'Spoiler!? I'm completely painless, I read everything': Fans and spoilers – results of a mixed method study

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Abstract:
This article discusses a specific practice of film franchise fans, namely so-called 'spoilers' and 'spoiler consumption', drawing on examples of *Star Wars* fans. The article presents results of a mixed method study, whereby the findings from an interview study and a questionnaire will be discussed. The empirical material offers not only insights into a specific popular-cultural fan phenomenon and fan practices, but at the same time also carves out the emotional and identity-related relevance of spoilers and this (fan-) phenomenon for its supporters.

Keywords: *Star Wars*, Fans, Fan Studies, Identity, Spoilers, Spoiler Consumers, Spoiler Avoiders, Mixed-Methods

1. Fans, Anticipation and Spoilers

The domestic movie market in North America is more than ever characterized by hugely budgeted (potential) blockbuster and film franchise productions – 200 million dollar productions are far from being an exception – that have to succeed financially. In 2015 alone, 11 out of 20 of the most successful film productions at the box office in the United States were sequels or extensions of existing film narratives. These films are accompanied by a number of media phenomena, like teasers, trailers, making-ofs, and interviews with cast and crew. All of these phenomena offer a brief insight into the visual aesthetics, characters and broad features of the plot of the advertised movie. However, all these phenomena circumscribe an (appropriation) process on the part of the interested public, in particular the group of loyal fans, which Jonathan Gray describes 'as a way of getting into a text' (Gray 2010: 149). Although the final product may represent the focus of these related

activities, the 'way there' is characterized by specific features and corresponding developments. Following Genette (2001), Gray (2010) and Geraghty (2015) depict these phenomena as paratexts. Paratexts describe an interaction structure between producers and recipients, but are also central to the understanding of fans and fan cultures, in particular when it comes to characterising the related passion and identification with *their* object of fandom, and ultimately to understand their self-conception as fans. The empirical examination of these paratexts and their relevance for fans includes not only the analysis of interaction structures, the production of attention, expectations and hype, but also the relevant appropriation processes of fans, and their relevance for speculation and individual interpretation of the material that describe a form of gradual, textual appropriation (cf. Grey 2010: 47; Hills 2015). Because fans cultivate a familiar relationship, one that can undoubtedly be described as 'intense', with *their* object, which they have appropriated over the course of a lengthy fan socialization process.

This paper deals with a phenomenon that, on the one hand, has hardly been examined closely in connection with (film franchise) fans, but which, on the other hand, offers diverse insights into what it means to be a fan, and which is discussed in the context of fans, on occasion even controversially. The article focuses on the phenomenon of so-called *spoilers* and *spoiler-fans* and which role and relevance they have in the context of the constitution of fan identity. Using the example of *Star Wars* fans, this text primarily deals with a social phenomenon of popular culture, in which people search for (non-)official content and information on a future movie in the process of its production, and consume the corresponding spoilers, or else consciously avoid them. The article examines the meanings fans ascribe to spoilers, their consumption or refusal, how they deal with them and which relevance they have in connection with their self-conception and their identity as fans. The introduction outlines several theoretical relationships between fans and the spoiler phenomenon (2). Following this, the results of a mixed method study which combines a qualitative interview study as well as a quantitative investigation with *Star Wars* fans, will be presented, which address this phenomenon and its identity-related meaning (3+4).

2. Fans and spoilers

The research and investigation into fans and their fan practices differ globally in terms of intensity. Scientific studies of fans have shown that during the course of a comprehensive as well as lengthy fan socialization process, fans have established a remarkable relationship. They are excited by the object of their desire on many levels, e.g. by films and their stars, are supporters of a football club, have a crush on a particular individual or a music band, and are loyal vis-à-vis their fan-object – even in turbulent times. As such, they utilize particular codes and symbols, with whose help *their own* fan status – openly, assertively, or hidden and in secret – is presented symbolically as a relevant characteristic, both in individual as well as biographical terms. The empirical investigation of these relationships, the research of *their* fan practices, and the relevance of this relationship for fan-identity

were the focus of a research project carried out at the University of Göttingen in Germany from 2014 to 2016. One of the research interests was to study the relation between *Star Wars* fans, their self-conception as well as their status as fans and the practice of spoiler consumption. The research project was designed to examine the identity-related meaning that *Star Wars* has for its fans, but also particularly to address questions of why *Star Wars* generates such enthusiasm and fascination for them. In this regard the *partial identity as a (*Star Wars*) fan* is lived above all in narrative contexts for justification, and in particular by a temporal component, whereby the past, the present *and the future* are entwined (cf. Rosa 2005: 237). The self-conception of fans cannot be exclusively characterized by experiences located in the past or present, but is also sustained by developments and their related expectations, such as new films. These touch on and thus fundamentally expand reference points of being a fan. This is also where the spoiler phenomenon is located.

While comprehensive empirical investigations on fan films, fan songs or fan art are already available (cf., e.g., Bacon-Smith 1991; Hellekson/Busse 2006; Jenkins 2012; Winter 2010), spoilers are an under-researched area. They are all the more important in fan discourses. Spoilers represent a component of fan discourse and are discussed passionately and controversially. Because in addition to teasers, trailers, posters, interviews, and making-of material, they can also be characterized as a component and accompanying phenomenon of film and TV productions. But what is a spoiler? In an empirical investigation of *Buffy* fans and the respective online and community activities, Williams (2004: paragraph 11) described spoilers as 'a piece of information regarding an upcoming plot or character development on a television show that is revealed to fans before the relevant episode airs'. Matt Hills (2012: 108) defines spoilers as 'bits of narrative information that circulate within fan culture prior to the official mass availability of the narrative concerned [...].' A similar description can also be found in Grey (2010: 147), where he refers to the diversity of spoiler sources in particular, and characterizes these largely as 'audience created paratexts' (ibid., 143). Williams (2004: paragraph 13) differentiates 'a variety of resources', from which spoilers can emerge, 'including industry sources [...], convention reports, location shoot reports and interviews with cast and production staff'. As such, a (movie-) spoiler is information, an image or a video clip that takes up and anticipates specific plot elements. Spoilers can also be differentiated in terms of their sources and the time they are made public. On the one hand, spoilers are distributed via publicly accessible media – usually on websites, in newspapers, magazines or also in film reviews – whereby hints or entire plots, such as already broadcast TV episodes or cinema films, can be revealed. But spoilers can also be information distributed as so-called leaks by insiders, or by people involved in a production, usually via the internet. These include text spoilers, videos and/or images. These latter spoilers, which will be the primary focus in the following, are largely published, discussed and negotiated in and via social media [Facebook], special websites or news aggregators and multiplicator sites [reddit].

For Hills, one of the central characteristics of spoilers is that they are a feature of online communities, which he describes as 'collective intelligence in action', following

Jenkins (2006: 28). From a psychoanalytical perspective, however, Hills criticizes that existing research on and about spoilers has disregarded in particular the related emotional aspects and respective relevance settings of fans. He justifies this by arguing that although spoilers are primarily of relevance in group-related online contexts and associated activities, they nevertheless have an inherent individual quality and meaning, in particular in connection with emotional features and the self-conception as fans. Using the example of the TV series *Lost*, Mittell and Gray (2007) investigated why so-called spoiler fans even read these spoilers, indeed actually enjoy consuming them and ultimately view this as part of their media practices. In their empirical investigation, they were able to discover that spoilers are an entrypoint for fans in an ongoing narrative universe:

> Spoiler fans highlighted how some surprises remain no matter how spoiled they may be, and a spoiled episode still offers new insights into the show's mythology, mystery, and character development, all pleasures of newness and originality. [...] Thus [...] spoiler fans experienced Lost as both a literary and a fan text, exhibiting considerable pleasure in its difference, newness, and failure to conform to the predictable, as well as comfort in its familiarity and known narrative. (Mittell & Gray 2007)

Jenkins (2006, 2008) also carried out several studies on the spoiler phenomenon, for example in his study on *Twin Peaks* fans, which was first published in 1995, as well as in a study of the CBS series *Survivor*, in which he examined the spoiler behaviour of fans and their motivational structures against the backdrop of internet-based communication practices. Jenkins describes spoiler fans as highly committed, who play 'a giant cat and mouse game, that is played between the producers and the audience' (Jenkins 2008: 25). Hills justifies the respective practices in particular by arguing that in the area of film and TV productions, for example, the relevant formats are conceived and marketed by the producers as a kind of mystery box, while fans in particular associate an emotional meaning with the filmic narrative, which may result in insecurities and uncertainties due to a cautious information policy on the part of the fans. The associated emotional and identity-related stress may, according to Hills, be compensated and processed via the consumption of spoilers (cf. Hills 2012: 115; Hills 2015: 164; Völcker 2016: 224). In addition to these individual aspects of 'spoiling', Jenkins refers to the relevance of group-related activities, whereby spoiler fans primarily realize a benefit in their (online) communities: 'The ability to expand your individual grasp by pooling knowledge with others intensifies the pleasures any viewer takes in trying to "expect the unexpected"' (Jenkins 2008: 28), while 'their pleasures seem largely external to the show' (Gray 2010: 148).

Spoilers do not only incorporate information, hints about twists, punchlines and plot development, but may also *spoil* the enjoyment of a movie. It is exactly this negatively connoted aspect of spoilers that is also discussed beyond academic discourse, for example in connection with film franchise productions. Thus, Martin Wittman described this

phenomenon in a rather controversial article in the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung on 08/01/2015 as follows:

> "Nobody knows what the future holds – apart from Astro TV" was the headline of a report in these pages three weeks ago. That isn't true. In actual fact, many people know what the future holds. Too many. They are far more intrusive than the TV fortune tellers, and you can't just not switch them on either, they are lurking in the most astounding corners. But why make it such a big secret what it's about. It says it in the opening credits. That's what the problem is. So, it's about those inconsiderate people who spread so-called spoilers (no, not the car parts) when writing about films or series: hints about twists, punchlines, hairstyles or plots. They disclose the secrets of works that rely on these secrets. (Süddeutsche 2015)[1]

For Wittmann it is clear: whoever is involved in spoiling is revealing something, and usually in such a clumsy way that he or she inevitably discloses the secrets and twists of a story to those wishing to remain 'in the dark'. In the scientific-empirical investigation of spoilers and the examination of the subjective benefits and respective preferences for or against spoiler consumption, a range of different aspects is discussed. Thus, spoilers, as described above, are of particular relevance in online contexts, whereby the meaning of pertinent information and availability of spoilers has been described as synonymous with the acquisition of prestige, reputation and power in fan discourses (cf. Jenkins 2006: 115ff.). Jenkins identifies relevant materials, in which the pleasure of textual appropriation, the identification of narrative structures and associated codes is described, which refer to the unfolding of an episode-spanning story. In an investigation of soap fans, Harrington and Bielby (1995: 129) also refer in particular to emotional and personal justification patterns, whereby narrative speculations were associated with the joy and pleasure of fully following a filmic narrative, but in particular also in order to be emotionally prepared for the relevant twists and events of narrative and characters. Following Booth (2010: 11), Hills (2012: 115) argues in a similar vein, whereby the fascination of spoilers and the reading of relevant information was associated with group-related pleasure on the one hand, but also has an emotionally compensating function on the other, representing a form of protection of the self as a fan: 'Spoiler fans […] enacting a technological narrative, unconscious, using web 2.0 to sustain ontological security, […] to protect the story of their self-identity and their self-narratives as a fan' (Hills 2012: 115). Within this sense, the reading of spoilers is interpreted as a safety function for the self as a fan, and an 'investment in a series diegesis' (ibid., 116, also Gray 2010: 152). The relevance of spoilers and their consumption have also been examined in social psychological research, especially in experimental settings. Here for example, Christenfield and Leavitt (2011, 2013) used experiments with short stories from different genres and differently placed/non-placed textual information on the content of the stories, to examine the associated practices. They found that 'spoiled' stories are

preferred by subjects. In two replication studies, with 412 and 368 subjects respectively, Johnson and Rosenbaum (2015, also Rosenbaum/Johnson 2016) investigated these relationships in a considerably more complex research design, in particular with regard to the measurement of personality traits. In contrast to Christenfield and Leavitt, the authors found contradictory results, which they ascribe to operationalization and measurement differences, as well as to the relevant practices of spoiler consumption mediated by personality traits. There are clear differences in the conceptual approach of the studies, in particular in the empirical measurement of study variables such as enjoyment and pleasure. In contrast to Christenfield and Leavitt (2011), the corresponding variables were measured using a multidimensional instrument. 'Unspoiled' stories were described here as more moving and thought provoking, whereby subjects with a lower need for cognition preferred spoilers, and subjects with high affective needs preferred 'unspoiled' texts (cf. Johnson & Rosenbaum 2016). However, the authors refer to limitations in the interpretability of their research findings: the study sample and the choice of the research object make them difficult to generalize and further research would be necessary with regard to the influence of individual personality traits on spoiler behaviour.

Against the backdrop of these research findings, it can be seen that spoilers are not only important in different contexts, but that they are also linked to different evaluations in emotional terms. Particularly their emotional relevance as well as their benefits from the perspective of their recipients will be examined in the empirical investigation presented here. From a socialization and identity-theoretical perspective, the study examines the corresponding relationships between spoiler practices on the one hand, and the self-conception as a fan on the other. The identity-related context and thus the question why fans consume spoilers, or else consciously avoid them, why they search for hints about the plot, central figures and character constellations, and how they ultimately justify this social practice has not yet been comprehensively examined *empirically* in connection with the relevant identity-related processes. Moreover, questions arise in connection with being a fan as to why they do this, or also consciously avoid it, how intensively they engage in this topic and which relevance spoiler consumption has for *their* partial identity as a fan.

3. Materials, Procedure, Methods and Analysis

Answers to these questions were sought using a mixed method investigation, which I carried out with *Star Wars* fans between 2014 and 2016. The focus of this investigation was on the one hand on qualitative interviews with 25 fans aged seven to 46 years, from Germany, Austria, Switzerland and one interview partner from Malta, and also on a questionnaire carried out in 2016 based on the results of the qualitative interview study with *Star Wars* fans, which provides an in-depth investigation of the spoiler issue and was designed to lead to quantifiable results.[2]

Mixed method procedures are more central than ever in empirical social research, as they offer a wealth of opportunity to examine a research topic and the corresponding

complex research questions from different perspectives, on a sound methodical and methodological basis. Although it is difficult to capture the subjectively justified understanding of actors in their social contexts and settings, with their speaking, interpretation and explanatory actions, using quantitative procedures, these deficits are exactly the strengths of qualitative procedures. By contrast, the weaknesses of qualitative research with regard to the generalization of results and the statistical quantification of relevant relationships can be offset using quantitative methods. Mixed method procedures and the appropriate research design thus enable differentiated access to the complexity of social reality as well as the capturing of different facets, perspectives and aspects of social phenomena. In order to examine the spoiler phenomenon, quantitative and qualitative data were gathered in *equal*: on the one hand with the goal of understanding fans and the spoiler phenomenon from *their perspective* and to identify phenomena and relationship structures, and in a second step to quantify the relevant patterns by means of the questionnaire survey, in order to arrive at statistically valid statements. The research design was conceptualized as a sequential procedure.

Participants for the interview study were sought via an interview request on several websites with a reference to *Star Wars*. Information on the intention of the interview was provided. Interested persons were able to volunteer, upon which an interview date was agreed and the contact addresses were deleted following the interviews. Due to geographical distances, technical aids were used to conduct the interviews, whereby 19 interviews were realized via Skype. Six interviews were conducted face-to-face.[3] The interviews technique (*l'entretien compréhensif*) used can be described as a method introduced by Bourdieu et al. (2010) and Kaufmann (1999) into social science research, which is characterized in particular by open interviews that are geared towards narrative offers and situational developments. Grounded Theory was used as an analysis and interpretation strategy (cf. Corbin/Strauss 1996: 15). The analysis of the material is based on a number of steps, in particular on coding procedures (cf. Böhm 1994: 126). The aim is the gradual identification of categories, the capturing of data-driven relationships between categories, the writing of memos, as well as the continuous collection of additional data geared towards saturation. Above all, the different coding procedures are a systematic as well as structured process, which should lead to an abstract as well as complex elaboration of the material (cf. Geertz 1987; Glaser/Strauss 1998; Corbin/Strauss 1996) and the systematic elaboration of relationships between categories.[4]

Building on the qualitative research findings, a questionnaire study was designed and carried out as a second step, firstly aiming at investigating the spoiler consumption behaviour and the findings from the qualitative sub-study by means of the questionnaire and a corresponding comprehensive sample. Secondly the other hand, the aim was in particular to examine the relationship between self-conception, practices of fans and spoiler behaviour by means of statistical procedures, on the basis of the research findings from the first stage of the project. For reasons of clarity, the results of the qualitative sub-study are presented first (4), followed by a discussion of these partial results and resulting

hypothetical assumptions, which were relevant for the conception and operationalization of empirical constructs for the quantitative study (5).

4. Results of the qualitative sub-study: Fans, being a fan, and spoilers

The interviews with *Star Wars* fans revolved around their self-conception as fans and in particular their handling of spoilers; as such, the interviews showed not only the emotional connection fans associate and feel with *their* object of fandom, but also a wealth of different activities, which fans undertake as *Star Wars* fans (cf. Völcker 2016: 141ff.). In addition, different, individually justified interpretive patterns and respective interpretations of being a fan were identified. The material suggests a closer analysis of these self-interpretation processes as well as the examination of relationships between those justifications and respective attitudes vis-à-vis spoilers and spoiler behaviour. In the following, for reasons of clarity, only key characteristics will be described. A detailed overview can be found in the further analysis of Völcker (2016).

4.1 *Self-conception and being a fan of* Star Wars

Differentiation and related categorizations of fans are widespread in the research literature (cf., e.g. Abercrombie/Longhurst 1998). In the present study, four narratively justified self-conception patterns were identified. In contrast to other studies of fan research (cf. ibid), these differentiations were not based on productive aspects and their respective features, but more *on the understanding and self-conceptions* in particular *by* the fans interviewed here, i.e. on how they experienced the acting out of their passions and related activities, and how they ultimately perceive themselves (cf. Harrington & Bielby 1995: 7). The four types identified are outlined in the following:

The first type was characteristic for all narratives of the children[5] interviewed, whereby there was a clear difference particularly in the described relationship to the object of fandom and the corresponding self-conception to that of the adult fans. A key feature was that children associate their fan status via the identification with external objects – mostly toys –, thus arriving at a largely reified form of self-definition. This relationship structure with the fan object can change and transform during their socialization process (cf. Völcker 2016: 166ff.). Spoilers as well as spoiler consumption were not (yet) relevant in this group. This was a grave difference different to the adult fans of the second, third and fourth type, with the second and third in particular being of relevance to a further consideration in the context of the individual spoiler behaviour. Fans who were assigned to the second type as part of the analysis characterized their fan status as 'universality-fans'; a term frequently chosen in the interviews for self-characterization. In their narratives, they made it clear that they see themselves as a part of the *Star Wars* universe and the opportunities offered there, that they are well informed, and described a critical to entirely negative attitude towards spoilers. They localized the key interfaces and connection points as fans in the *Star Wars* films and their more or less regular consumption. They also view themselves as fans in

terms of the resulting activities, who participate in the *Star Wars* universe and its opportunities, who indeed collect memorabilia and fan articles, but who also prefer diversity without deepening specific activities.

The narratives of this second type deviated from those of the third, whereby these narratives include descriptions of their fan-status with an addendum [e.g. as a 'hardcore fan' or 'nerd'], with which self-conceptions, connectedness as well as fan activities and distinction processes were associated. The categorization and description of these fans, for example as 'hardcore fans' or 'nerds', also resulted here from the *self-descriptions of the fans interviewed*, who took up the respective terms for self-portrayal, self-description and self-positioning to characterize their fan status (cf. Völcker 2016: 176ff.). In contrast to the fans belonging to the second type, these fans regularly consume spoilers and viewed this practice as an important feature of their social status as fans. Here, the connection with self-conception, activities and the corresponding, subjectively chosen fan status also described distinction processes in particular, because *Star Wars* fans also only come alive in a community, especially when they can differentiate themselves from others (cf. Mikos 2010: 109; Williams 2004). The interview partners assigned to this group in the interview sample did not account for their fan status via specific practices, but made clear in the interviews that Star Wars is an essential part of their everyday lives and their self-conception, whereby a type of expert status was repeatedly formulated (cf. Wilde 2015: 270), which was associated with their respective fan practices of appropriation and debate, and allowed for individual particularities. Here, a key feature was the accumulation of popular cultural capital, such as comprehensive knowledge about the object and also corresponding practices of appropriation and adaptation. For fans of this type, the resulting gains in distinctiveness develop within a narratively justified difference aesthetic of being different, even more extreme. The shared cultural practice is not only part of the symbolic and cultural capital through specialization, but *structured and characterizes* their relationship with themselves and the social world (cf. Rehbein 2006: 160fn.; Williams 2004).

By contrast, it was characteristic for the fourth group that interviewees of this type – exclusively women – talked and described themselves as fans primarily in terms of an 'assertion and defence role'. They reported that they experience this role in particular in their social relationships with others outside the *Star Wars* community, whereby they described their fan-status as 'atypical' in these contexts and due to gender-related stereotypes (cf. e.g. Travis 2013; Brooker 2002; Handley 2012). Fans of this type repeatedly faced such stereotypes during the course of their fan socialization, whereby they are required to assert and defend their being a fan vehemently. Here, a distinction mechanism takes effect as well, which is 'not aimed at specific groups, but rather at abstract classifications […]' (Wetzstein et al. 1999: 166f.). At the same time, social relationships within their fan contexts were described as rich and free of prejudice. The respective self-conceptions are thus similar to those of the third type, whereby here, their fan-status also involved the corresponding conceptual addendums, and the consumption of spoilers and related justification patters were also similar to those fans of the third type.[6]

4.2 *Fans and spoiler consumption*[7]

The interview material showed a relationship between these self-conceptions, the individually justified attitudes towards spoilers and spoiler consumption. Within the material two positions were formulated and explained: some fans 'do it' and allow themselves to be spoiled, and the others avoid spoilers. As such, a pattern was identified within the material, whereby those fans belonging to the group of 'universality-fans' avoided spoilers, while all fans in the so-called 'hardcore group', without exception, were more or less intense spoiler consumers and interpreted and justified their use of this information as a feature of their self-conception as fans. Here are some selected examples from the interview material:

4.2.1 *Spoiler avoiders*

When I asked 22-year-old Steven about his spoiler behaviour in our interview, he answered: 'Well, I don't read many spoilers or anything and the funny thing is, although I don't actually read them, I still seem to find out stuff, which is weird [laughs]' (Steven, lines 617-619). Even if Steven largely avoided spoilers, he still regularly searched for background information on the seventh *Star Wars* episode. However, he got his 'material' (Steven, line 628) primarily from information sources already published and officially accessible at the time of the interview, in particular teaser trailers as well as interviews and other marketing measures:

> Yeah, like I said, I'd like to know relatively *little* in terms of content. So it's enough for me to watch the trailers beforehand. And apart from that, yeah, when they say they have a *set* photo, you know, then I might have a look, because that doesn't really show you that much, but you can get a rough impression of the rough *location*. (Steven, lines 629-635)

Steven associates opportunities with and via this officially accessible material to gain insights into the new film and the production process, while avoiding relevant spoiler content regarding the plot or twists in the story, in particular from a surprise perspective.

Martin, also 22 years old, was sceptical about spoilers as well as leaks, and avoided them: 'So I stopped doing that relatively quickly' (Martin, line 465). By quickly, he meant that he followed some potential spoilers and general developments at the beginning of the production of the seventh film episode, but stopped actual shooting started in spring 2014, and today '[I] only watch relatively sporadically at Star Wars-Union[8] or sometimes on a film site, where you can find a bit, but mostly I only read the headlines, if at all' (Martin, lines 467-468). Like Steven, Martin also obtains his knowledge and the relevant information largely from publically accessible materials: 'Sure, I watched the teaser, was also really excited about it, but well I actually want to know as little about the film as possible. So I'll let myself be surprised as far as possible.' (Martin, lines 471-478). As with Steven, *the aspect of surprise* is central, which he gives as a reason for avoiding spoilers. In the interview, he

nevertheless justifies this behaviour, which he associates with a widespread marketing wave in contemporary mass cinema, which already anticipates entire content and dramatic twists in marketing campaigns: '[W]ell I just think that, um, generally, films today with trailers and with um previews and a web show and you've usually kind of seen the film already, or um almost find out what it's about' (Martin, lines 481-486). What he describes is an awareness on the one hand for the relevance and maintenance of the filmic secrets until the official reveal with a corresponding cautious attitude and maintaining the element of surprise, so to be able to experience a new adventure in the *Star Wars* universe as uninformed as possible. He sees the reasons for his attitude as grounded in a flood of information, which he observed in the marketing process of other media products. When it comes to this information spiral, Martin would like to 'get away from what's close to my heart regarding *Star Wars*' (Martin, lines 500-501), i.e. he wants to avoid spoiling his anticipation and expectations of the film in advance. Nevertheless, reading spoilers, especially among *Star Wars* fans, is a widespread phenomenon in his view: '[…] [Y]es, that's what it is perhaps, because they kind of try to confirm their own opinion, which they might have already formed, that something bad is happening in the background and oh yes, those spoilers or that report' (Martin, lines 513-517). Here, he referred directly to those in the second group, the spoiler supporters, who will be introduced in the following.

4.2.2 Spoiler supporters

In contrast to this first group and their motives for avoiding spoilers, fans belonging to the second group of spoiler supporters justify their behaviour and the consumption of spoilers by interpreting spoilers and their (regular) consumption as an essential part of their self-conception as fans. Stefanie, who reads or researches spoilers online very intensively and if possible every day, differentiates and justifies her spoiler behaviour, whereby she distinguishes between reading and watching: 'I absorb the information, I read it and weigh it up for myself: could it be true, yes or no, my problem is that I'm a *Star Wars* fan through and through, I soak it up like a sponge. I want to *know* what's going on, if it appears in the film then I might be disappointed [...]. But I'm like, I also sometimes read the end of a book in advance, so I know: does he survive or not' (Stefanie, lines 1318-1324). In other areas as well, for example when reading books, Stefanie often chose to 'spoil' quite consciously and with intention. The reason she gave me was that she 'just can't keep away from' plots and handling this information (Stefanie, line 1325); especially with regard to the new *Star Wars* films, she regularly searches for information. For herself and also for others, she justifies this practice 'because they just want to know, because it's just, it's like, how should I call it? What is it for me? I just want to know because I just want be prepared for it.' (Stefanie, lines 1341-1345). In our interview, she referred to a spoiler she read hours before our conversation [the death of Han Solo in *Star Wars* Episode 7], and which, in the way she talked about it, evidently impressed her. Here, an emotional bond with individual characters and the entire plot becomes clear on the one hand. She described the relevance of these narratives and their characters, as well as the associated relationship, in such a

comprehensive way that the death of a central figure that was discussed in the spoilers upset her even before she watched the movie. But this is exactly where Stefanie grounded her spoiler consumption. Because the most important reason Stefanie gave for consuming spoilers was being prepared for the associated emotional strain.

Thomas, 30 years old, by contrast justified his spoiler behaviour: to my question of whether he reads spoilers, his initial response was hesitant: 'I generally try *not* to do it' (Thomas, lines 1083-1085). This hesitance gave way immediately. Rather, he told me that in many cases, pure curiosity won over his intention to avoid them, and even just reading a headline with spoiler warnings would lead to it, '[t]hen I have to know. And then I read it. Of course, I don't know if it's true, but if the rumours sound convincing, and yes, kind of like interlock like cogs. Sometimes, I just don't have the willpower not to do it. Even though of course I wouldn't like it if I watched the film and already knew the entire plot.' (Thomas, lines 1087-1094). During our interview, he justified this behaviour several times with a subtle fear of 'missing out on something. So I check, I think, StarWars-Union at least four times a day, to see if something's happened. Or other fan sites, or on Facebook, in terms of content it's seventy percent about *Star Wars*.' (Thomas, lines 1113-1118). The daily supply of and the search for *Star Wars* news are a central element of his everyday life: he doesn't only visit relevant sites several times a day, but his timeline on Facebook and many of his activities in social networks are connected to *Star Wars* as well. Thomas traces his fear and ultimately also his drive to consume spoilers back to the poor reception of Episode I, although he definitely wants to avoid an 'Episode I, 2.0' (Thomas, *line 1138*) for Episode VII. Surprisingly, he also related these conclusions directly to himself and his social reputation as a fan, because '[y]ou want to be quote unquote taken seriously. Now, it has, Episode 1 caused real damage to *Star Wars*, or its name, because it's just a disaster in terms of content. […] Yes, of course I'm afraid it might happen again' (Thomas, lines 1142-1149). Thomas describes a connection between the quality of the entire *Star Wars* saga, in particular the poor experiences and the resulting criticism, which many fans associate with the Prequel Trilogy and especially Episode I, and links this to and with himself, to his own self-conception, but in particular to his reputation as a fan. Reading spoilers offers him partial protection and offers him the opportunity to get advance information and to associate the information he reads there with his individual interpretation/forms of reading, but also with his self-conception as a fan.

Paul justified his enthusiasm to me in a similar manner, as well as his intrinsically motivated need for spoilers and their regular consumption. In our interview, Paul spoke several times of *Star Wars* fans as 'once bitten, twice shy, so to speak' (Paul, line 1488). He related these conclusions, like Thomas, to the disappointments of the Prequel Trilogy. For him also, although he likes the prequels, they are associated with significant losses of quality compared to the first trilogy, and he is also driven by a concern regarding the narrative as well as visual quality of the sequel trilogy. For Paul, however, other factors include curiosity regarding the new and unknown: 'Just because I say personally that I can still enjoy a film if it's been spoiled. Yes, I mean only the large plot for, I would probably have been angry if

someone had come out of Empire before me and WHOA DARTH VADER IS LUKE'S father, then I would have probably killed them. For spoiling my fun' (Paul, lines 1348-1354). Besides his curiosity with regard to the content of a film, here Episode VII, he was concerned with two further aspects in relation to spoilers: on the one hand their veracity and their content. He justified this with his experiences with Episodes I-III –, that although much information was published and thus available in advance, including in spoilers, there were significant differences between spoiler content and the final movie. On the other hand, Paul is certain that many of the already published spoilers are steered due to a cleverly handled information policy, i.e. false information, which is consciously used and distributed. In addition, however, he does differentiate between reading a spoiler and watching a movie with regard to the relevant spoiler material. Because even if spoilers contain information on a filmic narrative, for him, this nevertheless means 'being surprised anyway about what happens, how it's ultimately carried out. What ultimately happens at the end.' (Paul, lines 1457-1460)

4.2.3   Interim conclusion (1) – Spoilers and spoiler consumption from the perspective of different fan groups

The interview material showed considerable differences and corresponding description patterns for or against spoiler consumption, which in turn related to the fans self-conceptions. Because all those fans who talked about the regular consumption of spoilers classified themselves in their self-descriptions as 'hardcore fans'. The justifications for this behaviour and the respective attitudes towards spoilers showed that these fans view the consumption of spoilers as an important part of their daily activities, especially in connection with emotional traits and the relevance *Star Wars* has in their lives. However, they also made clear that the focus is less on the spoiling or the anticipation of plot-related elements of surprise. Rather, they justified their behaviour with the fact that for them, the reception of spoilers merely touches on one level of the narrative of the movie experience, which comprises general plot and character developments in particular. The visual and especially the narrative implementation remain untouched by this. Further reasons were mentioned in addition to this, with which spoiler consumption was justified: for example, disappointment regarding the movies of the Prequel Trilogy. This disappointment resulted in a kind of drive for immunization, and 'seduced' fans into the regular reading of spoilers. With the related search for information, some fans are able to release themselves from emotional stress and to focus on the unfolding story. This spoiler group stands in contrast to fans who have a hesitant to rejecting view of spoiler consumption, and who tried to avoid speculation and discussion about plot development, story twists and key elements of the plot. This group included all fans who described themselves in their self-conception as 'universality-fans' or 'generalists'. Careful, interpretative conclusions may be drawn on the basis of the material regarding causes and reasons for this differentiation in terms of behaviour and attitudes towards spoilers and the self-conception of fans.

All the fans interviewed here stated an emotional bond with the material of their fan status. Some fans use relevant conceptual addendums ['universality-fans vs. hardcore fans'] to describe the emotional and social relevance and their identification with the narrative universe and the individual spaces for opportunity offered by *Star Wars*. It has become an important feature of their everyday lives in many aspects. However, this type of relationship is evidently not only linked more strongly to their self-conception and the corresponding partial identity as fans, but is also an essential feature of their relationship with themselves and the social world. Fans who characterize themselves as 'hardcore fans' use spoilers to immunize themselves against possible disappointments and the potential endangerment of their social reputation as fans and thus an essential part of their identity. They not only read spoilers to release themselves from emotional stress, but also describe and carry out a behaviour that might appear strange at first glance. But for the fans of the so-called 'hardcore group', the *Star Wars* narratives as well as the associated activities have their own, profound meaning, related to an emotional quality: ultimately, they are an important part of their identity.

The material, particularly the statements by the interviewed fans, especially the 'hardcore group', clearly showed that spoiler and spoiler practices are not only central in and for fan communities and their self-conception (cf. e.g. Hills 2012), but also how fans justify spoilers and their consumption, and how they *use* these as part of their identity construction. The practice of spoiling serves not only as information acquisition and as an opportunity to obtain information on key content, twists and character development prior to publication of the filmic narrative and to understand these, in the sense of Grey (2010: 149) as 'a way of getting into a text'. For the fans interviewed here however, spoiler consumption, in addition to many other fan practices, seems to be a way to experience and maintain an identity-stabilizing moment. *Star Wars* and its diverse opportunities to live out and identify with the fan object have such a central and at the same time identity-forming function, that information acquisition via spoilers enables fans to address the speculative construction and structure of a narrative, to thus construct it from its different facets and to position it into the existing narrative context. Spoilers and their consumption thus offer, at least in part, control over emotional responses and expectations. Moreover, from the perspective of 'hardcore fans' for example, this does not diminish their pleasure of the text. Rather, the reading of spoilers can also have an identity-forming function. Because for these fans, the fan object has become a central sub-aspect of their identity, is a continuously developing yet as an overall narrative also a stable reference and anchor point, which can have very individual and diverse meanings for its fans. In an era characterized by social change, differentiation and pluralisation processes, the fan object and its examination, e.g. via the consumption of spoilers, therefore offers opportunities for identity-related and identity-supporting connection and reference points. In this relationship structure, which is characterized on the one hand by belonging to the group of fans, and on the other by individual activities as well as emotional attachment and enthusiasm, identity reference points are enabled, which fans can fall back on in their everyday lives. Being a fan is a

central resource that offers stability, orientation and coherence; a reference and orientation point within self-actualization which, despite developments in this area, is constant and reliable. The reading of spoilers also functions in this sense and in regard to extensions of the filmic narrative as identity forming, as it allows not only an outlook on what is to come, but also enables a classification into existing interpretation and appropriation contexts.

The analysis of the qualitative material showed that those fans describing themselves as 'hardcore fans' not only engage with *Star Wars* and this narrative universe in different areas, but also that these different activities and their self-conception as fans are very closely linked. All these aspects seem to influence the way in which fans understand and characterize themselves and their status and reputation as fans. The more pronounced the respective identification and thus the self-categorization as a fan, the more likely spoilers are to be consumed, which are furnished with different function attributions and characterize a relationship structure. This is presented in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Theoretical model of the relationship between fan self-conception and spoiler consumption
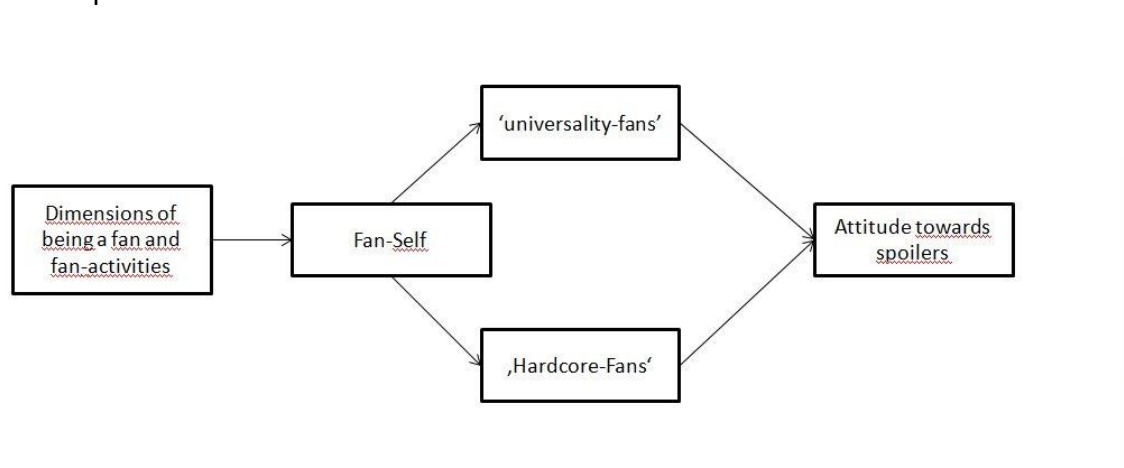
Author's own figure.

4.3 *Results from the quantitative sub-study*
Based on these results, a questionnaire study was carried out in Spring 2016 and distributed via an online tool. The primary goal was to further investigate and quantify the results from the qualitative sub-study and the relationships identified there. On the basis of the results of the qualitative study, the initial steps focused on the formulation of research hypotheses and the transfer of relevant constructs into measurable test variables. With regard to the hypotheses driving the research, two questions were particularly relevant. Regarding the investigation of the spoiler phenomenon carried out here, it is assumed on the basis of the qualitative material as well as other fan research (cf. e.g., Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998; Winter 2010) that not only a differentiation of fans and fan groups can be described, but also that the associated aspects of self-identification comprises different dimensions. This assumption is based on other investigations within fan research, in particular in the area of

sports fans, whereby the present investigation assumes a relationship between the self-conception as a fan and a corresponding self-identification (Hypothesis 1). The relationships between these facets of fan identification and the consumption of and attitude towards spoilers is largely unexplored, whereby here and following the findings from the qualitative sub-study, it is assumed that the respective self-classification as a fan not only goes hand-in-hand with a corresponding high level of identification in different dimensions, but also that statistical relationships with spoiler consumptions can be observed, whereby fans with a high level of identification in the different dimensions and the respective self-description, for example as 'hardcore fans', are more likely to consume spoilers (Hypothesis 2).

4.3.1 Operationalization

In the study, the transfer of theoretical constructs into measureable test variables is based on the development of different constructs and variables. In addition to personal data, such a age, gender and variables of socio-economic status, the participants were requested to provide a self-assessment regarding their own self-description as a fan [Question: If you had to assess yourself, which term would you use to describe your own *Star Wars* fan status to others?]. The resulting verbal responses were then evaluated by several raters independently of one another and categorized in a first step. Following this, the different results and types were discussed and compiled by the research group.

On the basis of the results of the qualitative study, a relationship between self-perception and characterization of being a fan and the different dimensions of fan identification was observed. Therefore, the quantitative study was also carried out with the aim of not only capturing this relationship structure and a corresponding dimensional differentiation, but also to describe the relevant relationships. Although hardly any comprehensive studies have been carried out and very few relevant instruments exist in this very specific area [film franchise fans], they do exist in other areas of fan research. As such, we made use of existing investigations. Following the work by Al-Thibiti (2004) and the scale on fan motivation for sports fans (FMS) he developed, the relevant items were taken up and adapted to the present study context. Al-Thibiti's study focused in particular on the analysis of motivational structures and the corresponding identifications of fans (cf., e.g., Funk, Mahony, Nakazawa, & Hirakawa, 2001). An item list containing a total of 30 items on a 5-point Likert scale, was presented to the participants of the study which ranges from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree', and requests participants to give their relevant response. Adapting the scale to the research context involved in particular the reformulation of items, but also the introduction of new items, which were based on the results of the qualitative sub-study.

In addition to the self-identification of fans and corresponding motive structures, we also captured communicative practices, whereby one aspect of interest was to capture communication behaviour in connection with the compilation of information in the context of spoiler consumption. For this, participants were presented with a total of eight items on a five-point Likert scale [1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree] and asked to respond

[example item: I speculate about mysteries and future episodes; I analyse specific images or sounds of future episodes e.g.]. The corresponding item formulations are based on the study on spoiler behaviour of *Lost* fans carried out by Mittell und Gray (2007). Prior to the actual field study, a pre-test was conducted to obtain feedback on the clarity and appropriateness of the questionnaire. Based on this test, some questions were modified to ensure that respondents could fully understand and choose an appropriate answer.

4.3.2   Survey and sample description

The survey was carried out from March to April 2016. The questionnaire was distributed via a questionnaire online tool [UniPark], different fan sites, Facebook groups etc. were contacted and asked to participate. The survey included a total of 1241 respondents; however, the dropout rate, a considerable problem in online surveys including in the present project context, was very high, leading to fully completed datasets of a total of 371 participants. The survey included 312 men (84.1%) and 59 women (15.9%). The age range was 12-68 years. With regard to spoiler behaviour, a large majority of fans surveyed regularly reads or actively consumes spoilers. Almost 75% of participants indicated that they do this on a regular basis, while accordingly, 25% of respondents take a more critical view of spoilers and their consumption. In terms of gender, there are hardly any differences between men and women, whereby 75% of male and 78% of female respondents stated that they consume spoilers regularly.

4.3.3   Modelling: Dimensions of being a fan

The data collected from the survey on self-perception and motivation in connection with the object of fandom were evaluated with explorative and confirmatory factor analyses. Explorative factor analyses were carried out at the beginning of the analysis process in order to search the data set for an unknown correlative structure. Following this, confirmatory factor analysis served as a statistical verification and a comparison of a theoretical factor structure with the empirical material. Here, both the number of factors as well as the classification of items to latent factors by a priori restrictions were modelled (cf. Geiser, 2010: 65ff.). Different models as well as the corresponding fit indexes were calculated.[9] The calculated models are presented in **Table 1** and are arranged in a model comparison.

Due to theoretical and empirical assumptions, in particular in regard to the study carried out by Al-Thibiti (2004), we began with an initial structure comprising 6 factors, whereby all items were considered in the relevant model (Model 1). Corresponding item formulations were reformulated in the context of the changed target group – i.e. film franchise fans. The content-related characterization of factor terms included aspects of visual and aesthetic quality, a factor of escape and privacy opportunity, a factor of avoidance of boredom, a social factor, an entertainment factor and a factor of atmosphere and entertainment (Model 1). However, this model calculation showed that the model fit

Table 1: Model results of the confirmatory factor analysis (Being a fan) (Models and fit values)

|	Model 1 (FMS)	Model 2 (SW-FMS)
N	371	371
Variable/Items	25	18
factors	6 factors	5 factors
	Quality	Quality
	Escape	Escape
	Boredom avoidance	Boredom avoidance
	Social	Social
	Entertain	Entertain
	Atmosphere	
Chi-Quadrat (df)	665.181 (198)	357.137 (125)
Chi-Quadrat/df	3,67	2,9
CFI	.778	.919
TLI	.740	.901
SRMR	.080	.050
RMSEA	.083	.071

Source: Author's own figure

failed to reach the threshold discussed in the literature (see **Table 1**). Accordingly, the number of items was reduced, the factor Atmosphere, which was also under-represented in the initial model with two items, was completely removed from the model.[10] By reducing the respective items and excluding the factor Atmosphere, an acceptable model fit was achieved for a model comprising a total of five factors of Star Wars-Fan-Motivation Scale (SWFMS) (see **Table 1**).[11]

4.3.4 *Being a fan and Spoilers*

In a second step, the data were examined with regard to relevant relationship structures between fan motivation on the one hand, the search for information, the fans' self-conception and spoiler consumption behaviour. Based on the qualitative findings of the first sub-study, the interviews with fans repeatedly showed a relationship between self-conception, a respective self-categorization and spoiler behaviour and attitudes. A structural equation model was calculated in order to identify the relevant relationships (Geiser 2010: 41; Urban & Mayerl 2014: 15). A model was formulated to evaluate the above-described hypotheses. Here, direct as well as indirect effects were specified and estimated, whereby the former are presented in **Figure 2**: on the one hand, relationships between the different facets of SW-FMS factors in the context of search for information as well as fans' self-conception and the corresponding spoiler consumption are described. The present data set

forms the basis of these calculations with n=371 complete cases.[12] **Figure 2** shows the standardized estimates of the path coefficients.

Figure 2: Structural equation model: Being a fan and spoilers
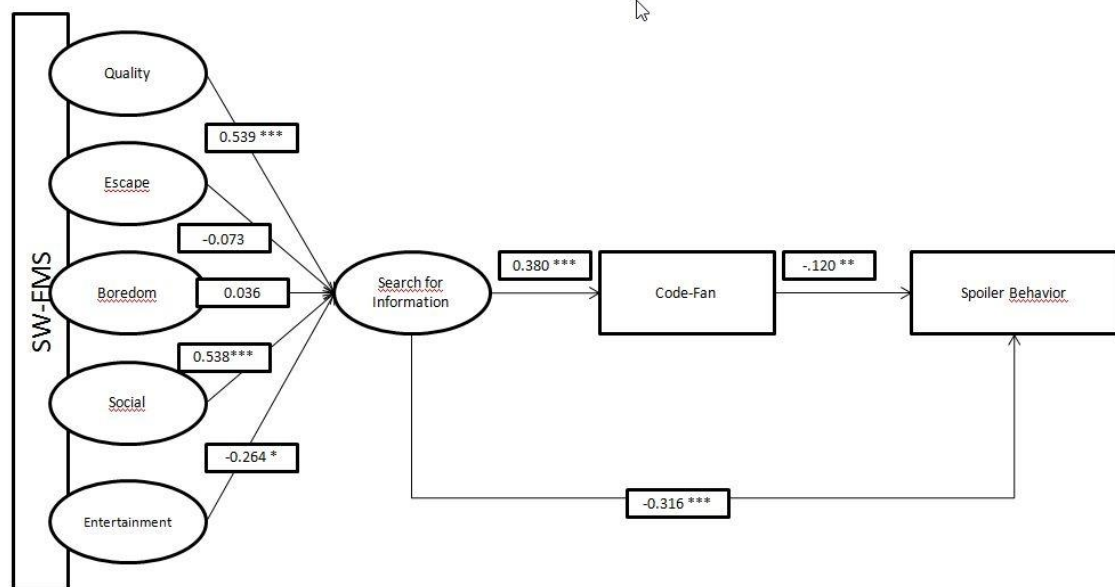
Source: Author's own figure; Ind. Effects: sign. total ind.: Quality to Spoiler (-.146**); Social to Spoiler (-.145*)

The constructs relevant to the study are contained in the structural model. It was expected on the basis of the theoretical assumptions and findings from the qualitative sub-study that these constructs might yield insights to explain spoiler consumption. All relevant significant and non-significant regression paths are presented, with the exception of indirect effects. This showed relationships between individual factors of the SW-FMS and the latent construct Search for information on the one hand, whereby in particular facets of quality, social aspects such as entertainment are significantly associated (Quality: .539; Social: .538; Entert: -.264). Mediated by these, relationships on the characterization of one's own fan status were analysed, whereby a similarly significant relationship (.308) was observed between search for information and thus also with studying the relevant material and background information. The relationship with spoiler consumption was also significant with a value of -.120, whereby a lower value for the spoiler variable must be interpreted as assent due to the way the item was formulated ['I read and search for Spoilers'; (1 = Strongly Agree, 5 = Strongly Disagree)], and thus a correspondingly high value for self-conception as a fan, such as a hardcore fan, went hand-in-hand with an agreeing attitude. A significant effect was also observed between search for information and spoiler consumption (-.316), whereby a pronounced search for information was associated with agreement with spoiler consumption behaviour.

4.3.5   Interim conclusion (2) – Spoilers and spoiler consumption

In the statistical analysis, we were able to observe a corresponding differentiation in different dimensions in the relationship with the motivation as a *Star Wars* film franchise fans, as well as we were able to describe relevant relationships with spoiler behaviour. In the sub-study, it was also shown that on the one hand, fan motivation for *Star Wars* fans, similar to sports fans, can be differentiated in terms of dimensions, which comprises different dimensions in the context of the fan relationship (Quality, Escape, Boredom, Social und Entertainment). By means of multivariate methods, relationships between these dimensions, the associated search for information, self-conception as a fan and the corresponding spoiler consumption were also described. Here, social aspects as well as qualitative features of the narrative also proved to be relevant. Furthermore, it was shown that the relationship observed in the qualitative sub-study between self-conception as a fan and the corresponding spoiler consumption, if not particularly pronounced but still significant, was also identified here. Of relevance here is the type of such a relationship with the object of fandom, a relationship that is not only linked directly to the self-conception of fans for 'hardcore fans', whereby also among other things, possible disappointments may go hand-in-hand with a potential threat to social reputation, and would thus mean a threat to social identity.

5.   Conclusion: Fans and Spoilers

The purpose of this research was to develop a valid and reliable measurement tool for motivation of *Star Wars* fans a*nd to describe the relationship between fan motivation and spoiler avoiders or spoiler consumers*. The qualitative sub-study resulted not only in differences in the relation to spoiler consumption or avoidance, but also that such behaviour can be interpreted in the context of the corresponding self-conception as a fan. Fans who stated that they regularly read spoilers describe themselves as 'hardcore fans', are involved in fandom in a range of contexts, and concerned with the relevant material. This is in contrast to fans who viewed themselves as 'generalists' in terms of their self-conception, who participate in the *Star Wars* universe without in-depth involvement in individual activities. Spoilers and their consumption were viewed critically, even rejected, by this group.

The findings from the first part of this investigation were substantiated in a second study, the appropriate instruments were further developed and relationship structures were statistically evaluated. With regard to the fan-status, different dimensions were identified, but beyond this, relationships between aspects of fan motivation, the search for information, the self-conception as a fan and the corresponding spoiler behaviour were also found. Some of the findings obtained from the qualitative sub-study were also observed here, whereby in particular the self-conception as a fan as well as individual aspects of this self-identification are linked to spoiler behaviour. The mixed method approach of the investigation enabled a comprehensive, perspective-enhanced insight into the practices of

film franchise fans, as we were able to show not only a statistical relationship between fans' self-conception, but the study, in particular the qualitative material, supplied different approaches in terms of justifications, explanations and an understanding of the associated practices of *Star Wars* fans. With regard to existing research on fans and spoilers, there are also interesting connection points and extensions. The study investigated in particular the identity-related attitudes and opinions vis-à-vis spoilers that are associated with the fan status and relevant activities. It was shown that not only the descriptions and characterizations of their own fan status and thus also the identification and partial identity as a fan differ, but that there are also corresponding relationships to spoiler behaviour. One of the reasons given for this differentiation is that seemingly, the form of this relationship and the corresponding self-conception as a fan, and thus also the relevance and identification with this narrative universe and the way in which spaces of opportunity are shaped, may play a role. Fans may view spoilers and their consumption as a way in which they immunize themselves against potential disappointments, which may affect their social reputation and partial identity as a fan (cf. Hills 2012). As such, they can relieve emotional stress in a relationship constellation with their object of fandom, which is of considerable importance to their own self-conception. The gradual disclosure of the unknown filmic narrative, such as with the consumption of spoilers – on the plot or central characters – unfolds step-by-step and thus involves a practice of gradual appropriation and adaptation. Here, the focus is not so much on plot-related twists of the narrative when it comes to consuming spoilers, but rather on the associated individual importance of this partial narrative for being a fan. The empirical investigations realized here focused less on affective and cognition-related attitudes about spoilers, but rather on aspects and features that are relevant in terms of the self-conception as a fan and the relevance of the fan object in their self-conception and their interaction practices, which act as explanations for or against spoiler consumption. In contrast to experimental studies, such as those by Johnson und Rosenbaum (2015), the present study was primarily concerned with narratively justified self-interpretation of fans in connection with spoiler practices. On the basis of the mixed method approach of the study, results and relationships of the qualitative study were further investigated in a quantitative study. This led to quantifiable results and statistically sound characterizations of spoiler practices. However, the study results cannot be generalized, as they are based on the analysis of a single fan object and the corresponding relationship structure of fans to this fan object. Nevertheless, the empirical material does offer connection opportunities and opens perspectives for further empirical research studies, as the investigation showed that in the research of fans and their spoiler practices, the way in which fans understand themselves in particular, and which identity-related meaning the object of their fan fervour has for them, are of relevance. Spoilers, and how fans interpret and deal with them, are a partial aspect of a complex relationship structure that should be further investigated.

Irrespective of the results obtained in this study, there is a manifold and controversial discussion surrounding spoilers, in particular among film franchise fans. In this

context, they can be considered as a part of an 'operational aesthetics', described by Mittell following Neil Harris. They can represent a part of firmly anchored practices for fans, whereby 'the pleasure was less about "what will happen?" and more concerning "how did he do that?"' (Mittell 2015: 42). The study shows that spoiler consumption is not only associated with negative features, and that reading spoilers does not necessarily reduces the pleasure of the movie being spoiled. Rather, their function is to offer a focus to fans for speculation and to enable the formulation of subjective theories and expectations in discussion forums, Facebook groups etc. In certain fan groups, they represent a part of their subjective as well as collective self-conception. They contribute towards putting together the overall picture of a narrative, whereby aspects of the how of the visual and acoustic production (must) remain unanswered and can still hold an element of surprise' (cf. Gray 2010: 153).

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Notes:

[1] http://www.sueddeutsche.de/medien/kolumne-schoen-doof-achtung-spoiler-1.2588275; (05.05.2016).

[2] All interviews conducted were completely anonymized and consent to publish the data was obtained.

[3] The interview sample comprised five interviews with children aged seven to 13 years, and 20 interviews with adult *Star Wars* films aged 18 to 46 years.

[4] Open coding as a first step enables a systematic 'breaking open' of the data material, and allows for the creation of categories and sub-categories (Corbin/Strauss 1996: 44). Axial coding follows on from this. Here, structures and relationships between individual categories can be identified and described (cf. ibid, 75ff.). Beginning with a social phenomenon, its conditions, interpretations, individual behavioural strategies as well as the consequences are carved out and sub-categories are developed. As selective procedure follows from this step, with which the key categories developed can be continuously examined and (one or more) core categories can be carved out.

[5] The work with children and adolescents in particular is challenging in the research process and the handling of relevant data. All contact to children and adolescents was made via their guardians; they were also informed about the project and the interview process as well as the voluntary nature of participation in a brief preliminary talk. Here, they were informed that the children could not only end the interview at any time, but that the direction of the interview was largely 'steered' by the children, who were able to speak freely about Star Wars and their fandom as well as about other topics. For all interviews and the handling of the empirical material, the strict legal and research-ethical regulations that exist in Germany applied.

[6] For an expanded observation and further examples of the interview material, cf. Völcker 2016.

[7] As the interviews were conducted during the production process of the seventh film episode ["The Force Awakens" (2015), Director: J.J. Abrams], the statements of the interviewed fans referred to this film.

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[8] One of the most important *Star Wars* Fan-Websites in Germany.

[9] As is customary, a total of five fit measures were taken into account. These included the chi-square value in proportion to the degrees of freedom. This value can be considered as good if the calculated proportion is chi-square/df<2.5, a value that is very rarely achieved in practice however (cf. Geiser, 2010, p. 60). For this reason, additional evaluation measures, which are more independent of the sample size, were used, such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) (cf. Bentler, 1990), the Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual Coefficient (SRMR) as well as the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Cut-off values are the thresholds discussed comprehensively in the research literature (cf. Hu & Bentler, 1999). As multivariate analyses rely on complete data sets, missing values were imputed. In the present study, this affected in particular missing responses to single items. Respondents with more than 30% missing values were removed. The models were calculated in 1000 iterations on the basis of a maximum likelihood estimation procedure. The correlations between the factors were released and determined in an oblique rotation procedure. This is based on the theoretical and empirical assumption of factor independence, particularly as these were dimensions of relevance and motive structures of fan motivation (cf. Backhaus, Erichson, Plinke & Weiber, 2008, S. 372).

[10] Such a step was already considered by Al-Thibiti (2004: 43), as the relevant factor was also represented by only two items in this study. Further interim models were calculated between Models 1 and 2. Again, for reasons of clarity, they are not presented here. Items with low loading strength were removed from the model calculation.

[11] The internal consistency estimates showed an alpha level of .874 for the overall SW-Fan Motivation Scale (SW-FMS). The alpha level for the subscales were .634 for quality, .882 for escape, .779 for boredom avoidance, .763 for social, and .777 for entertainment. The scale to capture information search behaviour with originally 8 items was reduced to 6 items, the internal consistency of .824 can be considered good.

[12] The estimated model must be interpreted with caution, in particular because only marginal fit values were achieved. As such, the values of CFI=0.903 and TLI=.899 are (just) in an acceptable area. This similarly applies to RMSEA=0.054 and SRMR=0.049.