

# TIME TO DTR: FAN PARATEXTUALIZATION ABOUT GAME OF THRONES' LAST SEASON

## *HORA DA DR: PARATEXTUALIZAÇÃO FÂNICA DA ÚLTIMA TEMPORADA DE GAME OF THRONES*

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The meaning of media products lies on the way their content is interpreted, since fans reframe them as productive consumers. They produce new texts - known as paratexts - about these products throughout this process. The aim of the current research is to investigate how fans' paratexts (re)produce discourses to re-signify media products' (para)texts. In order to do so, we analyzed the fan paratextualization of Game of Thrones (GoT), which was an economic and cultural phenomenon that has significantly echoed in social media.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Based on the Foucauldian Archeology, we collected and analyzed comments posted by GoT fans in promotional videos published in the TV series' official YouTube channel.

**Findings:** Fans' paratextual production has evidenced different positions about the cultural product consumed by them. Among them, one finds a public tribute highlighting its cultural legacy, which was based on feelings such as nostalgia and frustration with the way its plot was concluded. Thus, it is possible saying that these paratexts worked as reckoning for fans of this TV series. In broader terms, it is possible interpreting paratexts as the marketing content enabling fans to act as prosumers towards media products, the entertainment industry and fans' culture.

**Originality/value:** The current study investigates how fans' productive consumption takes place through paratext (re)production to establish the echo of media objects in fans' culture and to enable them to play the role of co-authors of texts consumed by themselves. This role reinforces that fans should be understood as consumers who can act freely, without taking into consideration marketing actions. Moreover, it implies that paratexts can be produced to boost the discursive production, which works as fans' prosumer performance.

**Keywords:** Game of Thrones, Paratext, Fans, Foucauldian Archeology.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Os significados dos produtos de mídia jazem na interpretação de seu conteúdo. Como consumidores produtivos, os fãs os ressignificam. Nesse processo, produzem novos textos sobre esses produtos, conhecidos como paratextos. A pesquisa tem o objetivo de compreender como paratextos de fãs (re)produzem discursos para significar (para)textos de produtos de mídia. Para tanto, nos debruçamos na paratextualização de fãs de Game of Thrones (GoT), um fenômeno econômico e cultural com enorme repercussão nas mídias sociais.

**Desenho/metodologia/abordagem:** Através de uma Arqueologia Foucaultiana coletamos e analisamos os comentários postados pelos fãs de GoT sobre os vídeos promocionais publicados no canal oficial da série televisiva no YouTube.

**Resultados:** A produção paratextual dos fãs apresenta diferentes posicionamentos sobre o produto cultural consumido: uma homenagem pública destacando seu legado cultural a partir de sentimentos de nostalgia e frustração com a conclusão de sua trama. Concluímos que esses paratextos funcionaram como um acerto de contas para os fãs da série de TV. De maneira mais ampla, é possível interpretar que os paratextos são conteúdos de marketing que permitem que os fãs atuem como prossumidores dos produtos midiáticos, da indústria do entretenimento e da cultura dos fãs.

**Originalidade/valor:** O estudo apresenta como o consumo produtivo dos fãs é materializado através da (re)produção de paratextos que tanto estabelecem a ressonância de objetos midiáticos na cultura dos fãs, quanto os leva a assumir o papel de coautores dos textos que consomem. Esse papel reforça como os fãs devem ser compreendidos como consumidores podem agir de forma liberta em relação às ações de marketing. Mais que isso, implica que os paratextos podem ser produzidos de modo a estimular a produção discursiva que funciona como atuação prossumidora de fãs.

**Palavras-chave:** Game of Thrones, paratexto, fãs, Arqueologia Foucaultiana.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) studies have increasingly focused on a specialized consumer type, namely: fans (Chen, 2021; Fuschillo, 2020; Sugihartati, 2020). According to this consumer research field, fans are often understood as members of a specific consumption subculture, who collaborate with each other to legitimize their consumerist practices (Guschwan, 2012; Kozinets, 2001).

The process to develop fan practices is inherent to the social spaces where they interact in, also known as fandoms, where the co-creation of economic values and cultural meanings work together (Fuschillo, 2020; Sugihartati, 2020)). This combination explains how fandoms work as participatory culture (Guschwan, 2012; Jenkins, 2006). Moreover, fandoms extrapolate the utilitarian logic of consumer communities, since they enable exchanges and collaborations among fans, media products and the community itself, in efforts focused on demystifying the marketplace ideology, according to which, consumers only work to optimize their experience (Fuschillo, 2020).

Fandoms set a collaborative network where different marketing agents benefit from social actions surrounding them (Arnould & Thompson, 2015; Cova & Cova, 2012). Thus, fans interact among peers and with media texts consumed by themselves (e.g., musical, cinematographic, television, literary products, among others) to legitimize their own consumption practices (de Souza-Leão & Moura, 2018; Kozinets, 2001).

Fans spontaneously take ownership of consumed media texts and spread them to other consumers (de Souza-Leão & Costa, 2018; Sugihartati, 2020). Consequently, fans are productive agents, both for media texts' producers and for their culture (Chen, 2021; Cruz, Seo, & Binay, 2021). Thus, the synergy observed in fans' culture is an example of prosumption within the Web 2.0 context (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018; Sugihartati, 2020).



According to Kozinets (2001), fans' ability to reframe media contents consumed by themselves, through encoding and decoding processes, is a cultural practice encouraged by producers, themselves. The entertainment industry often sees fans as an opportunity to validate and spread marketing discourses it wants to establish among consumers, in general (MacInnis et al., 2020; Wohlfeil & Whelan, 2012). Paratexts are an example of it; they lie on the marketing content encompassing both media and producers' discourses that are herein seen as marketing strategy to reach new audiences, and that are often re-signified by fans within the fandom environment (Gray, 2010; Hackley & Hackley, 2019).

Gennete (1997) has initially proposed paratext as complementary content to literary products. It concerns original texts whose content is expanded by paratexts through the addition of both new information and meaning to them (e.g., title, preface, cover illustration). Gray (2010) has reinterpreted this concept in the context of media texts, from this perspective. According to the aforementioned author, paratexts drive the way individuals read original texts and broaden their horizon. Thus, the materiality of media texts refers to complementary alternatives to consume these texts through other ones (i.e., paratexts) that can be produced through other media and in different formats (e.g., advertisements, websites, bonus materials) (Fathallah, 2016; Steiner, 2015).

Fans produce paratexts to expand their relationship with media texts. They use paratextuality to produce their own texts and to highlight new perspectives about media products. These fan-produced versions show how paratexts have become a fundamental type of content for fans to read and express discursive positions about such productions (Mittel, 2015; Scott, 2017).

However, although paratexts are established through convergence to social spaces formed by peers who share the same interests and have intense relationships with media objects (Guschwan, 2012; Fuschillo, 2020), they evidence fans' individual productions. Accordingly, different opinions can lead to disagreements among fandom members (Hewer, Gannon, & Cordina, 2017; Young, 2014). Moreover, they materialize fans' pursuit to establish truths about what is consumed by them, as well as about the very culture they take part of (Cavalcanti, de Souza-Leão, & Moura, 2021), by aligning or misaligning their discourse to the interests of entertainment and media objects (Chen, 2021).

Therefore, the aim of the present research was to investigate **how fans' paratexts (re) produce fandom discourses in order to re-signify media products' (para)texts**. This aim enables expanding the discussion about how paratexts work as massively mediated marketing communication strategy (Aronczyk, 2017; Hackley & Hackley, 2019) to encourage fans to re-signify the content of the aforementioned media products by producing new paratexts based on their own discourses (Fathallah, 2016; Ng, 2017). Original discourses established by fans' paratextualization substantiate the presumption arena whenever they address media products, the entertainment industry and their community.

Thus, the current study focuses on investigating fans' paratextualization as reactions to promotional videos about one of the most emblematic cultural objects in the entertainment industry, namely: Game of Thrones (GoT), which is an HBO TV series created by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss (D&D), based on the literary saga A Song of Ice and Fire (ASoIaF), by George R. R. Martin (GRRM), who is a former Hollywood screenwriter (Fathallah, 2016). However, because the literary saga is not concluded, the last seasons of this TV series have followed a narrative seen as the autonomous and non-canonical version of the original work, although it was assumingly in compliance with GRRM's plans (Trammell, 2019).

Thus, we have analyzed how the fandom received and produced paratexts to re-signify GoT's final season, based on its promotional videos. It was done by taking into consideration the massive fan anticipation for the end of the series after the two-year-long hiatus following the previ-



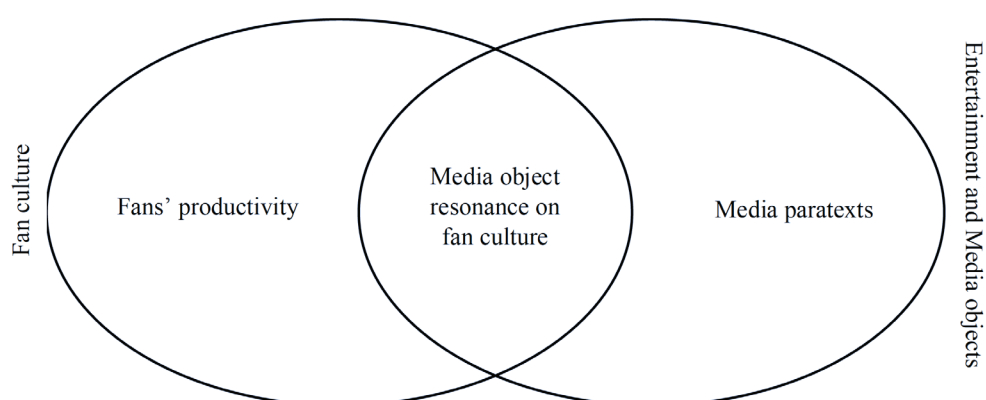
ous season. Thus, it focused on a significantly impactful cultural text that has been investigated in academic studies addressing different fronts, namely: authorship on content adaptation for television (Steiner, 2015); pirating and the echo of the show on social media (George, 2018); and fans' content production (Fathallah, 2016).

Thus, GoT's paratextuality resonance lies on the combination of cultural and economic aspects observed in mass-media marketing strategies. It promotes media objects produced by the entertainment industry and enables fans to both interact and disagree with their peers, media texts as well as with fan culture itself (Young, 2014). In broader terms, the current research echoes the understanding that consumers' discourse plays active role in legitimating this population as productive agents (Cova & Cova, 2012; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Therefore, the present study adopted the Foucauldian Archeology, since it is a methodology well-accepted in marketing research that enables understanding market discourses and the conditions producing them (de Souza-Leão & Moura, 2018; Denegri-Knott, Abraham, & Nixon, 2018; Tadajewski, 2011; Thompson, 2017).

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to meet the research aim, we split the literature review in two parts by linking fan productivity to media paratextuality. Thus, we herein address the main topic underlying the present research by briefly explaining how CCT approaches fans as specialized and productive consumers. More specifically, the aim of the current study is to investigate how fan interactions elaborate textual productions that, at some level, refer to media objects consumed by fans, in a productive manner. Accordingly, fans interactions work as media paratexts completing the original texts consumed by fans. Thus, the intersection between the two aforementioned concepts (see the following subsections) reflects fan discourses' (re)production to establish and maintain the echo of a given media product in the fan culture, as shown in Fig. 1.

**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

### 2.1 Fan productivity

Consumers become prosumers by engaging in functions that originally belonged to producers (Chen, 2021; de Souza-Leão & Costa, 2018). Prosumers take on tasks associated with products' conception and production, in a spontaneous and subjective manner, mostly through Web 2.0 technologies (Cova & Cova, 2012; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

According to Ritzer (2014), prosumption is the end of the production-consumption dichotomy and it can be understood as continuum of different possibilities between these dichotomous points. Fans' new practice forms in this context are an emblematic case of prosumption enabled by Web 2.0 technologies (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018; Chen, 2018; Sugihartati, 2020).

Fans act beyond the ordinary concept of consumption and become political actors (Cavalcanti, de Souza-Leão, & Moura, 2021; Cruz, Seo, & Binay, 2021), since they appropriate and re-signify media texts as a self-expression and engagement form (Jenkins, 2006; Guschwan, 2012). According to Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013), fans play crucial role in promoting media products; this phenomenon is known as spreadability. By doing so, they evidence their subjectivity towards these products, including aspects such as resistance and activism, a fact that forced the entertainment industry to rethink how to relate to consumer markets.

Fan practices are based on performances taking place within the ethos, according to which, they act in a participatory manner (Fuschillo, 2020). Accordingly, they tend to present productions capable of either intensifying or mitigating social and cultural ideas about the context they live in (i.e., gender, race, nationality and generation). Thus, their intense media object consumption associates marketing aspects with particular meanings (Cervellon & Brown, 2018; Seregina & Weijo, 2017).

Nevertheless, fans are often dealing with marketing discourses in multiple media. Furthermore, the intense way fans consume media objects derives from the contact they have with storytelling produced by the transmedia phenomenon (Ryan, 2015). Content transmedia has been legitimized in the convergence culture context as industry marketing strategy and as routine demand by consumers who express interest in appropriating multiple media (Campbell & Price, 2021; Feiereisen et al., 2020).

The concept of fan as specialized consumer became a research agenda for the CCT field after the seminal work by Kozinets (2001), according to whom, this specific consumer subculture does not appear to follow the utilitarian logic prevailing in the market environment. Moreover, fan practices often express identities manifested in hedonic relationships with popular culture objects (de Souza-Leão & Moura, 2018; Fuschillo, 2020); they often take place through coordinated actions organized in fandoms (Guschwan, 2012; Sugihartati, 2020).

Fans collaborate to their peers in interactions inherent to fandoms. It is done in order to intensify their consumption relationship with the cultural object, with other fandom members and with the community they are part of (Chen, 2021; de Souza-Leão & Costa, 2018). Fandoms are increasingly taking up virtual spaces where fans come together to interact and to share opinions about media products (Fuschillo, 2020; Guschwan, 2012) through collective intelligence (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). Such a process enables re-signifying media texts, as well as establishing relationships among fans, as well as between fans and these products (Gray, 2010; Guschwan, 2012). Accordingly, fans often widespread their versions of, and positions about, media texts (Chen, 2021), by acting as user-generated content producers who exponentially expand the reach of word-of-mouth communication (Labrecque et al., 2013).

Thus, fans' actions work as media product content incorporated by marketing management. No wonder, fans' actions are widely adopted by producers and copyright holders of media texts consumed by them, when the managers usually encourage fans to consume additional content (Hackley & Hackley, 2019; Kozinets et al., 2004). Thus, fans always go beyond the original content they are based on, or inspired by (Hackley & Hackley, 2019).

Differences between original media texts and texts produced by fans (i.e., any fan production) (Gray, 2010; Mittel, 2015) reveal their autonomy from producers (Chen, 2021). Although fan texts are not part of the original content of media products, they influence their interpretation, which is what turns them into paratexts (Gray & Murray, 2016).



## 2.2 Media paratextuality

Media products often take on meanings that shape the fan enjoyment experience (Cruz, Seo, & Binay, 2021). According to this process, derived, complementary or ancillary texts about these products are as important as the products themselves (Fuschillo, 2020; Gray, 2010). These texts, which are known as paratexts, provide extra contents that often complete fans' reading process and expand its possibilities (Genette, 1997).

Genette (2010) has revisited the concept of paratext and pointed out two different categories capable of explaining this complementary content. Peritext is the first category of paratext; it is produced as accessible-reading complementary text that is produced together with the original text. This paratext type corresponds to what the aforementioned author had originally proposed. Epitext is the second category of paratext; it is also produced in addition to the original text, although later on, and outside it, such as the case of posters, trailers, interviews or critiques about a particular product, hypertexts, parodies and mimics, among others.

Paratexts play fundamental role in the way fans read media products (Mittel, 2015; Scott, 2017). When fans read media texts, they are interested in the paratexts gravitating around them (Hill, 2015). According to Jenkins (1992), one of the most emblematic fans' condition lies on their poach characteristic when they continuously pursue new content to consume. Thus, any paratextual production has fruitful synergy to the entertainment industry, since it enables intensifying the relationship between its consumers and the received texts (Gray, 2010).

Aligned to understanding that paratexts enrich the enjoyment of media texts, our study evokes another typology, based on the function the paratexts performance. Entryway paratexts generate expectations and prepare the audience to consume a given product, whereas in-media paratexts complete consumers' experience (Grainge & Johnson, 2015; Gray, 2010; Janes, 2015).

Producers and consumers can perform paratextual productions since they both refer to marketing content focused on promoting products, as well as to consumers' reactions and resignifications (Gray, 2010; Scott, 2017). On the one hand, paratexts work as part of producers' marketing strategy (Scott, 2017). On the other hand, they are a way for consumers to express their interpretations, as well as to help others to understand the original media text. Their purpose is to establish bonds and to expand their repertoire about cultural texts that seem disparate or incoherent in the original content; it is done to enrich the context available to new readers (Cruz, Seo, & Binay, 2021). Thus, paratexts are ultimately a form of production shared between the entertainment industry and media products' fans.

Paratext (e.g., fanfictions, fanvideos, fanarts and fan theories, among others) production is a common practice in the fan culture. Fan paratexts manifest the technology appropriation necessary for complex intermedia relationships to take place (Gray & Murray, 2016; Fathallah, 2016). The fact that this practice is linked to media texts, over which fans do not own copyright, points towards the growing role played by it in the appropriation of global cultural meanings (Cruz, Seo, & Binay, 2021; Hills & Garde-Hansen, 2017).

## 3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

We herein adopted the Foucauldian Archeology method based on the aim of the current research: investigating how fans' paratexts (re)produce fandom discourses to re-signify media products' (para)texts. This method enables identifying discursive productions within social relations, such as the market ones. The major contribution of this method lies on the fact that it helps better under-

standing the historical and social conditions enabling the emergence of discursive events (Deleuze, 1988). Despite the overlap observed between theory and method in the Foucauldian philosophy, it produces the epistemological basis for research, rather than a social theory (de Souza-Leão & Costa, 2018; de Souza-Leão & Moura, 2018).

Consumer research studies have adopted the Foucauldian Archeology to investigate discursive regularities and epistemes produced through market relationships (Denegri-Knott, Abraham, & Nixon, 2018; Tadajewski, 2011). According to Thompson (2017), the method developed by Michel Foucault to assess the conditions necessary to produce discourses through documentary data helps expanding CCT. Accordingly, Tadajewski (2011; 2016) highlights how the Foucauldian Archeology enables reasoning about the socio-historical aspects of marketing phenomena.

### 3.1 Data Collection

Based on the Foucauldian Archeology, a data set is called Archive. It is delimited from a given event that refers to the disruption of a certain social phenomenon (Foucault, 2008). The Foucauldian analysis was herein applied to consumer paratexts produced through interactions in an online community (Denegri-Knott, Abraham, & Nixon, 2018; de Souza-Leão & Moura, 2018). In order to do so, data collection was performed in compliance with Kozinets' (2020) netnography proposition.

The research archive covered comments posted by fans about 25 videos produced by HBO to promote the final season of GoT (i.e., discursive event). They featured exclusive content published on the series' channel on YouTube, which is the world's most widely used platform for web video sharing and discussions. We made the option for analyzing this platform because it is the official channel used to promote both the original and complementary contents of the investigated television series. It has more than 4.6 million subscribers and shows growing and recurring clippings of interactions among its fans (i.e., likes, comments), a fact that makes it an official source for fans to consume, and discuss about, the content of the investigated series (Suciu, 2021).

The period covered in the current study goes from the publication of the first video on December 6, 2018 – approximately 18 weeks before the series' last season was released – to July 1, 2019 – 6 weeks after the season finale, when comments became in short supply and reached the saturation point. The elapsed data collection time represents three different moments corresponding to dates when fans interacted about GoT paratexts (i.e., before, during and after the episodes were released and the season finale): 1) raising **expectations for the release** (T1) of new episodes - comments reacting to the release of teasers and trailers preceding the beginning of the final season; 2) **reception during the last season's airing** (T2) - comments echoing the broadcasted episodes and the previews of the subsequent ones, as well as additional material released in the week between episodes; and 3) **repercussion of the series conclusion** (T3) - it refers to comments posted after the series finale was broadcasted.

We initially collected all comments, which totaled over half a million. Given this large volume of comments, we debugged the search archive to reach data consistency. First, we disregarded non-textual comments (e.g., emojis, words meaning laughter); we only took into consideration comments published in English. Then, we ruled out messages that were irrelevant to the research purpose (e.g., disconnected from the GoT subject, spam). This process took several weeks, since researchers selected and filtered the comments that met these criteria.

Table 1 shows the number of comments posted in each video; it highlights a research archive comprising 179,448 messages.



Video	Release date	Analyzed comments
Game of Thrones   Season 8   Official Tease: Dragonstone (HBO)	2018.12.06	5,145
Game of Thrones   Season 8   Official Tease: Crypts of Winterfell (HBO)	2019.01.13	14,698
Game of Thrones   Season 8   Official Trailer (HBO)	2019.03.05	28,124
Game of Thrones   Season 8   Official Tease: Aftermath (HBO)	2019.04.02	4,356
Opening Credits   Game of Thrones   Season 8 (HBO)	2019.04.14	2,024
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 1   Inside the Episode (HBO)	2019.04.14	1,864
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 2   Preview (HBO)	2019.04.14	4,002
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 1   Game Revealed (HBO)	2019.04.15	1,249
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 3   Preview (HBO)	2019.04.21	7,173
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 2   Inside the Episode (HBO)	2019.04.21	1,912
Florence + the Machine - Jenny of Oldstones (Lyric Video)   Season 8   Game of Thrones (HBO)	2019.04.21	5,993
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 2   Game Revealed (HBO)	2019.04.22	1,364
SZA, The Weekend, Travis Scott - "Power Is Power" Lyric Video   Game of Thrones (HBO)	2019.04.26	3,647
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 3   Inside the Episode (HBO)	2019.04.28	13,201
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 4   Preview (HBO)	2019.04.28	15,963
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 3   Game Revealed (HBO)	2019.04.29	10,329
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 4   Inside the Episode (HBO)	2019.05.05	5,004
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 5   Preview (HBO)	2019.05.05	14,254
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 4   Game Revealed (HBO)	2019.05.06	2,667
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 5   Inside the Episode (HBO)	2019.05.12	10,360
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 6   Preview (HBO)	2019.05.12	21,018
Game of Thrones   Season 8 Episode 5   Game Revealed (HBO)	2019.05.13	5,101
Total		179,448

**Table 1.** Research archive composition

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

### 3.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis has followed the operationalization systematized by de Souza-Leão (de Souza-Leão & Costa, 2018; de Souza-Leão & Moura, 2018), based on the logic and analytical categories developed by Foucault (2008), as described below.

**Illation of statements and their relationships.** The first analytical category of the Foucauldian Archeology refers to solid topics inherent to discourses that are identifiable from the historicity and rupture of different knowledge types. Although language is not reduced to signs, statements are identified through linguistic signs, by incorporating their pragmatic context and production conditions to the analysis. Statements are singular, and it means that there are no overlaps between them; however, they can be linked to other statements to form cross-sectional discursive relationships to the archive. These relationships between statements may be synchronous – when the conditions for the existence of related statements are simultaneous – or incident – when there is dependence on existence conditions between statements.

**Recognition of enunciative functions.** The Foucauldian concept of statements describes them as representations of discursive practices. Thus, these statements fulfill functions in individuals' discourses. Statements can assume more than one function and a single function may concern the effect of different statements, as well. The recognition of enunciative functions is based on matching and completing criteria: the relationships and truths spoken or contested through state-





ments are referred to as references; the associated domain refers to the knowledge domain enabling statements' production and their relationships; the subject, in its turn, concerns one's position or place of speech to produce statements; finally, statements hold production and repetition features defined as their materiality.

**Recognition of formation rules.** Discursive formations are regulated by rules that point out organization principles observed in statements, as well as their functions. They are based on criteria and logic that are analogous to those of enunciative functions: delimitations defined by statements' references result in objects; intervention, coexistence and knowledge succession forms that enable statements' formation are called concepts; the style adopted by subjects, by taking into consideration both the space and the context they are inserted in when they speak, refers to modalities; finally, articulated concepts concerning the materiality of statements refer to discursive strategies.

**Definition of discursive formations.** The set of relationships established among statements, their functions and formation rules generate convergences that represent the regularities of discourses forming a given archive. Therefore, discursive formations become evident through this set of relationships.

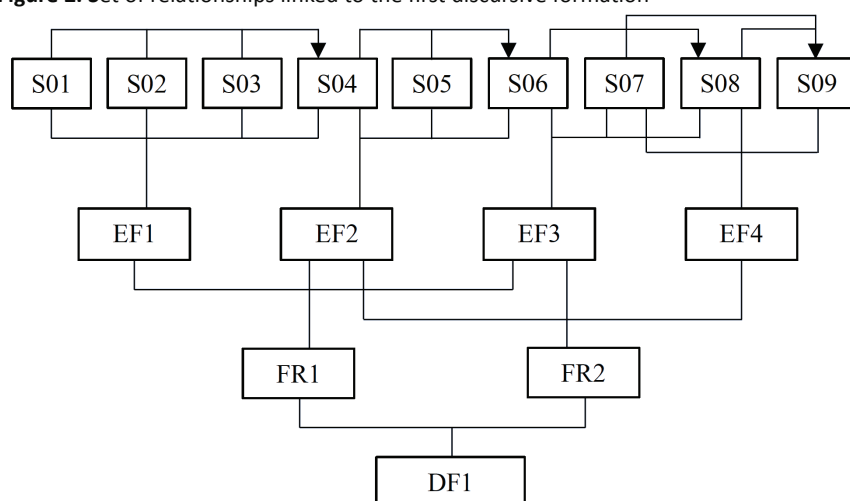
## 4 RESULTS' DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION

The following sections are organized based on the herein identified discursive formations. The formation rules and enunciative functions of each discursive formation they are related to are presented through their constitutive criteria. On the other hand, statements are presented through empirical contexts evidenced in the research archive. Results are discussed in the third subsection, in light of the assessed theory.

### 4.1 The Throne of TV Series

The first discursive formation (DF1) concerns the belief that the last season of GoT would be consistent with its cultural impact. Fans and regular viewers of the series acknowledged and valued its legacy for popular culture; they were excited about its denouement. They forged this discourse before the last season was released and the repercussion of broadcasted episodes. Fig. 2 shows DF1 constituent elements, which we herein described as follows.

**Figure 2.** Set of relationships linked to the first discursive formation



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

This discursive formation has two formation rules that **foreshadow an epic conclusion of the series** (FR1) and **praise the series' legacy for popular culture** (FR2). Both rules regard the effect of GoT (object) on popular culture, since they acknowledge (modality) the series as emblematic for this segment. On the one hand (FR1), there is certain euphoria (modality) associated with the exercise of omen (strategy) about its conclusion through the engagement (concept) of its admirers. On the other hand (FR2), there is the tribute (modality) paid by these admirers to the series' legacy (strategy), and it represents a revolution (concept) in television production.

Four enunciative functions are linked to the formation rules. They share the same reference, namely: the important role played by the TV series in popular culture. With respect to expectations about the series' finale (FR1), **fans yearned for a remarkable closure** (EF1), and it was expressed in comments based on promotional teasers and trailers of the final season (T1). This function is featured by fans' (subject) expectations (materiality), which were expressed through enormous buzz (associated domain).

Four statements are linked to this function (EF1). The first three statements are synchronously related to each other. Fans spread the idea that **GoT is the most epic television series ever** (S01), so they believe it will take years for another production to reach this very same range. Similarly, **the fandom expects an epic last season** (S02), both due to the unpredictability of the series' narrative and to the smaller number of episodes and longer production time than the ones observed in previous seasons. **The nostalgia around GoT's conclusion** (S03) is evidenced by the commotion of fans who report to already miss the series even before its finale. These statements highlight **the last season as the major event of the year** (S04). Fans echo that the Internet hype about the series' finale was the largest one ever achieved by a TV series, a fact that turned it into a milestone.

Thus, this remarkable event (S04) relates to the understanding that **GoT accounts for jamming the internet** (S05): the number (e.g., comments, views) of promotional materials was staggering. According to these two statements (S04-S05), **the final season integrated an iconic month in popular culture history** (S06), since this period also marked the release of Avengers Endgame, which was the last movie of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) Infinity Saga.

These statements (S04-S06) account for **resonating the end of GoT** (EF2), which relates to DF1's two formation rules. Just like the craving for an extraordinary closure (EF1), this enunciative function is also based on the buzz (associated domain) about the end of the series, although it focuses on its repercussion (materiality), which is promoted by both fans and regular viewers (subjects). It happened prior to the release of the final season (T1), as well as (S05 and S06 only) during its episodes' broadcasting (T2).

**Echoing GoT's importance** (EF3) is also associated with the two DF1's formation rules, as well as with recurrence in T1 and T2. It differentiates from the echoing of the series' conclusion (EF2) by treating GoT from the popular culture (associated domain) perspective. The understanding that **the last season of GoT takes part in popular culture history** (S06) is also associated with the present enunciative function (EF3), as well as with the idea that **GoT has changed the popular culture** (S07). GoT admirers argue that the series marked an era, both for its market performance and for its cultural impact, since it fed social networks' discussions and contributed to the anti-spoiler behavior. The perception that **GoT has changed TV** (S08) derives from these two statements (S06-S07). It is understood that the series enabled these media to have more relevance in popular culture, as well as that it boosted the habit of watching the series' episodes in real-time airing in order to avoid spoilers, a fact that led HBO to release them simultaneously, worldwide.

GoT's contribution to both the TV (S08) and the popular culture (S07) falls on the **rejoicing for its (GoT) notability** (S09). Fans were delighted with the series' success and impact on viewers; they felt rewarded by the news about HBO's plan to release GoT-derived series. Such statements (S07-S09) point towards the function of **acclaiming GoT's magnitude** (EF4), which only relates to the series legacy (FR2). This enunciative function is featured by the series' prestige (materiality) in popular culture (associated domain), according to its fans (subject).



In order to exemplify the entire analytical extract composing this discursive formation (see Fig. 1), we gathered some comments made by fans at different times and videos.

Before I began watching this show I could not imagine that a TV show would have such an impact on my life... together with the books this is, by far, one of the best stories ever written!" (Game of Thrones | Season 8 | Official Tease: Cryptes of Winterfell).

Did anyone notice how they never show the actual fighting in the trailers? The season trailer only showed scenes from the first 3 episodes. I think it's brilliant how they manage to keep us on our toes throughout (...) No show can ever compare to how epic game of thrones is, I'm gonna miss this so much. (Season 8 Episode 3 | Preview).

Thank HBO, D&D, entire cast and crew for this legendary show without your vision and dedication we wouldn't be able to experience such an amazing show. #thankful for the finale, I couldn't have hoped for a better ending (Game of Thrones | Season 8 Episode 6 | Preview).

The first message – which was posted after a fan watched the first promotional video of the final GoT season (T1) – indicates how he was constantly amazed by the series, which had significant impact on his life, since he described it as one of the best stories ever written. The following message highlights how the promotional video of the third episode (T2) does not reveal any crucial content (i.e., spoilers) and, yet, it leaves fans anxious and apprehensive about what is to come – which is something they consider unique and brilliant for a TV series - and about how they will miss it after it is over. Finally, in the last promotional video of the series and after watching the final episode (T3), a fan makes a point to acknowledge – everyone involved in the show for having provided him with a wonderful experience.

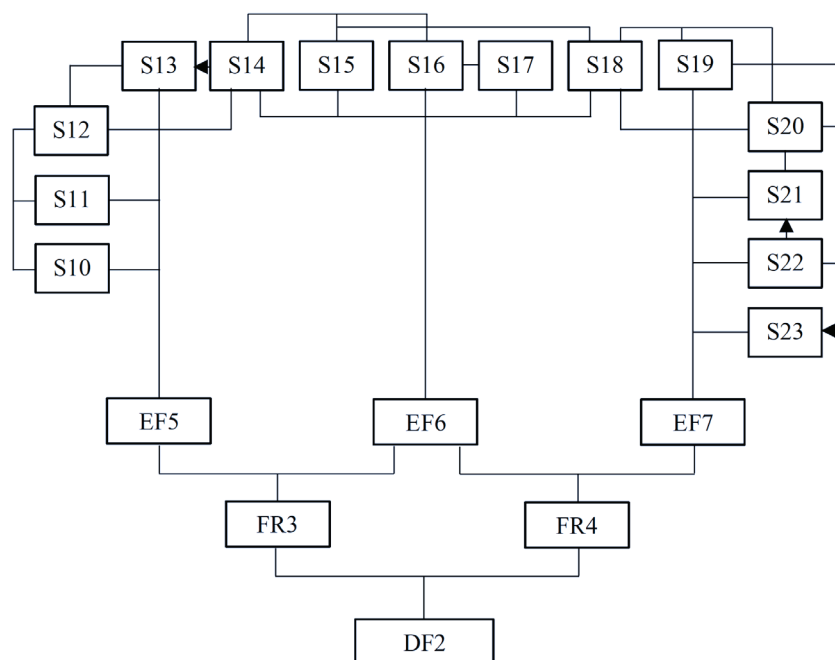
The fandom engaged in paratextual production capable of completing, broadening or even changing the interpretation (Mittel, 2015; Scott, 2017) of the series, by assigning an iconic value to GoT's legacy. This process shows strong affective bond between fans and the TV show. Paratexts presenting this feature become very influential in the way their readers interpret them (Hill, 2015), which is evident when this activity is shared among fans and regular viewers.

By expressing its expectations for the series conclusion, the fandom produced entryway paratexts (Grainge & Johnson, 2015; Janes, 2015). From the traditional perspective, it engaged in the last season's promotional campaign, through prosumption aligned to the producer's role (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). This behavior was certainly encouraged by HBO. Indeed, the entertainment industry has encouraged consumers' participation in media product repercussions (Hackley & Hackley, 2019; Kozinets et al., 2004). However, the fandom's buzz can be understood as user-generated content, rather than as word-of-mouth communication (Labrecque et al., 2013). Therefore, one can say that fans performed market productivity by taking on typical marketing tasks (Chen, 2011).

#### 4.2 Burned Throne?

The second discursive formation (DF2) concerns how the last GoT's season affected its relationship with fans. Part of them attested to the series' predicates, although they pointed out issues in its conduction. Another part of the fandom criticized its closure by revealing a disappointment level typical of enthusiasts. Such impressions were primarily built when the final season was broadcasted, mainly after its final episode. Next, we describe DF2's constitutive elements, as shown in Fig. 3.

**Figure 2.** Set of relationships linked to the first discursive formation



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

This discursive formation is supported by two formation rules, which refer to the end of the series as resounding conclusion (FR3) and controversial denouement (FR4). They refer to fans' relationship with GoT (object) and to their evaluation (modality) of what the series represented in their lives, as well as of the course of its plot. This process has evidenced conflicts (concept), be them due to the acknowledgement of issues regardless of the series' quality or to discrepant perceptions about how its conclusion was conducted. Most specifically, the reverberation of GoT's final season (FR3) attested (strategy) affectivity (concept), whereas its controversial end (FR4) criticized (strategy) its decline (concept).

Three enunciative functions underlie these rules and share the validity of the series (referential) for fans (subject). With respect to FR3, alone, **fans celebrate the end of an era** (EF5) by highlighting the quality (materiality) of the series through nostalgic comments (associated domain). Four statements are exclusively linked to this function. When it comes to all others statements, fans **compliments on how talented GoT cast is** (S12) were constantly observed during (T2) and after (T3) the last season. Actors and actresses were praised for playing their characters with strength and charisma, despite the fact that some plot lines left a lot to be desired over the last seasons. Moreover, the **last season's disclosure was praised** (S10) before its release (T1-T2). Fans highlighted the quality and undeliverable spoiler promo videos that would have further fueled their anxiety. Yet, in association with this statement (S10), some **fans praised how the series was directed with mastery** (S11) during the last season's broadcast (T2). They highlighted the plot twists, epic battles and thriller scenes that have made the series famous over the years, a fact that would have mainly resulted from the way its episodes were directed, rather than from D&D or GRRM. Testimonials have evidenced how **GoT became part of fans' biography** (S13) in that very same period. They pointed out how the series' longevity made special moments in their lives to be marked by the show. They also highlighted the significant female empowerment attributed to some of the main characters in the series, as well as the fact that the cast grew up or aged along with them, over the years, mainly with those who became teens or adults on screen.

On the other hand, when it comes to the strife about GoT's conclusion (FR4), an **assertion on GoT's ruin** (EF7) was expressed through fans' frustration (materiality) with the way the series distanced itself from the literary canon (associated domain). Five statements are exclusively linked to this enunciative function. According to part of the fans, **producers screwed up the end of GoT** (S19). They condemn D&D for not having planned better on how to adapt an unfinished literary saga (i.e., still under development). On the other hand, some fans pointed out that **the fault for GoT's downfall lies on the saga's author** (S20). They blame GRRM for being negligent, for not completing the planned books and, consequently, for leaving the series without its source of inspiration. These statements (S19-S20) are linked to, and reflect on, the **understanding about GoT's decline** (S23); they were all built during (T2) and after (T3) the last season's broadcast. They point out how the tone and the plot of the series failed to maintain the quality level that made it so famous.

After the series finale (T3) was released, two other statements completed this function (EF7). According to fans, **the end of GoT was hurried** (S22), and this statement is linked to the previous three statements - they are, somehow, related to each other. The hurried conclusion of the series would have caused **GoT's end to ruin ASoIaF** (S21) by revealing the end of the saga in a careless and distorted way. Fans expressed indignation about the fact that the adaptation had questionably revealed the outcome they were looking forward to read in the final books. Such feeling is also linked to GRRM's blaming for not having released the final books before GoT's conclusion (S20).

Finally, **fans have polemicized the end of GoT** (EF6), and this factor is linked to the two DF2's formation rules. It happened through divergences (associated domain) that attested prestige and frustration (materialities) about GoT's completion. This enunciative function is linked to five statements, which were all produced within the period-of-time comprising the broadcast of the last season (T2) and the repercussions after its end (T3). One of these statements is linked to all the others. The fandom featured several schisms that became even more evident in the series' conclusion and led to **intra-fandom conflicts about the end of GoT** (S16). These disagreements ranged from rivalries established based on individuals' preferences for certain characters to clashes between those who liked and hated the plot's outcome. Accordingly, strives were also evidenced in **extra-fandom feuds** (S17). GoT fans have shown rivalry towards fans of other television productions (e.g., *Lost*, *Breaking Bad*) and film franchises (e.g., *Avengers*) by comparing the TV series to them, as well as by criticizing the casting of certain artists (i.e., SZA, The Weeknd, Travis Scott) to participate in the final season's soundtrack.

On the other hand, part of fans highlighted **female power at the end of GoT** (S14). Such a position also worked as basis for a critique towards popular culture productions that often feature male heroes, whereas women are sexualized or play submissive roles. Moreover, female power was also one of the aspects that made the series mark the life story of its fans (S13), making both statements to share another function: the exaltation for the end of the series (EF5). This positioning is also used as response to fans who show **dissatisfaction with female protagonism** (S15). Some fans held the popularization of the feminist cause in the 21st century accountable for changes in the series' plot, and it was assumingly one of the determining factors of its decline (S20). Likewise, **critics to GoT's end have suffered prejudice** (S18). Part of the audience was outraged by the dissatisfaction of fans who did not accept the way the series was concluded – mainly by D&D (S19) and GRRM (S20) –; these fans were accused of preciosity, and pejoratively called nerds. Thus, (S18) is also encompasses the group of statements declaring the series' decline (EF7).

We herein selected relevant comments taken from different videos and moments subjected to our analysis. It was done in order to illustrate the second discursive formation and its analytical composition, as shown in Fig. 2.

It is rampage time. I never watch TV. You think I am lying but I am not. I don't even have a TV. I don't watch movies hardly ever either. I caught wind of GOT and Loved the first one I saw. So, I spent 100\$ for the box set. Something I NEVER do. I enjoyed every episode, loved it. Then the writers began to lose their mojo and destroyed the imp's character. How he was is what MADE him likeable. The writers OBLITERATED his character. (...) And this season 8 trailer teaser, psshhh gimme a break am I supposed to be like oooh ahhhh gasp! (...) yeah, you made a pretty rad show. It could have been even better though. I am just disappointed. It had all the makings of a true classic master piece. It could have been glorious. (Game of Thrones | Season 8 | Official Tease: Cryptes of Winterfell).

What a disappointment. 7 years of build up for a cliché knife switch from a character that had no business jumping at that height. 7 years of build up to see Arya, the princess that was promised! The Night King in a second... (Game of Thrones | Season 8 Episode 4 | Preview).

This episode is frustrating. I hate how they're doing Dany like that. Turning characters against her and making her have the characteristics of a 'mad queen' (Game of Thrones | Season 8 Episode 5 | Preview).

A long message sent in one of the promotional videos released months before the last season (T1) was released made strong criticisms about GoT's decline. According to this fan, the quality seen in the early seasons led him to act in ways that were not common (i.e., to collect box set), but that did not last long. Moreover, HBO and the producers obliterated the epic content of the series, as one can see in the eighth season teaser, which was just an arrangement of moments aimed at making the audience gasp. He concluded by indicating how disappointed he was with the series, which could have been glorious, but it was not. In a less formal tone, the second message indicates how another fan felt disappointed after watching the third episode of the final season (T2). After following the show for seven years, he could not believe that its entire narrative (i.e., Jon Snow's journey) was replaced by another one, made in haste (i.e., Arya killing the main antagonist, The Night King). Similarly, the other comment made after the end of the series (T3) indicated how a fan was frustrated by the fact that a given character (i.e., Dany) suddenly turned into a villain.

The repercussion of the series' last season can be featured as the production of paratextual media contents (Grainge & Johnson, 2015; Janes, 2015). Despite the conflicts and falters regarding the series finale, GoT fans ended up doing it in a critical manner. Just as media texts are open to potentially ambiguous interpretations (Gray, 2010), we can conclude that paratexts are arena to fans interactions and, eventually, discordance.

Contrary to what happened in the first discursive formation, we can say that fans adopted a more consumer-oriented approach to the TV series in an engaged sense to broad discussion about their consumer experience (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). They took misaligned positions on HBO's interests, which is a possible outcome when organizations adopt the strategy of inviting consumers to promote its products (Cruz, Seo, & Binay, 2021).

Overall, we cannot say it was the case of consensually attesting to the extinction of the series' legacy, but of putting it in a different place, which is much less emblematic and, certainly, not impossible. Thus, fans produced paratexts capable of changing the prevailing view of the cultural product (Hills & Garde-Hansen, 2017). Consequently, it is even possible inferring that GoT-derived series will be met by fans with less anticipation, since paratexts also affect the way they welcome new texts (Grainge & Johnson, 2015; Gray, 2010).

### 4.3 Who is the one determining the legitimacy of the Throne?

On the one hand, the first discursive formation is a public tribute that takes the form of a declaration of love. It defines the series as cultural legacy, as heritage for popular culture. This fan recognition is an apology that articulates the importance of GoT and for themselves as the longtime TV show fandom. After all, they state how the series played a relevant role in their lives; thus, it is possible saying that the series' legacy is also the legacy of their fandom. On the other, the second discursive formation, in its turn, broadens the range of feelings experienced by fans. Although these feelings range from praise to criticism towards the series' finale, the statements' tone is never apologetic. At the extremes, paradoxes feeling unite a continuum that unites fans paratexts: a less sweet farewell than it could be, and a sense of betrayal by the detachment of the literary canon.

The two aforementioned discursive formations reflect two sides of the same emotional bond (i.e., nostalgia and frustration). Therefore, we can conclude that the paratexts working as fan reckoning towards the series are the foundation of their affection towards, and the definition of their relationship with, it (i.e., DTR).

Fans have produced paratexts to reinterpret GoT, regardless of whether they were in compliance with HBO's expectations, or not. In these discussions, fans are the ones who can determine whether, or not, the series has achieved the legitimate throne position of television shows. Accordingly, fans can ultimately be considered co-authors of the series since they produce their discourses through their own paratexts.

We follow Foucault's (2011) argument that readers' discourse about a given text read by themselves is as necessary as the read text itself, since such readers' mindset the creator's production process and introduce their own creativity in the interpretation process. Thus, both the text and its interpretation have the very same value. Foucault (2011) explains this aspect based on his author-function concept. According to this philosopher, the authorship of a given text is not limited to its creator; it is established through subjective positions that enable individuals to signify it. Therefore, it features a mode of existence, circulation and functioning of discursive productions within different social spheres. In the case of media products, authorship becomes diffuse and complex. The participation of studios, creators, directors, screenwriters, and actors, among others, in audiovisual productions works in different meaning-making layers (Mittel, 2015; Steiner, 2015) that are only complete after transmedia appropriation by fans (Hills & Garde-Hansen, 2017).

## 5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paratextual production by GoT fans over its last season aimed at presenting their final opinion about the series. This aspect fits the very concept of paratext: i.e., a text deriving from another one, although it has a life of its own. If the original text concerns the closing of a given narrative, the paratext produced about it is also expected to have this purpose. However, based on its autonomous way of proceeding, this production can be understood as closure by fans, which is herein understood as their reckoning with the series.

Consuming and interacting with paratexts are the mainstay for fans to (re)produce discourses capable of establishing and maintaining media products' echo. In the case of GoT, these discourses establish a DTR arena for fans; DTR in fan culture can legitimize the role played by TV series in the history of television productions, as a whole. Consequently, it indicates how the resonance of a given media object simultaneously results from fans' productivity and media paratexts – as indicated in the conceptual structure shown in Fig. 1.



Paratexts produced by fan discussions observed in the herein analyzed discourses are productive for different agencies. Resonance on the Web is already a productive result for consumed media products, since it arouses the interest of new and curious audiences in them, through well-established engagement records. Paratext content and its meanings for the plot of media products set the directions and opinions about the entertainment industry. Disagreements among fans reflect questions about how fans should intensely support or criticize what is consumed by them.

Thus, based on the current results, paratexts extrapolate the function of marketing communication strategy (Aronczyk, 2017; Hackley & Hackley, 2019) and establish the echo of media products in fan culture (Fathallah, 2016; Ng, 2017). Discourses produced by fans denote their engagement in discussions about the direction of media products, the entertainment industry and the fan culture, as a whole.

Based on concepts describing consumers as productive agents (see Cova & Cova, 2012; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), the present study has introduced the concept of paratext in order to articulate new forms of the prosumption phenomena. We can advocate that all spontaneous consumer productions have textual nature, i.e., that they are ultimately symbolic, since they add layers of meaning to different products and brands. More specifically, the paratextuality theory can fit the agenda of fan studies focused on investigating market cultures and consumer ideologies. Besides the fact that content is often associated with fan culture and entertainment objects (see Gray, 2010; Hackley & Hackley, 2019), it enables specialized consumers to play proactive roles in texts read by them. Furthermore, our study has evidenced that paratext (re)production by fans elevates them to the status of co-authors of media texts.

Our reflection is based on the function-author concept proposed by Foucault (2011), according to whom, readers take a subjective position that allows them to interpret the text both to the antecedents that compose the moment of reading and the reader perspective about the content itself. Thus, the conditions that constitute the production of the work or the life of its creator assumes a secondary or disposable role in a reading process.

Therefore, the current study helps better understanding CCT studies focused on investigating fans as market agents who exercise certain freedom towards market paradigms (see Fuschillo, 2020; de Souza-Leão & Costa, 2018), due to their ability to be productive (see Chen, 2021; Sugihartati, 2020). With respect to the limitations of the current study, it is worth mentioning that, since our research only focused paratextual productions associated with GoT's final season, we overlooked the likelihood of observing evolution in the product-meaning process carried out by fans. However, it is noteworthy that both the herein collected data and the adopted analytical method helped better understanding the historicity of discourses.

Thus, the analysis of fans' paratextual production about other popular culture franchises (e.g., MCU, Star Wars, Wizarding World) can contribute to the theorization on paratextual consumer productivity. On the other hand, the concept of paratext can also be applied to the analysis of promotional actions held by these franchises, and its application can be expanded to the marketing communication field. Finally, studies focused on investigating the overlap between paratexts' cultural and market interactions can further analyze the herein addressed topic.

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