International Baccalaureate

Extended essay cover

Candidates must complete this page and then give this cover and their final version of the extended essay to their supervisor.

Candidate session number	
Candidate name	
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Examination session (May or November)	MAy	Year	2012

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: _____

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: Nerdfighteria: How is the collaborative nature of the Nerdfighter community practiced and how does this influence its participants and their perception of themselves and others?

Candidate's declaration

This declaration must be signed by the candidate; otherwise a grade may not be issued.

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

This is the final version of my extended essay.

Candidate's signature: _____ Date: 26.01.2012

Supervisor's report and declaration

The supervisor must complete this report, sign the declaration and then give the final version of the extended essay, with this cover attached, to the Diploma Programme coordinator.

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Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

The candidate   has had difficulties keeping his appointments and deadlines throughout the process of researching and writing his Extended Essay. He has been very independent during the process, and I hope he has been able to implement some feedback from the supervisor. The candidate has not informed the supervisor of his progress concerning the writing and the use of theory throughout the writing process. The candidate assures me that the Extended Essay is all his work.

This declaration must be signed by the supervisor; otherwise a grade may not be issued.

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent | 0,5 | hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature: _____   Date: __26/1 - 12__

Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Candidate session number	

Achievement level

Criteria	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3
A research question	2	2		2	
B introduction	1	2		2	
C investigation	2	4		4	
D knowledge and understanding	2	4		4	
E reasoned argument	2	4		4	
F analysis and evaluation	2	4		4	
G use of subject language	3	4		4	
H conclusion	1	2		2	
I formal presentation	2	4		4	
J abstract	0	2		2	
K holistic judgment	2	4		4	
Total out of 36	18 (19)				

19°

Name of examiner 1: _____   Examiner number: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

Name of examiner 2: _____   Examiner number: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

Name of examiner 3: _____   Examiner number: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

IB Cardiff use only: B: _____✓_____

IB Cardiff use only: A: __104037__   **Date:** __17/5__

Abstract.
Preface:

0.1 Contains a quick word list of emic terms.

0.2 Here, I quickly explain the history of the Nerdfighter, which is essential to understanding how they operate and who they are today. I talk about the first instances of vlogging within the Brotherhood 2.0 project, a communication project between the Green brothers and how they over time attracted an audience that would eventually evolve into the Nerdfighters.

0.3 I explain my methodology and where I derive my theoretic framework from, mostly form Dr. Michael Wesch and Mr Dan Tapscott.

I faced many practical issues in terms of methodology because of the nature of the internet. Participant observation had to be tweaked to suit my needs because living within the culture is impossible since it does not have a geographic location.

1.0 Defining the Nerdfighter.

1.1 The Increase of World Awesome and Decrease of World Suck.
This section deals with the philanthropic ideals of the group. Nerdfighters organize into groups to perpetuate what they consider to be Awesome, a word they use to describe all things that are good in their eyes. They do this using internet platforms, often ones that they themselves have made, or pre-existing ones. After helping the Nerdfighters gain $250.000, Esther Earl died from cancer and the community experienced its first sense of wide-spread loss. They then illustrated their will to self organize into charities and similar groups upon finding something that they think increases world Suck, the opposite of aweomse, and made two distinct cancer charities.
Other such activies that the Nerdfighters us is P4A, where once every year they promote charity by trying as much as they can to take over all of youtube by bombarding the site with videos about their favourite charities.

1.11 Fandoms.

Here I talk about fanadoration also known as fandoms and its status as a social platform. I also discuss Dr. Wesch's hypothesis about how these are a new form of artistic expression. I explain the social dynamics within such sub-groups.

1.2 Vlogging.

Here I discuss the importance and use of vlogging, video blogging. This is how Nerdfighters most express themselves and form social bonds, and it is where Awesome and Fandoms and formation of identity merge as the Nerdfighters try to define themselves either as groups or as individuals.

2.0 Nerdfighters view themselves as one big entity, almost devoid of social hierarchy and seem to believe that all that can be done as a group, should be done as a group. There is a much stronger sense of we than of I and as such, many of them see themselves as more of a part of one unit that as a individuals. The responsibilities lie not with the individual but with the group. Also, due to the advancement of the internet, it is hard to keep up with anthropological theory and we might benefit from developting better tools.

Nerdfighteria.

How is the collaborative nature of the Nerdfighter
community practiced and how does this influence its
participants and their perception of themselves and others?

Social Anthropology SL, Extended Essay.
By

0.0 PREFACE

0.1 Word definitions:

Vlogging. Vlogging is the act of making a video blog, typically only consisting of one person talking to their camera. They are often communicative and produced in a succession of series, but are not necessarily so.

Web 2.0. The dynamic web as it emerged with non-static, editable and interactive web sites and personal web pages. It is often referred to as the social web and is an umbrella term for all technologies that have democratized the means of online distribution to such a level that anyone can contribute with content online.

Fandom. An ad hoc, non-centralized fan-club.

Nerdfighteria. The term Nerdfighters use to describe their own culture and all other Nerdfighters. If anything or anyone is adopted into Nerdfighter culture, they or it are said to have become a part of Nerdfighteria.

Micro-blogging. A blogging format focused on short updates and short snippets of text, pictures, video, music etc. Famous examples of this sort of websites are Twitter.com and Tumblr.com

Peer Production. The construction of content through means of information sharing.

0.2 A historical introduction to the Nerdfighter.

To truly understand the Nerdfighters, the history of the Green brothers, also known as "the Vlogbrothers", must be understood. In 2006, the American brothers John and Hank Green decided to embark upon what is known as the Brotherhood 2.0 Project. The two brothers were at the time living quite far away from each other which is significant because the project involved ceasing all textual communication with the exception of emergencies, and instead they would every other day upload a short video onto the video sharing website YouTube with themselves talking to their brother through a camera. These videos were public, and the brothers slowly gathered a quite sizable regular following. As the mass of following grew, John and Hank started to interact more and more with their viewers and their videos started to morph from being a conversation between the two of them into becoming a conversation with them and their viewers who responded with their own videos and text comments. As this

interaction increased, there arose a need for John and Hank to give the mass of people they were talking to a name. To call them passive viewers would be wrong, they were a part of the "Vlogbrothers experience". As such, calling them fans would not be adequate either. Therefore, the brothers decided to name them the Nerdfighters, after an arcade video game of the same name (this is important to note as the name is not a reference to animosity towards nerds). From there, the Nerdfighters have developed into an online culture, heavily participating in the idea of peer production, as presented by Dan Tapscott[i] and Chris Anderson[ii] in its various forms, public discussion, charity work and promotion of pop culture.

This essay will deal with how the collaborative Nerdfighter community is practiced and how this influences its participants and their perception of themselves and others through philanthropic work using web-based activities.

0.3 Methodology

My choice of methodology to study this group was through participant observation. I partook in vlogging (both collaboratively and non-collaboratively), regular skype calls and forum exchanges with members of the community, community projects for the 'increase of world awesome and decrease of world suck' (I will come back to what this means later) and partially involved myself in some of the fandoms. Traditional participant observation is of course not possible to do, as there is no way to physically live within the community. Therefore I may not have been as involved as may be the case with studies of other cultures, but I have involved myself to the extent that was possible and appropriate.

As there is little documentation about this group specifically, I have chosen to only rely on a small set of sources for an improved paradigm. These sources have been chosen because of their value often within specific fields, not for an overarching view. In lieu of the lack of outside sources and challenges associated with participant observation however, as almost all of the interactions of group is recorded and stored online, there is a plethora of data available about the group's every move. I have utilized this to try to create an apt description of the Nerdfighters.

Dan Tapscott has delved into the topic of how large groups of people on the internet self-organize into socities, and hence was used repeatedly for theoritc framework in this

essay. His idea of peer production and mass collaboration are plainly visible in the Nerdfighteria.

1.0 DEFINING THE NERDFIGHTER.

1.1 The increase of awesome, decrease of suck.

In their video "How to be a Nerdfighter" the Vlogbrothers defined a Nerdfighter as someone made entirely out of awesome [sic]. This comment in itself holds little value to an outsider, but it illustrates an interesting part of Nerdfighteria which is the use of the word 'awesome'.

In colloquial terms, the word awesome when used amongst teenagers usually refers to something being fantastic, etc. and in a sense this is true for its meaning within Nerdfighteria. It is however not truly accurate. 'Awesome' is often used as a noun encompassing everything that a Nerdfighter appreciates or that is perceived as good. Notably it occurs in the group's two mantras:

1) To decrease world suck and increase world awesome.
2) Don't forget to be awesome, often abbreviated DFTBA and used as a way to identify one self as a Nerdfighter.

These two statements constitute what many consider to be the central idea of the group, to promote the common good in all facets of life. 'Awesome' is as such seen as a wide variety of concepts. One of the very notable way in which they promote awesome is through various charitable actions. There's a clear philanthropic idea in the Nerdfighter community. They often refer to themselves as a unit, they seem to see spreading awesome not as a task of the individual but a duty of the community as a whole. They self-organize into groups promoting this in various ways, often with the use of various web-sites and platforms that they have tailored to this specific goal.

We have for example the websites http://nerdfighters.ning.com, http://effyeahnerdfighters.tumblr.com and http://yourpants.org. These are used in various ways to spread information about events and activities for the group to participate in. These events and activities have a quite the wide range, being everything from creating a YouTube

channel for a collaborative vlog, to developing a new way to say hi to each other, to winning money for charitable organizations, or even sometimes form such organizations themselves.

This process starts with someone somewhere in the community stating an idea for a project. Most commonly, this is either done in the YourPants forum or the nerdfighters.ning.com forum (often just referred to as The Ning). From there it spreads through the variety of social networks that Nerdfighters use to communicate. The community then re-converges in shared action. One of the instances of this form of world awesome increasing that many hold as somewhat as a milestone for the community is when Nerdfighters managed to win a competition on the behalf of the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA) worth $250.000, a non profit human rights organization inspired by the works of JK Rowling[1].

One of the Nerdfighters who spearheaded this one activity has later become a symbol for Nerdfighteria. Her name was Esther Earl, a very active member of the community. In addition to the HPA, Esther helped establish a few different concepts, such as when she wished for her birthday that all members of the community remind their friends and family that they love them, This is now known as Esther day and is held annually on the 2nd of August. Not long after the success of the HPA-action, Esther died from cancer. This caused a lot of grief in the community, many felt that they had lost a central player promoting their values. Videos were made in her memory named "RIA Esther", RIA being short for "Rest In Awesome", and uploaded to YouTube, even by Vlogbrother John Green. In memory of Esther, Nerdfighters created the "Friends of Esther" foundation to help her family deal with the medical expenses incurred by her care. Another organization was also established, known as the"This Star Won't Go Out" foundation (TSWGO for short). TSWGO serves a similar function to the Friends of Esther as its proceeds go towards supporting families with members who are suffering from cancer and to projects in Esther's memory. The word "Star" refers to the Persian meaning of the name Esther, and the little green bracelets that the organization sells for income have become so popular within the community that it is one of the easier ways to spot a Nerdfighter while offline. It is in a sense a cultural marker, no one wears these bracelets without knowing its implication of identifying yourself as a Nerdfighter.

There is another noteworthy example in which large-scale charity work has been inspired from the acts of prominent members. One of the initial ways in which the Green brothers interacted with the Nerdfighters to decrease world suck and increase world awesome,

[1] http://thehpalliance.org/what-we-do/

was through what is now known as the "Project 4 Awesome" day, often abbreviated to "P4A". On that day, the Green brothers wanted all of the Nerdfighters to post a video about their favorite charity. The idea was that through mass participation in rating and commenting upon others videos, and using social channels, promote their videos so that for that day YouTube would be taken over by videos about charity. This practice has continued annually, and is still ongoing. P4A is celebrated on the 21st of december. The P4A project exemplifies how the Green brothers exact their influence over the community. There is no question that the Green brothers remain to this day at the center of the Nerdfighter community. That is not to say however that the community spins around them. It is often when we see a Green brother take the lead that the sense of unity within the community is most clearly expressed, as huge amounts of Nerdfighters gather with a shared goal or interest. When the brothers post a video suggesting a project, the forums will light up with discussion about how to best go about the project and intensive brainstorming and pooling of work hours and resources often commence.

1.11 Fandoms.

The way of charity participation mentioned above is only one of the levels within which we can see clear group dynamics at play. As previously stated, awesome is quite openly defined, and the increase of it is practiced in other ways than charity work. A central concept to Nerdfighteria is the idea of fandoms which spread awesome in terms of promoting what they see as good entertainment. Nerdfighters split into a variety of fandoms, the most prevalent of which center around Harry Potter and Doctor Who. These are not dichotomous, being part of one does not exclude participation in others. Fandoms are often used as gateways for people to become active members of the community, and there is an unspoken norm which assumes that you are partaking in at least one if you are to be a Nerdfighter. Having no knowledge of the inside references that these fandoms bring with them can sometimes lead to prospective or new nerdfighters feeling somewhat alienated. It is often through these fandoms that Nerdfighters bond into friendships, as within a specific fandom a Nerdfighter is likely to find people who are like minded or have specific and similar interests outside of the core Nerdfighteria.

Participation in fandoms can happen on several different social websites and on different levels of depth. They are most notably present on the Nerdfighter forums in various discussions, and also on the video sharing site YouTube and the micro-blogging site Tumblr. The expression of fandoms often take one of two forms. There are content-creators, who

often remix and re-appropriate pre-existing material of the object of admiration, and the content-watchers who consume, discuss, comment upon and redistribute the products of the content-creators. The remixes of content-creators can take the form of things such as fan fiction texts and animated GIF-images, but sometimes also involve video and music creation. Please note that the Nerdfighters themselves do not have specific terms for this dichotomy. The names "content-creators" and "content-watchers" have been arbitrarily placed by me for the sake of clarity. They do not use such titles to identify themselves or each other within the community. There's almost no hierarchy in Nerdfighteria

Typical of fandom participation is that it is non-centralized and as such has no hub. Participants of fandoms often do identify themselves as such though, describing themselves as "Whovians" (Doctor Who fans), "Potterheads", "etc. It's through these self-ascribed labels that members of a fandom identify eachother, and work as sets of cultural markers. Associating yourself with fandoms connotates a deep admiration for something, and subsequent deep knowledge of it.

The validity of an ascribed label in a fandom can be, and quite often is, scrutinized by fellow participants. If you are not perceived as dedicated enough for a fandom that you partake in, the validity of your claim to be a fan at all can be questioned. For some Nerdfighters, this can be quite severe because their standing within a fandom can be associated with a form of status, and association with fandoms can be instrumental for certain social bonds. It is important to note that this is not always the case, and it is more often than not the concern of content-creators and not of content-watchers. Certain content-creators are idolized within Nerdfighteria for their talents. An example of the idolized content creator is the band Chameleon Circuit who play music about the TV-series Doctor Who. Their music became so popular that they are often attributed with having spawned the genre of "Trock"[2]. Because of their stand in the community, to have their dedication to Doctor Who be questioned by the community could be catastrophic. In a sense, you can climb a social ladder as a content-creator, but not in the same way as a content-watcher. It is important to note that while content-creators are sometimes adored or idolized by participants of Nerdfighteria, there does not seem to be any strong notion of a split between these two groups. This goes back to the Nerdfighter strong sense of unity.

One of the noteworthy sides to the fandoms is how they allow the users to re-

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[2]Short for "Timelord Rock", a reference to the series' protagonist.

appropriate pop culture to make it their own. They take what already exist of videos and music and books, and they build upon it to make it their own. Many see it as a way to take back pop culture, and it blurs the lines of ownership from the producers to the consumers. It contributes, for the nerdfighters, to putting them and the social participation of their adoration at the center, rather than the stars and is one of the ways in which Nerdfighters turn the adoration into a social platform. This online phenomenon has been researched at great length by anthropologist Michael Wesch in his study of YouTube[iii].

Dr Wesch hypothesizes that taking bits and pieces of media and mashing it together is nothing short of new form of expressive art, where he is in essence describing what I have labeled fandom content-creation throughout this essay. It is the idea of publishing content, based on something that originally was not yours, and making it yours and in many cases making it an expression of self. Dr Wesch speaks in great length of what he calls the context collapse. What Wesch refers to when talking about the context collapse is the loss of importance of origin, and how things on the internet get torn apart from their original intention to be reapropriated, and how when something goes online you have no idea how, when, where or by who it will be used. This is especially prevalent when people are co-operating on peer-production projects over the internet, because of the lag of time-zones and constant availability of information. Dr Wesch uses one example in particular about the song "Dragon Sta Din Tei," a Moldavian pop song, which first spread around Europe's radio stations, then was uploaded to the internet, then got mixed with videos on Japanese animation forums, then flew over to North America where a boy films himself in his basement dancing to it. This final video, also known as the "Numa Numa" video, is according to Dr Wesch the mark of a new social form of expression. Since the publication of the Numa Numa video, innumerable videos have been posted of people joining in on the dance. Wesch identifies this as a new form of media. Dr Wesch himself said this:

"You might say that this is all just hype, that these are all just people dancing, but think about what they're dancing in front of! They're dancing in front of about 1 billion boxes, in places all over the world, networked together allowing us to connect in ways that we have never connected before. […] Web 2.0 is not about sharing information, it's about linking people."
This is in essence what fandoms do. They make the fan adoration into more than the movie or the book, and into a way to communicate and to link people. The fandoms prove that it is no longer about what information is truly made of anymore, but who it belongs to and how they can use that as a platform for their own social interaction, their social identities.

1.2. VLOGGING.

The two paragraphs above may seem disjointed and irrelevant, but they converge on the third and one of the most central part of the Nerdfighter community, Vlogging. Vlogging was the start of the Nerdfighter community and to this day remains an extraordinarily prevalent and important concept within Nerdfighteria. Vlogging is one of the most popular ways of expressing both the nerdfighter spirit of Awesome, fandom participation and of self.

Collaborative vlogs, also known just as "collabs", spawned from Hank and John Green's back-and-forth style vlogging on the vlogbrothers channel and has since become something of a hallmark for Nerdfighter vloggers. Collabs typically consist of 5 people making one video one day of the week each, monday through friday. These videos are usually then uploaded to one shared YouTube account. Collabs often originate from one of three scenarios.
1) A set of friends within a fandom decide to make videos together, about or centered around the fandom.
2) Someone proposes a specific project for a video series that would require several people over several days and those who are interested volunteer.
3) Someone seeks to become more comfortable talking to a computer and wants to make friends in the process.

Personally, I have partaken in collabs of the two latter kinds, and observed and talked to those who have made collab vlogs of type one. In terms of the social process, there seems to be very little that differs between the different types, minus the first one. That is to say that where the first mode is based on previous friendships, the two latter ones base themselves on forming new social bonds. This is often done by just posting an outline of what you want to do on a forum, and then those who want to join in, respond. This is a completely socially acceptable way to form new relationships within Nerdfighteria.

The 5 day collab vlog model derives from the channel "Five Awesome Girls" (5AG for short). The 5AG channel originated when the Nerdfighter girls Kristina, Kayley, Hayley, Lianne and Lauren wanted a way to communicate in video form and document their lives in video form in the process.. As such, their videos are in the third category. With themed weeks, and a strong sense of social participation, their videos have later become a model of emulation.

In my studies of the vloggers of the Nerdfighter community, I found again the tendency towards collaboration over that of solitary work. The strength of the social bond between the

partakers of a collab vlog is instrumental to its continued success. Much like I've mentioned earlier, there is a much stronger sense of we than of I in Nerdfighteria, and the moment that the social dynamic is weak, whatever bond is there will more often than not just cease to exist. Whenever a member of a collab vlog leaves the group, it is almost certain that the remainder of the group will disintegrate. It is therefore imperative that if they do not already know each other, the members must quickly grow to know each other. They often do make attempts at doing so, but they are not always successful, and sometimes it just turns out that the group is not a good fit.

One of the most noteworthy parts of vlogging as a phenomenon is that the vloggers infallibly go through a phase where they truly scrutinize themselves as human beings and how they are being perceived. The first time they film themselves, vloggers often become very aware of how they are being perceived from the outside. The goal of the first few vlog-videos are often to establish who you are as a person, and as such many end up going through a prolonged period of time trying to distill into a 3 minute video what that really means. This is complicated quite a lot also by the fact that one often feels a little insane when talking to a camera for the first time. This is another observation that Dr Michael Wesch shares with me. This search within themselves may challenge the way that the individual might think about themselves. They might take a harder look at themselves and choose to show certain traits and down-play others. Infallibly, it causes them to think hard about who they are and how they're perceived. The sort of outsider's perspective that you get when editing or rewatching a video causes one to rethink what one is saying and doing. Several of my nerdfighter contacts have described that by doing this, it allows them to be more themselves. It allows them to refine what to be themselves means and therefore, many will claim, what the vlog eventually becomes is more real. When they are allowed the tools to retouch everything they say and do, and cut out unwanted parts, Nerdfighters simply feel more comfortable expressing themselves and shaping themselves which allows for very open and free exchanges, and a multitude of ways to define themselves.

2.0. Conclusion.

The Nerdfighter is a person who sees above all the propagation of their own brand of good as their main goal on the internet. They feel that all things that can be done in group manouvers, should be done in groups, which forms a strong sense of unity amongst the members of

Nerdfighteria which continues to be what holds them together. They shape their identity through their shared adoration and their shared spirit of "Increase world awesome and decrease world suck." Anyone who wants to become a Nerdfighter, is to be considered one. While John and Hank Green continue to play an important part in the life of the community, Nerdfighteria is by no means their fan-club, as seems to be a common misconception. Applying conventional anthropological methods proved hard when dealing with the internet. Maybe we as anthropologists ought to rethink our own set of tools to accommodate the rapid social changes in online communities where there are few or no social hierarchies.

Word count: 3997

Bibliography:

[i]Tapscott, Dan. *Wikinomics: How mass collaboration changes everything.* 2006, **Tantor Media**, Inc

[ii]Anderson, Chris. *The Longest Tail* 2nd edition, 2008, Hyperion

[iii]Wesch, Michael. *An Anthropological Introduction to YouTube.* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPAO-lZ4_hU