
Galaxy-Wide Writing Strategies Used by Official Star Wars Bloggers

ARIELLE FELDMAN

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Introduction

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, a movie came out that changed cinema forever. While it actually wasn't all too long ago (May 25, 1977, to be exact) and the galaxy far, far away was our own Milky Way, the film amazed audiences as if it were otherworldly. This fan base that has stood the test of time is a discourse community, since it is a "group of people who link up in order to pursue objectives" (Swales 220). What began as a cult-like following grew to become a worldwide network of loyal fans. The objective of this community is to show appreciation for the variety of movies, toys, books, TV shows, video games, and more that have been released under the *Star Wars* brand.

As a discourse community, this ever-expanding group of sci-fi devotees achieves their objective by using several "mechanisms of intercommunication." These mechanisms are necessary in order to exchange information between members, and hence keep the community alive (Swales 221). Many communities choose "blogs" as one of their primary means of circulating material. Blogs, which are regularly updated websites that focus on one or several topics, serve as useful discourse tools. In fact, the act of "blogging" is seen as so valuable that Lucasfilm, the company who owns the movie franchise, runs an official blog where writers produce *Star Wars*-related content. The corresponding discourse these writers supply is the focus of this paper.

The bloggers of *StarWars.com* act as certified creators of *Star Wars* online material and inherently have to appease thousands of readers. They are usually the first to distribute important community news, such as actor announcements for new movies or dates of conventions. Therefore, the articles must be presented in a way that is easily digestible to fans. In order to achieve this goal, the writers employ tools that enhance the effectiveness of their articles, which are usually spread across external social media. These tools are intertextuality, organization, and nostalgia. Article effectiveness can be deduced from the number of shares accumulated by each, which is presented beneath every post in a Facebook share button.

Methods

To observe how the *StarWars.com* blog creates content for their discourse community, I took into consideration the last thirty articles that were posted as of March 23, 2017. This gave me an adequate sample size to observe and record my findings. Using all of the information that was provided publicly for me, I documented each article's title, number of Facebook shares, category,

date published, tags, author(s), and number of comments. My research uncovered strategies the bloggers utilize to achieve maximum post success.

Results

Writing Strategy #1: Intertextuality

Intertext can best be summarized as “the bits and pieces of Text which writers or speakers borrow and sew together to create new discourse” (Porter 397). At the beginning of this essay, an example of *Star Wars* intertext was used: “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.” This displays intertextuality because it is such a recognizable saying to *Star Wars* fans. So, by including the phrase, I set the tone for the rest of my paper to be about the films. The importance of bloggers borrowing *Star Wars* phrases for their articles is more than just for brand recognition (although that, too, is a benefit of their application). The use of technical jargon is crucial to a discourse community’s identity. By possessing a lexis, or a “shared and specialized terminology,” the group can establish itself and create connectivity amongst its members (Swales 222).

While fan devotion may vary in the community, some being die-hards while others casual viewers, knowledge of familiar terms from *Star Wars* is usually consistent across the board. It is the responsibility of the blogger to use the community lexis to their advantage when attempting to attract members to their posts. Generating blog traffic greatly benefits Lucasfilm because the bloggers typically use their posts to subliminally advertise *Star Wars* products. Intertextuality is thus one of the many driving forces that yields views and makes the blog posts profitable. However, the value of intertextuality goes beyond just being a marketing ploy.

For example, in the blog column “From a Certain Point of View,” two *StarWars.com* writers debate on a topic, which can range from who the best droid¹ is to which *Star Wars* video game is the most underrated. The title serves as intertext itself, since it is an exact line taken from *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*. There is a scene in the movie where the story’s protagonist, Luke Skywalker, demands an explanation from the ghost of his deceased Jedi² mentor, Obi-Wan Kenobi. The dialogue between the two is included below:

Luke: Ben! Why didn’t you tell me? You told me that Darth Vader betrayed and murdered my father.

Obi-Wan: Your father was seduced by the Dark Side of the Force. He ceased to be the Jedi Anakin Skywalker and became Darth Vader. When that happened, the good man who was your father was destroyed. So, what I told you was true, *from a certain point of view*.

The bloggers’ reference to Obi-Wan looking at the fate of Luke’s father “from a certain point of view” not only connects back to *Star Wars*, but also describes what the format of the column is: two bloggers giving their “point of view” on a concept. The ability of writers “to borrow traces effectively and to find appropriate contexts for them” is what keeps the posts relevant to the community and qualifies the writers as fans themselves (Porter 399). This segues into the second benefit of intertextuality, which is how it can create an emotional connection between bloggers and their audience. Readers enjoy the playful *Star Wars* references because it shows how the bloggers are true fans. This creates a shared experience between readers and writers; the commonality of knowing *Star Wars* intertext forms a bond between the two parties and encourages appreciation of the bloggers’ discourse.

¹ A droid is a robot that possesses artificial intelligence.

² A Jedi is a member of a group of wizard-like warriors who guard peace in the galaxy and can harness the power of “the Force.”

Writing Strategy #2: Organization

While intertext helps the bloggers attract the *Star Wars* fan demographic, varying organizational patterns make their posts more appropriate for social media. This is important since blogs and social media have become intertwined. Articles posted on *StarWars.com* are instantly shared on the official *Star Wars* social media account. Social media is also where blog posts get the most exposure. As of December 2016, 1.2 billion people use Facebook daily, which is much more traction than the comparatively niche *StarWars.com* gets (Facebook Newsroom). There are many different organizational formats that the *StarWars.com* writers put to use in their articles, but almost one-third of the thirty I studied presented their information in a list.

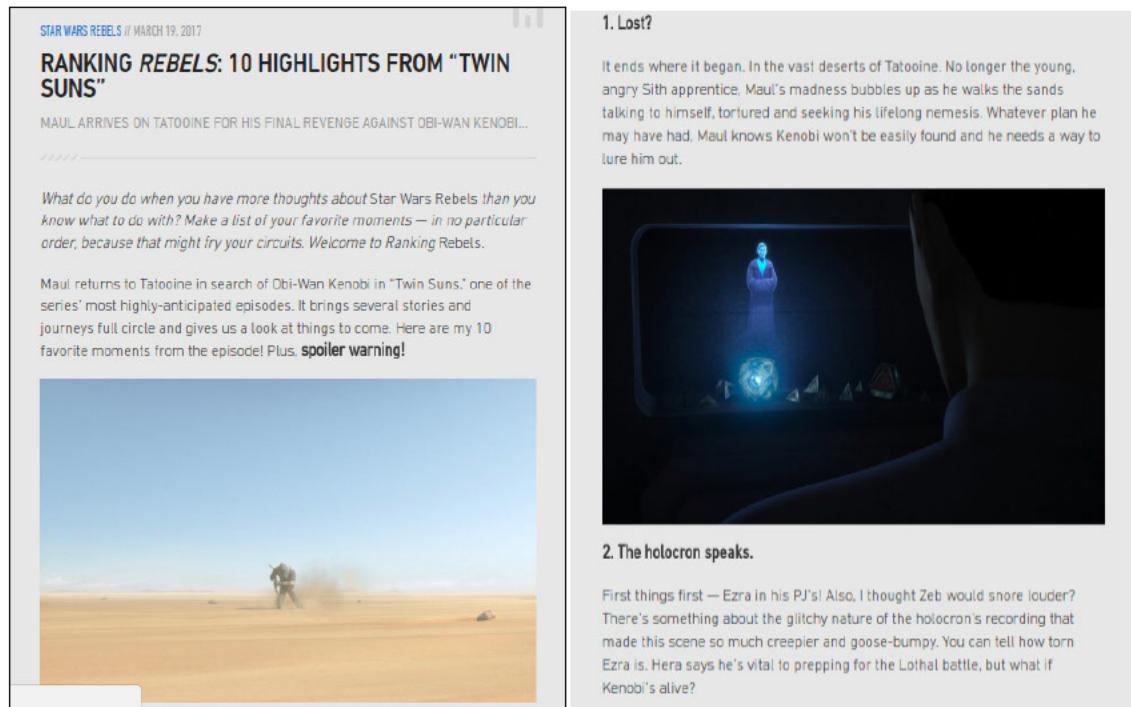


Figure 1: Excerpts from the blog post “Ranking Rebels: 10 Highlights from ‘Twin Suns’”

“Ranking Rebels” is another column on *StarWars.com*. New articles for “Ranking Rebels” come out after each episode of the TV show *Star Wars Rebels*. The author, who goes by the nickname “Geek Girl Diva,” uses the column to give her thoughts on the show in a numbered list. Each number dictates a “highlight,” or a favorite moment of the episode (see Figure 1). Adopting these categories gives Geek Girl Diva the leeway to delve deeply into topics while keeping her commentary condensed and structured.

Articles that list out topics to be covered perform well on blogs and social media platforms. In a study done by Fractl, a content marketing agency, it was discovered that lists “have the most reliable social traction, averaging around 21,000 shares per month with a variance of less than 2.5%” (Lehr). The results show how lists are an efficient way to present content, especially when covering a widely beloved topic like *Star Wars*.

Writing Strategy #3: Nostalgia

Despite the effectiveness of intertext and lists, neither of those attributes holds a candle to nostalgia. The “nostalgia effect,” as I like to call it, is when *StarWars.com* bloggers choose to create material that evokes positive memories of the past for fans. Even the screenwriters of the new *Star Wars* films implement this tactic. *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens*, for example,

incorporated nostalgia by having the original *Star Wars* cast reprise their iconic roles while also making several references to older movies in the script. The bloggers make sure they're doing the same by focusing on subjects that are more likely to resonate with long-term *Star Wars* fans.

The top three most shared *StarWars.com* posts from my sample met the "nostalgia requirement." With over 5,700 shares, the third most popular post is a "From a Certain Point of View" article discussing which of the *Star Wars* video games is the most underrated. One blogger's pick is a game that came out in the late 90s, while the other's choice was released in 2005. Cassidee Moser, the first author who praises an old school 90s Nintendo game, even says so herself that she enjoys how the game is "a buffet of *Star Wars* moments sewn together with threads of familiar elements pulled from the original trilogy" (Moser). Fans are notorious for preferring the original trilogy, the three initial movies that came out between 1977 and 1983, over the more recent installments from the late 2000s and today. *StarWars.com* recently ran a poll that proves the aforementioned. When readers were prompted to pick their favorite *Star Wars* film, 69% of responders chose an original trilogy film (*A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, or *Return of the Jedi*) over a prequel³ film (*The Phantom Menace*, *Attack of the Clones*, or *Revenge of the Sith*).

The second most shared article, "5 Things You Might Not Know About Lightsabers," is also in list format. While the article focuses more on recent *Star Wars* installments, its topic is still relevant to the demographic whose first experience with lightsabers⁴ was from the original *Star Wars* movies. It holds the interest of *Star Wars* fans new and old, presenting new canon information about the famous movie weapon.

Lastly, there is the most popular article with 16,000 shares, which is a huge jump from the previous article that topped out at 9,000 shares. The article is an interview with a comic book writer who is working on a series about Darth Vader, the *Star Wars* antagonist who is arguably the most renowned character in the franchise. The whole premise of the comic series is teeming with nostalgia. Dan Brooks, senior editor of *StarWars.com*, states in the introduction that the story "promises to shed light on some of [Darth] Vader's early acts and forays into the dark side, including how he built his red-bladed lightsaber, hunting down surviving Jedi, and more." The series would therefore answer questions hardcore *Star Wars* fans may have about the infamous villain the movies revolve around. As a longstanding fan of the films, this article grabbed my attention the most. Darth Vader is the face of *Star Wars*, so what better way to attract members and promote discourse amongst fans than to create an entire series about his untold history? The bloggers then wrote an article about this work in progress and turned it into entertaining publicity.

Nostalgia is channeled through the use of intertext, while organizational structures provide ways to properly present the information online.

Conclusion

Contributing to a discourse community is all about achieving common goals through member connectivity (Swales 220). By using the *Star Wars* lexis, following organizational techniques that fare well on the Internet, and promoting the feeling of nostalgia, bloggers have developed a system for creating valuable discourse that *Star Wars* fans share and respond to. These writing strategies build off of one another. Nostalgia is channeled through the use of intertext, while

³ The prequel films take place in a time period before that of the original films story-wise, despite being released several years after the original 70s and 80s movies.

⁴ Lightsabers are laser-swords used by Jedi that were introduced in the very first film.

organizational structures provide ways to properly present the information online. Using these strategies fosters connections between bloggers and readers and expands the community by attracting more *Star Wars* fans to the blog. If Obi-Wan Kenobi was a writer, he might have said that discourse “surrounds us, penetrates us, and binds the galaxy together,” since it is a great “Force” that unites *Star Wars* fans all over the world (Lucas).

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Arielle Feldman

Arielle Feldman is a sophomore at the University of Central Florida. She is a prospective Advertising/Public Relations major who has experience in video production, social media management, and creative writing. When she’s not studying hard for her classes, Arielle is visiting local tea shops and revising the rough draft of her screenplay. Her dream job would be to work on a *Star Wars* movie set, even if she’s just scrubbing the floors of the Millennium Falcon. She hopes to learn the ways of the Force by the time she graduates.