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"Anne Rice for Kids" and Twilight for TV: Young Adult Media Franchising and the Vampire Diaries

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“ANNE RICE FOR KIDS” AND *TWILIGHT* FOR TV:
YOUNG ADULT MEDIA FRANCHISING AND *THE VAMPIRE DIARIES*

by

Megan Connor

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ABSTRACT

“ANNE RICE FOR KIDS” AND *TWILIGHT* FOR TV: YOUNG ADULT MEDIA FRANCHISING AND *THE VAMPIRE DIARIES*

by

Megan Connor

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015
Under the Supervision of Professor Elana Levine

This thesis examines *The Vampire Diaries* as representative of the contemporary state of feminized media franchises, especially those that address young women. *The Vampire Diaries* exists primarily as a book series and a television series, produced by Alloy Entertainment and The CW Network respectively. Alloy’s production of the franchise, and others like it, connects to the company’s history of feminized media production as a book packager, and is indicative of its current transmedia consumerist model. Further, it underlines the importance of trends and the problematic role of the author in YA literature. The CW’s use of franchises like *The Vampire Diaries* has helped them create a brand as a new network, one that builds on the history of its predecessor, the WB, but adjusted to reach consumers of teen media newly configured as Millennials. By developing digital strategies to reach a feminine, Millennial audience, such as streaming availability, exclusive digital content, and engaging social media, the CW has become an innovator within the contemporary franchise model.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

On February 17, 2012, the three stars of The CW's *The Vampire Diaries* – Nina Dobrev, Ian Somerhalder, and Paul Wesley – were featured on the cover of *Entertainment Weekly*. The leads actually appeared on a trio of covers, each depicting the actors in suggestive, romantic poses, wearing nothing but lingerie and bedsheets. The cover proclaimed “Sexy Cast? Check! Obsessed Audience? Check! Why the Cult Hit is Hotter Than Ever.” The CW's programming had only made the cover of *Entertainment Weekly* three times previously: once for the network's first hit, *Gossip Girl*, and twice for their nostalgia-based programming, *90210* and *Ringer*, with covers featuring Jennie Garth and Shannen Doherty, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s Sarah Michelle Gellar, respectively. *The Vampire Diaries* cover in particular offers much to unpack about how the show is marketed and intended to be read, but this grouping of four covers also reflects the CW's concerted effort to shape itself as a fledgling network not just by developing programming, but by building franchises.

What exactly is a franchise? Derek Johnson's book on the subject paints franchises as “a cultural imaginary” that allows those in the industry, as well as the common layperson, to “make sense of the ongoing production of cultural goods over time and across networks of creative stakeholders.”¹ Indeed, franchises have become such a common part of the contemporary media landscape that the term has entered the general vocabulary rather than remaining specific to the media industries. Average viewers are conversant in the idea of franchises as a catchall term for a wide array of interrelated texts

¹ Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 25.

from prequels to reboots, book adaptations to video game continuations, and any number of related paratexts. The prevalence of franchises in contemporary culture is indisputable: every top-grossing film for the last fifteen years has been a part of a franchise.² Despite their overwhelming popularity and economic success, and in part because of it, franchises are not treated with critical acclaim, falling on the slighted side of cultural hierarchies as commercial products, rather than art.

Amid the superheroes, elves, and pirates, another trend stands out when looking at the top-grossing films of the 21st century. Four of the fifteen are young adult franchises, as *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* both started out as book series labeled YA, or “young adult,” before being adapted to film. Additionally, *The Hunger Games* and its arguable predecessor, *Twilight*, are unique for their popularity built on targeting young women specifically. And, to return full circle, *Twilight*’s success at the box office certainly inspired the CW’s decision to program *The Vampire Diaries*, a television series also featuring a vampire love triangle. While young adult media franchises have come to prominence, they have not necessarily become legitimated because of it. This series of qualifiers for *The Vampire Diaries* within franchise culture – YA, feminine, and TV – serve to create a complex crossroads of denigrated popular culture for the franchise to negotiate. This is certainly evidenced in the tagline used on the *Entertainment Weekly* cover: any success *The Vampire Diaries* finds has been coded as “cult,” as it falls outside mainstream, masculinized culture, which franchises have typically been included in. This thesis asks how *The Vampire Diaries* is able to find success according to franchise logic, despite its perceived low status as feminized media, what its success means for the status

² Tim Dirks, “All-Time Box Office Hits,” *AMC Filmsite*, accessed July 6, 2015, <http://www.filmsite.org/boxoffice2.html>.

and commercial viability of feminized media products, and what this might mean more broadly for franchise culture and the contemporary media industry.

To answer this question, it is helpful to return to the *Entertainment Weekly* cover story. The headline accounts for the franchise's success by its "obsessed audience" and "sexy cast," terms coded to imply the feminized address of *The Vampire Diaries*. This gendered distinction emphasizes the need for a continued focus on young adult media's feminine positioning, but also challenges the conception of franchise culture as gendered. Examining the formation of *The Vampire Diaries* as a youthful, feminine franchise and its consequent success belie the perception of franchises as an exclusively masculine arena. Through this case study, I argue that franchise culture need not serve a particular demographic or genre, but is becoming a consistent strategy of the contemporary media industry to attract consumers that expect multifaceted and convergent streams of content. Furthermore, franchises such as *The Vampire Diaries* point toward the growing use of traditionally feminized modes of engagement to connect franchises and audiences. Additionally, the prominence of young adult media franchises in contemporary culture indicates a larger preoccupation with youth and youth culture. This work then attempts to understand franchising not only from an industrial perspective, but also from a cultural one that considers youth-oriented, feminized texts that are at once critically maligned and commercial and popular successes.

Although the *Entertainment Weekly* cover addresses *The Vampire Diaries* as a television show, examining the full franchise requires a wider, more historical perspective. The franchise's origins are as book series in the early 1990s, which further draws on the publishing industry's long history of book packaging. How is the

contemporary franchise influenced by its connection to this historic, feminized practice of book packaging? In what ways does book packaging affect young adult media franchising today and specifically the development of *The Vampire Diaries*? Returning to the television adaptation, how has the franchise established itself as a “cult hit?” What does the focus on *The Vampire Diaries* mean for the larger network brand of the CW? Is the CW representative of the contemporary franchise model, given its address to a young, primarily female audience?

Literature Review

I have examined several interrelated fields of study, including teen media, franchising and adaptation studies, and celebrité studies. A study of teen media must include literature on television and film, as well as the burgeoning field of “YA,” or young adult, literature. Research on teen media generally examines the solidification of the genre since the 1990s and the characteristics that define it. My examination of young adult franchises draws from existing literature using an industrial approach to YA media, much concerning Alloy Entertainment, as well as literature on contemporary franchise formation more generally. Finally, I look at celebrity studies that address teen stars specifically, as well as work on contemporary conceptions of stardom that utilize new media.

Teen Media

The term “teenager” arose in the 1930s, when the Depression forced students to stay in high school rather than joining the workforce. However, it took time for the newly grouped 13- to 19-year olds to become a relevant demographic. The post-war economy of the 1940s saw teenagers become a viable consumer base, as they had increased leisure

time and disposable income to spend on media products. While lacking the “teen” label, literature addressing young adults had already been published since the mid-1800s. By the time teenagers were “created” as a market category, teen fiction had already introduced one of the most popular, longest-running teen series: *Nancy Drew*.³ It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that other media such as film and television specifically addressing teenagers began to appear and quickly grow in popularity. On film, teen cycles such as beach movies and juvenile delinquency films (popularized by 1955’s *Rebel Without a Cause*) drove teens to theaters.⁴ On television, talent shows and variety hours like *Teen TV Club* and *American Bandstand* appealed to young adults while also promoting educative, family-friendly values.⁵ Cycles of teen media continued to appear over time as the demographic grew in popularity and visibility. The 1980s in particular should be highlighted for the rise of teen romance novels, such as *Sweet Valley High*, the creation of the first youth-targeting cable channel, MTV, as well as “authentic” teen films, including the work of John Hughes. The following decades would only see the continued growth of teen media, and an increase in academic work about the subject, although often divided between a media studies interest in film and television texts and a library science and children’s studies interest in young adult literature. My research engages with both bodies of scholarship and applies their analyses to contemporary trends in teen media, especially as the objects these research areas study converge and become connected as franchise texts.

³ Carolyn Carpan, *Sisters, Schoolgirls, and Sleuths: Girls’ Series Books in America* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 50.

⁴ Timothy Shary, *Teen Movies: American Youth on Screen*, (New York: Wallflower Press, 2005).

⁵ Jeff Martin, “TV Teen Club: Teen TV as Safe Harbor,” in *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008).

Existing research has attributed the contemporary popularity of young adult media to several factors. The quantifiable size of the demographic of young adults is at a peak, as the current generation of Millennials, also referred to as Echo Boomers, are the children of the Baby Boomers, the original youth market. Besides their size, Millennials' most noted characteristic is their consumerism, creating an intense growth across all markets to cater to them. However, Valerie Wee argues that the true success of young adult media can be attributed to a youth-obsessed society that views teen culture as lifestyle- rather than age-specific.⁶ Indeed, "teenage" now stands in for a range of idealized qualities such as "vitality, excitement, vigor, promise, and cutting-edge interests."⁷ This allow teen media to be "read down" by older consumers that find the youthfulness of the texts appealing, but also "read up" by children and tweens who view teen media as aspirational.⁸ Widening the teen market in this way is not a byproduct but a goal, evidenced by such marketing strategies as in young adult literature featuring teen characters but written for less advanced readers.⁹ Without this broadening of the demographic, it is doubtful that teen media would have reached the level of success and prominence that it has today.

Scholarship engaging with media for young adults has attempted to outline what makes it unique as a form and as a genre. Valerie Wee has highlighted the organizing principles of teen media, but I will return to these in the context of franchising in the next section. Lori Bindig finds the four defining characteristics of teen television to be an

⁶ Valerie Wee, *Teen Media: Hollywood and the Youth Market in the Digital Age*, (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010), 37.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Mary Celeste Kearney, "The Changing Face of Teen Television, Or Why We All Love *Buffy*," in *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, ed. Elana Levine and Lisa Parks (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 23.

⁹ Amy Pattee, *Reading the Adolescent Romance: Sweet Valley High and the Popular Young Adult Romance Novel* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 106.

interest in paratextuality and intertextuality, as well as ties to the serial drama and the 1980s teen film.¹⁰ Margo Collins has noted that contemporary teen television (specifically *The Vampire Diaries*) engages with the millennial concerns of technology, community, and morality.¹¹ Finally, Michael Cart's characterization of popular teen chick lit, or "brat lit" as Bindig refers to it, while disdainful, can be neatly summed up in the themes of "sex...and couture."¹² Other authors have also highlighted the important relationship between teen media and popular music, which serves a marker of youth, even retrospectively, and can help enhance narrative and emotional affect.¹³ Many of these overlap, but the common element is the way these themes appear textually within teen media and more widely in marketing franchises to appeal to young adults.

It is surprising that none of these lists make explicit note of the gendered implications of teen media. Of course, some teen media may appeal to or even target young men. However, more frequently, the forms and themes of teen media address young women, which helps account for its oft-denigrated status and the little academic attention it has been paid. Many seminal texts have worked to understand the significance and value of popular yet delegitimized feminized media, such as Tania Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance*, Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance*, and Lynn Spigel's *Make Room for TV*, which analyze the ways women are able to find pleasure in media

¹⁰ Lori Bindig, *Gossip Girl: A Critical Understanding* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 15.

¹¹ Margo Collins, "The Emotional Power of Technology, Community, and Morality in *The Vampire Diaries*," in *The Millennials on Film and Television: Essays on the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Betty Kaklamanidou and Margaret Tally (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014), 95.

¹² Michael Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2010), 94; Bindig, *Gossip Girl*, 26.

¹³ Ben Aslinger, "Rocking Prime Time: Gender, the WB, and Teen Culture," in *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008); Kay Dickinson, "'My Generation': Popular Music, Age, and Influence in Teen Drama of the 1990s," in *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, and Identity*, ed. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson (London: British Film Institute, 2008).

within the constraints of a patriarchal society. While this history of feminist media scholarship has been applied to some teen media texts, notably work on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Twilight*, research that focuses on the popular feminine YA literature frequently skips straight to moral panic over the sexualization and commercialization of youth, as noted later in this section.¹⁴ I take a commingled approach to previous scholarship, prioritizing the value of commercialized, feminized teen media, instead of solely weighing its didactic benefits. However, I also draw on YA literature scholarship's emphasis on media's importance in the formation of adolescent identity.

Returning to the traits of teen media, contemporary teen media represent both a specific address to the millennial young adults of today and recognition of media that has come before. This is particularly evident in teen media's reliance on intertextuality, where one text invokes another text, through anything from direct reference to visual allusion.¹⁵ Intertextuality can inform the audience how to read the show, as well as widening audience appeal to those that understand dated intertextual references. For example, Rebecca Williams argues that *The Vampire Diaries'* success is predicated on its middlebrow positioning between other vampire texts: less sexually explicit and gory than *True Blood*, but more mature than *Twilight*.¹⁶

Bindig's other characteristics also play on this intertextual pastiche between past and present and can be linked to Collins' conception of community. The 1980s teen film and the work of John Hughes in particular have shaped the stock characters and common

¹⁴ Elana Levine and Lisa Parks, "Introduction," *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, "Introduction," *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

¹⁵ Bindig, *Gossip Girl*, 20-21.

¹⁶ Rebecca Williams, "Unlocking *The Vampire Diaries*: Genre, Authorship, and Quality in Teen TV Horror," *Gothic Studies* 15.1 (May 2013): 89.

themes of teen media today, namely stories that concern “the emerging sexuality of white teens that explore social and economic class differences within a peer group setting rather than a family narrative.”¹⁷ Collins views this peer dependence as a distinctly millennial trait and ties it to the use of technology to stay intimately connected to friends and family at all times. However, her analysis of *The Vampire Diaries*’ contemporary close-knit group of supernatural creatures rings strikingly familiar to teen antecedents like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

More distinctly millennial is Collins’ assertion that morality for millennials is “subjective and often a matter of individual determination.”¹⁸ This is evidenced in *The Vampire Diaries* by the continuous sympathetic representation of the vampire characters, including the main character Elena, despite the numerous graphic murders the characters commit. In comparison, the theme of redemption is made narratively explicit in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in order to justify morally gray characters. Moral ambiguity also ties to Cart’s indemnification of young adult media that revolves around sex and couture. His comments are made in reference to *Gossip Girl*, *The Vampire Diaries*’ sibling at both Alloy and the CW. While the frank and explicit depiction of sex found in these television shows and others can be tied to millennials’ moral standards, Cart’s real concerns seems to be the commercialization directed to young adults embodied by the “meretricious” display of fashion within *Gossip Girl*. Naomi Johnson’s content analysis of the *Gossip Girl* novels, which find the books cite approximately one brand or product per page makes Cart’s concerns hard to argue with, but can also be reframed in the context of

¹⁷ Bindig, *Gossip Girl*, 17.

¹⁸ Collins, “*The Vampire Diaries*,” 103.

franchising in the next section.¹⁹ I identify these and other key themes within the context of *The Vampire Diaries* franchise and argue that the cultural interests of contemporary young adult Millennials and the industrial imperatives of transmedia franchise production mutually shape them.

Franchising and Adaptations

Franchising is not a new phenomenon and academics have paid it particular attention since the increasing conglomeration of the media industries beginning in the 1980s and 1990s. Furthermore, convergence culture and the rise of digital technologies have made it easier for franchises to replicate and expand to new media. Derek Johnson's *Media Franchising* labels the contemporary climate of franchising as industry and business and as "shared and iterative culture."²⁰ While an excellent overview, his work fails to significantly address franchises that target women or young adults, gaps that my research contributes to filling. Some scholarship has already focused on teen franchises, both contemporary and historical, but without using that specific terminology. I argue that these gaps point to two major trends in franchise culture. First, the lack of franchising language in historical industry analysis suggests that while these practices are deeply embedded throughout media industries, franchising has developed as a business and cultural shorthand for the media industries only in the contemporary historical moment. More importantly, the lack of franchising language in teen media scholarship calls attention to franchise culture's traditional association with masculinized texts, which my research demonstrates is shifting.

¹⁹ Naomi R. Johnson, "Consuming Desires: Consumption, Romance, and Sexuality in Best-Selling Teen Romance Novels," *Women's Studies in Communication* 33 (2010): 55.

²⁰ Johnson, *Media Franchising*, 8.

Most useful to this literature review is the scholarship concerning Alloy Entertainment, given its ownership of *The Vampire Diaries*. Additionally, Valerie Wee's list of the five main characteristics of millennial teen media can easily be read in the context of franchising. They include: the exploitation of multimedia synergies, the increased importance of promotional branding, the "cross-over" teen personality, stylistic and aesthetic convergence across media forms, and a turn towards postmodern "hyper-intertextuality."²¹ I will address these themes below in the following section.

Alloy Entertainment is a media and marketing company that specializes in book packaging and television production for young adult audiences, particularly young women. Several authors, including Naomi Johnson, Amy Pattee, and Lori Bindig, have examined Alloy in the context of *Gossip Girl*, the CW's first successful program, and Alloy's first adaptation of a book series for television. Most authors note that Alloy's contemporary success as an "intellectual property house" has roots in the Stratemeyer Syndicate of early 1900s, famous for such series as *Nancy Drew*.²² The Stratemeyer Syndicate devised concepts for book series, then used ghostwriters to produce them, in order to increase the speed and volume of production. The Stratemeyer Syndicate also set the tone for young adult series fiction by marketing directly to teenagers, rather than parents and libraries, evidenced by the lowering of prices. Alloy can be seen as stemming directly from this tradition. The company began as Cloverdale Press in the 1980s, producing such teen series fiction as *Sweet Valley High*.²³ The book packager, renamed 17th Street Productions in the 1990s, continue to produce girl-oriented fiction including

²¹ Wee, *Teen Media*, 69.

²² Amy Pattee, "Commodities in Literature, Literature as Commodity: A Close Look at the *Gossip Girl* Series," *Children's Literature Association* 31.2 (Summer 2006): 155.

²³ Carpan, *Girls Series' Books*, 129.

The Vampire Diaries, and still does today after its purchase by Alloy Media + Marketing in 2000.

Alloy's marketing strategies line up neatly with Wee's conception of teen media. An interest in multimedia synergy, in which media products exist in an interconnected web promoting one another, is implied in Alloy's purpose statement "to create lasting enriching entertainment properties and maximize their appeal to the largest possible audiences in all media."²⁴ Of course, it should be noted that the core of this "largest possible audience" is teen girls, which expands to larger markets given the reach of teen media noted in the last section. Alloy's most consistent synergistic practice is adapting their existing book series properties to television and film, as well creating connections through digital properties. Wee notes that millennial media is marked by an "unprecedented degree of intersection" between media texts and forms, even seemingly unrelated ones, and ties this conception of synergy to the teen themes of convergence and "hyper-"intertextuality.²⁵ Convergence implies the increased blurring of conventions and styles between media, growing especially prominent with new technologies and the fluidity with which young adults prefer to consume their media. Intertextuality creates connections between texts that solidify the franchise or network brand, whether through reference, allusion, or even actor, as I will discuss in the next section. Furthermore, Jonathan Gray helpfully defines paratexts as a subset of intertexts, widening the frame of connected media that should be examined within a franchise to include "textual fragments" like promotional videos and posters, DVD extras, magazine covers, message

²⁴ Bindig, *Gossip Girl*, 25.

²⁵ Wee, *Teen Media*, 70.

boards, and beyond.²⁶ Of particular use to my discussion are “entryway paratexts,” which control and determine a reader’s entrance to the text.²⁷ I argue paratexts influence the perception and accessibility of the franchise, such as book covers, promotional art, or the introductory voiceover montage on television shows, and are vital to the success of teen media, given its feminized and serialized nature.

Alloy also places a strong emphasis on Wee’s second characteristic of promotional branding. Wee notes the way teen brands differentiate themselves through the example of the WB’s self-aware, reflective perspective. Other teen brands have been analyzed elsewhere, defining ABC Family as the home for millennial families, The N as “aggressively multicultural,” and MTV’s continued role as the home for music television (although that does appear to be shifting).²⁸ However, Wee’s interest in the cultivation of brands can be examined in a wider context of commercialism. Johnson as well as Bullen et al. argue that Alloy series such as *Gossip Girl* target young girls by emphasizing a postfeminist interest in sexuality and commercialism, or “sex and couture” as we have seen Cart label it.²⁹ Beyond promoting brands textually, *Gossip Girl* leveraged their particular connection to fashion onto secondary transmedia platforms. Louisa Stein notes digital franchise components like the *Gossip Girl Second Life* virtual experience and the Social Climbing Facebook game addresses the young female audience

²⁶ Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 117.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁸ Caryn Murphy, “Secrets and Lies: Gender and Generation in the ABC Family Brand,” in *The Millennials on Film and Television: Essays on the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Betty Kaklamanidou and Margaret Tally (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014); Sharon Marie Ross, “Defining Teen Culture: The N Network,” in *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008); Richard K. Olsen, “*Total Request Live* and the Creation of Virtual Community,” in *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008).

²⁹ Johnson, “Consuming Desires,” 54; Elizabeth Bullen, Kim Toffoletti, and Liz Parsons, “Doing What Your Big Sister Does: Sex, Postfeminism and the YA Chick Lit Series,” *Gender and Education* 23.4 (July 2011); Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 94.

“through an emphasis on social networking, social play, identity play, and fashion.”³⁰

Franchises for young adult women are further marked by the cross-branding of merchandising based on relational appeals of emulation and allegiance, rather than toyetic interest.³¹ Alloy properties frequently partner with fashion lines, such as *Gossip Girl*'s partnership with Bluefly.com and *Pretty Little Liars*' line of clothing at Aeropostle, so that fans might buy products to help them look like their favorite characters.³²

Given Alloy's franchising model that consistently turns book series into television shows, it is also important to address adaptation studies. Johnson's work on franchises accounts for their oft-denigrated status as mindless, profit-driven replication and multiplication, but also frames them as almost exclusively masculine. Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* takes a more feminized approach to the purpose and pleasure within adaptations, which centers on the mixture of “repetition and difference.”³³ Similar to Radway's work on the pleasure of romance novels, Alloy's model of book to series adaptation (and sometimes back again) draws on the distinctly feminized pleasure of enjoying the journey while already knowing the destination. Also relevant to young adult media, Hutcheon unpacks adaptation's pleasure for a “knowing” audience, similarly feminized in nature. Teen franchises such as *Twilight* bank their success on faithful adaptations, recreating iconic moments from the source texts for their devoted fanbase. Even given four separate directors with distinct styles, the “chief concern” of the *Twilight*

³⁰ Louisa Stein, “Playing Dress-Up: Digital Fashion and Gamic Extensions of Televisual Experience in *Gossip Girl*'s *Second Life*,” *Cinema Journal* 48.3 (Spring 2009): 118.

³¹ Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, Scott Walus, and Melissa A. Click, “Twilight and the Production of the 21st Century Teen Idol,” in *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, and the Vampire Franchise*, ed. Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 236.

³² Bindig, *Gossip Girl*, 127.

³³ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 4.

films was to remain true to Stephenie Meyer's vision in her books.³⁴ However, as I discuss in the next section, auteurship still plays an important component in teen franchising.

Teen Celebrity

Wee's interest in the teen-branded celebrity as a component of teen media deserves expanded exploration in the contemporary moment. Graeme Turner conceptualizes celebrity as both "a media process that is coordinated by an industry and as commodity or text which is productively consumed" which allows stars to be read as a part of a franchise with equal significance to a media text.³⁵ Turner notes that teen television stars are a particularly disposable commodity that are easily replaced by "the next cast of fresh young faces," as their celebrity is built on the intense multimedia cross-promotion of their franchise and does not translate to other roles given the "low-prestige vehicle" of television.³⁶ Derek Johnson also notes the difficulty that franchise actors have establishing themselves as distinct stars rather than the characters they are associated with.³⁷ I disagree, finding that contemporary young adult stars participate in a symbiotic relationship with media texts, both functioning to promote their franchise and use the franchise to further their own fame. Susan Murray finds that female teen fans in

³⁴ Mark D. Cunningham, "Traveling in the Same Boat: Adapting Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*, *New Moon*, and *Eclipse* to Film," in *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in the "Twilight" Series*, ed. Anne Morey (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), 200.

³⁵ Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁷ Derek Johnson, "A Knight of the Realm vs. the Master of Magnetism: Sexuality, Stardom, and Character Branding," *Popular Communication* 6 (2008): 215.

particular center their interest on a particular celebrity, and from there enter “a maze of information, products, and services” connected to a franchise.³⁸

The relationship between young adults and teen celebrities is of particular importance to young adult media franchises for several reasons. Aubrey et al. have noted that in franchises such as *Twilight*, the lead actors were specifically constructed as teen idols to provide the foundation of the franchise.³⁹ Teen franchises are uniquely situated to capitalize on “celebrity worship,” as the phenomenon begins in early adolescence. Celebrity worship is often represented as a feminine pursuit, but is not limited to an interest in male celebrities as a “fantasy crush” object.⁴⁰ Murray highlights the process of “negotiated identification” by which fans are able to relate to a same-sex celebrity, but also hold the star up as an idealized other.⁴¹ She argues that this connection is particularly strong for teenage girls, as they identify with teen celebrities based on age as well as gender. Parasocial relationships, discussed below, performed through social media facilitate this process, especially in the form of “life-coaching.”⁴² Young adults, already in a liminal stage of identity construction, are searching for models that may provide “free advice about grooming, impression management, self-promotion, and even ‘correct’ social, political, cultural and environmental values,” strengthening their attachment to teen stars and the associated franchise.⁴³

My research contends that relationships between teen stars and fans as studied by Murray and others have only become a more intrinsic part of contemporary teen media

³⁸ Susan Murray, “I Know What You Did Last Summer: Sarah Michelle Gellar and Crossover Teen Stardom,” in *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, ed. Elana Levine and Lisa Parks (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 49.

³⁹ Aubrey, et al., “*Twilight*,” 231.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴¹ Murray, “Sarah Michelle Gellar,” 46.

⁴² Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 104.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 104.

franchises. This shift is brought about in large part by new digital media such as social networking platforms that allow stars to create more personal relationships with their fans. Relationships between celebrities and fans have long been described as “parasocial,” or the mediated illusion of real relationship.⁴⁴ On social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, stars give their fans access to their day-to-day lives via a performative authenticity, which allows fans to feel a closer connection to stars as well as making them more relatable, as they construct a digital presence in the same way average people do. In particular, Marwick notes that Instagram offers a high level of perceived authenticity, as images rather than words are used for self-expression, and Instagram’s sole construction as a mobile app emphasizes a documentary, everyday perspective.⁴⁵ However, Instagram’s image-based communication also de-emphasizes interactions with fans, in contrast to Twitter which promotes them through @replies and retweets.

While a celebrity’s presence on social media is framed through a dialogue of authenticity, it can also be interpreted as a serious form of active labor. I argue that viewing social media as labor ties the teen television star not to the film star, but to the reality star. Turner and others have noted that there has always been a schism between celebrities of film and television, creating divisions between celebrities that have “achieved” fame in comparison to those that have been “attributed” it by the media industries.⁴⁶ While Murray, Wee, and others have suggested that convergence and intertextuality have led to a leveling of these traditional hierarchies in the case of teen

⁴⁴ Alice E. Marwick, “Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy,” *Public Culture* 27.1 (2015): 139.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 142

⁴⁶ Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 25.

media, many teen television stars share more in common with the entrepreneurial labor of reality television stars, given the moniker “celetoids” for their hyper-visible, yet short and unpredictable lifespan of fame.⁴⁷ This mode of celebrity via active labor is particularly gendered, as examined in cases studies on reality stars Lauren Conrad, Bethenny Frankel, and the Kardashian sisters.⁴⁸ In all cases, these reality stars demonstrate a postfeminist stance on success and gender as constructed through entrepreneurship and consumption. Through their reality shows and extratextual relationships with fans, these women present a mixture of the “ordinary and extraordinary” that makes them accessible to fans, yet deserving of emulation.⁴⁹ However, Leppert and Wilson argue that Lauren Conrad was able to become the first true reality star thanks to the work configuring her as a soap opera heroine, implying that hierarchies of fame are still present. Therefore, teen television stars are able to enact similar strategies to reality stars using social media and other paratexts to further develop their “brand” and connect with fans, while maintaining a higher status thanks to their role in scripted television programs.

So far, I have addressed celebrities that perform as the stars of teen media.

However, it is important to highlight that the creators of teen media also lend their fame and reputation to the brand of a franchise. As previously noted, the success of the *Twilight* franchise was dependent on the films working as faithful adaptations of the book

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Alice Leppert and Julie Wilson, “Living *The Hills* Life: Lauren Conrad as Reality Star, Soap Opera Heroine, and Brand,” in *In The Limelight and Under the Microscope: Forms and Functions of Female Celebrity*, ed. Su Holmes and Diane Negra (New York: Continuum, 2011); Suzanne Leonard and Diane Negra, “After Ever After: Bethenny Frankel, Self-Branding, and the ‘New Intimacy of Work,’” in *Cupcakes, Pinterest, Ladyporn: Feminized Popular Culture in the Early 21st Century*, ed. Elana Levine (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Alice Leppert, “Keeping Up with the Kardashians, Fame-Work, and the Production of Entrepreneurial Sisterhood,” in *Cupcakes, Pinterest, Ladyporn: Feminized Popular Culture in the Early 21st Century*, ed. Elana Levine (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

⁴⁹ Leppert and Wilson, “Living *The Hills* Life,” 263.

series. Mark Cunningham argues that Catherine Hardwicke's direction of the first *Twilight* film is the closest to auteurism of any of the films, as her previous films like *Thirteen* and *Lords of Dogtown* gave her a reputation for "captur[ing] the emotional truth of adolescence," which neatly lined up with Stephenie Meyer's vision, actually increasing the fidelity of the adaptation.⁵⁰ Work on Alloy properties like *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* also notes that linking an auteur creator to a television show both ties the text to the auteur's identifiable brand and increases the legitimacy of the franchise as a "quality" media product.⁵¹ Williams argues that Kevin Williamson's success with teen drama on *Dawson's Creek* and horror in the *Scream* film series legitimated *The Vampire Diaries* in opposition to the more denigrated *Twilight*.⁵² However, the prominent brand of an auteur, while beneficial to the franchise, obscures the "multiplicity of authorial voices" that actually works to create a television show.⁵³ Similarly, the shared labor of production in Alloy and other series fiction is concealed from readers and instead a strong authorial voice is promoted to solidify the brand of the series. This authorial voice is created in two ways. First, creators such as Francine Pascal created a series "bible" that detailed the characters, themes, and settings for her *Sweet Valley High* world to maintain consistency throughout the books.⁵⁴ Second, a story of authorship is presented to create a relationship between author and reader. Alloy publicized that Cecily Von Ziegesar, the stated author of the *Gossip Girl* series, attended the elite Nightingale-Bamford School in New York City and used her experiences as inspiration for the series,

⁵⁰ Cunningham, "Traveling in the Same Boat," 204.

⁵¹ Bindig, *Gossip Girl*, 27.

⁵² Williams, "Unlocking *The Vampire Diaries*," 93.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁴ Pattee, *Reading the Adolescent Romance*, 23.

although her actual authorship over the text is unclear.⁵⁵ This story obscures the shared labor and emphasis on brand marketing inherent to Alloy's production model in favor of a fantasy of authorial authenticity for the reader to connect with. Even so, as noted by Suzanne Scott, ownership over all the parts of the franchise, such as ancillary content, is still strictly controlled by the author (whether creator, network, or corporation) by privileging affirmational modes of engagement and textual interpretation, legitimating some fans while marginalizing others.⁵⁶

Methods

This project seeks to outline *The Vampire Diaries* as a model of a contemporary transmedia-oriented franchise. In selecting a franchise that uniquely orients itself toward young adult women, I examine the shifting notion of franchise culture, one that is moving away from a solely masculine and commercial perception, and becoming a necessary industry standard for companies to remain competitive and profitable. Furthermore, this particular case study highlights the way frequently employed franchise strategies draw on feminized media and practices, such as an emphasis on social relations and labor. *The Vampire Diaries* is indicative of current trends in young adult media, and so I have based my research model on Valerie Wee's work in *Teen Media*. Wee combines an industrial analysis approach with textual analysis, which considers "the larger contexts of production and how they shape the nature, form, and content" of the teen media she examines.⁵⁷ I draw on Wee's list of five main characteristics of teen media, as outlined in the literature review, throughout my discussion of *The Vampire Diaries*, focusing on the

⁵⁵ Pattee, "Commodities in Literature," 162.

⁵⁶ Suzanne Scott, "Battlestar Galactica: Fans and Ancillary Content," in *How to Watch Television*, ed. Ethan Thompson and Jason Mittell (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 327.

⁵⁷ Wee, *Teen Media*, 13.

importance of branding for Alloy, the CW, and the specific franchise, continually noting how those brands are built on a bevy of intertextual references, held together by stylistic and aesthetic convergence, and bolstered by the presence the cross-over teen personality. My work is also informed by Gray's conception of paratexts, stressing the equal importance of promotional and peripheral texts in giving value and meaning to a franchise.⁵⁸

Combining an industrial and textual analysis allows me to look at many different sources. The industrial analysis will examine trade press and popular press covering *The Vampire Diaries*, as well as the spin-off programs *The Secret Circle* and *The Originals*, from the time the first television series was green-lit in 2009 to present. I focus on the way these franchise texts are presented in relation to one another and the way the franchise is situated in the larger context of teen media. I also examine the press concerning prominent figures in *The Vampire Diaries* franchise, such as lead actress Nina Dobrev and showrunners Kevin Williamson and Julie Plec, and author L.J. Smith.

The textual analysis includes a variety of paratexts. While an in-depth knowledge of the "official" texts, such as the original trilogy of *Vampire Diaries* novels by L.J. Smith and *The Vampire Diaries* television program on the CW (2009-present) informs my work, paratexts provide a richer site of analysis, especially in conjunction with the industrial analysis approach to franchises this research takes. Paratexts include a comparison of book covers from the 1990s to present; promotional art and videos on the CW channel for *The Vampire Diaries* and both spin-offs, the CW website and digital companion app; and content on social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr.

⁵⁸ Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 2.

Chapter Breakdown

My research consists of four chapters. This introduction outlines the main premise of this research and contextualizes its purpose in the broader field of study. A review of the literature provided an overview of scholarship on the overlapping fields of teen media, franchising and adaptations, and teen celebrity. I also outlined my methodology, including the scholarship on which I have shaped my research model and the primary texts I study throughout my research. Finally, this chapter breakdown takes a more detailed look at the arguments I lay out in full over the course of my analysis.

The second chapter examines the creation and development of *The Vampire Diaries* franchise, beginning with the book series in the 1990s, created by book packager Alloy Entertainment. First, I look back at the historic practice of book packaging and related feminized modes of media production, suggesting that the contemporary teen franchise is not a new practice and has also been shaped over time to specifically target a young female audience. Second, I argue that *The Vampire Diaries* is emblematic of Alloy's transmedia consumerist business model that has found success by capitalizing on current trends in the young adult media industry. I also discuss the complicated role of the author in YA franchises, evidenced by the problematic relationship between Alloy and *Vampire Diaries* writer L.J. Smith.

The third chapter moves to a discussion of *The Vampire Diaries* television adaptation on the CW network. I argue that the CW's partnership with Alloy through *The Vampire Diaries* and other properties helped shaped the new network's brand as it began as a network in the late 2000s. Further, I detail the expansion of the franchise through two spin-offs, *The Secret Circle* and *The Originals*, to examine how the CW built a

sustainable brand targeting the young adult generation conceived of as Millennials. I also highlight the digital strategies the CW uses to reach this Millennial audience, through which the network has become an innovator of the contemporary franchise model.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, I bring together the implications of this work in a wider context, giving particular consideration to the effects of young adult franchises being constructed as specifically gendered. I also note the limitations of this work and suggest further directions it could be taken. Looking forward for Alloy, the CW and young adult media, what shifts will occur as the current young generation stylized as Millennials continually grows up and out of youth media? What effect will this have on young adult media and culture more widely? More generally, what does the success of *The Vampire Diaries* franchise signify for contemporary franchise culture more broadly and where will it go from here?

CHAPTER 2

Group-Plotting Blockbusters: Alloy Entertainment and the History of Book Packaging

When *The Vampire Diaries* television show premiered on the CW network in September 2009, it attracted more than one comparison to *Twilight*, the teen vampire film released the previous November. In actuality, *The Vampire Diaries* preceded *Twilight* by over a decade, started as a book series in 1990 by the company that would become Alloy Entertainment. Alloy is the hidden architect behind not only *The Vampire Diaries*, but many buzzy teen media products of the last decade, including *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, *Gossip Girl*, and *Pretty Little Liars*. I argue that Alloy's transmedia consumerist business model is representative of the franchise logic that dominates much of the contemporary media industries, but is rarely examined as such, given their production of feminized content.

This chapter begins by tracing the history of book packaging that leads up to Alloy Entertainment, considering its modes of production and distribution, as well as stylistic conventions, in parallel with other forms of feminized media. I argue that Alloy's assembly-line method of production and status as an "intellectual property house" complicates the place of authorship in teen media. In the case of Alloy, authorship is concomitantly valued for branding purposes and displaced by the necessarily collaborative process that drives franchising. As a packaged product, *The Vampire Diaries* is not only produced by Alloy, but in collaboration with other media companies: the book series is published by HarperCollins and the television series is aired on the CW network. Additionally, Alloy's shifting relationship with the series' primary author, L.J.

Smith, has necessitated creative solutions to smooth cracks in an otherwise cohesive franchise.

Furthermore, this chapter continually details the deftness with which Alloy creates new products and also later rebrands them to exploit current trends in the industry. *The Vampire Diaries* book series and its sister series, *The Secret Circle*, have been repackaged multiple times since their initial publication in the early 1990s. I argue that this practice can be interpreted as both economically beneficial, attempting to maximize profits from a young, undiscerning audience, and uniquely liberating for teen readers, freeing them from the discourse that suggests young adult, or YA, literature has an imperative to be socially and morally pedagogical in nature, rather than simply pleasurable. The most resounding trend in contemporary teen media has been a turn to transmedia and an emphasis on “synergistic multimedia entertainment products.”⁵⁹ While Alloy has found success by developing concepts geared toward this multiplication, this chapter focuses on the company’s primary role as book packager, turning to the CW’s role adapting *The Vampire Diaries* franchise to television in the next chapter.

Stratemeyer Syndicate to *Sweet Valley High*: A History of Book Packaging

Book packagers, or “literary development companies,” belie traditional ideas of authorship, but are entirely common within the book industry.⁶⁰ Packagers work in similar fashion to independent film producers, developing book concepts, contracting a writer, even creating cover art, and then selling the near-finished product to a publishing house. Two main genres most typically employ book packagers: labor-intensive books

⁵⁹ Wee, *Teen Media*, 70.

⁶⁰ “On Book Packagers and Literary Development Companies,” Stacked Books, accessed June 7, 2015, <http://www.stackedbooks.org/2013/10/on-book-packagers-and-literary.html>.

and series fiction.⁶¹ Labor-intensive books consist primarily of nonfiction, reference and coffee table books that are image-heavy or require other specialized knowledge and collaborative effort to produce. These novelty items rarely depend on authorship for sales, instead relying on the “gimmick” of the content. In contrast, series fiction follows a formula so generic that ghostwriters could easily duplicate it once a template has been established.

Ghostwriters have been used in practically every genre, but the practice of packaging fiction has existed almost exclusively within children’s literature since its inception. Additionally, the same discourses found surrounding today’s YA literature concerning authorship, literary value, and gender can be seen in the genre’s historic roots. The Stratemeyer Syndicate, founded by Edward Stratemeyer in the early 1900s, was a book packager that produced over a hundred different fiction series for young readers.⁶² Stratemeyer, who originally aimed his products at boys, would create the concept for each series, but then assigned the writing of individual titles to the company’s many ghostwriters, who wrote collectively under one pseudonym. This process was kept fairly secretive to maintain an illusion of authorship; readers and book critics alike were often unaware that series were not written by prolific authors, but rather a stable of ghostwriters.⁶³

Adults with a vested interest in children’s literature – librarians and educators – denigrated this assembly-line approach for being of poor literary quality. They worried

⁶¹ Jenna Glatzer, “Book Packaging: Under-explored Terrain For Freelancers,” accessed June 7, 2015, <http://www.underdown.org/packaging.htm>.

⁶² Illana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 30.

⁶³ Carol Billman, *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate: Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys, and the Million Dollar Fiction Factory* (New York: Ungar, 1986), 163-164.

about the effect series fiction would have on children, criticizing the books for their poor literary style, and the questionable morals and values presented within.⁶⁴ However, in spite of the criticisms, or perhaps because of them, series books appealed greatly to their young readers and the Stratemeyer Syndicate became immensely successful.

The success of one of the Syndicate's mystery series, *The Hardy Boys*, in 1927 caused Stratemeyer to order a complementary girls' mystery series that would become his most enduring legacy, *Nancy Drew*.⁶⁵ Ironically, Stratemeyer died before the first *Nancy Drew* novel was published in 1930. His daughters, Harriet and Edna Stratemeyer, were unable to sell the company due to the Depression-era economy and limited children's book publishing market and took over as owners themselves, despite the late Stratemeyer's strong opinions about women remaining in the home. Harriet Adams, née Stratemeyer, who had "fervently wished" to work at the Syndicate despite her father's wishes, proved an adept businesswoman, running the company for over fifty years, creating numerous other series for girls, and developing Nancy Drew into the household name she is today.⁶⁶

Around the same time as *Nancy Drew*'s creation in the 1930s, another form of media was utilizing an assembly-line model of production: daytime radio soap operas. Similar to Edward Stratemeyer's Syndicate, the Hummert soap opera "Mill" was the innovation of Frank and Anne Hummert, who sketched out storylines for the numerous radio serials they produced and turned them over to ghostwriters who completed the

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Carpan, *Girls' Series Books*, 50.

⁶⁶ Nash, *American Sweethearts*, 62.

scripts by writing dialogue and stage directions.⁶⁷ The serials were aired on a rapid schedule in fifteen-minute increments every weekday. Although they proved incredibly profitable, daytime serials, whose audience consisted mainly of housewives, were viewed as low culture, criticized for their open-ended narrative form, “explicit link to commercial intent,” and feminized subject matter.⁶⁸ Both the serialized content and the assembly-line production allowed radio serials like the Hummerts’, and, eventually, televised soap operas, to be trivialized as feminine. Critics doubted that anything of serious artistic value could be created as quickly as the radio serials’ efficient daily production, and pointed to the frivolous, advertiser-driven content as evidence.

The Stratemeyer Syndicate continued to publish series as the most prominent book packager into the late 1980s before being bought out. but a number of new book packaging companies cropped up when the practice was revitalized in the early 1980s by *Sweet Valley High* and the ensuing explosion of YA paperback romance series. The *Sweet Valley High* series, following the adventures of blond teenage twins Elizabeth and Jessica Wakefield, were all attributed to author Francine Pascal and published by Bantam, later part of Random House. The hidden middleman, however, was book packager Cloverdale Press, later renamed Daniel Weiss Associates after the founder and CEO. Pascal, as series creator, produced outlines for each novel, handing them off to Cloverdale Press, who hired ghostwriters to flesh out the text, edit the books, and design the covers before sending them off to Bantam for publication.⁶⁹ In the same way that radio serials and soap operas used a multi-tiered writing process to produce daily

⁶⁷ Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 167-168.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Pattee, *Reading the Adolescent Romance*, 22.

episodes, this assembly-line production method allowed Daniel Weiss Associates' series to be produced at the rapid speed of a book every month.

The constant production and release of new books contributed to the mind-boggling success of the series and the growing genre. A *Sweet Valley High* super edition entitled *Perfect Summer* was the first YA novel to reach the *New York Times* paperback bestseller list; over 34 million copies of the series' books had been sold by the end of the 1980s.⁷⁰ The series' success was also credited to *Sweet Valley High*'s novel approach to YA romance series fiction. The approach featured a recurring cast of characters and serialized plotlines that ended each book on a cliffhanger, rather than standalone novels, grouped only by their genre and publisher imprint. In this approach, series fiction paralleled radio serials and soap operas in content as well as form. The open-ended narrative structure of the *Sweet Valley High* novels served as a marketing tool to hook readers into picking up the next book in the series, wondering what would happen to Elizabeth, Jessica, and friends next. The dominance of romance in the YA market and its similarities to other forms of feminized media further cemented girls as the genre's target audience, a perception that still continues today.

Despite their best-selling status, *Sweet Valley High* and its ilk were not without detractors. Educators and librarians were still criticizing series fiction as they had done since the beginning of the Stratemeyer Syndicate. However, this resurgence of series fiction in the 1980s followed the purported "First Golden Age" of young adult literature in the late 1960s and 1970s.⁷¹ Authors such as S.E. Hinton and Paul Zindel were credited with writing nuanced, realistic fiction for young adults with real literary merit. Tellingly,

⁷⁰ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 39.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) first began considering YA novels for awards in 1973.⁷² Adults were not only the authors and primary arbitrators of taste for YA literature, but also the primary purchasers for schools and libraries.

Sweet Valley High and other series fiction of the 1980s changed that, by targeting teen consumers with mass-market paperbacks they could afford to buy themselves. Mass-market paperbacks are cheaper to produce than trade paperbacks and hardcovers, and so are historically associated with popular fiction like pulp novels rather than quality literature.⁷³ Mass-market paperbacks are also smaller in dimension than trade paperbacks, measuring seven inches tall by four inches wide to trade paperback's eight inches tall by five inches wide.⁷⁴ In children's literature, the size of the text indicates the age of the audience as well as quality of the text. Trade paperbacks were commonly used for literature for children, and so the smaller, "pocket-size" mass-market paperbacks, with their past use for pulp fiction, were meant to appeal to older, teenage readers. Thus the same hierarchal divisions of taste already found in adult literature developed in YA literature, between adult-approved, quality novels, and the series fiction teens bought for themselves.

Romance, including series like *Sweet Valley High*, continued to find success with teen readers heading into the 1990s, but horror soon became the most popular genre in young adult fiction. Christopher Pike's *Slumber Party*, published in 1985, began the trend, and continued to find success with standalone thrillers, while R.L. Stine's *Fear Street* and *Goosebumps* series, published in the early 1990s, sold over 40 million

⁷² Ibid., 31.

⁷³ Pattee, *Reading the Adolescent Romance*, 16.

⁷⁴ Cat Yampbell, "Judging a Book by Its Cover: Publishing Trends in Young Adult Literature," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 29.3 (2005), 349.

copies.⁷⁵ While romance series were clearly demarcated for female readers, horror drew more male readers to YA than the genre had seen since the days of the Stratemeyer Syndicate. This provided a new genre of opportunities and a new market for book packagers, who jumped on the bandwagon, adding horror to their widening repertoire of series. Daniel Weiss Associates, a prominent book packager of the 1980s, was producing ten series a month, including *The Vampire Diaries*. The series was pitched as “Anne Rice for kids,” a “Teen Dracula” concept that evolved into the story of a human girl caught between two vampire brothers, one good and one evil.⁷⁶ The concept drew on the newly popular supernatural horror genre, melding elements of the still popular romance genre to specifically attract teen girls to the series.

Packaging and Repackaging: *The Vampire Diaries* of the 1990s and Today

Developing a book concept based on trends within the industry, like *The Vampire Diaries*' blend of romance and horror, is not enough to assure success for book packagers. Trends need to be visually communicated in the packaging of the text to create a “grabability” factor capturing the attention of audiences and encouraging them to select the book.⁷⁷ The grabability of cover art is vital to book sales, serving as the text's primary marketing device, as traditionally the publishing industry has found conventional advertising ineffective.⁷⁸ This emphasis in publishing toward branding and marketing has forced popular cover styles to change rapidly, as they are driven by fashion and other trends outside the book industry, especially in regard to the dynamic YA genre. Industry logic inevitably demands that the books be continually repackaged with new covers in

⁷⁵ Pattee, *Reading the Adolescent Romance*, 145-146.

⁷⁶ Rebecca Mead, “The Gossip Mill: Alloy, the teen-entertainment factory,” *The New Yorker*, October 19, 2009.

⁷⁷ Yampbell, “Judging a Book By Its Cover,” 349.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 355.

order to retain steady sales. Since their initial publication, both *The Vampire Diaries* and *The Secret Circle* have been reissued and repackaged multiple times. A closer analysis of the original covers and their later repackaging identifies the way the emphasis shifted from one element of the series to another to align with current trends.

The Vampire Diaries' titled author, L.J. Smith, was Lisa Jane Smith, a young author with one commercially unsuccessful YA title to her name, contracted to write the series by Daniel Weiss Associates. Under the company's work-for-hire contract, Smith was paid an advance of a few thousand dollars to write the books, but retained none of the intellectual copyright to the characters and world she created.⁷⁹ The series was purchased by HarperCollins and published by HarperPaperbacks, the company's mass-market paperback imprint, in 1991. The initial trilogy was so popular that a fourth book for the series was released in 1992, as well as another trilogy written by L.J. Smith, *The Secret Circle*, this one about a group of teen witches.

The 1991 edition of the first book in *The Vampire Diaries* series, *The Awakening*, featured a close-up of a young woman's face, partially obscured by a black winged shape, juxtaposed with a shadowy figure in a forest beneath her and a crescent moon above her. The title of the series and the book are printed in red on the left side of the cover, with Smith's name below, and the short tagline, "The deadly power of love..." The title is also identified as "Volume I" indicating its status as series fiction with sequels to be purchased and read after this novel.

The photorealistic art is typical for cover art of the time, and draws specifically on the stylistic conventions of YA horror like the work of Pike and Stine with the use of

⁷⁹ Alexandra Alter, "'Vampire Diaries' Writer Bites Back," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 17, 2014.

dark colors, and the large scrawling font of the title in bright colors. Romance series like *Sweet Valley High* also used a similar photorealistic art style, but paired with cheerful pastels and a title font, also in red, but in a collegial varsity font. While the cover art tried to capitalize on the growing popularity of the horror genre, *The Vampire Diaries* can still be framed as splitting the difference between popular horror and romance series to appeal to female readers. The female figure on the cover of *The Awakening* looks broody and contemplative but is still more identifiably a protagonist for readers to connect with than the expendable female characters on the covers of horror series like R.L. Stine's *Fear Street*, who always appeared imperiled or terrified. Additionally, the series signaled to young female readers with both the series title and the tagline. Diary fiction is traditionally associated with girls, and the tagline's mention of "love" indicates romance will play a central role in the book.

The distinctive visual style matched by the rest of *The Vampire Diaries* books, as well as the "Volume" denotations, ties the series together as the beginning of a franchise, further expanded in *The Secret Circle* series. *The Secret Circle* titles used a similar visual cover style to *The Vampire Diaries* series, but featured the many characters of the coven of teen witches rather than the singular protagonist of *The Vampire Diaries*. *The Secret Circle* covers also included the identifier "author of the bestselling *Vampire Diaries*" beneath Smith's moniker, written in the distinctive red scrawling font found on *The Vampire Diaries*' covers, linking the two series together. Although the series do not take place within the same fictional universe, they are still branded together as part of the same franchise by Smith's labeled authorship and the similar visual styles of the book covers.

HarperCollins reprinted *The Vampire Diaries* several times during the following decade, under their renamed mass-market paperback imprint, HarperTorch, as well as HarperPrism, their short-lived science fiction and fantasy imprint, which would eventually become HarperVoyager. Most significantly for its status as a burgeoning YA franchise, *The Vampire Diaries*, as well as *The Secret Circle*, were entirely repackaged by the HarperTeen imprint in 2007-2008. HarperTeen, established in 2006, was one of many YA imprints created in the early 2000s by nearly every major publisher following the commercial boom of YA fiction.⁸⁰ Although series fiction had done brisk business since the 1980s, previous success was incomparable to the explosion of interest in the genre since the record-breaking success of *Harry Potter*, published from 1997-2007. The book series about the boy wizard, now the best-selling book series in history, is credited with altering YA literature in a number of ways, establishing it firmly as its own genre with its own *New York Times* Best Seller list, proving teen readers could handle books of 200+ pages, demonstrating the immense profitability of adapting YA literature, and generally cementing its place as a global cultural phenomenon.

The fantasy of *Harry Potter* also opened the door for the enormous success of the *Twilight* series. The book series, published from 2005-2008, and the subsequent film adaptations about the romance between a human girl and a sparkly vampire created a demand for supernatural YA fiction. HarperTeen capitalized on the moment, repackaging the now 16-year-old *Vampire Diaries* series for a new generation of vampire-crazed teen girls. The publisher believed that the targeted teen audience of today would never

⁸⁰ “Press Release: HarperCollins and FanLib Invite Teen Readers and Writers to Make Their Voices Heard in Innovative Online Forum,” HarperCollins Publishers, October 18, 2006, accessed June 9, 2015, <http://corporate.harpercollins.com/us/pressreleases/290/HARPERCOLLINS%20AND%20FANLIB%20INVITE%20TEEN%20READERS%20AND%20WRITERS%20TO%20MAKE%20THEIR%20VOICES%20HEARD%20IN%20INNOVATIVE%20ON>; Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 91.

purchase the 1991 edition of *The Vampire Diaries*, given its “embarrassing[ly]” outdated cover art.⁸¹ The updated cover and repackaging allowed *The Vampire Diaries* to be marketed as a new and on trend series, one viable for franchising expansion in the same vein as *Twilight*.

The cover art of the repackaged *Vampire Diaries* series clearly draws on the *Twilight*-spurred style of supernatural YA literature of the late 2000s. The *Twilight* cover is minimalist, a black background with a pair of pale white hands holding a red apple. Many books within the genre applied this minimalist style with black covers to be easily identified by their targeted audience. *The Vampire Diaries* series also matched *Twilight* and the current industry standard by being reformatted into the trade paperback format, meant to suggest the books “transcend[ed] the boundaries of age” and were no longer just for teens.⁸² In terms of quality, the shift toward trade paperbacks indicated the growing prevalence of YA literature in the contemporary book industry. Given the new preference toward longer YA works, the larger trade format also allowed the series to be reformatted into omnibuses that combined the original books into one text.⁸³

The Vampire Diaries: The Awakening and The Struggle omnibus, released in 2007, featured the right half of young man’s serious face over the majority of the cover, photographed, yet stylized to give him a pale blue pallor, a bloodied lip, and a glowing eye. “The Vampire Diaries” stretches across his cheek in an elaborate script, with the subtitle of the original novels in a small red banner below. Besides the style picked up from *Twilight*, this cover incorporates other contemporary trends of YA cover art, including using photography of young, attractive teens (as opposed to the 1990s

⁸¹ Mead, “The Gossip Mill.”

⁸² Yampbell, “Judging a Book by Its Cover,” 354.

⁸³ Cart, *Young Adult Literature*, 98.

photorealistic art), and the “big head” motif, in which a character’s face dominates the majority of the cover.⁸⁴ *The Secret Circle* omnibuses, released the following year in 2008, were designed to match the style of repackaged *Vampire Diaries* covers much more closely than the 1990s editions. The covers are nearly identical, from the “big head” art, this time a young woman, to the script font of the title and subtitled banner, as well as noting that the series is “by the author of the *New York Times* bestselling *The Vampire Diaries*” at the bottom.

Interestingly, these repackaged covers include more male representation on the covers than the original 1990s editions, but are marked as even more feminine than their predecessors. Although the success of *Harry Potter* had demonstrated that fantasy was a viable YA genre, the hyper-feminization of *Twilight* had marked vampires as for teen girls. HarperTeen’s repackaging of *The Vampire Diaries* indicates they leaned into this comparison to assure success with female readers rather than seeking to differentiate the series from *Twilight* and broaden their base. The strategy was successful and the series once again climbed the best-seller list.

“Publishing is Not an Expanding Business”: The New Alloy Era

Although the two series had remained at seven books for the previous decade, the successful repackaging marked a turning point for *The Vampire Diaries* franchise to expand dramatically. Daniel Weiss Associates had also gone through big changes, priming the book packager for greater success. In the 1990s, the company had changed its name from Daniel Weiss Associates to the even more uninspired 17th Street Productions

⁸⁴ Jillian Audrey, “Trends in Young Adult Book Covers,” *Writings and Readings*, May 31, 2012, accessed July 6, 2015, <http://jillianaudrey.blogspot.com/2012/05/trends-in-young-adult-book-covers.html>.

(their actual address), but continued packaging teen girl fare.⁸⁵ Weiss sold his company to two employees, Leslie Morgenstein and Ann Brashares, in 2000.⁸⁶ Morgenstein had been with company since 1989, actually pitching the “Teen Dracula” concept. Brashares, the editorial director at the time, would go on to write *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, the first best-selling series under the company’s new management. In the same year, 17th Street Productions, under its new ownership, was purchased by Alloy Online, a web and direct-marketing company that targeted Millennials.⁸⁷ The companies had worked together recently in a cross-promotional effort for the *Fearless* book series, Alloy creating a “Fearless Zone” on their website.⁸⁸ Morgenstein would continue as CEO of the company, while Brashares eventually left the company, working as an author full-time.

The reconfiguration of the book packager to the newly christened Alloy Entertainment signaled a shift in the way the company did business, to a transmedia consumerist model. While book packaging was still the core of the company, each concept was conceived in terms of its viability to expand beyond literature into a multimedia franchise including adaptations for television, film, and digital platforms.⁸⁹ This shifting emphasis toward transmedia seemed a logical step given the wider media industry’s success with franchising after a wave of conglomeration starting in the late 1980s.⁹⁰ Multi-media conglomerates found it useful to develop franchises that could be expanded across their diverse holdings using synergy, or cross-promotion between media products. In particular, teen consumers were becoming an “intensely attractive market,”

⁸⁵ Carpan, *Girls Series’ Books*, 129.

⁸⁶ Mead, “The Gossip Mill.”

⁸⁷ Jim Milliot, “Internet Company Buys 17th Street Productions,” *Publisher’s Weekly* 246.3, January 17, 2000.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Mead, “The Gossip Mill.”

⁹⁰ Wee, *Teen Media*, 51.

to target these franchises toward; the teen market was spending \$175 billion annually by the early 2000s.⁹¹ Although some other media companies were already geared toward teens, like television networks MTV and the WB, Alloy filled a unique gap as a book packager, creating the original concepts that could be developed transmedially. A few imitators sprung up following Alloy's success, targeting teens as well. However, Paper Lantern Lit and Full Fathom Five, run by authors Lauren Oliver and James Frey respectively, remain relatively small-scale book packagers and function mainly as vanity presses for their founders, achieving only moderate success, mostly in furthering the personal brands of the authors.

Alloy's new direction emphasized not only transmedia, but consumerist production, attempting to reach teen girls in every facet of their lives, and attract their \$175 billion in spending. Every concept developed was geared toward the consumption of branded products.⁹² Alloy's first major franchise under its new name was *Gossip Girl*, a series conceived by Alloy editor Cecily von Ziegesar and written by ghostwriters, which followed the lives of popular girls at a private school on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. The book series was quickly adapted to television for the new teen-oriented CW network. The popularity of the book series and ensuing adaptation spurred on a wave of teen "chick lit," or "brat lit" the disparagingly named genre that emphasized the fashion and wider consumption of the characters, along with the traditional themes of romance and relationships.⁹³ *Gossip Girl* and Alloy's similar brat lit series, dropped an average of a brand name per page, from the couture clothing the girls wore to the

⁹¹ Ibid., 20.

⁹² Johnson, "Consuming Desires," 55.

⁹³ Bindig, *Gossip Girl*, 26.

expensive liquor they illegally drank.⁹⁴ The television show promoted those and more products, as well as producing a number of fashion collaborations inspired by *Gossip Girl*.

Alloy's transmedia consumerist business model underlines their status as a commodity-driven business with no larger artistic intentions. Although that assertion could be leveled at most media companies, Alloy's production of media products for teens complicates that, given the history of pedagogic discourse surrounding children's literature. A 2009 profile of Alloy quoted executive vice-president Josh Bank admitting the company lacked any literary aims, and suggesting the collaborative development process they employed made it impossible: "You can't group-plot *Harry Potter*." This mentality may validate criticisms leveled at Alloy and its predecessors for its disinterest in "quality" literature, but the company's success suggests two different discourses. First, Alloy's status as the sole prominent book packager in combination with their YA emphasis – similarly modeled book packagers simply do not exist in any genres that target adult readers – fosters the perception that teen readers are undiscerning consumers with no regard for literary merit. Second, Alloy's success with their stated philosophy of "thinking first what kids want to read" suggests that young adults exert considerable agency in their purchasing and reading choices and are not dissuaded by the criticisms of adults.⁹⁵

The success of Alloy's first transmedia properties and the revitalization of *The Vampire Diaries* book series, thanks to the success of *Twilight*, made it a logical choice to adapt next. In early 2009, the CW announced that they had greenlit a pilot produced by

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Mead, "The Gossip Mill."

WBTV and Alloy based on *The Vampire Diaries* book series.⁹⁶ *A Secret Circle* adaptation followed in 2011. The expansion of the franchise into television meant that the book series could be repackaged yet again, this time to synergistically promote the upcoming TV series and push book sales. The first books in both series were released in the trade paperback format as “tie-in” editions to coincide with the premiere of the television show adaptations, using promotional photos from the show of the core three cast members as the cover art. *The Vampire Diaries* also released a mass-market paperback set of the series, using different promotional photos, around the time of the season one finale the following spring. The tie-in editions also changed the font of the book title to match the logos of the television series, and included the identifier “now a new CW series!” In the second *Vampire Diaries* tie-in edition, “the new CW hit series!” appears at the top of the cover. While fans of the book series most likely tuned in to the CW to see the adaptation on screen, these tie-in covers were designed to attract the considerably wider audience of television viewers to the books.

“Created By L.J. Smith”: Alloy and the Problem of Authorship

Given the renewed interest in the franchise and the upcoming television show, the book series began churning out new content rapidly. L.J. Smith wrote a second trilogy of books, *The Vampire Diaries: The Return*, which matched the marketing style of the 2007 omnibuses closely, released in trade paperbacks each spring from 2009-2011. However, as the franchise grew in popularity and size, problems emerged between Alloy’s new model and their old one as 17th Street Productions. Alloy had renegotiated with Smith to write the new trilogy as the company began to privilege tangible authorship

⁹⁶ Nellie Andreeva, “CW orders ‘Vampire,’ ‘Politics’ pilots,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, February 5, 2009.

in their new multimedia mindset.⁹⁷ Visible authors could be leveraged to promote their franchises by producing content on Alloy's other platforms, such as their digital content, as well as promoting their series through more conventional methods, like book tours. In a profile of Alloy in 2009, Morgenstein declared "author anonymity" a liability, mentioning the company's problems with promoting *The A-List* series by Zoey Dean, styled as a West Coast *Gossip Girl*, considering Dean was actually a pseudonym for a team of six writers.⁹⁸ In contrast, Lisi Harrison of *The Clique* series – *Gossip Girl* for the middle school set – wrote under her own name and maintained a weekly blog for Alloy that attracted thousands of fans.⁹⁹ In this regard, Smith was the best choice to continue *The Vampire Diaries* series, even though she had been out of the public eye during a decade-long hiatus from writing. Smith's return to Alloy was beneficial for her as well – rather than receiving a fixed fee for her work as she had in the 1990s, Smith now received a 50% stake in the series.¹⁰⁰

However, Alloy's plans to maintain *The Vampire Diaries* as a cohesive franchise were at odds with Smith's literary intentions for the series, a problem inherent with growing franchises. Smith was determined to do her characters justice and "follow... what they were telling [her] in [her] heart."¹⁰¹ Her draft of the second book for *The Return* trilogy was a hefty 800 pages and required serious "whittl[ing] down" by Alloy to be considered publishable.¹⁰² Smith's devotion to her characters and lengthy manuscripts slowed Alloy's carefully scheduled publication schedule. Meanwhile, Alloy had

⁹⁷ Mead, "The Gossip Mill."

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Alter, "'Vampire' Writer."

¹⁰¹ "lj smith (creator of the vampire diaries books) fired from the rest of the series," Tumblr post, 2011, accessed June 7, 2015, <http://anditsdraining.tumblr.com/post/3137484606/l-j-smith-creator-of-the-vampire-diaries-books>.

¹⁰² Mead, "The Gossip Mill."

contracted a ghostwriter to produce *Stefan's Diaries*, a series of six novels filling in Stefan's backstory as a vampire to be published in quick succession in a year and a half around the same time. Rather than staying true to the book series' canonical history, in which Stefan Salvatore and his brother Damon were born during the Italian Renaissance, *Stefan's Diaries* used the television show's history, which placed the brothers' origins in the Civil War-era South. These novels, despite being ghostwritten, still featured Smith's name prominently on the covers, but also cited Kevin Williamson and Julie Plec as the developers of the TV series. Additionally, the covers maintained a visual cohesion with the other book series by mimicking the "big head" cover style and bannered subtitles, while using the TV promotional art and font to tie it more closely to the television series.

The contrast between Smith's *Return* trilogy and *Stefan's Diaries* demonstrated the problems inherent with contracting a now established and independent author to work for hire. Smith had expressed hesitation about the television adaptation on her personal blog numerous times, eventually posting a general response on her "Ask L.J." page that although it was a "brilliant story" the television series was an entirely separate version from "the story told in the books."¹⁰³ The situation came to a head when Smith turned in a draft of the first book for the next trilogy, *The Vampire Diaries: The Hunters*. In staying true to her vision for her characters, Smith had diverged from the television show on a major plot point by having the female lead, Elena, chose Damon over his brother Stefan, whereas Elena and Stefan were still the main romantic pairing on the TV show.

Ironically, the television narrative would go in that very direction several years later, but

¹⁰³ Lisa Jane Smith, "Ask L.J.," L.J. Smith: Official Site, November 6, 2012, accessed June 8, 2015, <http://www.ljanesmith.net/author/ask-l-j>.

Smith's refusal to write novels in line with Alloy's cohesive franchise strategy could be easily solved by Alloy: Smith was let go due to "creative differences."¹⁰⁴

Smith's release from her contract did not deter Alloy's plan to continue growing *The Vampire Diaries* franchise. Although Alloy's new contract gave Smith a much larger stake in the profits of the franchise, Alloy was still the sole owner of the intellectual rights to the world of characters she had created and was free to continue adding to the series without her.¹⁰⁵ *The Hunters* trilogy was rewritten by a ghostwriter, as well as another trilogy, *The Salvation*, both published in quick succession over the next three years. The style of the books remained exactly the same and featured L.J. Smith's name prominently, although the small text above it now read, "created by *New York Times* bestselling author." Morgenstein's stated desire to move Alloy away from the liability of "author anonymity" was challenged by the greater threat of a disruption in continuity. *The Salvation*, the final trilogy to date, made a small concession by including the disclaimer "written by Audrey Clark" under Smith's name, even though the previous trilogy had also been written by a ghostwriter. Alloy further demonstrated they were willing to entirely rebrand if a product was not succeeding. When the television adaptation of *The Secret Circle* was canceled after only one season, the book series was repackaged with a new style of covers only a few months later. The covers each featured moody-looking teens centered and surrounded by graphically stylized representations of the various witches' powers. The repackaging also served to promote three new books in the series, released in similar quick succession, and also ghostwritten by Audrey Clark.

¹⁰⁴ Alter, "'Vampire' Writer."

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

The larger franchise, now centered on *The Vampire Diaries* television show, was largely unaffected by the change in authorship of the book series. However, some fans of the original book series were so upset with Smith's unceremonious firing that they boycotted the new books. Smith herself was deeply traumatized by the experience, comparing it to

well, think of someone taking a wee on your grandmother's (the nicest one's)—or if you're old enough, your mother's—gravesite. And then think of the whole world as you know it doing it. Think about how that would hurt in your mind, in your soul; and you'll have an idea of how my left pinky feels. You don't want to get me talking about how my soul feels. It feels . . . trashed. Mutilated. Worse than its felt in a long, long, long time, Like being raped in a lonely stairwell by a guy with a knife and then being blamed for it by the Supreme Court.¹⁰⁶

Smith's comments underline the shift in power created by Alloy's status as book packager. With traditional ideas, and legal rights, of authorship no longer valid, Smith was relegated to the role of unhappy fan, with a deep investment but no proprietary claim. Her dramatic use of hyperbole further aligns her with the feminized fan, often maligned for their intense devotion to their fan object. Additionally, Smith's situation demonstrates the complex negotiation of authorship involved in all contemporary multi-media franchises, where both fans and those involved in the production of the franchise must continually develop and adjust the contours of their fandom. Does it extend to books and the television series? Only the books? Only the books originally authored by Smith?

¹⁰⁶ "Interview with L.J. Smith part deux," Bookalicious, May 23, 2011, accessed June 8, 2015, <http://bookalicio.us/2011/05/interview-with-l-j-smith-part-duex/>.

Smith's next venture regarding *The Vampire Diaries* further emphasizes the complex negotiations of authorship in a multimedia environment. After her release from Alloy, many of Smith's fans wrote to her, begging her to finish her version of the story.¹⁰⁷ A new avenue was available to Smith to do so, Kindle Worlds. Amazon had launched Kindle Worlds in 2013, attempting to monetize the growing popularity of fanfiction. Through Kindle Worlds, fans were legitimized, able to publish, in e-book form, and make profit off of, their fanworks. However, Kindle Worlds still functions as a form of fan labor for the media industries, giving fanfiction authors even fewer rights than the author-for-hire model Alloy uses. Authors receive only 35% of the royalties from their works, half of what authors of original published works receive. Amazon splits the remaining profits with the copyright holders of the source material.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, in trade for writing fiction about pre-owned intellectual property, fanfiction authors give up the rights to any original characters or story ideas they may create.

Perhaps seeing the similarities to their business model, Alloy was one of several companies to license their properties to Kindle Worlds. After a friend notified her of the possibility, Smith began publishing *Vampire Diaries* fanfiction on Kindle Worlds, picking up from where the books she had written had left off. Although no doubt gratifying to her devoted fanbase, Smith was now entirely repositioned within the franchise. While those "in-the-know" may privilege Smith's fanworks as the true interpretation of the text, uninformed consumers now viewed her two offerings in the Kindle World digital store to be in the same standing as any other fan-author's work. For

¹⁰⁷ Alter, "'Vampire' Writer."

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

example, Michelle Hazen, prolific writer of eight *Vampire Diaries* novels available in the Kindle World store, holds equivalent or higher Amazon ratings than Smith.

Still, Smith frames her own narrative journey from author to fan as one of artistic integrity, impeded by legalities she did not understand as a young author. It appears she still does not understand them. Ironically, Smith's desire to finish her characters' story herself via Kindle Worlds once again provides Alloy with profit and intellectual property for the series. Alloy even promoted Smith's fanworks on the official *Vampire Diaries* website, as Morgenstein expressed the company's interest in new, unique revenue streams that further diversified the franchise.¹⁰⁹ The repeated commodification of Smith's work demonstrates the encroaching franchise logic of the media industries that has corporatized authorship and monetized fan labor, first removing her from *The Vampire Diaries* series, and then profiting off of her fanworks.

Despite its tenuous conditions of authorship, the protracted success of *The Vampire Diaries* book series since the early 1990s demonstrates the viability of Alloy's unique transmedia consumerist business model in targeting their young adult audience. This success, built on the historic model of assembly-line book packaging and an attention to trends within the industry, reveals a disinterest in literary quality and a troubling contemporary perception of mindless teen media consumers. However, Alloy's transmedia success in adapting properties like *The Vampire Diaries* to television and use of digital distribution models, also indicates the media savviness of teen consumers, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

The New CW: Franchises, Millennials, and Digital Platforms

Alloy's success in growing franchises out of the concepts it packages is dependent on their relationship with the media companies they partner with to produce and distribute their properties. The CW, a new network created in 2006, has become one of Alloy's main partners in adapting their properties for television, creating the CW's first two substantial hit programs. I argue the CW's initial launch and brand was dependent on the pre-established brand created by Alloy and its young adult literature properties. The CW's initial partnership with Alloy, translating the *Gossip Girl* book series to television, was instrumental in initiating the current trend of television franchises based in YA literature. However, as this chapter details, it was the second CW/Alloy partnership, *The Vampire Diaries*, that provided a successful franchise and later spin-offs that served as a longer-lasting foundation for the network's brand. I argue that *The Vampire Diaries* represents the beginning of the CW's brand: a brand that centers on the conception of a Millennial audience and builds on other successful teen media products, including the network's predecessor, the WB, youth-oriented stars and showrunners, and current young adult media trends.

Furthermore, the CW's targeting of a youth-oriented, Millennial demographic has pushed the network to innovate digitally in reaching said audience. I argue that the CW's digital emphasis has led them innovate contemporary franchise strategies through digital platforms, content, and social media, particularly for franchises like *The Vampire Diaries* that appeal to young female audiences. This chapter draws attention to the ways the CW uses streaming platforms and produces exclusive digital content in ways that differentiate

the network from its broadcast and cable competitors. Additionally, the CW's use of social media maintains its audience of female fans by building social ties and performing authenticity via the social media presence of CW stars.

Building the CW Brand

The creation of the CW network in the fall of 2006 marked a period of transition for teen media. The network was formed in a merger between the WB and UPN, and so is co-owned by CBS and Warner Bros. Entertainment. The earlier networks had both been failing in the ratings for the years leading up to 2006, and were unlikely to ever achieve parity with the Big 4 networks of ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox. Executives were hopeful that combining the two would prove more competitive, as both networks had targeted the same youth-oriented demographic.¹¹⁰ The failure of the WB in particular, a model of teen television culture for the past decade with shows like *7th Heaven*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Dawson's Creek*, indicated that the climate for teen media was changing as well.

What caused this transition to occur? The media industry and culture at large was still developing their conception of the young generation this teen media was intended for, and with it, creating new media products to more suitably target them. Although also called Generation Y in connection to their predecessors Generation X, and Echo Boomers as the children of Baby Boomers, the dominant name for the rising generation was the Millennials, given popular culture's preoccupation with the new millennium.¹¹¹

Generations, although a loose label with no firm or agreed upon dates attached, provide

¹¹⁰ Wee, *Teen Media*, 162.

¹¹¹ Betty Kaklamanidou and Margaret Tally, "Introduction: The Twenty-First Century Generation and the ABC Family Brand," *The Millennials on Film and Television: Essays on the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Betty Kaklamanidou and Margaret Tally (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014), 3.

the media industry, culture, and scholars with a construct to address people as a group determined by age and by specific, unique traits, influenced by the current sociopolitical climate, that characterize the group.¹¹²

Prominent scholars of teen media provide different, but overlapping, birth years for Millennials that provide evidence of this transitional period. Kaklamanidou and Tally define Millennials as those born between 1984 and 1992, or those who came of age after 2000.¹¹³ Wee's broader definition of Millennials includes those born between 1980 and 1995, but separates them into an older and younger segment.¹¹⁴ According to these scholars, in 2005, a year before the creation of the CW, Millennials would be between 13 to 21 years old by Kaklamanidou and Tally's definition, or younger Millennials 10 to 18 years old and older Millennials 18 to 25 years old by Wee's definition. These numbers line up neatly with the common age bracket for teenagers in 2005, indicating that the concept of Millennials was as much a relabeling of the teen market as defining a new generation. The age brackets also suggest that many Millennials were soon to leave their teen years behind and become young adults. The new CW network then appeared just as the media industry began to shift in targeting this lucrative Millennial demographic, from strictly "teen" media that the WB had emphasized to programming encompassing the "emergent adulthood" of Millennials entering their twenties.¹¹⁵ The CW continues to pursue Millennials today as the demographic ages into their twenties and even thirties.

The CW faced a number of challenges upon its creation in 2006, starting as a new network with little coherent brand identity. First, the network was bound by the

¹¹² Ibid., 2.

¹¹³ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁴ Wee, *Teen Media*, 20.

¹¹⁵ Kaklamanidou and Tally, *The Millennials*, 5.

imperatives of its two corporate parents, working with an amalgamation of leftover programming. But also, the disparate brands of its predecessors left the CW unclear on what audience to target and how. The network's premiere slate of programming in the fall of 2006 was a mish-mash of holdovers the WB and UPN. The WB had been known for its wholesome young-skewing programming, including *Gilmore Girls* and *Smallville*, while UPN's strength was in diverse situation comedies like *Everybody Hates Chris* and *Girlfriends*. The combination of these disparate shows and almost no original programming made the CW's purpose as a network beyond the obvious emphasis on young adults unclear. At the very least, the CW began with a strong visual brand for its introduction to audiences. The network chose a bright kelly green for a signature color and emphasized the theme of connection through their logo, the "C" connecting to the "W," their initial slogan "Free to Be Together," and their design, which used circular patterns.

After its first season without a clear network brand, the CW turned to a partnership with Alloy Entertainment, coopting the book packager's established brand of feminized YA media, starting with an adaptation of the *Gossip Girl* series. *Gossip Girl*, and Alloy's many other book series, emphasized current teen trends, concentrating on a young female demographic, and were specifically engineered to be adapted to television and film. Lori Bindig notes that fans of *Gossip Girl* provided a "ready-made" audience for the new CW network, a strategy so successful that it would jumpstart a trend of its own of teen book-to-television adaptations.¹¹⁶ Alloy had already proven the viability of this strategy by successfully adapted their best-selling book series, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, to film in 2005, with a sequel on the way. The CW planned to adapt

¹¹⁶ Bindig, *Gossip Girl*, 22.

Gossip Girl, Alloy's book series that began publication in 2002 and remained at the forefront of the teen "brat lit" genre. Network president Dawn Ostroff noted that nine books in the series had reached *The New York Times* bestseller list when announcing the *Gossip Girl* adaptation.¹¹⁷ Via this rationalized discourse valuating Alloy's previous success, the CW legitimated their partnership with Alloy and their own new network brand. Further, this discourse privileged the economic potential of the *Gossip Girl* franchise in an attempt to legitimate the CW's pursuit of Alloy's young, female audience.¹¹⁸

The *Gossip Girl* television series premiered in fall 2007 to solid ratings by the fledgling network's standards, and proved the perfect vehicle to jump-start the network's brand, providing a model for further programming decisions. More than the decent ratings, the series garnered considerable buzz, both positive and negative, with critics and audiences for its racy, hedonistic content. The CW then turned this buzz into a marketing campaign, using criticisms like "mind-blowingly inappropriate" and "every parent's nightmare" as slogans paired with sexually suggestive images of the characters. *Gossip Girl*'s success led the CW to grow their brand as "sleek...fantasy soaps"¹¹⁹ the following two years, adding young sexy reboots of 1990s nighttime soap opera staples *90210* and *Melrose Place*, and more Alloy products like *Privileged*, based on the book series *How to Teach Filthy Rich Girls*, while gradually phasing out old WB and UPN programming as shows ended their runs. These programming decisions highlight the way the CW relied

¹¹⁷ Johnson, "A Knight of the Realm," 1084.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1082.

¹¹⁹ Lisa de Moraes, "For Fall, CW Brings On the Suds – and Vampires," *The Washington Post*, May 22, 2009, C06.

on known franchises, fitting them into the Millennial brand they were establishing, developing only a few original programs.

The CW's franchise selection and marketing clearly delineates the network's brand as not just targeting the young adult demographic now labeled as Millennials, but young women within that group. *Gossip Girl*, as part of the Alloy brand, had expressly targeted teen girls within the YA book market, as discussed in the previous chapter. Further Alloy products were also developed to reach the same audience. However, the revival of older feminized brands like *90210* and *Melrose Place* suggested the CW hoped to reach women older than Millennials as well. The scandalous, sexualized marketing campaign for *Gossip Girl* further configured the network's programming as a "guilty pleasure" for older female viewers. Additionally, the CW's Millennial emphasis did not mean that younger teen and tween female viewers lost interest; the concept of KAYGOY, "kids getting older younger," indicated that younger audiences would seek out programming meant for older audiences to feel grown up, a strategy Pattee notes Alloy also uses by writing YA fiction for a younger reading level.¹²⁰

Along with familiar franchises, the CW relied on a set of familiar faces to draw in viewers. Young women especially identified closely with stars, and had proven to be ideal consumers for the media industries to target, readily engaging with extratextual materials and ancillary content.¹²¹ For example, Blake Lively, cast as one of the female leads on *Gossip Girl*, had already appeared as one of the stars in Alloy's first film venture, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. Reboots like *Melrose Place* could potentially attract double the viewers, casting stars like Laura Leighton and Heather

¹²⁰ Bindig, *Gossip Girl*, 14.

¹²¹ Murray, "I Know What You Did Last Summer," 45.

Locklear familiar to older fans of the original series, and contemporary young stars like Katie Cassidy and Michael Rady, who had already appeared in teen products for the CW and Alloy, *Supernatural* and *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, respectively, as well as teen pop star Ashlee Simpson.

The CW's reliance on a specific group of young actors was a strategy clearly borrowed from the earlier WB network. The earlier network had frequently depended on branded teen stars to promote their various products across media, nurturing a select group of actors by placing them in guest spots and slowly promoting them up to starring roles if they proved popular.¹²² In turn, the WB's strategy was borrowed from the classical studio system that kept a stable of stars under contract. The CW continually employs this graduated strategy and also reuses starring actors from canceled shows to strengthen the cast of new shows, making recognizable young adult stars a part of their network brand. For example, of the five lead actors on *Melrose Place*, which was canceled after its first season, each went on to be cast in supporting roles in other CW shows, while Cassidy, Rady, and Jessica Lucas also netted starring roles in other new CW shows.

Beyond repetitive incorporation in the network's programming, the CW's stable of stars embodied the network's brand of sleek teen fantasy. All of the actors employed by the CW were very conventionally attractive, even by television standards: the women thin with long, flowing hair, the men with chiseled abs and strong jaws. Additionally, each cast featured predominantly white actors, with only one or two minority actors featured per show. A casting director for the network noted the directive to maintain the *Gossip Girl* image of "hyper-skinny models" when the emaciated appearance of several

¹²² Wee, *Teen Media*, 159.

90210 actresses caused concern in popular press.¹²³ Unlike the negative press for the network's risqué content, these criticisms could not be reframed to benefit the network and pointed out the underlying problem with structuring the CW brand entirely around the *Gossip Girl* brat lit genre. Even Alloy had exhausted the genre, claiming they were “really a little sick of the mean-girl stuff,” as cultural distaste for the blatant sexualized commercialism of the genre grew, and the YA industry moved on to newer trends.¹²⁴

The Vampire Diaries: “It’s Not Twilight”

The CW had usefully drawn on its WB heritage and Alloy partnership to craft their brand, copying the WB's emphasis on teen star-branded serial dramas and building franchises with Alloy's on-trend content. However, in this transitional moment of teen media, as Millennials slowly began to age out of their teen years and new perceptions about the generation solidified, the particular Alloy property the CW had used to jumpstart the network with *Gossip Girl* as their flagship program seemed ultimately unsustainable for the network's brand. Interest in brat lit had waned, and the CW's launch of similarly branded programs like *Melrose Place* and *Privileged* had failed. However, Alloy's partnership with the CW, adapting a YA book series for television, had set a new precedent for young adult media franchising and so the CW selected another series to adapt that would help them pivot the focus of their brand as a network.

The Vampire Diaries, premiering in 2009, represented a refocusing of the CW brand that still partnered with Alloy and built on the history of the WB, but recalibrated to target Millennials. The CW would continue to develop a line-up of serial dramas that skewed toward young female viewers, but with content that reflected more current trends

¹²³ Alynda Wheat, et al., “Are the Skinny Starlets of ‘90210’ Setting a Bad Example?,” *Entertainment Weekly*, September 26, 2008, 12-13.

¹²⁴ Mead, “The Gossip Mill.”

and with a tone more in line with the sensibilities of the newly envisioned Millennial viewer. Who were Millennials? An *Advertising Age* section entitled “Getting to Know the Millennials,” and published by ABC Family, a cable channel that targeted the same youth demographic as the CW and would also partner with Alloy, described Millennials as tech-savvy, community-oriented, and diverse.¹²⁵ Conceptualizing audiences as Millennials was then not just a strategy to capture a demographic that may or may not identify as such, but a strategy to appeal to advertisers who wanted to align their products with trendy, youthful brands.

The Vampire Diaries, a long-time Alloy series, served this new Millennial strategy for the CW through a careful negotiation of intertextual references connecting the franchise to other media products, notably YA literature, which was proving to be a leader in contemporary young adult media industry trends. The fading popularity of brat lit in the YA market had been replaced by an obsession with the supernatural, especially vampires. The leader of the craze was the *Twilight* series, which, like *The Vampire Diaries*, concerned a human girl in love with a vampire. The CW program was greenlit in early 2009, only months after the first *Twilight* film premiered, and industry news generally deemed the move to be a smart decision for the network, if a blatant attempt to capitalize on the trend.¹²⁶ The CW delicately balanced *The Vampire Diaries*’ resemblance to the trendy *Twilight* by differentiating itself through another set of intertextual references to the showrunner, Kevin Williamson. While *The Vampire Diaries*’ similarities to *Twilight* guaranteed the show would appeal to teen girls obsessed with

¹²⁵ Julie Liesse, “Getting to Know the Millennials,” *Advertising Age*, July 9, 2007.

¹²⁶ Andreeva, “CW Orders ‘Vampire.’”

vampires, Williamson's involvement raised critical interest and much needed artistic authorship to a concept that could quickly be written off as a shallow knockoff.

This perception was built on Williamson's resume of previous work, including the horror franchise *Scream* and the WB series *Dawson's Creek*. *Scream*, released in 1996, was a "hyper-postmodern" update of popular 1980s slasher films in which characters were pop culture savvy and aware of the conventions of the horror genre.¹²⁷ The *Scream* franchise then established Williamson as an auteur capable of twisting tired source material into something fresh and clever, as well as adept at the scary and bloody conventions of horror. Additionally, the *Scream* franchise notably reconfigures the villain/Final Girl dichotomy of slasher horror by having the female protagonist, Sidney Prescott, survive multiple films in the franchise, developing as a character and defeating a different killer in each installment. Sidney's empowerment and prominence in the franchise underlines teen media's increasingly female-centric positioning as young females became "the ideal(ized) target audience at the box-office," even in a genre as traditionally masculinized as horror.¹²⁸ In Williamson's hands, *The Vampire Diaries'* conceptualization as horror told from the perspective of a young woman was an appealing, recognizable premise.

Williamson's other prominent work, the WB teen soap *Dawson's Creek*, further enhanced his reputation of refreshing tired source material. The teen characters on the show endured the same coming-of-age tropes as many other shows, but with smarter, wordier dialogue and plenty of allusions to teens past, including the iconic 1980s film *The Breakfast Club* and Williamson's own horror films *Scream* and *I Know What You*

¹²⁷ Wee, *Teen Media*, 125.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

Did Last Summer. This suggested Williamson could create a compelling group of teen characters for *The Vampire Diaries*. Additionally, the recurring love triangle of Dawson/Joey/Pacey and other romantic entanglements of *Dawson's Creek* proved Williamson could handle teen romance. The WB connection also reinforced that the CW was targeting the same demographic as the former network, but slightly aged up and relabeled Millennials.

During the press leading up to the premiere of *The Vampire Diaries*, Williamson worked to establish the show as a product of his own unique vision, and decried other comparisons, continually insisting that the show was “not *Twilight*” and would diverge significantly from the initial plot similarities. Vampires were just “a way in,” and the show would really just be “stories about a small town.”¹²⁹ The disavowal of *Twilight* seemed necessary for Williamson and CW executives in order to appeal for critical praise for their own vampire product, despite the fact that the target audience of young women was the same for both and the CW would continue to rely on those feminized appeals in marketing the show.

Interestingly, the CW did not rely heavily on their stable of previously hired actors to cast *The Vampire Diaries*. However, the cast still had resumés that made them recognizable within the larger teen media ecosystem. Nina Dobrev, cast as female protagonist Elena Gilbert, had appeared on the long-running Canadian teen show *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, noted for its realistic teenaged cast and sensitive handling of topical issues. Male leads Ian Somerhalder and Paul Wesley, as vampire brothers Damon and Stefan Salvatore, had each appeared on a number of series.

¹²⁹ Vince Horiuchi, “TV: Blooduscking mania redux?” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, August 4, 2009; Rob Owen, “The CW Turns to Vampires and a New ‘Melrose’ Place,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 5, 2009, C-5.

Somerhalder, most known for his role on ABC's cult hit *Lost*, had also appeared on WB shows *Young Americans* and *Smallville*. Wesley's varied resume included teen roles on network shows *Wolf Lake* and *American Dreams*, small parts on teen shows like *Everwood* and *The O.C.*, and a starring role on ABC Family mini-series, *Fallen*. Supporting cast members on *The Vampire Diaries* had similarly teen-oriented resumes, and as the cast grew – and needed to be continually replenished due to often fatal plotlines – the CW would continue to draw on their stable of familiar actors, as well as using actors known for their connection to other teen-oriented brands, like ABC Family and MTV, and foreign teen-branded stars from Canada and Australia.

Although they had built a cast of recognizable teen faces, the CW primarily depended on the *Twilight* comparison when marketing the television show to audiences. A variety of different promotional commercials aired on the CW leading up to the September 2009 premiere. All drew on *Twilight* in some regard. A short “Love Sucks” spot matched *Twilight*'s tone most closely. The entire promo, filmed in dreamy, muted gray tones, featured a close-up of Elena in a stormy field, as mysterious, masculine hands caress her face while she describes both the joy and agony of romance in voiceover. The color palette is reminiscent of Hardwicke's *Twilight* film, as is the voiceover style, which is employed by Kristen Stewart's Bella throughout the film. The promo still provides some subtle differentiation: it is clear there are two sets of hands touching Dobrev, demonstrating that the love triangle will take a central role, and the voiceover begins with “Dear Diary,” reiterating the conceit of the show.

The promotional commercial for the first episode of *The Vampire Diaries* begins by drawing viewers in with a *Twilight* comparison. Paul Wesley's character Stefan

appears first, perched on the roof of a building, and then leaps off and glides to the ground in a supernatural feat similar to Edward Cullen's "spider-monkey" tree climbing in the trailer for *Twilight*. Stefan's voiceover also begins the promo and further connects him to Edward. He decides to give up "liv[ing] in secret" because he has fallen in love with Elena at first sight and "[has] to know her." The trailer shows glimpses of the two meeting in high school, again similar to the *Twilight* trailer. Words in the signature *Vampire Diaries* font are also intercut with the footage: "Desire." "Heartbreak." "Envy." "Redemption." The upbeat pop music cuts out halfway through the trailer, the words begin to flash faster, now including "Fear" and "Rage," and the clear character building of the promo is replaced with quick cuts of screaming and terror, a girl's bloodied neck, and a fight that crashes through a second story window. Here, the promo illustrates one of the ways *The Vampire Diaries* will diverge from *Twilight*—engaging with Williamson's horror roots. Compared to the minimal, bloodless violence of *Twilight*, *The Vampire Diaries*' graphic content, still tempered by its place on network television, brought a more adult connotation to the CW show and an attempted to appeal to male audiences, expanding beyond the network's core female demographic. However, the promo concludes as the text shots rapidly speed up and then flash from the consistent black background to white, and the word "Love." The pop music returns, Elena and Stefan introduce themselves to each other and make prolonged eye contact, and the screen fades into the title card. Although more blood and action will be had, *The Vampire Diaries* ultimately sells itself as a love story, unmistakably referencing *Twilight*, to ensure that the network's core audience will support the show.

The inventive marketing for *The Vampire Diaries* further emphasizes the CW's attempts to frame their brand to appeal to Millennials and underlines the network's strong partnership with Alloy. In the weeks before the show's premiere, the CW partnered with the American Red Cross for a *Vampire Diaries* blood drive, targeting young adults on high school and college campuses around the country. The blood drive was advertised via a promotional spot using the three principal actors, as well as promotional photos from the show that had been altered to include the tagline, "Starve a vampire. Donate blood."¹³⁰ The promotional spot was screened on Alloy's Channel One, a twelve-minute news program of "sponsored educational material" reaching 6 million teenagers in 270,000 high school classrooms across the country.¹³¹ A typical Channel One program was about half hard news, half "soft spots" and advertisements, although banner ads also took up a portion of the screen for the entire segment.¹³² Alloy's use of Channel One, although criticized by educators and legislators for its commercialization of education, provided a unique platform to reach young adults and reinforce their partners' brands and products, including the CW. However, *The Vampire Diaries* promo is carefully framed as a PSA for the Red Cross blood drive, only directly mentioning vampires through the use of the tagline and the introductory text, "a message from *The Vampire Diaries*." Through the name and the appearance of the actors, the PSA still functions as promotion for the show, but the serious tone and content addresses potential CW viewers using the

¹³⁰ Stuart Elliott, "Looking for Viewers. No Need to Pardon the Puns," *The New York Times*, August 25, 2009, 3.

¹³¹ Ronald V. Bettig and Jeanne Lynn Hall, *Big Media, Big Money: Cultural Texts and Political Economics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 233

¹³² *Ibid.*, 234.

Millennial construction of young adults as civic-minded citizens, that care about important issues in their community.¹³³

More Than *Vampires*: Witches and (Unoriginal) *Originals*

Although these strategies successfully launched *The Vampire Diaries*, the failure of the franchise's first spin-off, *The Secret Circle*, demonstrated the CW had attributed the franchise's success solely to its supernatural generic conventions, missing some of the more crucial appeals of the earlier series. *The Vampire Diaries* had proven a hit for the network from its premiere, capturing the CW's largest audience ever with almost five million viewers.¹³⁴ The network's new shows the following season in fall 2010 suggested they thought *The Vampire Diaries'* appeal were in classic WB-style teen fare: *Life Unexpected* followed a teen girl reconnecting with her birth parents, while *Hellcats* was *Bring It On* in a college setting. Neither show performed well and were quickly canceled. In fall of 2011, the CW tried again by adapting *The Secret Circle*, the book series about a coven of teen witches written by the same author as *The Vampire Diaries*, L.J. Smith.

In the same way the books had relied on displaying L.J. Smith's authorship and a similar stylistic cover design to tie the two series together, *The Secret Circle* television show was immediately connected to *The Vampire Diaries* through proclaimed authorship. Kevin Williamson signed on to executive produce, along with Alloy executives Leslie Morgenstein and Gina Girolamo, and a new name for the network, Andrew Miller, who would serve as the primary showrunner. *Vampire Diaries* staff writers Elizabeth Craft and Sarah Fain were also conscripted to work on the new show.¹³⁵

¹³³ Collins, "The Emotional Power," 94.

¹³⁴ "The War of 18-49, The Vampire Diaries," *Spotted Ratings*, May 30, 2103, <http://www.spottedratings.com/2013/05/the-war-of-18-49-vampire-diaries.html>.

¹³⁵ "CW builds 'Circle' of friends, *Daily Variety*, February 9, 2011.

The CW planned to connect the shows more explicitly by pairing them together on Thursday nights, with the rookie show *The Secret Circle* following the highly-rated “proven launch pad” of *The Vampire Diaries*.¹³⁶

The CW used many of the same strategies to promote *The Secret Circle* as they had for *The Vampire Diaries*, such as emphasizing the show’s fantasy elements. The show was promoted heavily throughout the summer leading up to its September 2011 premiere. The cast and crew appeared at San Diego Comic-Con, or SDCC, in July for panels and a screening of the pilot. As the name suggests, SDCC, begun in 1970, was originally conceived as a gathering for comic book fans. Although a few films had been promoted at the convention over the years, including *Star Wars* in 1976, fans mark the box office success of 2000’s *X-Men* as the turning point for SDCC as Hollywood realized the potential in promoting their comic-based, science fiction, and fantasy products to an audience with a proven fannish enthusiasm.¹³⁷ Attendance has grown over 60% in the ten years since, and SDCC now sees around 130,000 attendees each year.¹³⁸

The Secret Circle’s appearance at SDCC 2011, along with CW siblings *The Vampire Diaries*, *Supernatural*, *Nikita*, and *Ringer*, marked another turning point for the convention, as they were some of the over 80 television series to appear there, vastly outnumbering films.¹³⁹ A TV show’s appearance at SDCC identified it to viewers as genre entertainment, with complex plotting and characters inspiring fan devotion, a group the CW wanted to be included in. The CW’s panel and screening were well received and

¹³⁶ Lacey Rose, “CW Pushes Sarah Michelle Gellar, Kim Kardashian and the Desire to Make Noise,” *Hollywood Reporter*, May 19, 2011.

¹³⁷ “The History of Comic-Con – San Diego 2014,” YouTube video, 4:12, posted by “Super Comic Fun Time,” July 16, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=119&v=oOhjTBpxT60>.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ “Geek heat; TV turns up Con volume,” *Daily Variety*, July 14, 2011.

proved effective at creating hype for *The Secret Circle*, at least among media-savvy audiences. The show saw a sizable increase in Twitter citations, making it one of the most anticipated shows of the fall.¹⁴⁰ This demonstrated not only SDCC's increased usefulness as tool for television marketing, but also the dexterous marketing of the CW's new brand. In contrast, *The Vampire Diaries'* initial foray at SDCC in 2009 had gone poorly, being scheduled between screenings with a disparate, hardcore comic-driven audience, *Human Target* and *Watchmen*.¹⁴¹

The aesthetic style of *The Secret Circle* marketing campaign was designed to suggest its pairing with *The Vampire Diaries* and fit together with the wider brand of CW serialized dramas. Promotional posters featured the young, attractive cast, heavily made up in stylish clothing, using dark, rich color palettes. The group photos were clearly composited from individual shots, enabling new marketing materials to be continually reconfigured based on the slant of the advertising. Both shows also released character one-sheets for the 2011 season with a remarkably similar style. In *The Vampire Diaries* posters, each lead offered up a different bright red, bloodied fruit to the viewer, in a darker nod to *Twilight's* iconic apple cover. The six posters for *The Secret Circle* also emphasized hands, as each member of the coven held a spark of elemental magic: fire, earth, air, and water. The differences between each individual posters – which fruit or which magic each character held – encouraged a level of fan analysis to interpret those differences and also suggested a collectability for the posters akin to baseball cards. Additionally, the overall aesthetic tone of the posters was similar to the trendy YA covers of the book series, drawing the components of the franchise together.

¹⁴⁰ “TV Twitter Traction; Comic-Con helped new shows gain buzz,” *Daily Variety*, August 2, 2011.

¹⁴¹ Todd VanDerWerff, “Comic-Con First Look: The CW's ‘Vampire Diaries,’” *Hitfix*, July 26, 2009, <http://www.hitfix.com/articles/comic-con-first-look-the-cw-s-vampire-diaries>.

Promotional videos for *The Secret Circle* further indicated that the CW thought the main appeal of the show was its fantasy elements. The most frequently aired videos, 30 second promotional spots, emphasized the magical action of the show: both a house and car catch ablaze, a raging storm with lightning and electric lights sparks, and a lone romantic scene features the two young leads holding hands and causing water droplets to hang suspending and sparkling in the air. Highlighting the witchy special effects left little time for character development in the promos, the interpersonal drama appealing to the Millennial construction of community that Kevin Williamson and *The Vampire Diaries* were known for. In contrast, the promos for the third season of *The Vampire Diaries*, although including their share of exciting action, still emphasized the relationships between Elena and the two vampire Salvatore brothers, as well as new “Original” vampire, Klaus. Additionally, the 30-second spots neglected any mention of the connection between *The Secret Circle* and Kevin Williamson, L.J. Smith, or *The Vampire Diaries*, although the longer SDCC trailer did note the show’s lineage.

The CW did draw on familiar actors to try to create name recognition for *The Secret Circle*. Britt Robertson, cast as the female protagonist Cassie Blake, had joined the show immediately following the cancellation of the CW show *Life Unexpected*, in which she also played the lead. The other leads had similarly teen-oriented resumes: Thomas Dekker’s long history included a starring role in a television adaptation of *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*; Shelley Hennig was Daytime Emmy winner as an Outstanding Younger Actress during her 5-year run on *Days of Our Lives*; and Phoebe Tonkin was known for her Australian kids series, *H2O: Just Add Water*. Notably, even the adult lead of the show, Gale Harold, had just finished a stint on the canceled CW show, *Hellcats*.

However, despite the CW's reliable casting strategy, the teen focus and emphasis solely on fantasy elements over interpersonal relationships was to the detriment of *The Secret Circle* and it was canceled after one season. The show was unable to create interesting and meaningful relationships for audiences to invest in and the coven of teen witches was given poor reviews by critics as "dull, carbon-copy high school characters."¹⁴² Although other factors likely contributed to *The Secret Circle*'s cancellation, the show's teen characters, when viewed along with the recent failures of teen-oriented shows *Life Unexpected* and *Hellcats*, seemed partially at fault. Rather than a distinctly different companion series for *The Vampire Diaries*, *The Secret Circle* came off as a flimsy retread of the same material the CW had introduced two years previous. Further, the focus on magical effects compounded with the ensuing "dull" characters suggested the CW had attributed *The Vampire Diaries*' success to its on-trend supernatural genre, instead of the compelling characters and relationships Kevin Williamson had created.

Despite the lack of sustainable character drama, *The Secret Circle*'s marketing campaign incorporating the show as part of *The Vampire Diaries* franchise was initially successful. Pairing the shows on Thursday nights proved them "very compatible," with *The Secret Circle* retaining 86% of *The Vampire Diaries*' 3.1 million viewers for the premiere.¹⁴³ Over the course of the season, as viewers actually engaged with the show, ratings dropped considerably. The CW attempted to draw in new viewers over the course of the winter hiatus by re-airing the first half of the season in a week-long marathon

¹⁴² Robert Bianco, "There's little magic in 'The Secret Circle'; But teen viewers may come around," *USA Today*, September 15, 2011, 8D.

¹⁴³ Rick Kissell, "Contests drive NBC game, finale score for net," *Daily Variety*, September 21, 2011, 7.

leading up to the winter premiere to no avail. By spring, the show was only attracting around half a million viewers per episode and was canceled after the season finale.¹⁴⁴

Even with the failure of *The Secret Circle*, *The Vampire Diaries* remained the CW's most profitable flagship program, and so the network made it a priority to expand the franchise through another spin-off, *The Originals*, for the 2013-2014 season. The CW recalibrated their spin-off strategy that had failed with *The Secret Circle*, and *The Originals*, was developed to be both more directly connected to the lead program in the franchise and adjusted to connect with the perceived Millennial audience as they continued to age out of their teens. New network president Mark Pedowitz acknowledged the CW's attempts to widen the network's appeal to older audiences through shows like *The Originals*, and the previous year's successful comic adaptation *Arrow*, while still serving their core "bread and butter" audience of young women.¹⁴⁵ These changes underline the way the CW made careful adjustments to their established brand, while maintaining their more general strategy of building off franchises and adaptations.

The Originals was a fairly original development for *The Vampire Diaries* franchise, not based on a book series, but on characters primarily developed in the television series. This made it easy for the CW to create a cast of not only familiar actors, but familiar characters that audiences would want to follow to the spin-off show. However, Alloy remained involved in the expansion of the franchise, producing a new trilogy of books, published by Harlequin's HQN imprint, to accompany the spin-off

¹⁴⁴ "SpotVault – The Secret Circle (CW) – 2011-2012," Spotted Ratings, accessed May 24, 2015, <http://www.spottedratings.com/2011/09/spotvault-secret-circle-cw-2011-12.html>.

¹⁴⁵ Susan Young, "Fall TV Preview," *Daily Variety*, September 12, 2011, 18.

series and fill in the backstory of the characters.¹⁴⁶ The main characters would be the “original” vampire family introduced on *The Vampire Diaries*, led by Joseph Morgan’s Klaus, as well as the werewolf carrying his hybrid baby, Haley, played by Phoebe Tonkin.¹⁴⁷ Tonkin had been cast on *The Vampire Diaries* as Hayley almost directly following the cancellation of *The Secret Circle*. Her immediate rehiring, along with Britt Robertson’s repeated casting, attests to the CW’s vested interest in building their brand with teen stars, even as particular vehicles for those stars failed. The show would also maintain consistency with *The Vampire Diaries* through Julie Plec’s leadership as executive producer. Plec had already been operating in a showrunner capacity on *The Vampire Diaries*, as Williamson had left to work on new projects *The Secret Circle* and CBS’s *The Following* for the past two years.

To create further assurances that this spin-off would be a success beyond the familiar cast of characters, the CW tested the viability of *The Originals* using a backdoor pilot. A backdoor pilot uses an episode of a currently airing show to transition spin-off characters to a new locale or situation, setting up the eventual separate show.¹⁴⁸ In this case, *The Vampire Diaries* episode 4x20 “The Originals” aired April 25, 2013, and while the beginning and end of the episode featured the lead characters from *The Vampire Diaries* in their home of Mystic Falls, the majority of the episode followed Klaus and Hayley to New Orleans and introduced the new characters that would populate the spin-

¹⁴⁶ Theo, “Books with Bite: A Series Based on The Originals is on Its Way!” July 11, 2014, accessed July 8, 2015, <http://vampirediaries.alloyentertainment.com/the-originals-book-series-711141/>.

¹⁴⁷ Nellie Andreeva, “CW Plots ‘Vampire Diaries’ Spinoff With Backdoor Pilot Starring Joseph Morgan & Phoebe Tonkin And Penned By Julie Plec,” *Deadline*, January 11, 2013, <http://deadline.com/2013/01/cw-eyes-vampire-diaries-spinoff-with-backdoor-pilot-starring-joseph-morgan-phoebe-tonkin-and-penned-by-julie-plec-402184/>.

¹⁴⁸ Carina Adly MacKenzie, “‘The Vampire Diaries’ spinoff explained: How backdoor pilots and planted spinoffs work,” *Zap2It.com*, April 25, 2013, http://www.zap2it.com/blogs/the_vampire_diaries_spinoff_explained_how_backdoor_pilots_and_planted_spinoffs_work-2013-04.

off show. The carefully constructed approach proved successful, as *The Vampire Diaries* saw a small uptick in viewers for the episode and immediately ordered *The Originals* to series for fall 2013.¹⁴⁹

Further marketing and promotion for *The Originals* stuck closely to strategies that had worked for the franchise and the network in the past. The cast and crew appeared at SDCC for a panel and a screening of the pilot in July to promote the show, which proved more successful as *The Vampire Diaries* franchise had become a popular, regular panel at the convention.¹⁵⁰ The CW once again partnered with the Red Cross for a promotional blood drive.¹⁵¹ Additionally, the network continued to attempt out-of-the-box marketing that appealed to their target demographic of consumer-driven young women with “Mikaelson’s Blood Cleanse,” a 3-day juice cleanse package from Joulebody themed around the show, including flavors like “Kale or Be Kaled” and “Blood Sugar.”¹⁵²

The promotional art hewed closely to *The Vampire Diaries* style, but updated to suggest the spin-off’s more adult tone in line with the maturing of the Millennial audience. The logo for *The Originals* mimicked *The Vampire Diaries*: the main title preceded by a small “the” and underneath a red calligraphic swoop that dripped down like blood in the first letter. *The Originals* altered the style with a slightly more ornate font and a red fleur-de-lis inside the “O” that would become the symbol of the show. These changes hinted at narrative elements of the show that dealt with the long history of

¹⁴⁹ Lesley Goldberg and Philiana Ng, “CW Orders ‘Originals’ to Series, Renews ‘Beauty and the Beast,’ ‘Dixie,’” *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 26, 2013, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/cw-vampire-diaries-originals-series-beauty-beast-hart-of-dixie-447339>.

¹⁵⁰ Lesley Goldberg, “Comic-Con 2013: The Complete TV Lineup,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 20, 2013, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/comic-con-2013-complete-tv-567659>.

¹⁵¹ Lesley Goldberg, “Fall TV’s Odd Marketing Stunts: Blood Drives, Tiffany and More,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, September 16, 2013, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/fall-tvs-odd-marketing-stunts-629636>.

¹⁵² “The CW ‘Originals’ Blood Cleanse,” Gilt City, accessed May 24, 2015, <http://www.giltcity.com/boston/joulebodycwnat>.

the original vampires, set in the historic French Quarter of New Orleans. Executive producer Plec framed the design and narrative of the show around her hope, and likely network directive, to capture a more adult and gender-neutral audience, one that had “graduated” from the coming-of-age story of *The Vampire Diaries*.¹⁵³

The premiere of *The Originals* in the fall of 2013 was orchestrated to build on *The Vampire Diaries*’ audience, but also firmly establish the show as an independent success for the CW that could anchor a separate night of programming. The pilot episode, slightly altered since airing in April as part of *The Vampire Diaries*, was billed as a “series premiere event” and aired in the 9 p.m. Thursday spot behind *The Vampire Diaries*. This scheduling was intended to make sure all viewers of *The Vampire Diaries* were aware of the spin-off before *The Originals* moved to its regular time-slot at 8 p.m. on Tuesdays. The CW hoped that the closer franchise ties to *The Vampire Diaries* would encourage fans to follow *The Originals* to Tuesday nights and create another successful night for the network.¹⁵⁴ Additionally setting the show up for success, the CW waited until October to premiere its fall season, avoiding the marketing blitz of premieres from the Big Four networks, as well as shortening the season to reduce reruns and air more consecutive new episodes.¹⁵⁵ The strategy worked, and *The Originals*, paired with longtime staple *Supernatural*, saw the best comparative ratings for a CW Tuesday since the network’s

¹⁵³ Philiana Ng, “‘The Originals’ Boss Targets Broader Audience for ‘Vampire Diaries’ Spinoff,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, July 30, 2013, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/originals-boss-targets-broader-audience-595511>.

¹⁵⁴ Michael O’Connell, “TV Upfronts: The CW’s Fall Schedule Tries to Anchor a Third Night (Analysis),” *The Hollywood Reporter*, May 16, 2013, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/tv-upfronts-cws-fall-schedule-523541>.

¹⁵⁵ Marisa Guthrie, “TV Upfronts: CW Will Not Revisit ‘Selection’” Eyes Comedy,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, May 16, 2013.

inception, and over double the previous year.¹⁵⁶ By slightly maturing their content, but staying close to the established *Vampire Diaries*, the CW was able to successfully grow the franchise.

Streaming and Chatting into Digital Platforms

Much of the analysis above examines the conventional broadcast network strategies the CW uses to target young adult audiences, newly configured as Millennials, but the network's most unique strategies are digital in nature. However, the CW struggles within the wider media industry to frame these digital strategies as successful and innovative, given the inability of contemporary industry standards to accurately measure audiences on new digital platforms. Digital strategies are vital to the CW brand, as the defining feature of the Millennial generation is their privileging and constant use of new technologies. Millennials consume more media than any generation before them, spending almost 15 hours a day interacting with various media and communication technologies, but they often discard traditional viewing practices for new ones.¹⁵⁷ The CW must expand digitally to reach their intended demographic, although in doing so they risk losing the more conventional success of their network peers.

Partnering with streaming services is a key component of the CW's digital strategy. Many other broadcast and cable networks have formed partnerships with services like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon, or created their own streaming services, as has HBO, to create additional revenue streams. But the practice of streaming content is an instrumental part of the CW's business model because of the network's dependence on a younger demographic. The study on Millennials featured in *Advertising Age* found they

¹⁵⁶ "Schedules Plus, CW Tuesday," Spotted Ratings, accessed May 24, 2015, <http://www.spottedratings.com/2013/12/schedules-plus-cw-tuesday.html>.

¹⁵⁷ Liesse, "Getting to Know the Millennials."

“can’t live without” their laptops and computers, but place less value on televisions, making digital viewing a primary concern for the CW.¹⁵⁸ This means that the main mode of engagement with television programming for young adults does not actually require a television. Additionally, new technologies like smart televisions and digital media players that connect to them mean that even those viewers with televisions may never view traditional broadcast television as it airs.

The variety of options of digital and streaming practices has not totally dismantled traditional viewing practices, but expanded them. In 2011, the CW made an unprecedented deal with Netflix that gave the streaming service rights to all the television series aired on the CW for the next three years. Each individual series would be available on Netflix on a one-season delay and for four years following the end of the series.¹⁵⁹ Netflix’s model invites viewers to binge-watch, consuming a large number of episodes in a short period of time. This allows viewers to discover CW shows even years after they have premiered and catch up quickly. Also in 2011, the CW made a deal with Hulu, allowing a handful of current episodes to be streamed on the site, one day after air for the Hulu Plus pay model, and eight days after air for the free model.¹⁶⁰ Hulu’s model encourages viewers to stay up-to-date on currently airing shows with only a brief time-delay that mimics the way viewers watch time-shifted programming on digital recording devices.

Besides partnering with pay-model streaming services, the CW developed a streaming video player for their website, as well as adding a streaming app for mobile

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Andrew Wallenstein, “CW’s Online Bonanza; Output pact boost netlet, Netflix,” *Daily Variety*, October 14, 2011, 1.

¹⁶⁰ Philiana Ng, “The CW Inks Five-Year Deal With Hulu,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 28, 2011.

devices in 2012. The app was so popular with CW audiences that it was downloaded over one million times in the first two months alone.¹⁶¹ These developments indicate that the CW recognizes the importance of streaming availability to their demographic, but wants to maintain a distinct network brand, by keeping viewers in-house, and also create additional advertising revenue streams. Further, the CW's streaming player and app filled a gap in the spectrum of time availability, and began offering new episodes on the CW website eight hours after airing instead of three days after. The shorter delay was meant to curtail illegal streaming of the network's programming, which research indicated made up 20-30% of viewing.¹⁶² Illegal streaming, while problematic for the CW, revealed that Millennials still place value on the liveness of television, and would use any digital means necessary to stay current with shows they enjoyed. The CW paired this change with promos encouraging audiences to "see it tonight, stream it tomorrow," and proved moderately effective, growing CW streaming viewers 12%.¹⁶³ Other broadcast and cable competitors use similar streaming models, but many view digital streaming as an additional viewing option rather than an entirely separate one, requiring users to sign in with their cable provider in order to watch online. In contrast, the CW website and app boast a "no logins, no passwords" policy that allows viewers to stream content immediately without affiliation to a TV provider.

In this way, streaming services can be seen as expanding the possibilities for viewing television programming, not fundamentally altering it. However, taking these digital platforms into account alongside broadcast ratings can change a network's

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Andrew Wallenstein, "CW shortens Web delay," *Daily Variety*, March 14, 2012, 1.

¹⁶³ Lacey Rose, "Upfronts 2012: CW Peddles Bold Programming, Fan Favorites and the Power of Netflix (Analysis)," *The Hollywood Reporter*, May 17, 2012.

perspective on their success, especially for the CW, given Millennial allegiance to digital platforms. In 2012, the CW's streaming partners accounted for around 20% of the network's in-season viewing.¹⁶⁴ Taking streaming numbers into account along with traditional broadcast ratings altered the network's plans for the following year. *Hart of Dixie*, a small-town medical drama starring Rachel Bilson, was likely to be canceled after its first season given its lackluster ratings, but was the CW's most-viewed show on Hulu, earning it a second season.¹⁶⁵ Streaming services then not only created more options for the CW's audience, but provided the network with alternate revenue streams and reworked the CW's own definition of success.

However, it should be noted that this shift also created problems for the CW's business model as a broadcast network. To make a profit, broadcast networks depend on commercial buys from advertisers. These deals are negotiated annually in the early summer following upfront presentations by each of the major networks of their upcoming seasons for potential advertisers. Much of the decision-making process for advertisers is based on ratings, which are dependent on viewing metrics like Nielsen that track traditional audiences that watch programming on broadcast television as it airs.

The CW, with its digitally-minded audience, must then continually justify their lower traditional ratings by framing themselves as digital innovators – “the first fully converged network” – and pushing the desirability of their young, consumer-driven viewers.¹⁶⁶ CW president Pedowitz touted the network's viewership as over 20% streaming and suggested that the Nielsen metrics, even adding in +3- or +7-day DVR data, which accounts for viewers who watch up to a week later, were simply “miss[ing]

¹⁶⁴ Andrew Wallenstein, “Originals help CW court digital auds,” *Daily Variety*, May 18, 2012, 6.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

the boat in the 18-34 demo” and not accurately capturing their viewing habits.¹⁶⁷ Despite championing alternative ratings metrics, Nielsen remains the industry standard and so those are the numbers the CW must contend with. As an alternative to simple ratings, the CW leans on their persona as hip and innovative, attracting advertisers with their “pioneering integrated TV-digital media buy” that puts an equal ad load in online and on-air content.¹⁶⁸ This pitch helps the CW appeal to advertisers interested in capturing the lucrative young adult market.

Providing content via streaming services is the CW’s most quantifiably successful digital strategy. Although these digital practices are not yet fully integrated into the broadcast network business model and negotiation still continues between broadcast and streaming providers on how they can be mutually beneficial, streaming services represent the most logical shift toward digital expansion, simply moving content from one screen to another, on a platform that still allows for the measuring of audiences. However, as they cater to Millennial audiences, the CW pushes beyond streaming into other digital ventures, building their franchises and network brand through a variety of exclusive digital content and their skillful and comprehensive social media marketing.

The CW premiered CW Seed, a website and later app for exclusive digital content in 2013.¹⁶⁹ CW Seed acquires and produces comedies, both more traditional-length 30-minute sitcoms and shorter webisodes. CW Seed then serves as a complement to the CW broadcast offerings, which consist almost solely of hour-long dramas. The digital studio frequently relies on the same strategy as the CW proper, working with known entities like

¹⁶⁷ AJ Marechal, “CW: Nielsen undercounts us,” *Daily Variety*, January 14, 2013, 5.

¹⁶⁸ Marisa Guthrie, “The CW Closes Upfront Negotiations Even With Last Season,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 5, 2013.

¹⁶⁹ Bill Brioux, “Have series, will travel (on mobile devices); Edgy shows aim at young viewers, many of whom don’t watch TV,” *thespec.com*, August 26, 2013, G4.

actors and producers who have built-in audience awareness. Notable series include *Play It Again, Dick*, a meta spin-off of Ryan Hansen's *Veronica Mars* character, *Very Mallory*, an animated series that includes CW guest stars in every episode, and *L.A. Rangers* and *Stupid Hype*, which *Hart of Dixie*'s Wilson Bethel stars in, directs, and produces.

The network then rebooted *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* in 2013 as one of its sole primetime comedies and obtained the exclusive rights to the show's back catalog of episodes for CW Seed.¹⁷⁰ The show appealed to Millennials nostalgic for its original 1998-2004 run, and also functioned to promote current CW programming by featuring familiar CW actors in the rotating fourth performer spot. CW Seed was also used as a testing ground to develop series in a more cost-effective manner than pilot season.¹⁷¹ *Backpackers*, a Canadian webseries that was part of CW Seed's initial offerings in August 2013, was reconstituted into sitcom-length episodes to air on the CW proper in summer 2014. The show was ultimately unsuccessful and was abruptly canceled, but renewed for a second season of webisodes in 2015.

The CW's own website is clearly geared toward its young audience through its design and content. The design is minimal and image-heavy, primarily black with the network's signature bright green that maintains a strong aesthetic similarity to the CW's on-air branding. The navigation is simplistic, with links to each individual show, the "younger sibling" CW Seed site, and a menu organizing the site's few other features.

The CW website's most unique feature, the "Social Directory," demonstrates the network's privileging of social media as a vital part of their brand extension, further developing franchises through ancillary content. None of the CW's broadcast network

¹⁷⁰ Bill Keveney, "'Whose Line' stars nine years later; CW pulled that scene from the hat and got revived improv show," *USA Today*, July 16, 2013, 2D.

¹⁷¹ Andrew Wallenstein, "CW Orders Series From Its Digital Studio (Exclusive)," *Variety*, April 8, 2014.

competitors, or even other youth-skewing cable networks like MTV and ABC Family, utilize social media in the same configuration, although most have some social media presence. The formatting of the Social Directory is almost opaque in its simplicity and offers little textual instruction on the purpose of the website or a key to decoding the symbols that dominate the page. In this way, the CW creates an exclusive appeal for the tech-savvy audience that can both decode the Social Directory and place value on the content it provides.

The Social Directory provides a guide to the social media content for each of the network's programs. Each CW show is listed on the Social Directory using a hashtag, rather than just its proper name. While some hashtags are simply the title of the show, many are the shorter, more web-appropriate abbreviated version. *The Vampire Diaries* becomes #tvd, *America's Next Top Model* becomes #antm, and so on. Clicking the hashtag takes the user to a Twitter search of the tag, inviting them to join the conversation about the show. Underneath the hashtag for each show is a listing of the primary cast by actor, with subtitled character names, as well as the longform, official title of each show at the top of every list. Symbols are listed next to each name, linking to the various social media platforms each uses. Most commonly represented are Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and occasionally Tumblr, although the CW also includes icons for Pinterest, Vine, GooglePlus and YouTube.

The Vampire Diaries, or #tvd on the Social Directory, serves as an excellent case study for the CW's social media marketing; the content produced is typical for the network, while the show's popularity produces a high level of viewer engagement. The Social Directory lists Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr accounts for the show.

Each of the accounts presents different content that is engineered toward regular user practices for that social media platform. The Facebook page is updated the most regularly and also receives the heaviest traffic: posts appear daily, and sometimes more, including photos and videos. Twenty-two million users “like” *The Vampire Diaries* page. Every post is “liked” well into five digits, and “shared” and commented on hundreds or even thousands of times. Posts include exclusive digital content that can also be found on the CW website, such as “*The Vampire Diaries* Rehash” webisodes, stylized as “Re#ash,” that recap each episode after it airs. In contrast, Tumblr and Instagram accounts have smaller followings, but focus on platform strengths of GIFs and images from the show, respectively.

The Re#ash webisodes are an exemplary model of the way the CW crafts ancillary franchise content to appeal to Millennial audiences, specifically women. The webisodes recap each episode through a mixture of video clips and captions, read by host Arielle Kebbel. Kebbel was a relatable, recognizable CW face for the hosting job, appearing on *Life Unexpected* and *90210*, and then *The Vampire Diaries* as Stefan’s vampire BFF Lexi, quickly becoming a fan favorite character before being killed off. During an episode’s airing, *The Vampire Diaries* Twitter page, which currently has 1.5 million followers, encourages viewers to tweet about the show using the hashtag #TVD and also posts still images from the episode along with the hashtag #CaptionThisPhoto. The Re#ash webisodes then select viewer tweets and captions, credited to their Twitter handles, to be read aloud by Kebbel as she recaps the episode’s action. Interestingly, despite the CW’s development of streaming platforms for their content, fan participation in Re#ash still demands the viewers watch the episode live in order to participate.

Fans may feel their investment in the show has been rewarded by being formally recognized by *The Vampire Diaries*, but Re#ash serves to maintain what Suzanne Scott calls an “affirmational form of fandom,” reinforcing the CW’s interpretive power by only selecting Twitter content that falls within their prescribed narrative for the show.¹⁷² Re#ash encourages the feminized appeals of the show, privileging romantic relationships, although almost exclusively heterosexual ones, and also emphasizes the female gaze. For example, the fan tweets and Twitter handles highlighted on Re#ash frequently reference the show’s many canon romantic pairings, including Damon/Elena (“delena”) and Stefan/Elena (“stelena”), but ignore transformative fandom’s interest in popular homosexual fan pairings like Damon/Alaric. Re#ash participates in the female gaze by fetishizing the attractive male bodies of the show, but never the female ones: Damon is “hot” and “sexy,” but Elena is “beautiful” and “pretty.”

The Social Directory also illustrates the CW’s reliance on both the personal brands of its stars and the participation of its fans to build its brand as a network. Although the websites of some other networks do provide actor or character bios, the CW is the only network to directly connect to the actor’s personal brands by providing links to their outside social media content. This is clearly demonstrated in the way that the Social Directory uses the images associated with the actors’ personal social media accounts to identify them, rather than promotional images that are network generated. Audiences that interact with stars’ social media via the Social Directory are then being “channeled” into affirmational fannish behavior they may have performed independently, but through a sanctioned and regulated mode by the CW.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Scott, “*Battlestar Galactica*,” 324.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 321.

The CW's willingness to affiliate the network brand with the personal brands of stars frames them as connecting authentically with their fans, but can also be a liability. On April 6, 2015, Nina Dobrev posted a photo of her and executive producer Julie Plec, accompanied by a long message announcing she would leave *The Vampire Diaries* at the end of the sixth season in a month's time. Dobrev addressed the message to her "Dearest TVD Family" and thanked the fandom for giving her "love, passion, and support."¹⁷⁴ The message both promoted her personal career and the show, encouraging fans to read more about her experiences in her cover story in the June 2015 issue of *Self* magazine, but also "fasten [their] seatbelts" and tune in to the rest of the season of *The Vampire Diaries*.¹⁷⁵ While official statements to traditional news outlets followed, the CW still allowed Dobrev to break the news of her exit on Instagram where her fans would be the first to see it; the post received over 538,000 likes and 173,000 comments. However, the timing of Dobrev's Instagram post was also prompted by rumors of her departure. *Vampire Diaries* crew members had posted photos to social media of a group trip including Dobrev using the hashtag #ninawewillmissyou.¹⁷⁶ These crew members were not listed on the CW's Social Directory, but fans were still able to track their association with *The Vampire Diaries* through username tagging and other means. The CW's reliance on social media can then become a liability, undermining network strategy as they are not able to police all the content produced in connection with them.

The CW's overall network strategy, conceived as the home for young Millennials, has found a modicum of success in the decade since the network's inception. Given the

¹⁷⁴ Nina Dobrev, Instagram post, April 6, 2015, <https://instagram.com/p/1JyBOdn3eW/>.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Marisa Roffman, "'Vampire Diaries' Shocker: Star Nina Dobrev Exits," *Hollywood Reporter*, April 6, 2015, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/vampire-diaries-nina-dobrev-leaving-786529>.

network's youth, and youth-oriented appeals, the CW must continue to depend on the curation of established franchises and known quantities of showrunners and stars, tailored to fit their brand as Millennial, predominantly female, and tech-savvy. Further, the CW depends on the conception of their brand as young and digital to qualify their limited traditional success as a broadcast network. In framing themselves as innovators of digital youth media, the CW has become one, setting a precedent for the contemporary franchise model.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

Project Summary

This thesis has attempted to situate *The Vampire Diaries* as emblematic of contemporary young adult media of the 2010s and as reflecting wider industry interests in franchising and adaptations. *The Vampire Diaries*, as a television franchise on the CW network adapted from an Alloy book series, belies the perception of franchise culture as masculine. It is a novel feminized text embedded within sites that have a history of feminized media production. I have examined *The Vampire Diaries* as a book series, connected through Alloy to a history of book packaging, and as a television series, resulting in two additional spin-off series and an array of digital content. I argue that through this history, *The Vampire Diaries* demonstrates the presence and viability of the feminized franchise, and moreover that these franchises are leaders in certain modes of franchise strategy and content production.

The first chapter introduced and outlined this project, framing it within the contemporary media industry's understanding of franchise culture. It reviewed the bodies of literature integral to this research, including teen media, franchising and adaptation studies, and star studies. Additionally, the chapter outlined my methodology, a combination of industry and textual analysis, and its usefulness for my understanding of how the context of production has shaped *The Vampire Diaries* franchise, and additionally its corporate owners, Alloy Entertainment and the CW network.

The second chapter examined Alloy's ownership of *The Vampire Diaries* as the latest configuration in a long history of feminized, serialized media production, detailing

the company's history as a book packager and the importance of the larger practice. Additionally, it noted how Alloy uniquely addresses not only a feminine audience, but a young audience, targeting teen girls. I argued that Alloy's current transmedia, consumerist business model is built on that history and finds success by locating and appropriating current trends within the industry. Last, I unpacked the way Alloy's model has complicated the literary notion of authorship given contemporary franchise logic.

The third chapter moved forward to *The Vampire Diaries*' adaption to television, as Alloy partnered with the CW. I argued that this partnership was vital for the CW in developing a brand as a new network, particularly using Alloy properties *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. The CW necessarily reconfigured Alloy's teen girl brand to address a demographic constructed as Millennials as that audience graduated from their teens into their twenties. I noted the CW's further refinement of this brand through the respective failure and success of two *Vampire Diaries* spin-offs, *The Secret Circle* and *The Originals*. Finally, I argued that the CW's new digital strategies, necessary to reach their perceived Millennial audience, have helped them become innovators of young adult media and in the contemporary franchise model more widely.

Limitations and Future Research

This research takes a primarily industrial analysis approach to *The Vampire Diaries*, Alloy, and the CW. However, it depends on my own interpretation of trade press and primary texts rather than any interviews with those involved in the industry. Although difficult to obtain, firsthand accounts of how young adult franchises like *The Vampire Diaries* are conceptualized, produced, and marketed would go far in understanding the current landscape of the teen media industry. Along with network

strategy, texts I have discussed like social media posts are impossibly opaque. Social media is often positioned within a discourse of authenticity and so I have read it as such, but it is impossible to discern if texts like Instagram posts are actually created by their attributed author.

Only considering *The Vampire Diaries* and its connected media also limits this research. I selected this case study because it was representative of many common themes in contemporary teen media I wished to address, but the larger picture of the teen media ecosystem is then neglected. Given their propensity to treat media streams equally and their “hyper”-intertextual engagement with different media products, young adults interpret media as one larger, interconnected picture and academic study should reflect that perspective. The emphasis on *The Vampire Diaries* also neglects case studies that illustrate particularly distinctive configurations of teen media, such as *Pretty Little Liars*’ massive and dominant social media strategy or the rebellious fandoms of *Teen Wolf* and *Supernatural* that actively resist the dominant reading of their shows. In regard to franchise culture, the upcoming television adaptations of *Scream* and *The Mortal Instruments* would provide interesting case studies, the former evidence of the sustainability and shifting themes of the horror franchise over two decades, the latter a television reboot of the failed launch of a film franchise, trying to harness the fan base of a popular book series even further entrenched in questions of authorship than *The Vampire Diaries*, given Cassandra Clare’s problematic history as a fanfiction author.

This research attempts to address multiple forms of young adult media, concentrating primarily on television and literary texts. Young adult literature has been severely understudied from a media studies perspective and certainly merits further

research, especially given the contemporary prominence of YA literature as source material for building franchises, both on television and film. As I have discussed in a connected project beginning to map trends in YA literature and adaptations, almost 60% of best-selling YA novels of the last two years have resulted in an ensuing adaptation and franchise.¹⁷⁷ This thesis, explicating the history of *The Vampire Diaries* franchise within YA literature, further reveals the need for such study, along with the complications inherent in such an undertaking, given the complex history of the franchise spanning over two decades.

Cultural Implications Looking Forward

While I position *The Vampire Diaries* as representative of a transitional moment in young adult media in 2009, it appears that the industry, and particularly the CW, may be undergoing an even greater time of transition today. The network, which usefully conceived of their young demographic as Millennials at its start, must now find a way to grow up with the audience they constructed, as Millennials age into their twenties and even thirties. The CW is still demonstratively more interested in the young female audience that started as its “bread and butter” than its broadcast network competitors, but the network’s recent programming decisions suggest they are trying to play on the same level as those competitors, while maintaining the successful network strategy of franchise development.¹⁷⁸ Whereas *The Vampires Diaries* premiered in 2009 amongst a slate of still relatively teenaged fare, the franchise is heading into its seventh season this fall surrounded by much more diverse programming. Notably, this year’s *Jane the Virgin*, adapted from a telenovela and featuring numerous Latino characters, became the CW’s

¹⁷⁷ Megan Connor, “Nerdfighters and Shadowhunters: Contemporary Trends in YA Literature,” independent study paper, May 15, 2015.

¹⁷⁸ Young, “Fall TV Preview.”

first major critically acclaimed program, winning a Golden Globe for Gina Rodriguez's portrayal of the titular Jane.

Most apparent is the CW's growing interest in superhero fare. Live-action comic book adaptations about superheroes have been a dominant, reliable blockbuster strategy for contemporary film since 2000's *X-Men* and the last several years have seen a resurgence of that trend on television as well.¹⁷⁹ The CW has utilized corporate parent Warner Bros.' ownership of DC Comics, and is currently airing three series based on their comics – *Arrow*, *The Flash*, and *iZombie* – with two more scheduled for the 2015-2016 season. Several other networks have also recently ordered superhero series, including Netflix's planned set of four Marvel series. With *Arrow*'s 2012 premiere, the CW is then arguably the leader of this trend, especially given the CW's reputation as the network for trendy Millennial programming. When the *Arrow* spin-off, *The Flash*, premiered in 2014, it gave the network a ratings high unmatched since the premiere of *The Vampire Diaries* in 2009, additionally beating broadcast competitors ABC and Fox in the timeslot.¹⁸⁰

This superhero trend marks the CW's desire to court a gender-neutral audience, given the masculinized history of superheroes and comics. However, it should be noted that the CW continues to use the same network strategies that worked for the more feminized *Vampire Diaries* with *Arrow* and *The Flash*, primarily a dependence on franchise fare adapted from outside source material. The actors from both programs have teen-oriented resumé's, whether from the CW or other programming on cable networks like MTV or Disney as well as broadcast network teen programming like *The O.C.* and

¹⁷⁹ "The History of Comic-Con," Youtube video.

¹⁸⁰ Michael O'Connell, "TV Ratings: 'The Flash' Premiere Gives CW a 5-Year Best," *Hollywood Reporter*, October 8, 2014, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/tv-ratings-flash-premiere-gives-739170>.

Glee, and further, fit within the conventionally attractive standard set by the network. Additionally, the shows still place an importance on interpersonal and romantic relationships amid all the action set pieces. For example, on *Arrow* the canonical relationship from DC Comics between Oliver Queen and Laurel Lance was upended by the chemistry between and subsequent fan interest in Queen's relationship with his hacker sidekick, Felicity Smoak, a minor character appropriated from the 1980s Firestorm comics.

The CW's vested interest in digital strategies as part of their Millennial network brand, including the availability of streaming content, the production of digital exclusives, and an emphasis on social media, suggests further transitions are yet to come for the broadcast network model and media industry. Millennials that have established streaming-centric viewing habits and disregard the primetime "appointment" viewing for a la carte time-shifted programming will continue to age until their preferences become the dominant cultural preferences. In the future, the CW could be seen as a leader of not just digital ancillary content, but of the streaming model that all distributors will have to participate in to reach viewers. Further, the CW's digital strategies belie the traditional view of technological savvy as masculine, given the CW's connection to feminized media products and corresponding digital strategy that privileges feminine modes of engagement.

In contrast, while the CW continues to develop and grow as a network, Alloy Entertainment has noticeably slowed its output of new properties. Although they have produced a few new series within the last several years, including *The Originals* and *The 100* for the CW and *Ravenswood* for ABC Family, which was shortly canceled, Alloy's

biggest successes after long-canceled *Gossip Girl*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *Pretty Little Liars* for ABC Family are reaching the ends of their runs. New projects indicate Alloy is pivoting to film production, although all projects remain in development, their potential to reach fruition unknown. The projects in development also suggest Alloy is clinging to past success, including a final installment in *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* franchise, *Sisterhood Everlasting*, and YA book-to-film adaptations helmed by *Gossip Girl* and *Pretty Little Liars* showrunners. Continued monitoring of Alloy will reveal if this is the end of the contemporary moment of book packaging, or a break on the way to a new and different configuration for the model.

Whatever future changes arise for Alloy and the CW specifically, *The Vampire Diaries* is still particularly representative of the positioning of feminized media franchises in the contemporary media industry. As the *Entertainment Weekly* cover stated, *The Vampire Diaries* franchise is a success, “hotter than ever,” but only when qualified as a “cult” hit. Other gendered franchises, especially content targeting young women, like *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games*, are treated the same way, consistently denigrated for the audience they appeal to by even those involved in the production.¹⁸¹ This devaluation spreads culturally, affecting even those audiences these products are ostensibly made for, so much so that in an Introduction to Media class I recently taught all of the students agreed that *Twilight* was dumb, and *The Hunger Games* slightly better because “guys wouldn’t mind watching it.” Any innovative, industrial success I have discussed in connection with *The Vampire Diaries* then seems paltry when considering

¹⁸¹ “Nobody Hates Twilight More Than Robert Pattison,” *Buzzfeed*, June 16, 2012, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/cconnelly/nobody-hates-twilight-more-than-robert-pattinson-s3x>.

that the audience must submit to this notion that the things they like are “less than” or frame their pleasure as “guilty” in order to participate.

As recently as this summer, the success of several feminized franchises, or those proclaimed feminist, has indicated that we could be on the cusp of change. *Pitch Perfect 2*, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Spy*, and *Inside Out* have all opened in theaters in the last several months to commercial and critical success. These films are all led by women, even upturning classically male genres like action through the “sneaky feminism” of *Mad Max*.¹⁸² Although most pessimistically, this trend could be viewed as simply that, it is more hopeful to suggest that, thanks to denigrated but economic and industrial successes of feminized franchises like *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*, feminized media products and their female consumers are beginning to be valued as more than a niche audience, and worth pursuing with more complex and costly industry initiatives.

¹⁸² Eliana Dockterman, “*Vagina Monologues* Writer Eve Ensler: How *Mad Max: Fury Road* Became a ‘Feminist Action Film,’” *Time*, May 7, 2015.

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