6).

[Figure ~~8~~6: Breakdown of what participants researched.]

More than half of the participants (69%) conducted research as part of their move into the active phase of content creation. Participants who produced image-based fanworks conducted the most research (55%), with the second-most group creating text-based posts (38%). The following most researched area was reference images from the actors' filmographies, which were used for fanart and gifsets (animated image sets). For example, ~~Participant ~~P1 stated that they searched for scenes from the actors' real-life films: "I knew what scenes I wanted to convey in gifsets partially because others' posts gave me an idea of the tensions in them".

Themes and Other Media

Part of this information seeking process involved identifying themes and links to other media objects. Table II represents some of the most popular themes from *Goncharov*, and how many participants engaged with them.

[Table II: Most popular themes from *Goncharov*.]

Sensemaking through text-posts and fanart seemed to be of critical importance to most of the participants. A key element to their initial engagement with *Goncharov* was the ability to draw comparisons to current fandoms, other popular media objects, and classical literature. ~~Participant ~~P5 described being part of fandoms which also involved espionage or crime as plot devices, including James Bond (1962-2021), *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (TV series 1964–1968, film 2015), and *The Ipcress File* (film 1965, TV series 2022). Familiar themes of violence and trauma drew them to *Goncharov*: "there's something so visceral and feral about very violent and capable characters struggling with bigger issues which then lead to their self-destruction". ~~Participant ~~P31 created direct comparison posts between Goncharov and classical literature, stating: "my current favorite post […] was one

comparing the themes of Macbeth ~~(particularly isolation caused by ambition and the inevitability of fate)~~". ~~This is a popular style of post on Tumblr, where fan posts deliberately illustrate comparisons between characters and/or lines from their favourite media objects, and also underscores the need to anchor the unreality of Goncharov with something very real.~~

Phase 3: Communication

A third phase for some participants involved communication, or verbalising ideas, which allowed them to take steps towards creation. Willson (2022) described this process as, "both temporary and cooperative in nature, involving the informal social exchange of information […] for the purpose of obtaining assistance and/or social support on an intellectual endeavour. The process is active, iterative, and generative, resulting in the *creation of new information* [our italics]" (p. 811). ~~In OFCs, communication is an important element of transformative fandom. For instance, Thomas (2007) describes the sorts of conversations role-play fans have out-of-character regarding world-building cultures, language, sound effects, film techniques, and the plotting of storylines. From these discussions, the narrative and fantasy world are brought into existence, to be explored in-character.~~

The question "Did you discuss the idea for your post(s) before publishing?" was multiple choice and garnered 115 results from participants. Just over half of the participants (51%) had discussions about their ideas via Tumblr, other platforms, text messaging or WhatsApp, or in-person. Most of these discussions took place between online friends or, in a couple of instances, roommates and family ~~who were all aware of *Goncharov*~~. The impact of discussing ideas was clearer to some participants than others. The most powerful factor highlighted was the sense of community and encouragement experienced. ~~Participant~~ P16 explained that their "drawing of Katya that did very well on Tumblr wasn't affected by discussing the idea, [I] just remember showing the work in progress to my friends and them laughing about it". Participants appreciated discussing the film with others because it allowed them to build a new social community or experience a sense of belonging with a pre-existing community. Another participant responded: "We joked about [Goncharov] together, laughing and generally having a great time, and they were encouraging when I sat down to scribble out some quick slash [homoerotic] art. The general good mood and levity of the whole situation encouraged me to post the piece" (~~Participant~~ P3).

Several participants described reaching out to mutuals to flesh out ideas. ~~Participant~~ P30 described having conversations "about 'similar' films from the [era]. [A] good one thrown around was [V]ictim (from the 60s) which has interesting [dynamics] between the husband and wife, like [G]oncharov and [Katya] have". Similarly, ~~Participant~~ P33 ~~used this moment of social exchange~~reached out for the purpose of obtaining social support, assistance, and prompting others to join in: "I asked a couple of ~~aroace~~ […] mutuals if they'd help me getting the idea known by reblogging my post and creating similar ones".

Friendly support sometimes blurred the line into 'beta-reading'~~.~~ ~~Beta-readers are (~~essentially the fandom version of ~~an editor~~literary editing).~~, who support fanfiction writers.~~ ~~Participant~~ P91 stated, "I talked about plot ideas and got suggestion[s] and beta". ~~Participant~~ P71 noted that discussing the film made their ideas, "[m]ore refined maybe. At least less rambly and more on point. Helped with actually discussing themes/char[acters] in a real way […] Discussing it had a way of getting to the meat of what you wanted to write quicker and developing a sense of reality to it".

In only a few instances, in-person conversations were logistical in nature. One participant described asking another musical creator for permission to cover their song; another explained that they had

coordinated with their housemate(s) to explain why they wanted to record music in a shared home. These conversations are rare in the sample.

Phase 4: Transformation

The fourth phase was transforming content by appropriating material from *Goncharov*'s 'canon' to deepen the illusion. Taking media elements and replacing the content or context to give them new meaning is central to transformative fandom, allowing fans to express other possibilities that amend the past, present, or future of a media object.

Queering

Floegel (2020) posits information world-queering as a process where fans reorient normative content to create more satisfying and representational texts. The most evident form of transformation in *Goncharov* was to read the characters ~~of *Goncharov*~~ as queer, with Katya/Sofia and Goncharov/Andrey being the most popular ships. Understanding that the 'canon' should be queered was foundational to the story of *Goncharov*, agreed at the point of creation, and once ~~Once~~ this became apparent to fans, there was a sense of excitement about 'playing' with the characters beyond the established 'canon'. This was encapsulated in the phrase: "[I] needed to write a post or two about the gays" (Participant 75). Numerous participants agreed that "[h]omoeroticism was definitely the [theme] I engaged with most" (~~Participant~~ P22).

The 'canon' 1973 release of *Goncharov* complied with the Motion Picture Production Code (Hays Code) (Connanro *et al*, 2022-2023), which was enacted in America in 1933, and guided what was permissible in most Western motion pictures until the late twentieth century. The Hays Code required filmmakers to represent queer characters in films as sexless, and that their sexuality, if acknowledged, was a 'perversion' (Crewe, 2015). ~~*Goncharov* fans~~Participants ~~agree that there are~~often mentioned the subtle nods to the homoerotic subtext of the film, such as the pride flag being included in the shading of Goncharov's jacket in an 'unreleased' version of the original film poster.

~~It is interesting but unsurprising that Goncharov fans provided a queer reading of the 'film' as a fourth phase in the information creation process. In fandom spaces, reading characters as queer allows audiences to see themselves represented, and to project their experiences onto fictional characters. As Floegel (2020) explains, "Slash [...] is unique in that it expresses queer possibilities that transform past, present, and future cis/heteronormative trends. [...] Fan-created queer content can renegotiate texts to provide more satisfying narratives amidst largely heteronormative mainstream media" (p. 787). Tumblr, as host to numerous popular OFCs, is considered a safe space for adolescents and young adults to "engage in critical identity-based exploration and developmental tasks" (McInroy *et al*, 2022, p. 630). With the lack of meaningful queer representation in media, fans frequently turn to OFCs to develop transformative characters, relationships, and story arcs in their favourite media objects (McInroy *et al*, 2022). Particularly popular on Tumblr is the shipping of two male characters with homoerotic tension. To cite Participant 3: "that's classic [T]umblr - shipping two male leads with homoerotic tension — and the Goncharov fandom didn't feel complete without it".~~

~~Floegel (2020) suggests that information world-queering is a process where fans reorient normative content and 'fill in the gaps' (Jenkins, [1992] 2013). Queering in OFCs has mostly been studied in the context of fanfiction platforms; and while *Goncharov* fanfiction was created, fanart and analysis of the film were the initial forms of information creation. The aims of these posts were to explore the subtext of the film. Participant 1 explained that the "power dynamics and concealed emotions~~

behind the characters' relationships made me want to look for video material from the actors' other movies to see if I could combine them to create the atmosphere I felt for Goncharov. I especially looked for something to portray love, love/hate and unfulfilled or fated to fail-love." When describing Katya and Sophia's relationship, one participant wanted to communicate the tragedy of their relationship: "There's a yearning between them which is like horrifying and beautiful" (Participant 2).

Phase 5: Pluralising

The final step in the information creation process was pluralising. Once information is shared about a document, the experience of creation is extended to others and meaning can be communally understood or reinterpreted. In Campbell-Meier and Krtalić's (2022) study, creation is described as a social process; wWith *Goncharov*, the action of sharing on Tumblr exposed the phenomenon to followers and mutual networks. By tagging the fanwork, individuals who did not necessarily follow the participants were also able to view the post and experience information encountering. This is pluralising. As put by one respondent, "[f]rom there publishing posts was both logical and needed in order to contribute to the longevity of the idea" (Participant 68).

Reblog Chains

One affordance provided byof Tumblr's UI is 'reblog chains', where Tumblr users reblog a post and add related comments in the caption, "creating potentially countless threads of constantly transforming, multimodal, multiauthored texts" (McCracken *et al*, 2020, p. 5. See Figure 9 as an example). Reblog chains are unique to Tumblr and promote responses between individuals who may have no association with other contributors to the chain. This highlights Tumblrs' focus on flexible and content-based interactions rather than user-centred interactions or restricted content-based interactions.

[Figure 9: Screenshot of a *Goncharov* reblog chain.]

Of the participants, most (45 participants) did not experience their posts becoming a reblog chain; 22 were not aware if their posts had become reblog chains, and 31 participants were actively aware that their posts had become reblog chains. This does not suggest that those who did not experience their posts becoming reblog chains were less active in the communicative aspects of *Goncharov*; Tumblr users are far more likely to reblog a post and add commentary in the tags, given that they are able to add freeform tags when reblogging (McCracken *et al*, 2020). The majority of those who did experience their posts becoming reblog chains (23 participants) had produced text-based posts, which are more likely to instigate dialogic forms of communication.

Participant P78 described the process of creating a "collaborative meta [analysis] chain" with one of their mutals regarding costumes in the film: "we were discussing the Katya/Sofia intimacy dynamic, but also that of Katya's maid, Moira (who had an unrequited crush on Katya)." Although only a small number of participants experienced this social process, it is a notable example of the social and ludic/paiadic elements of the Goncharov fandom.

Recordkeeping

Lastly, efforts were made to record the canon of *Goncharov* in real-time. 5 participants from the 54 who responded to the question 'Were you involved in any attempts to record the canon of Goncharov?' confirmed that they had been involved. This primarily involved making 'lore' compilation posts (i.e. master-lists). Other efforts included several Google Docs which were mass-

authored and moderated by a select few. To produce content for the fandom, the agreed canon was carefully documented. These reference documents detailed iconic scenes, allowing participation through art and analysis without employing moderators.

~~Recording and archiving information about and surrounding a media object has been referred to as 'affirmative' fan practice: when fans "tend to collect, view, and play, to discuss, analyze, and critique" (Hellekson and Busse, 2014, p. 3). These actions are usually perceived in opposition to transformative fan practice, where fans take steps to transform worlds and characters, either through fanfiction, cosplay or fanart. Recordkeeping as a fandom activity can typically serve to separate the 'canon' from the 'fanon' (i.e. transformative interpretations of the media object). In the case of *Goncharov*, the canon was born from the fanon, negotiated by a select group, or microfandom, where individuals might work collaboratively on Discord groups, blogs, chat rooms, or other online communication platforms (Booth, 2015). To produce content for the fandom, the agreed canon was carefully documented.~~

68% of participants claimed that an awareness of *Goncharov*'s 'canon' impacted what they were posting. ~~However, it was clear that *Goncharov* fans were less concerned with maintaining a perfect canon as they were in helping others connect with the film. This contrasts with most collaborative story writing efforts where co-authors are usually more aware and concerned with inconsistency than driving forward narrative, stressing the importance of canonicity in collaborative storytelling (Tapscott *et al*, 2013). Participant~~ P71 explained: "Some character[s'] personalit[ies] and relationships […] became canon quite early, so you kinda moved down that trajectory by default. All the big canon scenes and ships just […] became a fact about the movie, so you discussed topics with that in mind". Similarly, ~~Participant~~ P41 explained that they:

> […] looked at a google doc that is (or at least attempts to be) a master list of characters, scenes, themes, and links to other info (like ~~[Y]~~youtube posts of soundtrack music, trailers etc) and from them got some info that fit with the concepts I was developing for my fic [fanfiction]. I put a couple of posts on ~~[T]~~tumblr when I first thought of the fic ~~(fanfiction)~~ idea, and used the reference doc so I felt I wasn't contradicting it.

However, it ~~was clear that~~some *Goncharov* fans ~~were~~expressed less concerned with maintaining a perfect canon ~~as they were in helping others connect with the film. This contrasts~~, contrasting with Tapscott *et al's* (2013) assertion that most collaborative story ~~writing efforts where~~ co-authors are ~~usually~~ more ~~aware and~~ concerned with inconsistency than driving forward narrative~~, stressing the importance of canonicity in collaborative storytelling (Tapscott *et al*, 2013)~~: "I was aware of it, and considered that to be the baseline, but just like any fanfiction all the 'canon' becomes is a place for me to mix and match as I see fit. A sandbox if you will" (P68). ~~These reference documents detailed iconic scenes, allowing participation through art and analysis without employing moderators. Booth (2015) suggests that this is typical of fan practice "as fans continually look to iconic moments in a text's past to reference their fandom. Identifying moments from the past to define a particular moment of fandom is key to a fan's intimate relationship with a text" (p. 6). The act of documenting characters, ships, themes, and major scenes thus supported the production of other posts and fannish outputs.~~
~~Other participants emphasised the element of collaboration and play, and the importance of not contradicting others' content unless it was purposeful. This follows Booth's (2015) understanding of cult media fans, who suggested that "only through play does meaning of any kind achieve mutual fan understanding" (p. 17). For example, Participant 32 stated:~~

~~I wanted to play along with "canon", so that it would be like I was playing alongside other posters collaboratively, rather than contradicting them (except maybe if contradicting them would be more~~

Discussion and conclusion

Information creation

This study supports Koh's (2013) findings of information creation in digital environments, where there are clear patterns of "visualizing, remixing, tinkering, and gaining a sense of empowerment" (p. 1826). Reference images and footage were especially important in the creation of *Goncharov*. These images and footage from period film and other media were remixed by Goncharov fans to make realistic depictions of the movie, from posters to film edits/clips, gifsets and fanart. As the online *Goncharov* corpus grew, a few users took on the role of recordkeepers, organising and presenting content in master Google Docs, and developing a loosely agreed-upon canon. One could conceive of *Goncharov's* entire canon as an example of 'tinkering' – "an idea, which then grows and evolves by continual modification, experimentation, and trial and error" (Koh, 2013, p. 1835) – its playful and participatory elements are certainly indicative of this. But it is on the edges of this canon that 'tinkering' sometimes came to the fore. While weight was put on not contradicting the canon, P32 stated:

> I wanted to play along with "canon", so that it would be like I was playing alongside other posters collaboratively, rather than contradicting them (except maybe if contradicting them would be more interesting or funny). [T]he "yes, and" environment fostered by goncharov posters was very fun, but you kind of had to know some of what you were saying "yes, and" to.

In this sense, inconsistences did not break the immersive nature of *Goncharov*—it only heightened the fandom experience. Despite the documentation of *Goncharov*'s canon through master-lists, glaring errors did become prevalent in many posts, leading to conflicts of interpretation, and the creation of meta, or essays, where negotiation of canon could take place.

Lastly we see *Goncharov* as a site of empowerment, not merely through the unique environment it afforded in driving creation and creativity, but also through the ability to "engage in critical identity-based exploration and developmental tasks" (McInroy *et al*, 2022, p. 630) and "renegotiate texts to provide more satisfying narratives amidst largely heteronormative mainstream media" (Floegel, 2020, p. 787). While world-queering has chiefly been explored through fanfiction, *Goncharov* gives good insight into the practice in a multimedia context. This allowed fans to explore the homoerotic subtext through information creation:

> [I]'m involved in a fandoms [sic] where there is a lot of queering homoerotic ships which never became canon […] the discourse [I] saw people were treating the main ships as canon

and as if the director had intended them to be like that BECAUSE of the struggles with betraying each other at every turn. [I] ended up making a post about queer presentations in film around the same time (P33).

The information continuum model proposed below (Figure 10) was developed from the thematic analysis, which aimed to synthesise the IB and content creation processes of the participants. As a continuum model, the framework is meant to represent both the "multi-dimensional view of […] creation" (McKemmish, 2001, p. 335) and the cyclical nature of information flows.

The model can be broken down as follows:

- *Information encountering*: The process of encountering *Goncharov* and witnessing mutual blogs discuss, reblog, or post content.

- *Information seeking*: Conducting research such as exploring the *Goncharov*-related tags, to identify, develop, sense-make and understand themes, sometimes through comparison with other media/fandoms.

- *Communication*: The ability to engage in fandom-type discourse and discuss ideas. Fans are brought together by a sense of community and encouragement.

- *Transforming*: The imitation of real fandom discourse, such as queering the characters and producing typical fandom-like discussions of scenes, characters, and themes.

- *Pluralising*: Sharing content on Tumblr to extend their ideas for others to engage with. In some instances, pluralising leads to affirmative activities such as recordkeeping and documentation of canon.

[Figure 10: *Goncharov* as an information continuum process.]

Motivations

Motivations for creating *Goncharov* were complex and varied. Guo (2022), the only other study looking specifically at fan information creation, suggests that Chinese fans engage in information creation to bolster positive narratives about their favourite celebrities. *Goncharov*'s fans showed a similar desire to positively reinforce the fandom by contributing more to its narrative, as the more one contributed, the longer it would continue – "publishing posts was both logical and needed in order to contribute to the longevity of the idea" (P68). Participants described *Goncharov* as "fun", "exciting" and "fascinating", and wanting to contribute to the "hype" – "I was drunk, excited about the collective hype and wanted to make something that a lot of people would want to see" (P23). Fans described a feeling of personal pleasure, playfulness and pride in adding to the narrative:

> […] it's quite a bold statement but my drawing got quite popular and I believe it helped establish certain visual tropes that I later saw depicted in next art posts in the tag (P89).

> I contributed ideas to the "canon" of Goncharov, which other users often interacted with as though they were canon (P32).

> I just very much enjoyed the idea of a group in-joke and as a professional musician I thought it would be funny to add in my favorite part of movies, the soundtrack and musical analysis, to the joke (P7).

These quotes also speak to how a sense of community also motivated participants, harking back to the social aspects of creation found by Koh (2013) and Willson (2022). The pull of "building on previous ideas and current thoughts and actively contributing to an idea" (Willson, 2022, p. 812) was powerful. There was a sense that in contributing to the phenomenon, one had become a part of a wider collective of creators:

> I created a new character, Büthmor, and a scene in which the four central characters sat in chairs arranged like a clock. I think adding to the "canon" makes me a sort of producer (P50).

There was also a perceived low barrier to participation, an ability to ~~Fans were able to bring their own interpretations to the canon, fill in perceived gaps, queer the characters, engage in community, and~~ play in the virtual sandbox without fearing censure: "[t]here was also no fear of getting involved in actual fandom drama or shipping discourse, because everything was made up, which made me feel comfortable posting [my] piece" (~~Participant~~ P3).

~~*Goncharov* was more than a film which did not exist. Participants faked fandom discourse, yet felt it viscerally. It is a rare example of collaborative, spontaneous mass-storytelling, where the (un)fiction itself is fake, yet the discourse and fandom around it is not. What stands out is a desire from participants to create and contribute to a wider fan experience through the creation of a fan object. From fan content to fandom discourse, witnessing and engaging with mutuals creating posts, finding a sense of fulfilment in queering characters, and sharing enthusiasm over discussing themes; these factors brought the film to life, but they also brought a bottom-up community into existence. The *Goncharov* community was able to create the object of their fandom on their own terms, by documenting a shared set of themes, tropes, and iconography, and disseminating this shared canon through the creation of spreadable media (Jenkins *et al*, 2013) and the network affordances of Tumblr itself. Fans were able to bring their own interpretations to the canon, fill in perceived gaps, queer the characters, engage in community, and play in the virtual sandbox without fearing censure: "[t]here was also no fear of getting involved in actual fandom drama or shipping discourse, because everything was made up, which made me feel comfortable posting [my] piece" (Participant 3).~~

~~The study's findings suggest that *Goncharov*'s creators were excited about what was being created by the wider community, and were thus encouraged to seek, share, and create new information. Their enthusiasm led them to encourage others to join. Satisfaction, play, and community were intrinsic factors as to why they participated in creating *Goncharov*.~~

Information seeking and information sharing

As with Koh's young participants, Goncharov's fans "content development simultaneously accompanied information seeking, use, and sharing behaviors" (Koh, 2013, p. 1831). Fans described complex and non-linear processes where they would encounter *Goncharov*, seek out more information (mostly through the tagging system on Tumblr, sometimes by other means off-platform), discuss their findings with friends or fellow fans, create content (either original creations, or through remixing others' posts), and share these among their networks. Notably, the progression from casual information encountering to deliberate searching was not always linear; several participants experienced a serendipitous transition, stumbling upon sources of inspiration by simply scrolling through the trending Goncharov-related tags. Sometimes information seeking was precipitated by thinking the movie was real – P3 admitted to being "initially completely fooled". This participant then went on to discuss the 'movie' with friends in-person, who encouraged them to create fanart. Twenty-three other participants mentioned sharing information about *Goncharov* with people offline, indicating that while the phenomenon played out very much in online spaces, behind-

the-scenes private and in-person discourse still had a role to play. P3 created their fanart in response to a post about how "all the problems in Goncharov would have been solved in Goncharov and Andrey just had gay sex", and how they found this notion simplistic. They were not afraid of backlash, as the phenomenon was "fake" and a "joke of fandom recreation", describing these parodic and ludic aspects as "freeing".

This example echoes Campbell-Meier and Krtalic's 2022 study, in that these information practices require advanced literacy skills – information, visual and cultural literacy – in order to parse the thematic, artistic, social and ludic aspects of the phenomenon. *Goncharov* is not merely a fake movie – it is also a community, a collaborative artwork, and a sort of game. First, fans had to comprehend that the movie was unreality – fake. They could then 'play the game' by contributing in various ways, which would require some research into the 'rules of the game'. Their contribution would become another brick in the edifice of *Goncharov*, which could then influence others. Complex social information exchanges comprised all aspects of this process, from "bouncing ideas" (Willson, 2022) with friends, to reblog chains, to contributing to and using master lists.

The data revealed that *Goncharov*'s creators demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of OFCs as information-rich environments, and an ability to navigate them to fill in information gaps. Most participants confined their research activities to Tumblr itself, leveraging the platform's tagging system to enhance their exploration. Some ventured beyond Tumblr to seek out materials from various media sources, or engaged in sensory-type research, particularly in the creation of music scores. Notably, the progression from casual information encountering to deliberate searching was not always linear; several participants experienced a serendipitous transition, stumbling upon sources of inspiration by simply scrolling through the trending Goncharov-related tags.

The data demonstrated the significant impact that information sharing had on the creative process of the participants. The participants' ability to share and disseminate information was evidently impacted by their own experiences, knowledge, mutual connections, and grasp of OFCs, similar to Floegel's (2020) study of queer-world building in fanfiction OFCs. What emerged was a collective ability among participants to not only construct the informational landscape, story, and meta of *Goncharov,* but to address the gaps which usually appear in media objects (such as queer erasure).

Information sharing did not simply occur online. 23 participants engaged in conversations about *Goncharov* in-person and this either prompted them to create content or feel an encouragement usually found in OFCs. This suggests that the presence and ubiquity of ICTs has not rendered in-person, enunciative productivity obsolete (Fiske, 1992).

Fan perceptions of ownership

Goncharov is a truly authorless work. Since the fandom was built around a fictitious media object, its creators are also fictitious: one who does not exist (Matteo JWHJ0715) and the other whose only impact on its existence is to claim that it does exist (Martin Scorsese). The work cannot be assigned to its *actual* creators—only the 'fanon' can be attributed to them. Credit is not why the participants were motivated to create *Goncharov*; rather, the sense of collective community speaks to the inherent desire to participate and, subsequently, to produce an information object.

Tellingly, 63% of participants responding 'No' to the question 'Do you view yourself as a producer (creator) of Goncharov?'. The 37% who replied 'Yes' qualified their response, highlighting their creative role as being part of a collective effort:

"I think everyone who posted about it created it in some way. It was such a group effort" (~~Participant~~ P2).

"[W]e all worked together on it. It's kind of like when AO3 won a Hugo award. ALL of us were involved, so WE won a Hugo together" (~~Participant~~ P44).

"We are all creators of Goncharov. That's how he came to life" (~~Participant~~ P65).

"We Are All Goncharov" (~~Participant~~ P98).

In some more unique instances, ~~people~~ participants noted that they were the original poster of an idea, scene, or theme which was picked up ~~soon after~~ later by others~~: "....I spent the first three days completely glued to Tumblr, reblogging, adding my own meta, and watching/editing the Fanlore article" (Participant 78)~~. ~~The data~~ This suggest~~s~~ that the few who created many posts (especially those who created content during the first week in November 2022) had a greater perception of their own influence and authorial role, while still accepting that they were not sole creators, and that they were co-owners of the wider narrative. Some contributors felt the need to ask permission to remix or build on the work of others, but none mentioned any resistance to their creative process. No participants mentioned giving credit to other creators. Two explanations may exist for this: 1) in the case of reblogging, the original post is always retained; 2) credit may have removed the sense of verisimilitude that unreality requires.

Reijnders (2017) suggests that fanfiction writing is "part of a basic human drive towards storytelling and a manifestation of our cultural tradition that has always been a practice of sharing" (p. 6). While ICTs have had a profound impact on fandom practice, "empowering and disempowering, blurring the lines between producers and consumers" (Pearson, 2010, p. 84), ~~. But~~ the internet has also made co-authorship more possible. ~~Colás *et al*'s (2013) study identified six types of popular culture information spaces related to interaction and co-authorship: choose your own adventure (CYOA) books; table-top role-playing games (RPGs); CYOA video games; role-playing video games; forum RPGs; and fanfiction web communities.~~ While RPGs are usually formed by a production team, they require active involvement from audiences to progress the narrative. RPGs combine storytelling with active play. Their rise in their popularity demonstrates that storytelling is not necessarily top-down; ~~H~~humans want to ~~actively and intelligently~~ participate in stories *together*~~. Similarly~~, and the large participation in *Goncharov* demonstrates the human desire to take part in shared storytelling. As Tumblr user tichuly (2022) opines, "[G]oncharov (1973) is simply a product of the very human urge to create stories in a community and pass them on through word of mouth. [W]e are bored peasants working in the field with no way to pass the time and a need to create folklore".

~~Contributions to LIS~~

~~The results of this study are significant to LIS because they confirm the complexity and significance of creation as an information practice in its own right (Floegel, 2020), and as part of the information communication chain (Robinson, 2009). They suggest that information creation occurs simultaneously with other information practices (Koh, 2013), demonstrating that the information creation process is composed of information seeking, information sharing, and information organisation. These practices are highly contextual and influenced by broader discourses, which in the case of this study were connected to the norms of fandom practice, OFCs, and other everyday serious leisure activities of fans online. In line with Multas and Hirvonen (2022), we recommend future research take a holistic view of information creation as not merely an end product.~~

Nevertheless, the results challenge current perceptions of hobbyist/serious leisure information creation as content, rather than information (Cox and Blake, 2011; Fulton, 2017). Floegel's (2020) work on fanfiction as 'information queering' suggests that identity-based information work offers a more promising understanding of serious leisure information creation. Information within the *Goncharov* fandom was created as a reflective storytelling experience with elements of both work and play. This is highlighted by the high level of creative labour that some demonstrated, such as producing an orchestral score for the soundtrack from a piano piece.

Fans have been acknowledged as undertaking information-rich work without necessarily understanding that they are (Price and Robinson, 2017). *Goncharov* seems to both corroborate and reject this perspective. For some, the experience was driven by pure enjoyment. For others, it was a reflective fandom experience, where they understood that *Goncharov* could be anything they desired; that by creating edits and analysis, they were bringing the film to life, and by developing discourse, they were creating the fandom. As put by thetwistyoucantresist (2022), "Maybe the real Goncharov was the Fandom we made along the way".

Goncharov*'s information creation framework*

The framework proposed below (Figure 7) was developed from the thematic analysis and findings. Based on Campbell-Meier and Krtalic's tattoo information creation framework, it represents both the "multi-dimensional view of […] creation" (McKemmish, 2001, p. 335) and the cyclical nature of information flows encountered in Goncharov's community.

The framework can be broken down as follows:

- *Information encountering*: The process of encountering *Goncharov*, perceiving its unreality, and witnessing mutual blogs discuss, reblog, or post content.

- *Information seeking*: Conducting research such as exploring the *Goncharov*-related tags, to identify, develop, sense-make and understand themes, sometimes through comparison with other media/fandoms.

- *Communication*: The ability to engage in fandom-type discourse, discuss ideas, and negotiate creative processes. Fans are brought together by a sense of community and encouragement.

- *Transforming*: The imitation of real fandom discourse, such as queering the characters and producing typical fandom-like discussions of scenes, characters, and themes.

- *Pluralising*: Sharing content on Tumblr to extend their ideas for others to engage with. In some instances, pluralising leads to affirmative activities such as recordkeeping and documentation of canon.

[Figure 7: *Goncharov* information creation framework.]

~~Conclusion~~**Contributions and future research**

This study contributes a framework of information creation which can be adapted for further research in other related or adjacent disciplines, particularly in the areas of fan information behaviour, information creation, collaborative storytelling, and human-computer interaction. As our study is small in scope and not generalizable, further study on the Goncharov community, and on

similar communities, is encouraged. While 'massively multimedia online collaborative unfictions' are currently rare, it is hoped that this framework can be used in future example of the phenomenon.

Following Koh's (2013) call for more research on the information creation practices of youth on digital platforms, we add knowledge on this area within the context of Tumblr, and on the "ownership issue in remixing" (Koh, 2013, p. 1836), although in 'massively multimedia online collaborative unfictions' conceptions of ownership are likely to be more idiosyncratic compared to remixing in more conventional digital practice. We therefore suggest further research on other platforms, and in other contexts. In terms of future work on Goncharov, it would be interesting to collect demographic information on participants such as their gender identity, age, and sexuality, to ascertain the impact of identity-based information work.

Lastly, we contribute to Gorichanaz's (2019) call that more research "should consider the information behavior involved in an artistic task from start to finish" (p. 1004). While *Goncharov* is neither art nor complete in the traditional sense, this study does give some insight into the information creation process as it pertains to a communal artistic endeavour. "Art is informative", Gorichanaz (2019, p. 1004) declares; and indeed the documentation of a piece of art that does not exist is a wellspring of information. However, perhaps the art was not as important as the hands that came together to document it. As put by thetwistyoucantresist (2022), "Maybe the real Goncharov was the Fandom we made along the way".

This study aimed to investigate the information creation process of Goncharov. The results demonstrate that Goncharov's fans are imaginative individuals who create information not necessarily for the purpose of being acknowledged as authors, but to participate in building a fan community from the ground up. This study provides new knowledge on information creation, which is an under-researched area within LIS and information-based studies in general. The framework of fan information creation (Figure 10) is the first such representation in a fandom context, specifically *Goncharov*. It consists of five key phases (information encountering, information seeking, communication, transformation, and pluralising), and thematic analysis highlighted the emotional anchor between these steps as excitement, which was encouraged by both social and technological dynamics. Because the participants were enthusiastic about the information they had discovered, they were influenced to seek, share, and produce their own information, in a unique instance of spontaneous, collaborative storytelling.

Future scholarship can use this study to build upon our understanding of *Goncharov* as a unique instance of collective fan creation. In particular, it would be interesting to collect demographic information on participants such as their gender identity, age, and sexuality, to ascertain the impact of identify-based information work. In terms of exploring gender demographics, this may lead to an interesting discussion on the current understanding of transformative (generally female-dominated) versus affirmative (generally male-dominated) fandom participation. Fan co-authorship and collaborative online storytelling would also be fruitful areas of research for LIS scholarship.

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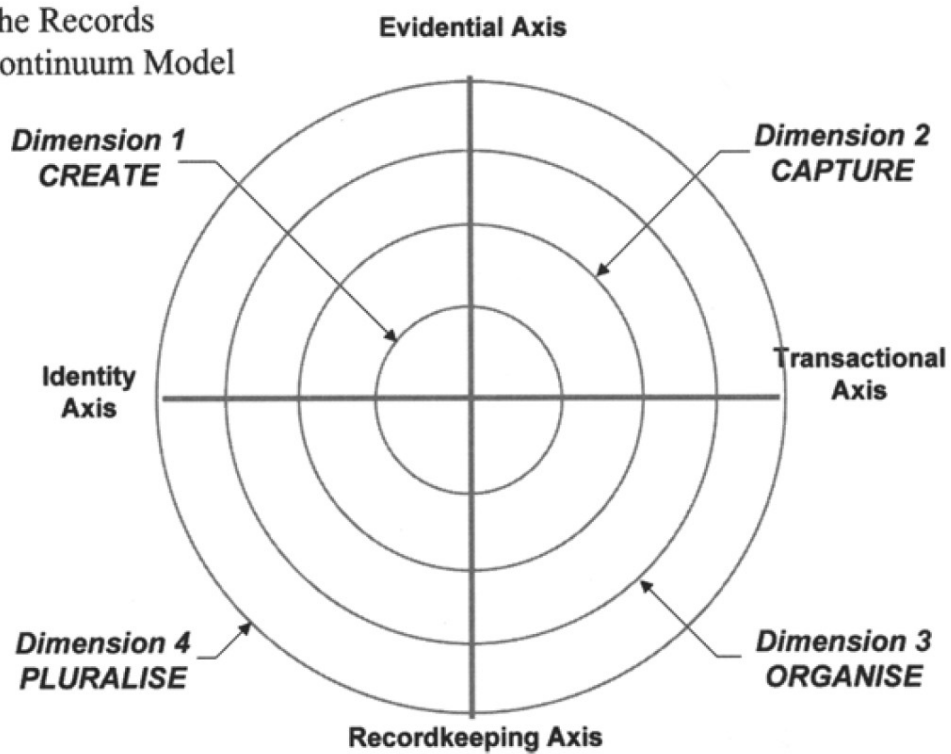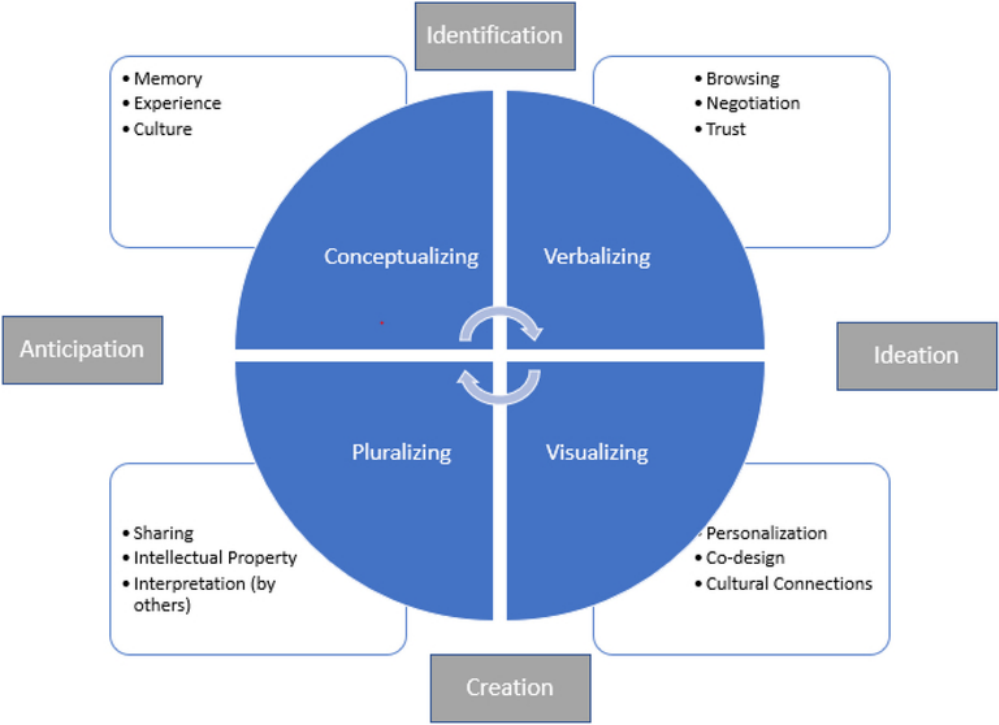47
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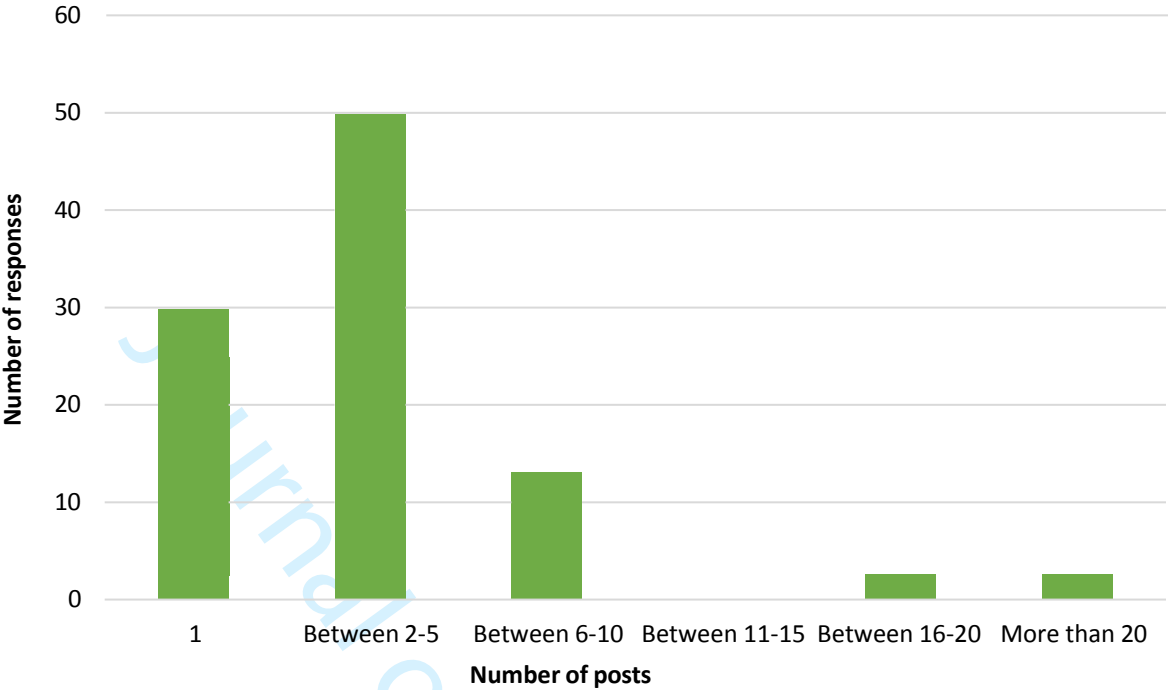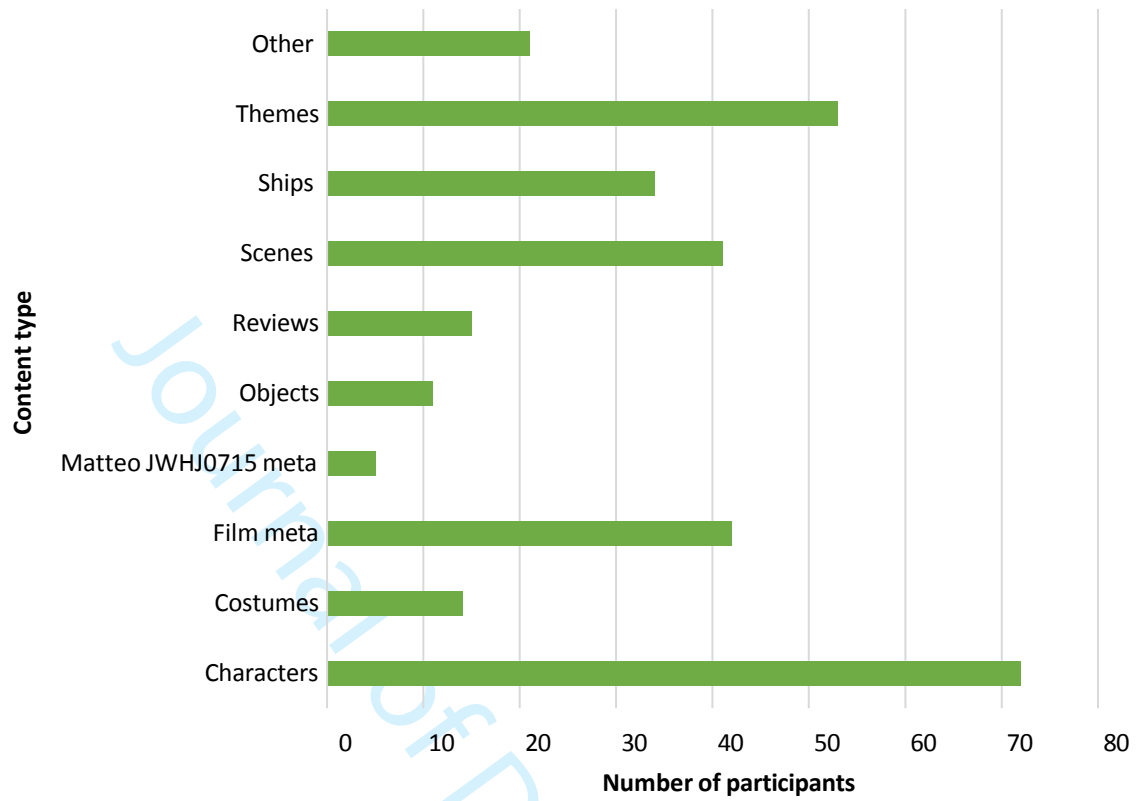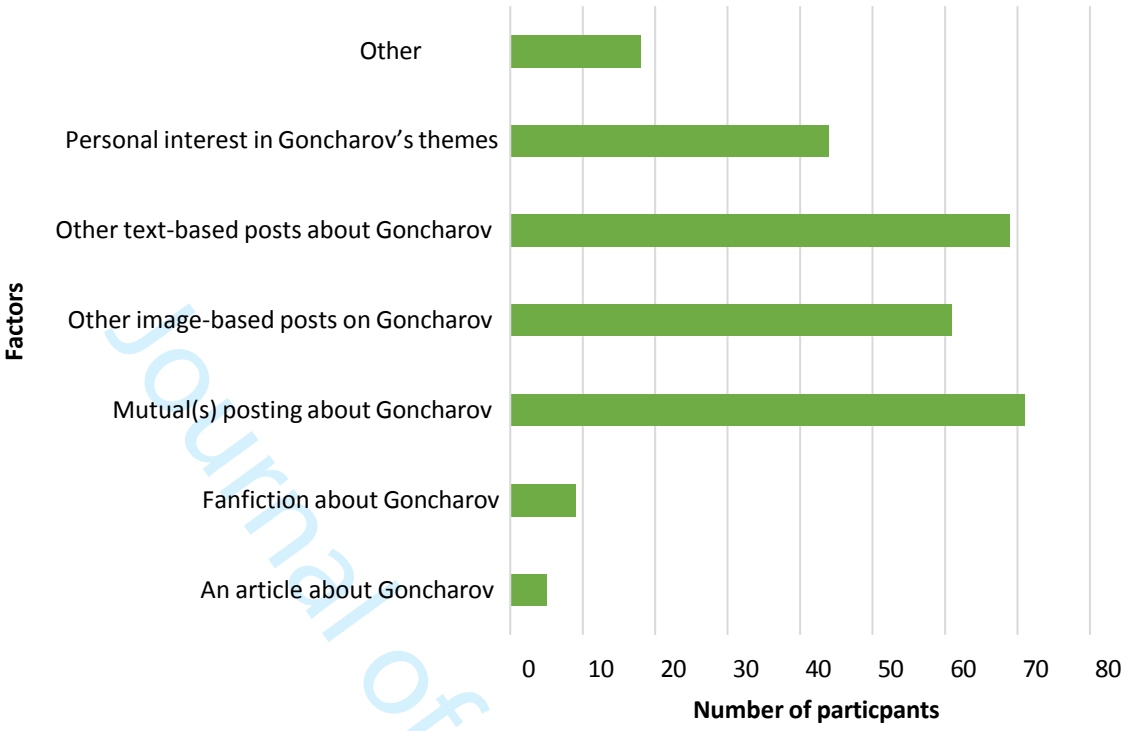Figure 1: The records continuum model (McKemmish, 2001).

224x178mm (120 x 120 DPI)

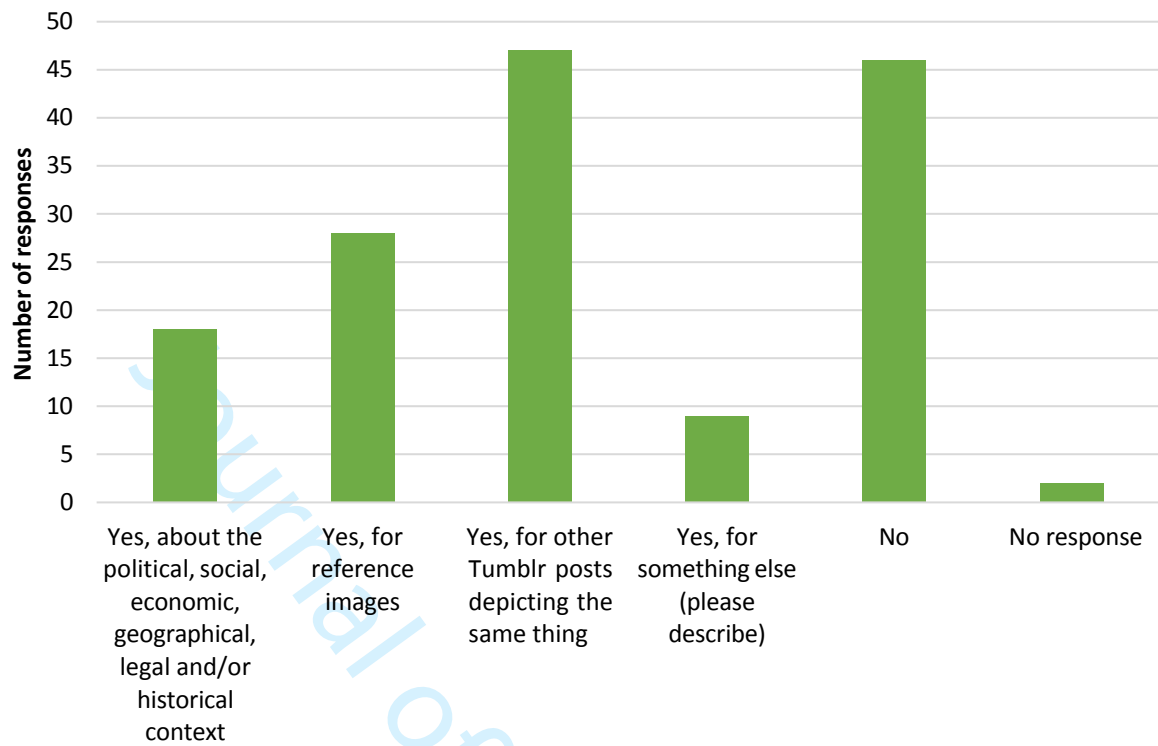Tattoo information creation framework (Campbell-Meier & Krtalić, 2022)

130x94mm (150 x 150 DPI)

Preliminary codes	Themes
1. Information Encountering	Community sharing; mutuals sharing
	Interest in similar fandoms and/or media including literature and video games
	Comprehending unreality
2. Information Seeking	Identifying, developing and/or creating themes
	Conducting 'research', e.g. video references and image references
3. Information Sharing	Co-creation
	Canon: negotiation between enjoyment and
	affirming plot points
	Forum, Tumblr and in-person discussions
4. Transforming	Canon divergence: ahistoricising historical discourse and queering characters
	Alternative universe/crossover
5. Affirming	Sharing content online
	Reblog chains
	Compiling information

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Research areas

Themes	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Familial obligation	12	4%
Homoeroticism	31	10%
Inevitability of fate	34	11%
Isolation	14	5%
Loyalty and betrayal	35	11%
Poverty and class issues	17	6%
Revenge	21	7%
Running out of time	23	8%
Sapphic love	25	8%
Self-perpetuating cycles of violence	26	8%
Stigmatisation of the mentally ill	11	4%
Struggle between duty and desire	19	6%
Toxic masculinity	16	5%
Trust issues	19	6%
Other (please describe)	3	1%
Total:	**306**	**100%**