BUILDING A STORY USING SOCIAL MEDIA

A CASE STUDY OF THE BAND GHOST

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KK429A Bachelor Thesis 2019
Media and communication studies
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Abstract

This study examines how a music band can manage to build an image and story using social media platforms after the infamous break of the golden era. To put it further into perspective, the second part of the study focuses on the fans’ connection to the band and how they use social media themselves. The purpose of this study is, through interviews, qualitative content analysis and rhetorical analysis, to explore how a band successfully use social media to keep their fans’ anticipation alive. To explore my purpose, I have conducted and analysed qualitative interviews. In the analysis section, the data has been interpreted in relation to theories of star image, participatory fandom and the live experience as well as compared to previous research while connecting my own analysis to it. The study discusses tendencies shown in the results when analysing posts from Ghost’s official Facebook page, as well as how participatory fandom as we know it may be at risk, as social media giants keep growing and eliminating other forums that have been vital to fans.

- Building a story using social media: A case study of the band Ghost.
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- Media and communication studies
- Bachelor thesis, 15 ECTS
- K3 School of Arts and Communication
- Malmö university
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- Examinator: Margareta Melin
- Springterm 2019
- Keywords: participatory fandom, star image, social media, fans, Ghost
1. Introduction

As the huge arena fills with the musky scent of incense, the band members step out one by one on the extravagant stage, with large backdrops resembling the colourful windows of a cathedral. The members of the band are all wearing masks hiding their true identities, positioning themselves by their assigned instrument. For the night, they’re merely nameless ghouls. A song starts playing, something you would only imagine being played as a theme song for a classic horror movie - and the lead singer, The Cardinal, takes the stage to the neverending cheers of the crowd.

In the middle of the concert, the band starts playing the familiar notes of the controversial, and seemingly satanic song “Year Zero”. Before the very last chorus, they cut the music so that the singing audience can be fully heard. “Hail satan, archangelo, hail satan, welcome year zero” forcefully echoes through the room, resembling what many would call an, ironically enough, religious experience. Myself, I often describe my first experience seeing Ghost live in 2015 as having “seen the light”, completely being mesmerized and drawn into the world of the secretive band.

It is February 23th 2019, and the Swedish metal band Ghost just played their largest arena-show to date in Stockholm. For a weekend, they have returned to the lead singer’s home country after extensive touring all around the world. Less than five years and one album ago, they played nightclub-venues with the capacity of 1500 people.

Despite their satanic direction, Ghost is truly a social media-fairytale. Starting on MySpace in 2010 and since then forming a unique relationship with their fan community without revealing their true identities. Ghost became a fantasy in which the fans wanted to play along, despite knowing you could easily google their true identities if you really wanted to. The lead singer of Ghost, who recently has been identified as Tobias Forge, mentions how other bands which came up during early days of social media relied on those platforms – not only for promoting the band themselves, but promoting each band member. Ghost succeeded to short-circuiting the process with an overcompensating image, having the audience focusing on that image alone (Bennet, 2018).

In this study, I will further investigate the different ways Ghost has built their image using social media, and how they communicate with their fanbase. In order to fully interpret the content, I will be interviewing fans for potential new insights and perspectives.

2. Contextualisation

In 2021, it is estimated that there will be over 3.02 billion social-media users across the globe (Statista, 2019). Needless to say, social media is now a part of most people’s every day lives. Due to its growing popularity, companies and corporations are adapting their ways of reaching out to followers and possible consumers. However, it is not just the companies that are trying to connect to their audiences – celebrities, artists and bands have been given a whole set of new tools to truly connect with their fans directly, but also to promote their work.
There is truly room for everybody – but the truth is, it is getting more difficult by the
day to find new, creative ways to succeed to reach out to as many as possible. This
especially applies to the music industry. In 1999, the global recorded music industry had
23.8 billion US dollars in physical revenue – and in 2017, only 5.2. The interest of actually
buying music physically, such as CD’s, is at an all-time low. Consequently, artists and bands
are constantly faced with the challenge of finding new ways to promote themselves, as
social media is a very active and fast-moving domain (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009).

In 2015, after ten years of sales steadily falling, the industry started to see a small
growth of revenues in music again. Mostly relying on streaming services such as Spotify, as
well as digital sales and performance rights, it is growing slowly but steadily. Consequently,
the music industry lost what was pretty much exclusively theirs – and now they’re fighting
for the space of promotion on social media, just like everyone else.

The emergence of social media is still fairly new, and we are still learning and adapting
to the opportunities and issues that come with it. It is no secret that there has been a
dramatic shift within the music industry in regards of sales. It is therefore important to
further look into what makes a band or artist break through the tough industry using social
media, but also how this shift has potentially changed the relationship to the consumer and
their community.

2.1 The Story of Ghost

This study will discuss Ghost’s social media-communication, hence how they have
built their image and story. Therefore, some background information is required. Ghost
was formed in 2006 in Linköping, Sweden and started getting recognition after uploading
demos to MySpace in 2010. To attempt to understand how Ghost use social media to build
a story, image and keep their fans anticipation alive, it is important to note how they
grounded themselves in social media in the very first place. If you had bands like Blue
Oyster Cult or Pentagram listed as some of your favorites on MySpace in March of 2010,
you might have received a mysterious message. The message informed you that a band
called Ghost recently uploaded new music to the site. Within only 48 hours, their page was
filled with praise from thousands of users – which was considered very impressive, seeing it
as MySpace was starting to lose market shares to other social media giants that had started
to emerge at the time. By the time their first album officially dropped, the band had
successfully gained a loyal fanbase who were already fans of similar music (Loudwire,
2018). Ghost created their page on Facebook in 2008 and was already onboard of the
social media train long before it became the biggest social network in the world in 2012
(Brittanica, 2019).

Since the beginning of their career, Ghost has remained anonymous. The Swedish
metal band is mostly known for the horror imagery, drawing inspiration from the occult
and satanic themes, hiding the band members’ identities behind cloaks, masks and made-up
names. As of today, Ghost has released four albums and gained a wide audience from all
over the world. Throughout the album cycles, the main character (the vocalist) is replaced
by another character, with a new persona. What distinguishes the vocalist is the pope-like
outfit – wearing a papal ferula and mitre. His left eye is white and his face resembles a skull.
The band members, all wearing chrome masks resembling demons – are called the
nameless ghouls. The band members have changed masks and outfits throughout the years – but unlike the vocalist and his big persona, remains silent and nameless. Besides the lead singer and band members, Ghost have created a story in which other characters have been presented. The characters are as following:

**Papa Emeritus / Papa Emeritus II / Papa Emeritus III / Cardinal Copia**  
*The vocalist*

**Nameless Ghouls**  
*Band members*

**Papa Nihil**  
*An elder male character appearing in promotional videos, announcement meet-ups, occasionally on stage during live performances*

**Sister Imperator**  
*An elder female character appearing in promotional videos, announcement videos and announcement meet-ups*

In 2017, the vocalist was sued by former band members – claiming he had cheated them out of their rightful profit. As a consequence his name was made public, as well as the former band member’s identities, spreading all over the news. As of today, the vocalist stays in character on stage and in the story, but is instead now doing interviews as himself – Tobias Forge. The new band members – remain anonymous, off- and on stage.

To further put my material in a context, I will continuously provide with necessary background information of Ghost throughout the study. In the next section, the purpose of the study will be discussed.

### 3. Purpose and Research Questions

As of the late 20th century, a crisis of reproduction began to afflict the music industry. In the beginning of the 21st century, the largest corporations at the time, AOL-Time Warner, Sony/BMG, Universal and EMI, experienced falling sales and misplaced investments. This crisis marked the break of the so called “golden era” of the music industry, described as the 15 years of steady growth in sales of recorded music (Crewe, French, Leyshon, Thrift & Webb, 2005). The emergence of social media instead offered new ways of reaching out to existing and potential consumers, which forever changed the relationship between the band and fancommunity. As social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter has become the logical factotum for companies, artists, and private persons to create and spread content, keep up with news and engage with others, the lines between different mediums are getting blurred. Trends, innovations and information are faster than ever, and there is room for everyone. As an industry that used to successfully stand alone, how does one adapt to the new and competitive arena of social media, and maybe most importantly, stand out from it?
The aim of the study is to look further into how the band Ghost uses, and has used social media to build their image and tell a story as well as how the band has succeeded to build a long lasting and loyal relationship with their fans.

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Using Richard Dyer’s theory of Star Image, how does Ghost use their social media to build a story and image?

2. How do the fans of Ghost use social media platforms to stay connected to the fan community and band?

3. How does the fans of Ghost experience their relationship to other fans, on- and offline?

Lastly, this study will discuss what the results potentially can tell about the future of the use of social media within the music industry.

4. Literature Review

In this section, a further look is presented in the following three categories: the break of the music industry, fan communities and the progression of social media and connection to the celebrity.

4.1 The Break of Music Industries “Golden Era” – And the Emergence of Social Media

As a consequence to the break of the “golden era”, in which is described as the 15 years of steady growth in sales of recorded music, piracy issues emerged and file sharing sites such as Napster and BitTorrent began to take over (Crewe et al, 2005, Haynes & Marshall, 2018). Salo, Mäntymäki and Lankinen (2011) argues that the rising popularity of such sites is one of the reasons why consumers arguably no longer value legitimate music distribution services.

Negus (2018) claims that the impact of digitalization still continues to be debated, even though it is now less debated as a break in the golden era, but rather as a historical continuity of the digital era. Haynes and Marshall (2018) emphasise a more optimistic discourse, arguing the positive opportunities the internet creates for independent musicians, such as reaching new global audiences and engaging with them in ways that facilitate self-sustaining independent careers. Rogers and Sparvier (2011), along with Galuszka and Brzozowska (2016), suggest that social networking sites, such as MySpace, Facebook or even crowdfunding sites have emerged as an important international early stage promotion outlet for new and upcoming artists.

It is therefore of interest to study how the effect of this crisis has potentially led to newer ways of branding oneself as an artist or band, and in turn how this has affected the relationship with the fan, or fandoms. While doing so, earlier studies done on the subject will be referred to on the subject, or subjects similar to the topic. The relationship between the artist/band and fan communities, in relation to the use of social media, is especially interesting to study as it might prove of new ways of capitalize on their personal
connections and relationship with the fans. Furthermore, this might raise a question of ethics. Salo, Lankinen and Mäntymäki (2013) claims that until very recently, the record labels’ knowledge about their customers has been very limited. Earlier, there has been no reliable way of finding out who buys what music, in what format and in which channel. They further argue that the popularity of social media and emergence of social media technologies have enabled the marketers to reach potential consumers on a whole new level. Using Battle Star Galactica and Veronica Mars as examples, studies shows that many producers seek ways to benefit from fan prosumers, such as indirectly monetizing user-generated content for the purpose of promotion (Pearson 2010, Navar-Gill 2018). Haynes and Marshall (2018) explain how the internet enables musicians to continually engage with fans, while maintaining an audience actually willing to spend money on their products, in which social media is central to the idea. Further, referring to Baym, they explain how the overall idea of making oneself accessible, helps the fans develop greater affection for the artists’ or bands’ work, becoming invested enough to want to spend money on them. Marshall (2015) claims that the celebrities sophisticated use of social media produces a different presence than earlier known, arguing it is an investment in a public self. Marwick & boyd (2011) therefore argues that networked media is constantly changing the celebrity culture – the way that people relate to them, how celebrities are produced but also how celebrity is practiced.

4.2 Fan Communities and The Progression of Social Media

This brings us to fandoms and social media. Salo, Lankinen and Mäntymäki (2013) explain social media as user-generated content with two-way interaction, either between two users, or a user and a company. What enable the content production and interaction online are tools such as tweets, social networks, blogs, communities and forums. Margiotta (2012) explains how the development of social media has noticeably transformed the way people communicate with one another. Furthermore, it is important to understand how social media is related to consumer behavior. Margiotta suggests that this new media form is increasingly becoming influential in the marketplace, substituting traditional media, giving instant access to information at their own convenience. Social media can obtain information and develop opinions and awareness. Due to its nature as consumer generated content, social media is perceived as a more trustworthy source of information (Margiotta, 2012). With this in mind, it brings us to fandoms and online communities, and in turn, their newfound online relationship with celebrities.

For the last 30 years, fandoms have turned from a marginal phenomenon into a larger movement influencing society on a bigger scale (Fuschillo, 2018). Kaplan and Haenlein explain the main objective of communities being the sharing of media content between users, further arguing the risks of online communities from a corporate viewpoint. Communities carry the risk of being used as a platform for illegal sharing of materials while lacking the means to control it. On the other hand, the popularity of content communities makes them an attractive channel for businesses, reaching a broader, yet more specific audience (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2009). It can be argued that social networks brings new opportunities to internet marketing, stating that a community brings together different users with similar interests, providing tailored and targeted commercial information for the
members of the community. Furthermore, social media enables effective viral marketing, spreading messages fast (Salo et al, 2011).

Chadborn, Edwards and Reysen (2017) argue that individuals participate in fan interests for a variety of reasons – some for entertainment, some to escape stress, other to fulfill a need for belonging. Misailidou (2017) argues with the help of Henri Tajfel’s Social Identity Theory, that for members of any fandom, whether it is sports or music, belonging to a group means more than just sharing an interest. She claims that being a member of a fandom or fan communities is a vital part of the individual, and something that they carry with them in life. Fuschillo (2018) explains the phenomena as someone with a relatively deep, positive emotional conviction about something, or someone famous. The person is driven to explore and participate in fan practices and inhabit roles marked up as fandom.

4.3 Connection With the Celebrity Through Social Media

In Click, Lee and Holladay (2013) study of Lady Gaga, known as a pioneer for her use of online and social media to connect with her fans, they suggest that research on new media has explored the new ways celebrities use social media to heighten a sense of intimacy between producer and consumer, which in turn offer greater possibilities for interaction. Giles (2017) argues the perspective that social media offers the possibility of direct access which has led to an alteration in what it means to be a celebrity fan, especially for those who aspire to become a celebrity themselves. He explains how fans can hold reasonable expectations that their favorite celebrities might actually reply to a tweet. Courbet and Fourquet-Courbet (2014) argue it is possible for fans to develop relationships defined as a parasocial interaction, in which they can be very influential in terms of audience members identities, attitudes and lifestyles. It can be argued that the identification through parasocial relationships makes the audience feel as if they know a celebrity as a friend or as if they share a lot of similarities, even though the celebrities themselves may be unaware of the existence of the specific fan (Chia & Ling Poo, 2009, Marwick & boyd, 2011). Click, Lee and Holladay (2013) refer to Caughey’s suggestion that fans often describe such relationships by comparing it to an actual, real-life relationship, in which they refer to their hero as a “friend”, “older sister”, “father figure” or “mentor”, to mention a few. Such relationships can be seen as substitutes for actual experiences, or function as an ideal self-image.

Pearson (2010) argues how the digital revolution has had a profound impact upon fandom and its communities, blurring the lines between the producers and consumers. Click, Lee and Holladay’s (2013) qualitative study agrees and the results show that the heightened sense of closeness and familiarity has blurred the boundaries that used to separate relationships in traditional media. Salo, Lankinen and Mäntymäki (2013) strengthen this by claiming that the use of the internet by music bands is a natural response to some of the behavior of fans who want to know about the artist as much as possible. By doing this, it is getting the fans involved, allowing them to become co-creators of the artist and bands success. Click, Lee and Holladay (2013) suggest that the seeming lack of media gatekeepers, such as publicist or management, heightens the intimacy and makes the online interactions feel more authentic. Celebrities’ online-presence also allows them to truly
speak for themselves. With so many mediated voices attempting to speak the meaning of the celebrity, their own social media-account emerges as the privileged channel for official statements and comments, rather than relying on formal bookers or managers, maintaining a distance between the celebrity and the fan (Muntean & Petersen, 2009, Marwick & boyd, 2011). Referring to Anne Petersen, they claim this new “aura of realness” makes celebrities seem more approachable, and in turn more likeable and relatable (Muntean & Petersen, 2009).

It can be argued that social media and online communities have not only brought the band or artist closer to the fan, but also fans closer to each other. Bury claims community has always been at the heart of participatory media culture as participatory fans were among the early adopters of ICT’s – information and communication technologies (Bury, 2016).

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, most studies made on the subject have focused on the psychological aspect of the prosumers and consumers relationship online. As Click, Lee and Holladay (2013) suggest, it is necessary to understand how the association between the highly regulated star image created by traditional media and the seemingly authentic identity built through social media, in turn may have transformed how the fans identify and interact with celebrities. Although, their own study focuses on the communication between a sole artist and the fans, claiming Lady Gaga and her fans have “a connection like no other”, making it difficult to apply the results on a larger scale. Marwick and boyd attempted to study the producer-consumer relationship through three case studies – but never studied how the relationship affects the fans within the communities or compared it to earlier producer-consumer relationships (Marwick & boyd, 2011). From a media and communication studies perspective, there is a lack of studies actually examining how the shift from traditional media, to new media, has affected the relationship between producers and consumers in the music industry, but also how the shift might have affected fandoms and how they interact with each other.

5. Theoretical Definition

In this section the set of theories and terms used to interpret the qualitative content analysis and interviews will be discussed, as well as the following theories and terms:

5. 1 Star Image

In Richard Dyer’s book on film stars, he argues that stars are images of media texts, a manufactured and constructed image by institutions for financial gain, rather than a real person (Dyer, 2011). Despite the fact that the book focuses on film stars in particular, I will be applying these theories on the band Ghost as they present themselves as characters in a theatrical sense, through their performances, communication, their albums and their music videos.
Stars within the music industry usually establish their persona through their music and performances, and develop their characters for each album. In Dyer’s chapter on Stars as Specific Images, promotion is argued the most intentional and straightforward of all the media texts that help constructing a star image (Dyer, 2011).

Despite originally being written and published in 1979, and long before the great breakthrough of social media, I will attempt to apply Dyer’s theories on Star Image on the band Ghost in terms of creating characters and building a constructed image and brand. The promotional side of Ghost is a huge part of their career, which makes Dyer’s theory highly relevant. He describes the term publicity as something that, in contrast to promotion, does not appear to be deliberate image-making. He exemplifies the term as what the “press finds out”, or what “one let’s slip in a interview” in which the consequences can be harmful or fatal, or perhaps, in some cases, give it a new lease of life (Dyer, 2011). The consequence being, in the apparent or actual escape from the image the star is actively trying to promote, it comes across as more “authentic” (Dyer, 2011) This term is relevant in this study as Ghost had a scandal in 2017, involuntary revealing the identities of the band members.

Dyer (2011) argues the characters’ personality is rarely something that is given in a single shot, but rather something that has to be built up over time. The signs of a character are, according to Dyer, the following:

— **Audience Foreknowledge**
The audience having a familiarity with the story, or there are familiar characters. The foreknowledge may also come from promotion, such as advertising or publicity, setting up certain expectations of the character.

— **Name**
The name of a character may suggest certain personality traits. With this said, a star’s own name may affect the way we think about characters.

— **Appearance**
What a character look like may also indicate their personality. This way, the appearance can be divided into categories, placing the character to broad cultural opposition such as masculine/feminine, old/young, nice/nasty, and so forth. The type of face and build may also refer to certain characteristics of groups.

— **Objective correlatives**
The use of psychical correlatives to symbolize mental states’, such as the use of décor, symbolism and setting. The characters environment may be felt to express him/her. The character may also be associated with a certain object.

— **Speech of character**
What a character says and how they say it indicate personality both directly and indirectly.

— **Speech of others**
What other characters say about the character, and how they say it, may also indicate personality traits.
— **Gesture**
The vocabulary of gesture may be read to formal or informal codes. Both may suggest certain personality traits or temperament.

— **Action**
Action is what the characters does in the plot. What distinguish the action is that its narrative or points towards a plot, whereas the gesture does not further, the narrative or is not essential to the plot.

— **Mise en scène.**
The visuals such as the cinematic rhetoric of lighting, framing, placing of actors can be used to express characters personality or their state of mind.

Despite Dyer’s focus on what characterizes a character within films, I will be applying the same list on Ghost for comparison, in combination with Dyer’s theories on star image. Ghost career are based off different fictional characters in their music, live performances, promotional videos and music videos, which makes the list highly relevant to interpret similarities and differences, to further analyse what role social media plays in building the character.

McDonald (2011) critiques Dyer has been receiving – claiming the study was largely too focused on the star as text without attention to how the images of them construct fantasies and pleasures of the audience. This brings ut to the next relevant theories for the study: fan culture and participatory fandom.

5. 2 Fan Culture

According to Baym (2007), most researchers would define the term “fandom” as something that involves a collective of people organized socially around a certain object or objects, such as popculture. This group helps develop a sense of shared identity and individuals within the fandom create self-concepts and self-presentations. Fiske (1992) claims that fans create a culture with its own systems in terms of production and distribution. Gray, Harrington and Sandvoss (2007) argue it is especially interesting to study fans as they are not seen as a counterforce to existing social hierarchies – but instead agents of maintaining social and cultural systems. Gray & Busse (2011) argue that since fans and fan communities exist on the same spectrum of media consumption, studies and findings may tell us a great deal about an audience as a whole.

The way fandom has been researched has changed over the years – at first, it was focused on the consumption of mass media and studied as a site of power struggle. It has been described how fans were associated with the cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people, such as those who were disempowered by race, age, class and/or gender (Grey et al, 2007). Thus, in earlier research, it has been noted how fans have been portrayed as part of an undifferentiated and easily manipulated mass. Later studies, such as Jenkins (2007), attempted to redeem them as creative, productive and thoughtful, which allowed the fans to speak for themselves. Gray & Busse (2011) refer to earlier work offering a picture of fandom as thoughtful and deliberative, happening in communities of engaged and intelligent individuals – and most importantly: as a legitimate source of production of meaning and value, in and of itself. This brings us to today: the fan as a
dedicated consumer has become a centerpiece of marketing strategies. Instead of being diminished, they are often wooed by different cultural industries as long as they recognize the industries’ legal ownership of the fandom object (Gray et al., 2007).

Despite fandom being known for creating family-like bonds, it is of importance to discuss the hierarchy that may arise within the communities. Cavicchi (1998) describes the elitism that arose from the different fans stories in his study on Bruce Springsteen – in which the fans judged each other based on the knowledge of lyrics, how many concerts they had earlier attended, or on how many records they own. Throughout the study, the main focus is fans as members of fandom rather than the particular identity of the individual fan.

### 5.2.1 The Live Experience

This study will largely be focused on how Ghost built their image using their social media, and it turn how the fans interact with and experience the bands communication and image, as well as the fan community. However, Ghost are largely known for their live performances, which will inevitably be mentioned throughout the study.

In contrast to the online fan presence, Duffet (2015) argues concerts enable the fan to behave in a more personal, private and emotional way. They are experiencing an emotional exchange, not only with other fans but with the band or artist on stage as well. Cavicchi (1998) exemplifies this by referring to Bruce Springsteen fans seeing themselves as a part of the performance, singing along and interacting with the artist. Meanwhile that particular concert is just one of many for the band, it may be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the fan. The live experience can hence be grounded in something much larger than just the few hours the artist on the stage. The live experience can include the anticipation in actually buying the ticket, counting down to the event, queuing for hours, meeting other fans, and so forth. The whole process becomes almost ritual like, which is what Cavicchi argues separates fans from the general concert-goer.

Spiritual energy is sometimes associated with vivid music experiences, as it gives a sense of belonging. Cavicchi strengthens this by discussing how a dedication towards a live experience can mirror a religious revelation. The way Christians often describe their religious transformation in discovering a sense of closeness to God or Jesus, Cavicchi found bears resemblance to how several of his respondents described their feeling towards Bruce Springsteen (ibid, 1998).

### 5.2.2 Fan Productivity

Fiske (1992) describes three different forms of fan productivity, which will be of value in distinguishing the fans’ relationship to the band. Semiotic productivity, referring to the creation of meaning in the process of reading. Enunciative production, referring to forms av social interaction cultivated through consumption, such as the verbal exchange between fans, wearing merch, or replicating a celebrity’s appearance. The last form of production, textual, refers to materials or texts created by fans – exemplified by fanzines, fan fiction or selfproduced videos. Considering Fiske’s book being written in 1992, and before the breakthrough of social media as we know it, these three forms of production will be applied on social media platforms. Cavicchi (1998) argues fans are ideal consumers of
brands as they are persistent in staying up to date, purchasing merchandise and engage in different sort of fan productivity, thus regularly promoting the artist/band. Fiske (1992) proposes that individuals engage in semiotic productivity when commercial goods, such as music, becomes meaningful to them. This touches on fan productivity, such as wearing merch, creating art, covering songs or participating in fandoms online. Busse & Gray argue fandom productivity can offer a more intense understanding of how viewers interpret a context within an intertextual field. The content created by fans are commentary on the source text, and thus contain limited shared interpretive space. However, the texts and conversations together create a fanlike space on its own, tending to be intertextual with the fan community it circulates in. As the internet allows fans to share their work, and communicate with like-minded, communities usually attracts creative individuals. Busse & Gray (2011) propose that fans engage emotionally not only with the text they analyse – but also with their fan community. This brings us to participatory culture.

5.2.3 Participatory Culture/Fandom

Henry Jenkins (2006) proposes that community has always been at the heart of participatory media culture, as is therefore an important part of this study as I will be looking further into the fans and their feelings towards their own community. A participatory culture emerges as a culture absorbs and responds to new media technologies: enabling average consumers to appropriate and recirculate media content in new ways (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins (2006) defines participatory culture as one where there are relatively low barriers to artistic expression and strong support for creating and sharing what you create with other. It is important that the members feel that their contribution matter and that the members feel some degree of social connection to one another. However, not every member must contribute – though it is important that they feel free to do so if they would want to, and know that what they chose to contribute will be valued by other members. The community is driven by creative expression and active participation, such as blog posts, webpages, original artwork, photography and videos. Different forms of participatory culture include affiliations, expressions, collaborative problem-solving and circulations (Jenkins, 2006).

In conclusion, as this study aims to study the band Ghost and their fans in regards of social media, the five different theoretical frameworks and terms will be of value in attempt to place the material in a context and to further analyse it.

6. Methodology and Material

In this section, the chosen methods for the study will be discussed. The acquirement of the empiric material, approach and the application method will be defined. In the method of data collection, I have chosen to use qualitative research. According to Given’s (2008) book on qualitative research methods, qualitative research allows a greater focus on details, attitudes and emotions. Engaging in conversations with fans could be very beneficial could be very beneficial for the study in order to learn more about the specific emotional relationship between the fans and the band, rather than measuring numbers. The hypothesis is that this method will provide with enough information to attempt to further
understand what role social media may have played in the relationship between the fans and the band.

6.1.1 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of interpretation – to study a text from a hermeneutic perspective means being an active reader in the creation of meaning (Gripsrud, 2011). With qualitative methods, it is important to view the analysis part as interpretive. A principle that is often applied to studies within hermeneutics is the hermeneutic circle, which signifies the researchers’ understanding of the different parts of the text to understand it as a whole and vice versa (Gripsrud, 2011). Gripsrud (2011) further argues that meanwhile a researcher attempts a deeper understanding of a text from an objective approach, the researcher must be aware of the fact that the individual’s historic, cultural and social prerequisites will play a large role in the interpretation.

While structuring a case study, it is important to find relevant theoretical frameworks and terms. The choice of theories is what helps the researcher to further generalize their results – the generalization can later be compared to said theories, to develop, question or confirm them (Kvale, 1997). Kvale (1997) explains how an analytical generalization is based on assertive logic, and the researcher can by argument, theories and by specifying their preposition present their generalization, in turn leaving it to the reader to judge the accuracy of the statement.

The goal of this analytic strategy is therefore to put differences and similarities against each other, and explain the outcome with the help of theories.

6.1.2 Rhetorical Analysis

A rhetorical analysis based on Vigso (2019) will be applied to the communication of Ghost. As I will be looking further into different Facebook-posts, a rhetorical analysis helps me interpret the contexts of the sender, intended receiver, message as well as the semiotics of the selected mediatexts. As Ghost’s communication is quite unique and is driven by connotations and semiotics, a rhetorical analysis would be of value for the study. Rhetorical analysis is a critically questioning method, meaning it is trying to answer why a text look a certain way, and how the sender influences the intended receiver. Vigso (2019) argues most researchers today use rhetorical analysis to look further into the persuasion, rather than the eloquence of the speech, thus how the speech affects the audience. The wording, enunciation and body language has always been seen as valuable rhetorical tools – but today music, images and the choice of colours are just as important (Vigso, 2019).

The structure of a rhetorical analysis is recommended as following:

1. Who is the sender?
2. Who is the intended receiver?
3. What is the sender trying to convince the receiver about?
4. In what context?
5. How is the sender trying to convince the receiver?
To further understand a text, the art of rhetoric is divided into three main genres: forensic (the judicial or legal), deliberative (the political), and epideictic (the ceremonial). A text must not necessarily consist of only one genre – different parts may hold different functions (Vigsø, 2019).

The different forms of appeal, ethos, pathos and logos, are valuable when a rhetorical analysis is performed. Ethos is the appeal of ethics – such as convincing someone by the persuaders credibility. Pathos appeals to emotion – you can convince an audience by creating an emotional response. Lastly, logos – appealing to logic, hence persuading an audience by reason. Vigsø (2019) argues the three of them belongs together – it is simply not possible to convince or persuade someone using only one of them. Based on the audience, the sender can decide to focus on different forms of appeal in their communication. By example, if you are lacking ethos, you can instead focus on logos to persuade the audience. The choice of appeal can therefore be of value to study as it can tell something about how the sender perceives the receiver, and the other way around (Vigsø, 2019). To be able to study the communication of Ghost, the rhetorics of semiotics is of importance. Simplified – semiotics is the way we create meaning by observing everything as signs. Vigsø proposes the meaning can be divided into two. Denotation – the individuals objective interpretation, and the connotation: the mutual association the signs create for those who belong to the same culture (Vigsø, 2019). A third tool is suggested by Barthes: myths. Myths serve to communicate a social and political message, as well as to neutralize dominant cultural beliefs (Bignell, 1997). That being said, an audience can understand and enjoy media texts in diverse ways, as the texts are read in relation to other signs and cultural contexts (Bignell, 1997).

6.1.3 Qualitative Content Analysis

In combination with rhetorical analysis, this study will use the method of qualitative content analysis – which is often used to study different parts of a media text to understand it as a whole. This is of value as I will be combining Facebook posts with Facebook comments, background information of the band and interviews with fans to make sense of the ways Ghost communicate to build an image and story. A qualitative content analysis method defines the process in which the researcher examines and arrange the material to find a result (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). With the help of qualitative content analysis, the study will primarily look closer at how the band have used their Facebook page throughout the years. In order to do so, this study focuses on Facebook posts representing milestones in their creation of image and story. To further analyse the subject, the material will be placed in a context with the chosen different theoretical frameworks and terms earlier mentioned.

6.1.4 Qualitative Interviews

To further understand the content Ghost produce on their social media, and thus how they create their characters and image, I will reach out to the actual consumers: fans. The interview works as a producer of knowledge, providing us insights and well-established descriptions of the respondents outlook on the subject. The interviews will be semi-structured and built around the same set of questions, with room for discussion and
potential follow-up issues, which may lead to new perspectives and insights. The template was therefore created to attempt answering the research questions, to further understand the relationship between the fan and the band. With this said: there are no standardized, predetermined interview guides to what will lead to a successful interview – however, there are standardised ways of approaching the interview, as well as certain techniques. As you can never know what answers to expect, it makes you more tied to the situation than other methods, and it is up to the interviewer to benefit by asking the right questions, and how to do so (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014).

The follow-up issues are just as important for the interview, as it may be needed to fully grasp the less aware side of the respondents – and this is potentially where the most unexpected answers might reveal themselves (Ekström & Larsson, 2019). My own foreknowledge of the band Ghost, as an interviewer and as a proclaimed fan, helped me shape the questions based off the answers received. Meanwhile, it is important to acknowledge potential issues. Ekström & Larsson (2019) argue it is important for the interviewer to position oneself as “consciously naive” – meaning, to attempt to eliminate the risk of making assumptions based off the interviewers foreknowledge on the subject as it may affect the result.

6.1.5 Analysis Method

The interviews in combination with the rhetorical analysis have been processed and analysed in the search of differences and similarities. I chose specific parts of the interview to put it in comparison with the qualitative content analysis and rhetorical analysis.

6.2 Material

A rhetorical analysis has been performed with qualitative content analysis on four of Ghost’s Facebook posts, all representing important milestones in their story. The first post represents the first time the leader, the vocalist, was replaced in 2012. The second post represents the newest leader replacement to date. The third post represents how a new character is shaped. The fourth post represents the promotional aspects of Ghost, breaking the fourth wall of social media. The four posts were picked to summarize the way they build their image and story, as well as to fit the research questions and topics. Furthermore, to place the Facebook posts in a context, relevant FB comments have been quoted.

In addition to the qualitative content- and rhetorical analysis, five in-depth interviews were performed with both former and, on different levels, active fans, all of which were found in a fan made Ghost group on Facebook. When announcing I was looking for volunteers for the study, the individuds interested in participating were asked to clarify how long they had considered themselves fans of Ghost, as well as where they come from. In total, 21 volunteers signed up. After performing five in-depth interviews, I decided enough information had been obtained, and the data was showing signs of being saturated.

The respondents were a group of volunteers from a variety of different countries. The group consisted of four women and one man, and their ages varied from 22–52. The five interviews were done over Skype and Facebook’s Messenger as it allowed to include fans from all over the world. Relevant quotes from the interviews has been chosen to further clarify the link between the empirical data, theoretical frameworks and earlier research.
Referring to his own work on Star Image, Richard Dyer (2011) points out there is a gap in studies on the audience. As this study focuses on the ways Ghost has built their image and story using social media, the fans’ own experiences will be researched to reach a deeper understanding of what role social media have played in the relationship between band and fan community.

6.3 Selection
The focus of the study is not to figure out who the fans are, or if there is any similarities or patterns in their age, gender or where they come from. The important part was that they all active in the same Ghost fan group on Facebook, thus already being grounded in the theoretical frameworks of fandom and participation culture. As previously described, the selection were made based off for how long they had been fans, as well as were they came from, to obtain diversity to some degree, as it makes the result easier to apply on a larger scale.

Respondent 1: Male, 32 years, USA.
Respondent 2: Female, 28, Hungary
Respondent 3: Female, 22, UK
Respondent 4: Female, 33, Czech Republic
Respondent 5: Female, 51, Canada

6.4 Ethical Discussion
Throughout the studies and interviews, I have been faced with ethical consideration. When choosing to do interviews, it is especially important to consider the the respondents confidentiality as well as questions that may appear sensitive. The respondents in my study all participated voluntarily, and was free to withdraw their consent at any time. They were informed how the interview would be structured and what the main themes of the interview were beforehand. It was also clear that they would remain anonymous when published – besides stating their age, sex and location.

6.5 Validity and Reliability
The validity and reliability of a study does not necessarily go together – a study can thus obtain high reliability and low validity, and vice versa. The validity concerns the strength and accuracy of a statement (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). The validity of the collected empirical material can thus be strengthened by the quality of the questions, as well as the quality of the transcription or recording. The validity of a study is worked with throughout the whole process – not only during the analysis, and functions as a link between the research questions, empirical data and theoretical frameworks (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014).

Kvale & Brinkmann (2014) explains reliability as the authenticity of the result – meaning: would the result appear the same if the same study was made by another researcher during another time? If a study focuses too largely on the reliability, the creativity and variety of a analysis can be negatively affected (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). As I have chosen to work with qualitative methods, and thus working with materials that are highly interpretive and empirically based, the results would most likely not look the
same. While choosing the method of interviews, it is hard to avoid the risk of possibly asking leading questions. Following the semi-structured questions helped to strengthen the reliability as far as possible, but of course each interview were different with different follow-up issues. My own foreknowledge on the band and community may also affected how I have interpreted the selected material, analysis and results, despite positioning myself as what Ekström & Larsson (2019) calls “consciously naive”. The theoretical frameworks, terms and methods therefore helps filtering and categorizing the empirical data.

7. Result and Analysis

In this section, I will connect the empirical data that I have collected with the theoretical framework and earlier research. I will be attempting to answer the three research questions of the study, the division of the analysis is therefore based on those. That being said, the focus is not to establish any truths through the interviews and content analysis, but rather to explore thoughts and structures that may deny or confirm earlier research on how bands use their social media and consequently how it affects the fandom. The disposition of the analysis will be as following: Ghost and their image - and building an image with a story. The second section will discuss the fans and how they use social media to stay connected to the band and community. The third section will discuss breaking the fourth wall – discussing the real life relationship to the band and other fans. Lastly, a conclusion will follow. Throughout the different sections, Dyer’s theories on Star Image as well as the promotional aspect will be applied.

7.1 Ghost and Their Star Image

In this section, I will apply Richard Dyer’s theories on Star Image, in combination with a rhetorical analysis, in order to look further into the ways Ghost builds their image using social media. To do so, I have chosen different posts from their official Facebook page I believe represents important milestones in their career.

Before looking further into the posts, it is important to note that Ghost relies a lot on their live performances. They were already active and touring when they started building their image and story online. The sound and look of the band can therefore not be explained by their social media presence but rather their own inspiration and ideas in life, but is important to acknowledge as it affects the way they create a and narrate the story and image. The look I have previously described is the main look that they have gone with more or less from the start in 2008, and therefore is something they are grounded in and known for. Without openly explaining the theme, it is clear what the different items together represents. They have thus succeeded to ground a name and appearance, important parts of what defines a star image according to Dyer (2011). Of course, this is part of what have made the band controversial – using seemingly holy items and placing them in a satirical and satanic context. Speech of others have therefore been varied, depending on the receiver.

Their live performances aligns with the thematic way they dress and their backdrop resembles the large, colorful windows of a cathedral, thus creating mise en scene (Dyer, 2011). Before the concerts the room fills up with the scent of incense – and while the band
is performing the singer uses props such as thuribles and altar bread, mimicking the roman
catholic church, hence having succeeded to built objective correlatives to their image
(Dyer, 2011). When performing live and in interviews – the lead singer speaks with a heavy
italian accent, and, depending on the personality of the character, makes jokes about sex
and money throughout the show. Their live performances and interviews have thus helped
them succeed to build speech of character (Dyer, 2011). Besides the speech of the
characters, the body language has been very different based on the character. For example,
the latest addition to the band (Cardinal Copia) is very whimsical – behaving awkwardly in
promotional videos, while Papa II, the second character appearing as a vocalist, was the
complete opposite – with an evil looking face and a much calmer body language. The
gestures of the characters are therefore ever changing, but still an important part of what
defines Ghost as a whole. When looking further into the different posts, it is important to
note that this information is already grounded to the audience and does not need to be
accentuated further. Next, the study will discuss the ways Ghost builds their image by
telling a story.

7.1.1 Building an Image With a Story

In this section, I will with the help of a rhetorical analysis look into the way Ghost builds a
story and image with the help of social media. While looking further into the way they tell a
story, I will apply Richard Dyer’s theories on star image and promotion (Dyer, 2011).

In 2012, the Ghost Facebook page posted a status saying:

![Ghost Facebook post](Ghost Facebook page, 2012)

When applying the rhetorical analysis model as earlier described, the post tells us the
sender is Ghost (Facebook page) and/or Papa Emeritus I (Signed). The intended receiver
is explicitly “Children of the world” – in this context, implicitly the fans and Facebook
followers.

What is Ghost trying to convince their fans and followers about? Using words such as
“summoning” and “ritual” works as a connotation to something religious and thus inviting
and convincing the audience to become part of something larger and spiritual, something
that can be strengthened by the foreknowledge the fans had obtained on Ghost.
At this point in their career, no one really knew Ghost intended to change characters and therefore very little context were given to the audience. Using the foreknowledge the audience had on Ghost, such as the fact that the lead singer dressed as a pope, a few fans started to refer to the papal conclave within the roman church. Debating back and forward whether it was time for another pope to be elected – and what that would mean for Ghost. 

Drawing from Vigsø (2019), the context can be interpreted as Ghost using established western denotations – the roman church as a main theme in a satanic context – thus succeeding to leave a lot to the audience's imagination, encouraging the subjective connotation of each individual receiver.

> "just as in the vatican, new pope, (same singer of course) each album will celebrate a new pope. The creator of Ghost (the one behind the emeritus mask) will never leave” Facebook comment, 2012.

> "Will we be graced by Papa Emeritus II for that next album?” Facebook comment, 2012.

Despite the clear connotations of the roman church and just having released a successful album, the comment section soon filled with worried and sad fans.

> “if he leaves the band its because journalist twats couldn't leave his true identity alone” Facebook comment, 2012.

> “I hope we’re getting trolled...it better not be what it sounds like” Facebook comment, 2012.

> “WTF?!?! No more Ghost?!?!? Or maybe I might be interpreting wrong but still WTF?!?!?” Facebook comment, 2012.

The post, in addition to the hints that had been given through playing with connotations, is what laid ground for Ghost’s unexpected story telling. Ghost made the characters come to life, making them replaceable – rather than just functioning as a shock factor in the shape of disguise or makeup which had so obviously been done before in the history of rock- and metal genre.

When looking closer at how the sender is trying to convince the receiver, it shows that the wording of the post makes the sender, Ghost, appear as a higher power – speaking to the children of the world as a leader, implicitly creating ethos. The post is therefore categorized as an epideictic oratory (Vigsø, 2019). Using the word “last” implies the message is referring to something unique and therefore an event you would want to be a part of, therefore implementing logos in the message – persuading an audience by reason. In this post, participatory fandom is a big part. Ghost are inviting their fans and followers to take part of what is to come, implicitly encouraging discussions as well as inviting them to take part of the ritual outside the online world.
Post number two (Figure 2), posted in April of 2018, shows the latest transformation up to date.

![Ghost Facebook post, April 2018](image)

**Figure 2** (Ghost Facebook page, 2018)

The sender in this context is the Ghost Facebook page – simultaneously posted on their Instagram- and YouTube accounts as well to reach a wider audience. The intended receiver is thus their fans and followers on said platforms.

The post begins with “[MESSAGE FROM THE CLERGY]” – and “We wish to inform you…” The wording keeps the post formal and ceremonial, as with the majority of their posts since their very start of their communication on Facebook in 2008. The post reads “We wish to inform you our new leader has arrived.” And links a 4 minute video, introducing a new character. For the first time in the history of Ghost, the new lead singer, Cardinal Copia, is not part of the bloodline (Papa Emeritus I, Papa Emeritus II, Papa Emeritus III) and the higher power, a character I will return to, are hesitant whether he will be able to fill the shoes of the predecessor. The sender is thus convincing the receiver that a big change is about to happen, but that nothing is certain and anything can happen at this point.

In the context of this post, Ghost had already laid ground for their background story of their earlier character transformations throughout their career, thus obtaining ethos. This checks another important point of Richard Dyer’s (2011) theory on star image: audience foreknowledge, which has been constantly built since 2011. Out of a rhetorical aspect, they have hence been benefiting from an established doxa (Vigso, 2019). In
comparison to the first post regarding the transformation in 2012, this later is considerably more complex.

To understand the context of the post, some background information is required. During their last concert of 2017, the final song of the set was suddenly interrupted right before the chorus by guards stepping out on the stage, grabbing the singer and aggressively pulling him away, storming backstage. Merely seconds after, a new character is introduced for the first time: the elderly Papa Nihil. Escort by two well dressed guards, he is wearing the classical mitre and robe, dressed in white from head to toe, holding an oxygen mask against his mouth. He is taking careful steps, supported by his walking cane onto the massive main stage. The atmosphere among the crowd is like a rollercoaster: some are seemingly confused, some are laughing, and some are debating what could be going on. When the unfamiliar character grabs the microphone, the enormous audience goes completely silent, anxiously waiting for an answer to make sense of what just happened. With a heavy bass line eerily echoing in the background, the character speaks in Italian with a dark voice – mesmerizing the audience. Within seconds the light goes out and the new character carefully walks off stage. After two minutes of silence in the dark, which at the time seemed like an eternity, the stage staff starts to pack down the instruments: much to the audience’s surprise. They never finished the final song and the audience was left wondering what happened, consequently playing with the pathos of the audience that had emotionally invested themselves in the story. This was later recognized in media, linking fan recorded videos of the event, and extended into a massive discussion in fan groups and on Reddit – translating the Italian and debating what it could potentially mean for the future of Ghost (Gaffa 2017, Metal Injection 2017, Loudwire 2017). Like we’ve seen Ghost do so many times before, the band is implicitly encouraging discussions and conspiracies, but this time, it reached the mainstream media.

Between this event in September of 2017 and April of 2018, Ghost gives subtle hints of what could be the new front man while using the benefits of social media to promote a new live-DVD, merchandise, upcoming tour dates and short snippets of what looked like potential music videos. To promote the upcoming transformation (Figure 1) six chapters in the shape of 3 minute videos, were released one by one, airing on YouTube and being promoted on Facebook and Instagram. With the help of characters, such as Papa Nihil and Sister Imperator (introduced on YouTube in 2016, announcing Ghost-related news, see Figure 3), they build up suspense, hinting about what is to come combining it with humor, while providing the viewer some background story to the characters using flashbacks (Figure 2). Throughout the six chapters, short clips of unreleased songs can be heard as a soundtrack of different lengths, other chapters functioning as subtle ways to hint about meet and greet-packages and upcoming tour dates. As with figure 3, the same procedure was done in 2006. This is what Dyer (2011) refers to as action in building an image. The mixture of the live performances and the different 3-minute YouTube skits therefore shows important actions in which the former leader is replaced and how a new character is shaped.
To look further into how the sender (Ghost) is trying to convince the receiver (fans and audience in large), it is important to look at the bigger picture of what story Ghost has built. Ghost built their theatrical image around their satirical and satanic take on the roman church – and the idea that the characters obtain different personalities, are replaceable and therefore have a lifespan. Ghost combines the live and online experience to prepare for what is to come for the latest transformation, only giving away subtle hints. The months before the reveal, the band releases promotional videos and posts regarding current releases, merchandise and what’s to come. It can be argued that the band use their platforms to reach beyond social media for promotional purposes, creating the story of Ghost out in the real world, and not just on a live stage. Premiere parties and “special sermons” to gather the fans is nothing unusual for the band and further builds on the feeling of being invited to something spiritual (Figure 4), therefore extending the plot beyond social media.
The promotion can therefore be argued is, with the help of pathos, being disguised as a story with cliffhangers, that you can not help but look forward to and want to discuss in between – keeping the fans anticipation very much alive. Dyer (2011) emphasizes the promotion-aspect of star image – referring to texts in which were produced as part of a deliberate creation of an image, and are therefore the most straightforward of all texts which construct star image. He describes the promotion as material concerned with the star – such as fan club publications, fashion pictures, studio announcements and public appearances. Dyer’s ideas of promotion can be applied on Ghost with slight moderation. Focusing on Ghost’s official Facebook page, the promotion aspect of star image therefore include tour announcements, promotional videos, “special sermons” (Figure 4) and pushing merchandise. This is somewhat connected to enunciative production – referring to forms of social interaction cultivated through consumption (Fiske, 1992).

In a larger context, Ghost is convincing the receiver by building up anticipation in which the outcome is unknown – but that you definitely want to be a part of. In conclusion – Despite originally being written in 1979, and long before the great breakthrough of social media, Dyer’s theories on Star Image easily applies on Ghost in terms of creating characters and building an constructed image and brand. He further describes how a
personality in a film is seldom something that is given right away, but rather needs to build up by the producers and audience (Dyer, 2011). Although the band changes and develops characters throughout the years, the main message, story and theme (the roman church) for Ghost have remained the same since the very beginning of their career.

By hiding behind characters and purposely creating a fictional story in which the out-of-costume persona is not a focal point, Ghost manages to short circuit the issues of what Dyer defines in succeeding to build star image. Dyer (2011) describes the contradiction between stars-as-ordinary and stars-as-special, and critiques the phenomena of stars being treated as superlatives. In contrast to my own subject, in which the star image is built around fictional, exaggerated characters, it can be argued superlatives serves as a benefit to the band. In the same way, Ghost is benefiting from what Dyer (2011) describes as “deconstruction”. He claims much of the arguments against “characters” comes from a formalist position – in which it is suggested that the only interest of the character is in the qualities of the text and its structuring. Further he proposes a radical variant, in which the text should cease to construct the illusion of lived life, and that characters instead functions as devices, a part of a bigger design. In a conflicting way, he argue that stars are incompatible with this point of view, as they always bring with them the illusion of lived live. In the context of Ghost, the band have with their anonymity and storytelling successfully minimize the risk of bringing the illusion of lived life outside of the characters, thus stripping them of humanity (Dyer, 2011). Ghost are therefore successfully reduced to a mere concept, which in this context works in their favor.

7.2 The Fans and Social Media

In the previous section, the rhetorical analysis shows how Ghost built themselves an image and story using social media, in combination with live events. To further investigate what role social media may have played for the fans who are the predominant consumers in this study, I have interviewed five, on different levels, active fans. The five respondents were asked about how they first found out about Ghost – and when they realized they were becoming fans. The majority of the respondents answered they became fans after seeing them live opening for another band, despite already having heard their music digitally. It can therefore be argued that the image and storytelling of Ghost is what captivates the audience rather than the music alone.

I watched, but I was feeling myself getting entranced, drawn in, Papa was just so engaging. The Ghouls movements and playing were on point. Somewhere within their set, I didn’t even know…what, how, but I was becoming a fan. Respondent 5.

I was really a newbie, I didn’t know the lyrics, but I enjoyed the show very much. After this show I started to listen to the band very heavily, and I started to like them. So I consider myself as a fan from that time. Respondent 2.

Despite their different levels of fandom, there was one answer that stood out among the respondents. Their fanlike activities (in this context: cosplaying, managing fan groups online, covering Ghost songs, attending concerts, looking up and interacting with fan content online, wearing merch, meeting up with other fans) – was exclusive to the band.
Ghost, and could not be compared to another band or artist that they liked on the same level. Only one of the respondents participates in similar activities in regards of other bands or artists, a band she had been a fan of since she was a child. This supports the argument that Ghost has exceedingly succeeded to build a story and image that the fans connects with and feels committed to.

Other people asked me to be an admin/moderator of other band's fan groups but I said no, because I don't have time and energy to be active everywhere. [...] So Ghost is my number one favorite band right now, however there are so many other great bands I follow, but I don't invest that much energy like I do in the Ghost fandom. **Respondent 2**

Drawing from Jenkins (2006) theory of participation culture, the respondents were asked about how they use different social media platforms to partake in the fandom and community. Out of the five respondents, four were actively contributing to the community by managing a fan group, covering songs and uploading artwork. Only one of the respondents were solely active in fan groups (liking posts, looking up videos, keeping up with news), but not necessarily contributing with content. The five respondents, in disregard of their different levels of activity and contribution, thus aligns with what Jenkins defines as participatory culture – meaning, there is strong support for creating and sharing what you create, they feel like their contributions matter, and there is a social connection (Jenkins, 2006). In this case, it can be argued that the creativity and storytelling of Ghost have inspired the fan community to contribute with their own creative content, or at least feel free to do so when ready in the forums given.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked how they experienced the online community themselves, as a participant. To my surprise, the answers dramatically shifted depending on their activity. Overall they enjoy the atmosphere, but seemed to distance themselves from other fans in different ways, claiming how it can get “a little whacky”, and how fans that follow the band like a religion “are amusing”. Only one respondent had nothing negative at all to say about the online community – though emphasizing she mostly uses the online community to keep up with the fans she had met in real life or to take part of the content being shared. What is important to note is that all five of the respondents claimed they were not using any other forums or website specifically for Ghost but various Facebook fan groups – thus, their experience of the online fan community in this study can only be limited to those.

A majority of the respondents answers aligns with Cavicchi’s (1998) studies on Bruce Springsteen, claiming that there is an elitism and hierarchy among the fans, differentiating each other based on knowledge, dedication or activity. What differentiates this study’s results from Cevicchi’s (1998), is that the majority of the respondents – proclaimed fans – distanced themselves from the more hardcore fans, categorizing the others to the extreme.

[…] atmosphere is pretty fun. Sometimes a little whacky for me, but that's cool. I like that flavor. **Respondent 1.**
Intense! A lot of people are really into ghost and follow them almost like a religion which I think is amusing. **Respondent 3.**

Respondent 2, the one out of the five who manages a fan group on Facebook, accentuates the drama within the communities:

Well what can I say, it’s becoming very annoying nowadays. You know if there is a band with one big community... people become rival to each other. [...] People try to impress other people how big fans they are. **Respondent 2.**

The respondent further acknowledge how it is bound to happen with fanbases that quickly grow larger – there are so many people with different opinions, and they dare to speak their mind online as there will be no real consequences. The role of fandom providing members with a sense of collective belonging – creating almost family-like bonds – has been emphasised in earlier studies. Having said that, and with the respondents answers in consideration, it is important to discuss the hierarchy within fandoms. Fandoms are organized with an internal structure, organized after knowledge, experience and know-how fans (Fuschillo, 2018). By contrast to “normal” audiences, the fandom holds the ability to construct alternative interpretation and readings (Sandvoss, 2005). Of course, Ghost being such a secretive group about their band members and how the story of Ghost is going to unfold next, it leaves a lot to the imagination and to discuss. With a lack of clear indication of what is right and wrong about Ghost, the discussions tends to quickly escalate. With a steady and fast growing fanbase, averaging 4-5 thousand new likes a month on their official Facebook page, hierarchy is bound to happen – conflicting, and possibly overshadowing the positive aspects of the online fandom that have earlier been accentuated (Social Blade, 2019). One respondent in particular experienced the fan groups getting out of hand, most dramas focused on the sharing of content.

Drama is always there in every group [...] But the most drama is always about sharing photos and posts. “You don't use credit”, “You shared this without a permission”, “I shared it first, you stole it”, etc etc. Fans try to repress others, and it's really annoying. **Respondent 2.**

The respondent further explains how she started unfollowing a lot of fan groups on Facebook as they started spreading hate – creating rumours about one another in attempt to gain more followers. With Bury’s study in mind, the conflicts within the Facebook fangroup could be explained by the medium itself (Bury, 2016). Participatory culture and fandom has always been premised on building a community, creating connections with individuals of similar specific interests. She argues it is the media texts that binds and not prior relations. In regards of social media, Bury (2016) refers to Facebook’s architecture, making it the next logical central hub for participatory fans: a timeline with individual- and group accounts with a range of uploading capabilities. Her data strongly conflicts this. She suggests that Facebook is premised on having a large and wide-ranging social network as possible – her respondents strengthens this by claiming how they only use Facebook as a tool to stay in touch with friends and family, arguing they would not really post anything personal or very interesting. Another respondent claims she could never do fanlike
activities on Facebook as it got her full name revealed – and because there are individuals that she knows from high school on the platform (Bury, 2016). Bury’s (2016) respondents comments, in line with this study’s results, serves as a reminder that participatory fandom to some extent still can be considered deviant or ridiculed.

This could potentially conflict with, and harm what distinguishes a participatory fandom – and hence explain why the fans of Ghost strongly seems to prefer the offline community and live experience of engaging with other fans. In this context, concerts or meet-ups serves as a more closed space compared to platforms such as Facebook. Bury (2016) explains this by referring to Facebook’s own Help Center, in which they claim they require people to provide the name they use in real life – as it keeps the community safe. Ironically, as a participatory fandom, this is not considered a safe space. The traditional fan platforms, such as different listservs, UseNet or specific discussion forums in general – do not, in contrast, demand authenticity or attempt to police identity. Thus providing the user with a more creative space in which they are not being monitored in the same way. Bury (2016) instead suggests Facebook serves to extend friendships beyond the fan community context, rather than functioning as a platform for maintaining communities.

It is however important to state that not all respondents in this study were negative about the fan groups on Facebook. Some comments did suggest the groups functioning as an extended family, as well a great way to keep up with new footage and news concerning the band. What is interesting to point out is that the live experience, both concerts and meet-ups, were overwhelmingly positive in comparison to the social media experience, despite social media being the bands main platform to keep their fans anticipation alive and build their story.

7.2.1 Breaking the Fourth Wall

Internet provides us with great opportunities to share content and keep up with news. Despite Ghost being a secretive band, conspiracies as well as “proof” of the band members’ identities and information have been floating around since the very beginning of their career. When asked, the majority of the respondents agreed and said they enjoyed the mystery of not knowing about the band members’ identities – actively avoiding discussions and conspiracies on social media, until it was no longer possible to do so.

At the beginning I didn't care about the identities, because I was blown away with the music, I didn't care who are those people behind the mask. Of course if you are using social media platforms you see and read stuff about the band members even though you don't want to know. After a short period of time, I started to talk with Hungarian fans who told me about the identities. **Respondent 2.**

Nah, the mystique is cool enough for me, but obviously I know Tobias is the mastermind at this point. **Respondent 1.**

I did not at first. But when they were on offer on specific FB groups I did pay attention. I did not seek out all their background details though. It's available if you dig deeper. I've seen some 'surface' details but I like to keep some mystery. **Respondent 5.**
Ghost is a highly unique band, that ended up in a highly unique situation. When the band members sued the lead singer in 2017, claiming he cheated them out of their rightful profit, the anonymity that the band had kept protected for so long was broken. Dyer (2011) describes the consequences of scandals as something that could potentially harm a career, or give it a new lease of life. Ghost faced both consequences. The lead singer became a public character – often being called the “mastermind behind Ghost.” He started doing interviews as himself (although often wearing some sort of disguise, such as exaggerated sunglasses or wigs), which allowed him to speak for himself in a whole new way. As expected, it inevitably made a mark on the fan community, good and bad. Dyer (2011) refers to this as a potential problematic fit, in which the star and character may clash. Dyer (2011) proposes publicity as an apparent escape from the image that is being promoted, revealing something that is more “authentic”, and thus often interpreted as a privileged access to the star. As Ghost successfully has built their image and story on being anonymous and by playing characters, the publicity could instead be harmful to the relationship between the producer and consumer. One respondent in particular who claimed to have lost interest in the band, said:

> The lawsuit affected my interest, it did seem in my opinion like Tobias was taking advantage of the rest of the band […] It also comes across as greedy, I doubt he's made as little money off ghost as the trail suggested. **Respondent 3.**

The band themselves did not post any news about the trial despite it being all over the news – instead new music, along with music videos, were released. The story was thus never formally interrupted, though fully being speculated outside their own channels or by the audience. To this day, the trial does seem to have affected and separated the online community.

> […] there was a huge fight about the trial and sometimes people are still fighting because they pick sides and they try to explain the “truth”. **Respondent 2.**

### 7.2.2 The Live Experience

To put the fandom in perspective, and knowing the respondents attend or used to attend Ghost concerts regularly, they were asked about how they experience the fandom offline. In contrast to the online communities, they were solely positive – claiming the shows and fan meet-ups connected with them felt like literal rituals.

> It's way better than online. Especially when you wait for one day to see the band, you make so many friends because you are all here for the same reason, to see your favorite band live on stage. **Respondent 2.**

> Shows were amazing! Literally like a ritual […] **Respondent 3.**

> […] was pretty awesome just interacting with other fans outside of concerts and at area bars before concert. Atmosphere was friendly and fun. I wore corpse paint to
three of three concerts, not as papa or cardinal copia, but just my own vibe.    

Respondent 1.  

I’ve got one great new friend, we did European leg in February, doing 3 shows Amsterdam, Antwerp and Paris. […] similar is the love and appreciation of the music and live performance. Respondent 5.  

In conclusion, it can be argued that fan communities on social media platforms have been romanticized in earlier studies with all its given possibilities, not focusing on the negatives, such as losing the freedom or right to remain anonymous. Especially considering Ghost being grounded off social media in the first place and continues thriving off their promotion and unique audience communication, it would make sense that their fan community online should be just as ideal and functional. The respondents of this study answers conflicts this statement, questioning the emphasised benefits of social media within fan communities and instead focusing on the real life fandom and productivity, such as attending concerts and meet-ups, cosplaying or wearing merchandise.  

7. 3 Conclusion  

The purpose of the study was to look further into how the band Ghost use, and has used social media to build their image and brand themselves as a band – and in turn, how the fans experience their relationship to Ghost in regards of social media and the fan community. Richard Dyer’s (2011) theory of Star Image and Image construction was applied on Ghost to attempt to understand the way they have successfully constructed their image over their years using social media. To look further into how they build a story, a rhetorical analysis was applied on four Facebook posts with a description of Ghost’s background to place the posts in a context. By using an explicit theme throughout their career – the roman church with a satanic twist, Ghost have managed to build a theme the audience can relate to based on their foreknowledge of religion, its hierarchy and religious items.  

The qualitative interviews allowed the study to discuss different topics in depth to attempt to answer the research questions. Despite Ghost using social media to build their story and keep their fans anticipation alive, the majority of the respondent’s comments indicate a negative attitude towards the online fan community. A majority of the respondents seemingly distanced themselves from the “extreme” fans or the drama that had emerged over the years, instead celebrating the live experience with the band and other fans.  

In the next section, I will discuss further what tendencies this may show for the future of the music industry.  

8. Discussion  

As social media giants such as Facebook, Instagram and twitter have emerged, traditional ICTs are slowly getting replaced. As the social media giants work as a high speed factotum in which we receive news, share content, become part of groups, keep up with
organizations and businesses that we like – all while engaging with friends and family, other online activities seem to disintegrate. The respondents in this study exclusively use Facebook to keep up with said groups, while using the benefits of Instagram for the content they are receiving, such as videos and images, rather than contributing themselves. In regards of Facebook, this is critiqued by Bury’s (2016) study in which her respondents claim they wouldn’t perform fanlike activities on the site. Bury (2016) claims that social media platforms have still not become “fan community central”, which can be explained by its limitations of architecture, limiting features of in-depth interactivity. When it comes to fan participation in terms of creating and sharing content, the formal landscape is more favorable than it used to be during traditional ICTs, as unauthorized uses against copyright is not as strict (Gray et al, 2007). With this said – although the social media giants do offer participatory fans a range of pleasure, such as sharing and uploading features, they do not able the ideal community formation as seen in traditional ICT’s. Bury (2016) suggests Facebook may even disable it. In a similar way Bacon-Smith proposes that fan communities can be divided into “interest groups” or “circles”, Facebook groups could potentially be too large to meet the personal needs of its members.

The negative attitude perceived among this study’s respondents toward the online community could potentially be linked to Bury’s (2016) argument, as Facebook is the only social media platform they use to interact with other fans of Ghost online. Therefore, the issues of maintaining a larger community on Facebook could potentially explain why the respondents much rather prefer the face-to-face, live experience with other fans. This aligns with Bury’s (2016) studies, as her results show that the needs of her own respondents were met in much smaller groups, in which they heavily relied on face-to-face-communication.

In regards of Ghost’s success in building an image and story, I believe their achievement is carried by their anonymity and their exaggerated characters, making the social aspect of social media less relevant. There is no focus on the band members as individuals and the information the receiver is given are solely there for promotional purposes, whether it is building a story or announcing new merchandise. As opposed to the endless flow of information we are constantly getting fed while using social media, in which we invest ourselves in, Ghost’s way of using social media appears as refreshing. One of my respondents strengthens my argument by describing her fascination of the band.

“Sometimes too much information is sensory overload. Ghost was not that with an online band presence. But just enough to keep curiosity and interest in place. We have to work a little too. It feels real. It feels genuine […] The expression is there. It’s true, if you have Ghost… you have everything!” **Respondent 5.**

Ghost seems to have cracked the code of bringing back the fandom we witnessed in the 1970’s and 1980’s in which the information about the band or artist was limited, making it a privilege to keep up with a band by purchasing magazines featuring interviews or by catching them on TV. In a similar way, Ghost is limiting themselves by the anonymity and by not giving away the story or opening up about their private lives, letting
the audience know that the story can unfold in mysterious and unexpected ways. All while using the benefits of social media to promote themselves in regards of tour dates and merchandise – but maybe most of all: to keep the story alive. Ghost’s unique way of communication therefore conflicts with the positive aspects of social media that Muntean & Petersen (2009) and Marwick & boyd (2011) arguably celebrates in regards of connection between celebrity and fan. What Ghost has succeeded to create with their image, story and audience might just be the start of bringing back the fascination with the live performance and face-to-face experience with other fans that the music industry seemingly lost after the golden era.

Lastly, in a world in which social media and high-speed spreading of information has so naturally become a part of our everyday lives and hence blurred the line between what is public and private, we might just need something to focus on in the outside world – whether it be a fictional story that has run for 8 years or a 2,5 hour theatrical live concert.

8.1 Suggestions for further research

As with Bury’s (2016) study, the interview questions of this study were not designed to specifically address the issues of community, but instead unexpectedly arose during the interviews. The unexpected turn raises interesting questions regarding the survival of participatory fandom as we know it – and perhaps future fan studies will focus on the evolution of fan community. In this study, I have been looking further into how the fans of Ghost use Facebook to stay in touch with the band and fan community, as it was the only platform the respondents used for said topic. Future studies of said fans may focus on community formation in other traditional forums that are still active, such as Reddit, to find possible similarities or differences – and to get a broader picture of how fans use social media to stay connected to the community in 2019 and forward. To further put the results in a context, it would be interesting for further research to study other bands, within different genres, and their fan communities. We might just be headed towards a shift in which we find new ways to participate in and experience fandom – outside the online world.
9. Reference List


Building a Story Using Social Media –
A Case Study of The Band Ghost


