
Buffy, Angel, and the Creation of Virtual Communities

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The Internet has provided a powerful medium for the creation of virtual communities. In the case of Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel: the Series, the community is comprised of fans whose commonality is their love of the universe created by the producers, writers, cast and crew of these two television series. This paper will explore the current status of the major ongoing communities of Buffy and Angel fans, and the support that binds them into a "real" virtual community.

"The Internet, you know . . . The bitch goddess that I love and worship and hate. You know, we found out we have a fan base on the Internet. They came together as a family on the Internet, a huge, goddamn deal. It's so important to everything the show has been and everything the show has done—I can't say enough about it."
(<http://filmforce.ign.com/articles/425/425492p10.html>: IGGN.)

This is the first of a projected series of short sociological studies dealing with the general subject of the Buffyverse fandom. Subsequent project topics include (1) canonical and non-canonical love in the Buffyverse (Bangels, Spuffies, Spangels, etc.), (2) fanfiction (writers and readers), (3) unpopular canonical decisions, (4) a review of the relevant literature on fandom, (5) the delineation of character loyalty, (6) the fancon, (7) the Buffyverse as entrepreneur, and (8) predictions about the Buffista and Angelista fandom over the next five years.

The general goal of the long-term project is to expand our learning, our understanding, and our explanations for fan behavior, oftentimes called fan love. Our study throughout the entire project will be limited to the fans known as Buffistas and Angelites. Both series were created by Joss Whedon, who is associated with the production company, Mutant Enemy.

This paper places special focus on the virtcom (a “virtual community” or, as its also called, a “fan board”) and the ways in which the virtcom maintains loyalty to the show, the characters, and, in some cases, extends beyond the boundaries of fandom into the creation of an actual community without borders—a virtual community (or “virtcom” as it’s referred to here). The Internet helps feed the multi-million dollar business enterprise that is *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel: the Series*. The hypothesis of this paper is that the virtcom can literally become a virtual community, by means of which Buffistas (and Angelites) can regularly interact.

☉ Reality and Television

Sociologists study “the things” which are produced by—and in turn produce—social life. Sociologists view “these things” with the assumption that people create, identify, use, and repeatedly use “those things” until they have created a pattern that creates our reality. Reality, then, is socially constructed, made up of “the things” we do repeatedly enough to create that pattern we call “reality.” (Hence, those phenomena we encounter rarely are often referred to as “unreal,” “surreal”—i.e., not “real” enough.)

The social phenomena that make up the reality of everyday life in the United States includes the popular culture medium of television. Television creates a significant impact on our society and our concept of reality. The average American spends four hours every day, almost 1,500 hours every year, 25% of her/his waking time, watching television. This is a significant amount of time. So much, that one might expect more research and studies on television’s impact in our lives. Indeed, it’s surprising how few sociological studies have been done on the subjects of popular culture and mass media, in comparison to its import in everyday life, and how relatively insignificant (in academia and in the larger society) is the regard of popular culture studies. Surprising too, how few studies have been done on the people who consume popular culture and mass media—the fans.

The current data on television viewing indicate that the average American television viewer is watching 6 hours of television every day. For viewers who are intensely interested in a particular kind of television program, (Let’s say sports or horror or fantasy shows) that 6 hours a day can serve as a mechanism for transporting the viewer to a reality where the television programs watched—their characters, actors, writers, directors, story arcs, etc., assume a priority in their lives.

In fact, the act of watching the show becomes an important focus on their Real Lives. Lives come to revolve around watching the show, talking about the show with others who watch, discussing the scripts and dialogues, learning the names of actors, writers, and directors of the show. It becomes important to not miss an episode of that show. Fans want to see the show “fresh,” not taped, (although many will tape the show for later rewatching.) because the subject of the show—and the loyalty to the show—are strong in their lives.

It’s literally possible to spend way (a Buffyism, meaning “very”) more than four hours a day living in the television show’s “universe,” i.e., a world created by producers and writers, buttressed by make-up artists and special effects artists, actors, musicians, etc. Genre fans’ lives, therefore, become what they visualize—peopled by characters reminiscent of those in the TV-verse, with pop cultural references, a vocabulary and language gleaned from episodic dialogue. Thus, can a fan move their *weltanschauung* from the world familiar to non-genre universe viewers to the world of what exists on television. Talking with other TVverse fans is *of the good, insane troll logic* need not apply. (“Of the good,” and “insane troll logic” are also Buffyisms.)

☉ *Buffy the Vampire Slayer + Angel* the Series = *The Buffyverse* (or the *Jossverse*)

One of the most prominent “universes” in popular television is that of “the Buffyverse,” (Both *BtVS* and *AtS* share the television universe created by Joss Whedon.) a universe created by Joss Whedon, writer and creator of three remarkable television series: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel: the Series*, and *Firefly*. (When referring to ALL of the series’ created and penned by Mr. Whedon, fans use the term, “Jossverse.”) The former series, *BtVS* and *AtS*, have received cult status since their premieres on March 10, 1997, and October 5, 1999, respectively. Its fans watched each program, digested dialogue, and then popped onto the Net immediately after each episode to discuss, digest, and deconstruct each episode. Even now, with *BtVS*’s run of new episodes finished, and *AtS* about to end its run of new episodes, many *BtVS* and *AtS* Website boards include threads (discussions specifically limited to one topic) for a particular season or show. Buffistas and Angelistas can quote dialogue from entire episodes; weave “Buffyisms” and “Angelisms” into

their everyday language; compare Real Life situations to those in the episodes, and compare folks they know in Real Life with characters on the shows.

Although the long-running *BtVS* series ended in May 2003, and *AtS* is, sadly, scheduled to end its run in May 2004, syndication assures that new generations of Buffistas and Angelistas will generate indefinitely. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel: the Series* are a global phenomenon, with an extensive international fandom in Canada, the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and many countries in South America, as well.

In fact, in the United States, *BtVS* plays in syndication 4 hours every day and one hour each day on weekends. *AtS* plays one hour in syndication daily, one hour each day on weekends, and two hours every Tuesday—and there are still six new episodes to be broadcast in the next few weeks. Result? Buffistas and Angelistas can watch their hero and heroine, their friends, their lovers, and their epic stories, for a total of twenty-two hours a week. Many fans own every season of *BtVS* and *AtS* available on DVD (eight seasons, to date), and not only watch the DVD's in their spare time, but still watch the shows televised in syndication.

Of course, there are also books, fanfiction available on the Internet, board discussions, *BtVS* soundtrack music available on two separately-issued CDs to play in one's car or at home, collectible major character dolls, two RPG's (Role-Playing Games), video games, comic books, graphic novels, collectible cards and plates, souvenir items, T-shirts, key chains, bumper stickers, and all sorts of other goods and wares, regularly-scheduled Fan Conventions (called "fancons") and a regularly issued *Angel* magazine and a *Buffy* magazine. There are also two streaming" radio (Internet radio) radio programs, each dedicated to discussions and the music played on Buffy and Angel. Their titles: *The Succubus Club* and *Radio Buffy*.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer and *Angel: the Series* are a multi-billion dollar business, and its fans not only watch the show, they also purchase the goodies. In other words: they *watch*, they *read*, they *listen*—they are surrounded by, and live in, a universe which, at the same time that it is enriching its makers, is also enriching the lives of the millions of fans who populate it. It's a mutually reinforcing circle of life. And this does not include the profound place of *BtVS* and *AtS* on the Internet. Indeed, it might be said that, without the Internet, specifically the virtual community, the Buffyverse might never have spread so wide, so far, so deeply into the realm of the cult TV show, and American industry. (It's called show **business**, but that's another study.)

And all of this? Doesn't include the latest piece of high-tech business and high-tech life: the cyberness of The Internet, which feeds the business of Buffy and Angel memorabilia, DVDs, CDs, graphic novels, novels, and etc.

Enter the Virtual Community

The Buffyverse exists nowhere as profoundly as the Internet. It can be said that the true Buffista and Angelista exists in a Buffyverse made unique and richer by the (sometimes) synergistic energy of fanfic writers (who write without remuneration, and are the subject of a future study) who post their tales on the Internet and Internet fan boards. Provide fans with a means by which they can “check in” daily with other fans, and you have a sub-culture of people (commonly called a “cult fandom”) that metaphorically lives in the Buffyverse.

Loyalty to *Buffy* generally includes its spin-off, *Angel: the Series*. The devotion fans previously accorded only to *BtVS* stretched to include *AtS*, especially so at the beginning of *AtS* Season five, when Buffy's most popular character (excluding Buffy herself), Spike the Vampire (also known as William the Bloody) joined the cast of *Angel*, offering that show a re-charged mission and an increase in viewers, many of whom followed the charismatic character (and the actor who plays him) to *AtS*. Many of the formerly only *BtVS* virtcoms now follow each new episode of *Angel: the Series*, with a formal review and discussion on the boards, much as they did new episodes of *BtVS*.

Enter the Internet, and enter the realm of real social change. Millions of people spend time every day chatting with others through the medium of the Internet. Although the Internet has often been criticized for replacing real-life social interaction, through the modality of the virtual community the Internet has become a means of encouraging and enabling people to cross sometimes vast territorial boundaries to form communities of people who share the same interests, fears, loves, and experiences. Nowhere is this phenomenon of the virtual community manifested more clearly than in the fan virtcoms (“the boards”) supporting genre television. The fan support is complete such that, in the UK such TV shows—and their fans—are referred to as “cult TV.” In the United States, cult status had, prior to *BtVS* and *AtS*, been limited to the *X-Files*, *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* phenomena.

A community is described sociologically as . . . well, it isn't described sociologically. Indeed, there isn't any one single definition of community that is accepted in sociology. Odd, that. Anthropologists use the term community more than sociologists, and often use the term territorially, such

as when studying contemporary societies bound by specific physical boundaries. As used by sociologists today, the term is ambiguously applied, expanded to include both people who live within specific territorial boundaries as well as citizens of an online community. The community beyond borders—the Internet community—is called a virtual community, or “virtcom.” A virtual community is a contemporary, 21st century manifestation of what sociologists used to call a *public*—a group of people united by a common interest/passion, except, in the 21st century they communicate with each other chiefly through the Internet. The last century’s *public* is today’s *virtcom*. There are literally hundreds of thousands of virtcoms on the Internet.

Virtual communities, “can gather strangers from the far reaches of cyberspace and throw them together in the real world.” (Metz, p. 134) And I would add, for long, long, periods of time; long enough to create real and lasting relationships. Relationships in the virtcom reflect relationships in the real world. Polite hellos are quickly replaced by a sharing of opinions, ideas, fears, happiness and secrets. Citizens of virtcoms use personalized avatars (personal icons), emoticons, and animated and static imported images, to overcome the anonymity of invisibility. These enable the citizens of virtcoms to interact at deeper levels at a faster pace than might be appropriate in Real Life.

Board posting does have its problems, since communication is chiefly through a visual vacuum. We can’t see each other. The chief problem is that the written word does not afford us a glimpse of recipients’ body language, facial expression, and general mien. Regionalisms, communicating across national and linguistic boundaries, etc., make virtcom communication a challenge. Emoticons, and other images such as those noted above, and shorthand phrases (Like lol [lots of laughs], ROTFL [rolling on the floor laughing], ITA [I totally agree.], IMHO [In my humble opinion], and IIRC [If I remember correctly]) help, but board conflicts can be common and hard to forget. It’s not unusual, for example, to get caught up in one’s desire to make a point, tell a joke, or add color commentary to a subject under discussion only to find that one has offended at least one person, and perhaps a sizeable number of persons. Then, it’s not unusual for others to jump right in, in full attack mode (called “a flame”), before the original poster has a chance to even respond, clarify, apologize, or delete.

But, back to the main topic: How did the concept of a “virtual” community develop? What are its roots? Writing in 1979, Barry Wellman and Barry

Leighton reconceptualized the model of community away from fixed territorial and physical reference points and toward the concept of community that was bound by the territory of social relationships, social ties and social bonds. (Wellman and Leighton, 1979, pp. 3760–379).

Instead of physical boundaries, they suggested a reformulation of neighborhood and community into the concept that people were not geographically limited in their choices of relationships, and were, indeed free to create their own communities, based on their social relationships and social interests. By so doing, people would be expanding their opportunities to become engaged in a social community unlimited by spatial boundaries.

Three years later Claude Fischer's research on social spaces and social relationships in California supported Wellman and Leighton's suggestion that community was more socially constructed than geographically constructed. People, Fischer said, were more interested in hanging out, spending time, socializing, and just generally interacting with others who shared their socioeconomic status, education, and interests.

Let's stop a moment and recall that, until the development of the railroad and the automobile, most people interacted only with others who lived within a five-mile radius. Autos, trains, telephones, radio, television, and then the wondrous Internet, all stretched our possibilities for meeting, greeting, bonding, and friending. With the Internet, we can literally make friends with people half-a world away, who have interests and passions like our own. Citizens offer each other support. When someone in a citizen's family dies, when someone is about to lose their job, when they have work or school or family or health problems? The citizens of the board are there to offer solace, advice, and support.

☉ *Hypothesis and Method*

The Buffyverse was chosen for four reasons: (1) the deep loyalty Buffy and Angel fans have for the show, its cast and crew of writers; (2) a prior review of the literature on genre fandoms indicated that genre series fans are generally more engaged with their favorite shows than are non-genre fans; (3) the researcher is a Buffista who has some previous knowledge of the Buffyverse fandom; and (4) The *BtVS* and *AtS* fan communities occasionally engage in face-to-face activities designed to afford citizens an opportunity to meet face-to-face (sometimes with citizens of cast and crew) at fancons (fan conventions), social events, and events designed to raise money for charity. These latter

activities grew directly out of large boards such as *City Of Angel* and *the Bronze Beta Board*.

How large and powerful is the Buffyverse virtual community? Well, all of the major characters (and actors) (and some minor recurring characters) have websites dedicated to them. *Many* websites dedicated to them. Many of these Websites (not all) also have boards.

For our purposes, I did not include Websites dedicated to the series' actors. Actors' websites may extend beyond the series to include movie work and theatre work, thus taking the study beyond the confines of the universe of *Buffy* and *Angel*. For our purposes, we're focusing on the *characters* that the actors portray.

There are hundreds of Websites dedicated to the major characters: Angel, Buffy, Cordelia, Spike, and Willow. There are Websites dedicated to the love relationships (called 'ships) of the major characters: Buffy/Angel, Buffy/Spike, Cordelia/Angel, Willow/Tara, for example. There are also Websites dedicated to what are called "unconventional," i.e., non-canonical 'ships, such as Spike/Anya and Spike/Angel. There are Websites dedicated to specific episodes of *BtVS* and *Angel*, such as *Once More with Feeling*, *Chosen*, and *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been*. In addition, there are thousands of sites maintained by fanfic writers who support various 'ships. Each of these sites may/may not have a fan board.

Such is the loyalty toward the 'verse that even *minor* recurring characters may have their own websites. Warren, a character from *BtVS* Season 5, who became a villain in Season 6, has a website dedicated to him which includes fanfiction adventures. The same is true for Gwen Raiden, a *Rogue*-like character who appeared in several episodes of *AtS* Season 4. Finally, a mention should be made of the Website devoted to the Hyperion Hotel, (*Hyperion's Attic*) Team Angel's Art Deco base of operations for *AtS* Seasons Two through Season Four.

With so many possibilities, how did I decide which virtcoms to observe in-depth? Alexa.com, an amazon.com company, and Google.com, periodically post statistics on the 100 most frequently visited sites (called a "traffic post") in the Buffyverse. Their statistics are not useful for this study, since they count "visits," not postings, and since many of the sites listed do not have fan boards.

There was one board I purposely eliminated from inclusion: the Bronze Beta. The Bronze Beta is arguably the most famous cult TV board. Celebrities post there. The producer and the writers of both *BtVS* and *AtS* post there.

Scholars have written articles about the influence of the Bronze board. It seemed “over-exposed,” so I moved over it to boards that seemed less self-conscious, less aware that others were reading their postings.

I used three methods. First, from a listing of the major *Buffy* boards postings according to Alexa.com and Google.com (the major source for statistics on Web traffic), I derived a random list of twenty-five fan boards. From these boards, I derived another twenty fan boards that I obtained from links on the Alexa and Google-derived boards. My next step was to randomly choose four boards for daily observation. (I randomized via the traditional “paper sack” method.) The results? The boards observed were, (in order of choosing) (1) thebigbad.net, (2) soulfulspikesociety, (3) hellmouthcentral.com, and (4) cityofangel.com. One board was a “general” board; two were character (Spike) specific, one was series-specific. Considering the spread, I gained a renewed trust in the “paper sack” method, and a renewed wonder at the mathematics of probability.

The initial population of twenty-five Alexa/Google boards and twenty linked boards were randomly chosen for inclusion in this study based on (1) facility of posting and (2) regularity of posting. Fan boards which had been randomly selected, but had not received regular postings in the first week of June, 2003 were not included in the study.

Regular posting was defined, for purposes of the study, as having at least 5 messages posted for each day in the first week of June 2003. Observation began the following week. I registered and lurked at each site for at least an hour each day, every day, 6 days a week over a five month period, starting with June 8, 2003 through October 31, 2003. While I did occasionally post, the only board at which I posted with any frequency was the S³. (The Soulful Spike Society board is referred to as S³ by its citizens.) In addition to the four in-depth boards, I observed an additional 15 boards, checking in every two days for at least an hour. This was a time-consuming method, but it garnered me an appreciation of the Buffyverse fandom, and the people who love and support the creative staff employed by Joss Whedon and the folks at Mutant Enemy, the producers of BtVS and AtS.

A caveat on SoulfulSpike. I fought myself on including it because I am not only a registered citizen of S³ (as it’s known to its board members), but a frequent poster there.

By the end of August, I was considering eliminating SoulfulSpike from the observation list. In doing research on virtcoms, I had found a home for myself—hence, I felt the need, for purposes of objectivity, to eliminate my

home community from the base of those being observed. Still, that board was growing, dynamic, and very active—easily the most active, per citizen, of any of the observed boards. How could I eliminate the board that was appearing to be the closest to the virtcom ideal? How could I withhold the data, the knowledge, of an active, *real* virtcom in fandom? Because it is the board at which I post most frequently I did want to eliminate it from the study, but the results were such that I **had** to include it. I decided, therefore, to continue to include the board, but to eliminate any mention of specific board conversations and controversies in the written report *for all fanboards*. (Such is the conscience of objectivity. Fan boards are rife with controversy, most of which stem from communication problems noted above.)

Members of virtcoms are often called “citizen” in the literature. We can approximate the level of virtcom involvement per citizen by a simple arithmetical formula. This can be done arithmetically, by dividing the number of posts by the number of citizens (Let P = Posts and C = Citizens, so: $P \div C$). The resulting number will yield the number of posts per citizen ($P \div C = \#$ Posts per Citizen).

The number of posts per citizen is an indication of commitment to the online community. The greater the number of posts per citizen, the more likely the board is to be a virtcom. The fewer the posts, the less involved the person, and the less likely the board is to be a virtcom. The results were somewhat surprising, as we will see.

Private boards, of which there are thousands, were not included in this study. Such boards are small, with size limited by founders. These are the elite boards; free speech is a given. For purposes of this study, small boards would not be germane. Such boards are more properly defined as a clique or circle of friends, rather than a true virtcom. For example, during the observation period, one board had 1 citizen, but logged in 28 visits and not one visitor posted. (Information on this URL is provided in the Appendix).

There are two major weaknesses to the methodology. First, it’s important to remember that although boards are maintained by a half-dozen people (all of whom are volunteers), they may be visited by thousands each week. In the thirty-six hours following a new episode of AtS, thousands of fans may be trolling the boards, reading reviews and looking for an opportunity to chat about the episode which has just been broadcast. Many visitors to a site lurk and read—few post. Where registration is required prior to posting, many don’t bother to register; other may register, post, then

move on to another board, and never post at that board again. Since we are looking at the numbers of *regular* posters, we are interested in the forum as a *community*, not solely a means of information. Second, the number of boards studied is microscopic compared to the number of boards that exist. Undertaking a study of the top 100 boards would have necessitated a cadre of trained observers—which I did not have.

The strength of the methodology is that, by limiting the number of boards studied to four, and by focusing on each board for a minimum of 8 hours a week, I could gain both a better depth of understanding of the concept of a virtual community *and* the depth of involvement in fandom on the part of the citizens of those communities. Of course, it's all about the mission—and the mission—(learning more about fandom) could be kept on track with a smaller, more intense observation, as opposed to a larger, more diffuse observation.

☉ Expectations and Observations

Beginning my observations soon after the finale of *BtVS*, I hypothesized that much of the board communications concerning *Buffy* would be about the finale, *Chosen*. By mid-summer, discussion of *Chosen* had trickled out and speculation concerning *AtS* Season 5 was exploding.

The popular and highly original *AtS* spin-off ended its fourth season at the same time that *BtVS* was ending permanently. There was some question as to whether or not *Angel* would be renewed for a fifth season. Producer Joss Whedon shot a new concept finale, and all parties reached an accord that (1) character Spike would be added to *Angel*'s regular cast (2) *Angel* would return to a MOTW format, thus enabling new viewers to catch onto the premise more easily, (3) the cast location would be removed from a demon detective agency housed in a 50's noir-style hotel to an evil law firm whose Los Angeles branch is housed in a contemporary skyscraper, and (5) two popular female characters were eliminated and replaced by different female characters—played by actresses at least ten years younger.

The WB's demographic research had revealed that Spike was the most popular character in the Buffyverse. It was Spike's fans The WB was hoping to entice as new *AtS* viewers. I was particularly delighted about the choice of two Spike-centric boards, since it was inclusion of the character of Spike that was creating speculation throughout all the boards. As both a fan of *BtVS* and a sociologist, I knew the Spike-change would have an

effect on board posting, or at least, reading the postings about it was bound to be interesting and fun! (“We all need less ritual and more fun!”, Spike, *School Hard*.)

The WB and ME (the production company) hoped these changes would result in higher ratings for the critically-acclaimed spin-off series. The anticipated changes in *AtS* created a buzz in the boards. Each day’s circuit of observation included a growing thread regarding rumors and “spoilers” about the season’s opener and the role that Spike would be playing in the series. Always a controversial presence in the lives of Buffy and the Scoobies in Sunnydale, Spike had appeared on *Angel* several times, each appearance bringing energy, a quality of gleeful mayhem to each of his appearances there. So much so that many long-time *AtS* viewers were concerned that his character would overshadow that of the lead or over existing characters in the series.

In the months since, the presence of Spike has proven to be a catalyst of change for the series. The *Monster of the Week* format has a tag-along, but subtle seasonal arc, replete with red herrings of evil puppets, warlocks, demon clan fights, parasitic worms, Nazis, and cybermen. The new location has allowed the writers to focus on corporate evil and the dangers of succumbing to its temptation. Ratings shot up 36%; several national critics listed it as one of the ten best shows on television, and that the scripts were better than ever; oh, and The WB—*AtS*’ network—cancelled the show, presumably because it’s old.

During the period of observation, the most popular topic on *BtVS* fanboards (commonly called *BuffyBoards*) were:

1. Attempts by *BtVS* viewers to catch up on the storyline for *AtS*.
2. The projected changes in *Angel: the Series*, especially insofar as the addition of a new regular (Spike, a.k.a., William the Bloody).
3. The addition of two new female recurring characters, Harmony (a recurring character on *BtVS* and a guest character in an episode of *AtS*.), and Eve, a liaison to the Senior Partners at Wolfram & Hart.
4. The deletion of two popular female characters, Cordelia Chase and Lilah Morgan.

Many fans claimed they would not return to *AtS* because of the deletion of the characters of Cordelia and Lilah; others claimed they wouldn’t return

to watching *AtS* because of the inclusion of Spike. Still others said that Spike's inclusion on the show would spark their becoming a regular viewer of the show. These events were all discussed, digested, pondered, debated and meditated upon in the active boards.

Following is an abridged list of the major boards observed, including the four that were examined in-depth, in descending order:

Buffista Fanboards (Virtcoms)	
Soulful Spike	106,850 posts/169 citizens = 632 posts each citizen
Hellmouth Central	231,041 posts/677 citizens = 341 posts each citizen
Buffyworld Forum	622,693 posts/2,205 citizens = 282 posts each citizen
Buffymania.net	10,668 posts/41 citizens = 260 posts each citizen
Buffy-vs-Angel	30,258 posts/207 citizens = 146 posts each citizen
Smg.fan	233,097 posts/2,502 citizens = 93 posts each citizen
Totally DB.uk.com	3,936 posts/49 citizens = 80 posts each citizen
Buffy.com.au	114,939 posts/1651 citizens = 70 posts each citizen
Stranger Things	27,778 posts/2,324 citizens = 62 posts each citizen
Charisma Carpenter Forum	37,080 posts/1,035 citizens = 36 posts each citizen
alysonhannigancorner.com	11,579 posts/441 citizens = 26 posts each citizen
marstersmobsters.com	9,985 posts/494 citizens = 20 posts each citizen
sparklies.com	29,508 posts/1,999 citizens = 15 posts each citizen
charismacarpenter.com	19,077 posts/1,433 citizens = 13 posts each citizen
The Big Bad	12,650 posts/1,300 citizens = ~10 posts each citizen
davidboreanaz.com	12,471 posts/3,380 citizens = 3 posts each citizen
CityofAngel.com	129,360 posts/156,000 citizens = 1 post each citizen
	Note: # posts/# citizens = # posts each citizen

Using this measure, the boards that are closest to a virtcom are those that have over 100 posts each citizen. That would include the following boards: Soulful Spike, Hellmouthcentral, Buffyworld Forum, Buffymania.net, and

Buffy-vs-Angel.com. Of those listed, only two—Soulful Spike and Hellmouthcentral, were part of the in-depth study.

Citizens of three of the four boards under observation did **not** post messages that were Off-Topic, i.e., not germane to the Buffyverse. There were also very few Off-Topic conversations during the observation period at the boards I studied less intently. There was one exception: Soulful Spike.

Board members discussed their private lives, their fears, their hopes and dreams for themselves, their families and friends. Virtual prayers were sent for citizens experiencing hard times. Child-rearing tips were exchanged. Citizens were supported, nurtured, and encouraged. Disagreements and controversies were quickly mediated. Respect for each other was treated as importantly as the board's *raison d'être*: an appreciation of the character of Spike and indeed, all the characters of the Buffyverse. Unlike many of the boards I'd observed, disagreements were quickly settled, with all parties moving on to positive interaction quickly.

Mixed in with the personal exchanges were the On-topics specifically related to the two series, their characters, myths, episodes, music, etc. Unlike other boards, the Verse discussions often related to the philosophical, psychological, and even anthropological aspects of the characters and their stories. I had found that rare commodity: a real virtual community! And, oh how rare it is! The conversations were of a type not usually seen in the larger boards, with topics rarely seen in the larger boards. Here was that Eldorado promised in the literature: a true virtual community. Eureka!

☉ Conclusions

Conclusions, while always tentative, indicate that although the virtual community is indeed rare, it does exist. It wasn't what I'd expected, though; in my enthusiasm for online living, I had expected to find that at least half of the four would be virtcoms, and that as many as one-half of the less-intensely-observed forums would also be virtcoms. Clearly, from the table above, this was not the case.

Where information about citizens' gender was available, it seems that most of the Buffyverse citizens (at the boards observed) are females. There are more males registered at AtS boards and Jossverse boards, though females predominate there, too. This is in line with the two series: Buffy is about a young female super-heroine; Angel is about a young (well, young-looking; after all, he is a vampire) male superhero. Angel is aimed at a male

audience, and it delivers male citizens, too, according to the boards' posters.

Many of the women are married, with children; whereas, the many of the males are single. At the major boards, where citizens average 100 postings/more, female citizens are more likely to be older—over 25 years of age, college-educated or with some college background, middle-class, white-collar workers, professionals and semi-professionals.

Many of the men are younger—thirty-five years old or younger. Younger males are likely to be college students. Older males are likely to be college-educated, and, like their female counterparts, middle-class, white-collar, professionals and semi-professionals.

Not surprisingly, many of the citizens are very computer-literate, capable of answering complicated questions to help another citizen with a computer problem. One board (Soulful Spike) includes a large number of lawyers and teachers.

Many citizens are lovers of sci-fi and not only watch sci-fi fantasy programming and movies, but also read sci-fi. Older citizens initiate younger citizens into sci-fi reading, movies, and TV programming. This is one area where you won't find a generation gap; the Buffyverse brings the generations together.

This study had begun as part of a larger endeavor to learn more about cult TV fans and the fandom experience. This I have accomplished, and will continue to accomplish throughout the long-term study, and each project will hopefully add to the knowledge base about the Buffyverse fandom. The next projects will find me working with a former student to design a Website that will make information about, and access to, the next three fandom projects easier : (1) canonical and non-canonical love in the Buffyverse (Bangels, Spuffies, Spangels, etc.), (2) fanfiction (writers and readers), (3) unpopular canonical decisions, (4)) the delineation of character loyalty, (5) the fancon, (6) predictions about the Buffista and Angelista fandom over the next five years, and (7) the Buffyverse as entrepreneur.

☉ Appendix

Following is a listing of major virtual communities in the Buffyverse:

http://www.hellmouthcentral.com	Hellmouth Central
http://www.whedonesque.com	Whedonesque

http://www.protej.com/Buffy/	The Council of Watchers
http://www.buffymania.net	Buffy mania (This is an Italian site.)
http://www.buffyworld.com	Buffy world
http://www.buffy-vs-angel.com/cgi-bin/sunnydale/ikonboard.cgi	Buffy-vs-Angel
http://www.cityofangel.com	City of Angel
http://www.thebigbad.net	The Big Bad
http://www.sparklies.com	Sparklies
http://www.morethanspike.com	More Than Spike
http://scubiefan.proboards18.com/index.cgi	Soulful Spike
http://totallydavidboreanazuk.com	Totally David Boreanaz (This is a UK site.)
http://www.stranger-things.net/forum/guide.php	Cordelia Chase

Following are the sites of websites created to celebrate specific episodes of BtVS/AtS:

http://musical.chosentwo.com/main.html	Once More With Feeling
http://www.aynohyeb.moonlitviolets.com	Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been
http://www.hyperion.moonlitviolets.com	Hyperion Hotel
http://chosen.blueberry-scone.com	Chosen
Eternal Flame (one member, 28 postings.)	

Flash mobs:

http://www.flashmob.com
http://www.flashmob.co.uk

Buffy Radio Stations:

http://www.thesuccubusclub.com	A radio program focused on Buffy and Angel series Unintended consequences/Intended consequences.
http://www.radiobuffy.nu	French Buffy radio program.

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