



Department of Media Studies

Paratext and Transmedia Marketing surrounding the
Pretty Little Liars season five finale:
Presenting the *A* Reveal

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Abstract

Television narrative does not stand alone on television but extends through other material such as posters, previews and other marketing tools. This extra content is called paratext and exists in the space between the text, audience and media industry (Gray 2010: 23). The theoretical frame of this study includes Jonathan Gray's definition of paratext and Gérard Genette's, which states that paratext comes before the text, to present it (Genette and Maclean 199: 261). Additionally, Ramos-Serrano and Lozano-Delmar's (2010) essay on new marketing strategies will be used. My essay suggests it is not sufficient to look at paratext and transmedia marketing separately, but how paratext is used in transmedia marketing should be investigated. This is because paratexts do more than fill the space between text, audience and industry. It is a separate entity. With a textual analysis method my essay uses a case study of the tweets surrounding *Pretty Little Liars* season five final episode 'Welcome to the Dollhouse'; investigating how tweets from the show's official account @ABCFp11 and producer I. Marlene King's account @imarleneking presented the episode through paratext, how these paratexts were used in transmedia marketing, and how audience participation functions in transmedia marketing. I have found that @ABCFp11 and @imarleneking posted tweets that were paratexts that either did or did not extend the narrative. The narrative extending paratexts work as transmedia marketing strategies by allowing the audience to enter the diegetic world of the show. The paratexts that did not extend the narrative were mostly audience retweets about their excitement towards the episode. Paratexts surrounding the final episode were successful transmedia marketing because they kept the audience's attention on the show and cultivated loyalty between show, audience and industry.

1. Introduction

Television narrative does not stand alone on television but extends through other material such as posters, previews and other marketing tools. This extra content is called paratext and exists in the space between the text, audience and media industry (Gray 2010: 23). It is not a new phenomenon, however the way producers and audiences interact with the external texts is new and creates an inconclusive flow of narrative texts (Grümsek and Drotner 2014: 25). This flow uses audience participation to market the television show through transmedia marketing.

In a world lead to great extent online, networks and television producers use social media platforms to release different material related to their television shows. Paratexts are used to present the text (Genette and Maclean 1991: 261), the television show, but also to promote it. Transmedia strategies extend the narrative experience to start a process of self-promotion of the show and to cultivate a loyalty between audience and industry (Ramos-Serrano and Lozano-Delmar 2010). There are numerous earlier studies made on paratext or new media marketing, however there has not been much research on how paratexts work in transmedia marketing strategies. It is not sufficient to look at paratext and transmedia marketing separately, because paratexts does more than fill the space between text, audience and industry. It is a separate entity that fills a vital role in transmedia marketing. This essay will use a textual analysis method to explore these aspects through a case study of the use of Twitter as a promotion device for the *Pretty Little Liars* (ABC Family, 2010-) season five final episode 'Welcome to the Dollhouse'.

24 March 2015 ABC Family aired the episode 'Welcome to the Dollhouse' as the final episode of the series *Pretty Little Liars*' fifth season. The show's fans had long awaited the episode and it achieved much attention on social media. During the weeks leading up to the episode release the network and producers used Twitter to promote the episode but also as a means of giving the viewers clues on the show's big mystery — who is the perpetrator 'A'. This essay will use tweets from the *Pretty Little Liars* official Twitter account @ABCFp11 and the show's executive producer I. Marlene King's account @imarleneking between the 18 and 23 March 2015, the week before the final episode release, to investigate the relationship between paratext, transmedia marketing strategies and a participating audience. I suggest that the tweets from @ABCFp11 and @imarleneking do supply an extension of the narrative but that the audience's active participation is ground for the most extension of the experience. In addition, I suggest the photos or clues supplied

through Twitter function as a means to hold the audience's attention rather than actually supplying them with usable clues.

The motivation for this specific material is the presence of active participation on social media, especially Twitter, from both audience, network and producers surrounding the show and this particular episode. Furthermore, that there is a mystery that has yet to be solved after several seasons makes *Pretty Little Liars* an excellent case to explore when concerning how paratext further involves the audience in the narrative by supplying clues, and how this works as a commercial strategy. Thus my research questions are as follows:

- ▶ What type of paratexts do the tweets present?
- ▶ How are paratexts used in transmedia marketing strategies?
- ▶ How does audience created paratexts function in transmedia marketing strategies?

The research questions will allow me to investigate the extent of the use of paratext in transmedia marketing and how the relationship actually functions. By first identifying the nature of the paratext, secondly their use in transmedia marketing, and finally how the industry uses the audience to create paratext that promotes the show.

2. Theoretical Frame and Earlier Studies

2.1 What is paratext?

Gérard Genette supplies a thorough definition of the term paratext. He suggests that literary work consists mainly of a text. In the case of television narrative the text is the collection of episodes. In addition, he states that these texts, however essential they are, rarely appear alone, but are accompanied by "a certain number of products," (Genette and Maclean 1991: 261). It is difficult to know if these accompanying products do or do not belong to the text. In any case they surround it and come before it, "in order to *present* it, [...]" Thus the paratext is for us the means by which a text makes a book [or a television show] of itself and proposes itself as such to its readers, and more generally to the public." (Genette and Maclean, 1991: 261)

When referring to media paratext the concept becomes slightly more complex as there is an active audience and industry to consider, not present in Genette's definition, therefore I would like to complete the media paratext definition with a citation from Jonathan Gray:

Paratexts surround texts, audiences, and industry, as organic and naturally occurring a part of our mediated environment as are movies and television themselves. If we imagine the triumvirate of Text, Audience, and Industry as the Big Three of media practice, then paratexts fill the space between them, conditioning passages and trajectories that criss-cross the mediascape, and variously negotiating or determining interactions among the three.

(Gray 2010: 23)

Interactions between text, audience and industry is the focus of transmedia marketing. It is a marketing tool using the internet and media paratexts for communication between audience and industry about the text, outside of the text itself.

2.2 Transmedia marketing strategies

Over the past decades media convergence has become an increasingly occurring phenomenon. Media companies have evolved their strategies by releasing their programmes across multiple platforms, becoming part of a transmedia culture (Simons 2014: 2220). *Lost* (ABC 2004-2010) was one of the first television shows to use innovative transmedia strategies as marketing and thus revolutionised the television experience with audience participation. Ramos-Serrano and Lozano-Delmar describe the extent and purpose of those transmedia strategies in 'Promoting *Lost*: New Strategies and Tools of Commercial Communication' (2010). The goal with the transmedia strategies for *Lost*, similar to those of *Pretty Little Liars*, was to extend the television show experience and to keep the attention of the audience, and entertain them, while the show was producing new seasons (Ramos-Serrano and Lozano-Delmar 2010: 426).

The transmedia strategies work firstly by channelling conversations of the fans and creating a loyalty between the show and its audience (Ramos-Serrano and Lozano-Delmar 2010: 429). The transmedia practice uses audience participation as a key device. The audience who is at the centre of the communication is encouraged to actively comment or search for information, and thus the creators of the show cultivate a loyalty between themselves, the show, and the fans, that is of the essence when it comes to attaining them as viewers (430). A loyalty that has become exceedingly important as the television show selection has increased and fickle viewers have a variety of programming to choose from.

The second way transmedia strategies work is to extend the narrative world for the audience. By experiencing the television show outside of television the audience can move into the diegetic world of the show (Johnson as cited in Ramos-Serrano and Lozano-Delmar 2010: 426). Through

the paratexts for *Pretty Little Liars* viewers can transport into the narrative world by being allowed clues so they themselves can try to solve the mystery the girls are trying to solve in the show. The cultivation of these types of practices work to maintain attention on the show outside of the weekly programming.

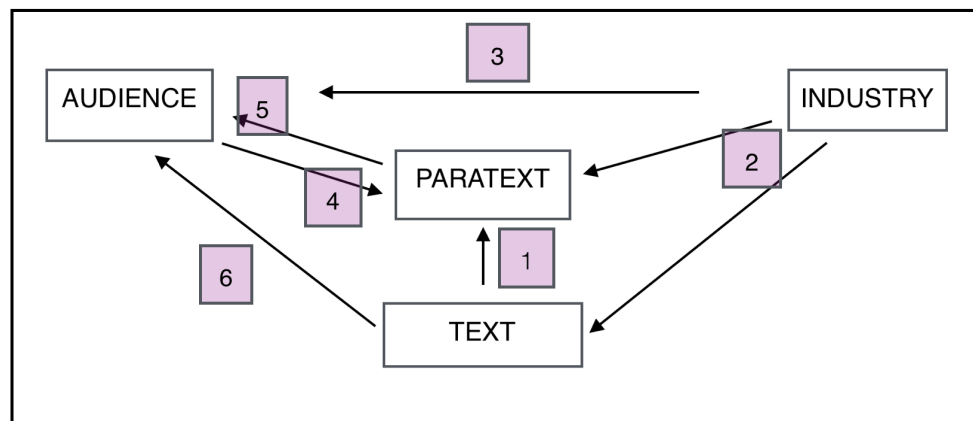
The development of parallel entertainment contents is called "advertainment" and was the strategy that was most successful for *Lost* (Ramos-Serrano and Lozano-Delmar 2010: 430). Advertainment is a hybrid of advertising or publicity and entertainment (Sáez as cited in Ramos-Serrano and Lozano-Delmar 2010: 430). The mechanism used the entertainment factor of *Lost* itself to create more products, starting a process of self-promotion of the show (Ramos-Serrano and Lozano-Delmar 2010: 430). Today this strategy is not as new as it was during the time of *Lost*, as social media has become an even more integral part of the television experience than in 2010 when the essay was written. However, what Ramos-Serrano and Lozano-Delmar write about *Lost*'s advertising campaign holds true for that of *Pretty Little Liars*. They "have not only understood the importance of the show in advertising actions, but they have also converted the internet in[to] the strategic center from which each and every one of the advertising devices start." (Ramos-Serrano and Lozano-Delmar 2010: 431) How paratexts surrounding *Pretty Little Liars* succeeded in this will be presented in the results.

2.3 Paratext in transmedia marketing

Active participation is as mentioned above an integral part in transmedia marketing. A network's invitation to the audience to participate is not paratext, however when the audience participates by for example creating their own ideas of how narrative will unfold it becomes paratext. In this way the industry cultivates the creation of paratext in the audience. Thus beginning a process of self-promotion of the show.

Jonathan Gray (2010) suggested that paratext fills the space between text, audience and industry. I suggest the link between the four entities is much more complex. All entities, paratext, text, audience and industry work together to create meaning of the text. Paratext does not simply exist fluidly between audience, text and industry but is itself as separate as the other three entities. The below model combines Gray's definition, Genette's concept of text presentation, and uses Ramos-Serrano and Lozano-Delmar's concept of new strategies for the involvement of audience and industry.

Figure 1.



1. The paratext is about the text and uses parts of it to present it.
2. The media industry creates both paratext and the text.
3. The media industry invites the audience to participate in the creation of paratext.
4. The audience participates in creating paratext, on the invitation of the industry and on its own accord.
5. The audience takes part of paratext that has been created by the industry or by others of the audience.
6. The audience takes part of the text itself.

Not all transmedia marketing is paratext however. There is transmedia marketing, which will be shown through tweets in my results, that announces a release date or invites the audience to conversation but do not present the text or extend the narrative and are thus not paratext. Similarly not all paratext appears on social media. I have chosen to perform my study on Twitter, however, paratext is also present in for instance conversations between audiences in the home, or in forums or promotional trailers on television.

3. Material and Method

3.1 Material

Pretty Little Liars is an American television drama broadcasted by ABC Family. The show, soon beginning its sixth season, tells the story of four teenage girls in a suburban town in Pennsylvania. The girls who have lives filled with secrets have since the series started been

tormented by someone with the alias 'A' (*Pretty Little Liars* 2010-). The mystery surrounding this unknown perpetrator is what drives the narrative forward and the clues concerning A's identity are essential to my study on the paratexts surrounding the season five finale. Before the episode release there was much paratext present on social media, especially on Twitter. Both the show's official Twitter account (@ABCFp11) and its executive producer I. Marlene King's account (@imarleneking) were used to promote the episode and reveal clues. Although the episode was kept very mysterious up until its release the viewers were lead to believe A would be revealed. The paratexts surrounding the episode are focused on that reveal through for instance the official hashtag #BigAReveal.

I have selected to do my case study on the episode 'Welcome to the Dollhouse' and its surrounding paratexts because it is the most recent episode of *Pretty Little Liars*, a show that is a prime example of how social media is used in transmedia marketing. Additionally, Twitter is the ultimate platform to study audience participation. Lastly, the mystery constantly enveloping the show and A's identity makes it an interesting case to research in terms of how paratext can extend the narrative world and involve the viewer in solving the mystery. Thus the material for my research is firstly, tweets from *Pretty Little Liars*' official Twitter account @ABCFp11 and tweets from executive producer I. Marlene King's official Twitter account @imarleneking to establish how the episode was presented through paratext and how these paratexts were used in transmedia marketing. The data collected is from tweets related to the episode that were posted between the 18 and 23 March 2015; the days between the release of the season's penultimate episode the 17 March, and the season finale 24 March. Secondly, audience participation will be explored through analysis of tweets and retweets by @ABCFp11 and @imarleneking in the same time period.

3.2 Method

I will assume a textual analysis method as described by Ekström and Larsson (2013). It is a qualitative analysis method and focuses on how a text works together with other texts, if it is conventional or unconventional, and how the text creates context for and relations with its audience. The method is used to see "how entities are linked together to form larger sections of text with different functions" [author translation] (Ekström and Larsson 2013: 155). This method that asks questions like "What happens in the text? [and] How does it create its meanings?" [author translation] (Ekström and Larsson 2013: 155) is the method best suited to investigate and explore

my research questions, since it is the link between paratext and text, and how their relationship shapes understanding in the audience, that is the base of my study.

Using the archive website tweettunnel.info that allows the viewing of old tweets organised after Twitter user I began viewing old tweets from the chosen accounts in the selected time frame (18-23 March 2015). The tweets were coded with six different sub-codes (see Appendix), where two codes separated between different forms of paratexts: paratext that extends narrative and paratext that does not extend narrative. A third code included relevant transmedia marketing: non-paratext transmedia marketing tweets related to the final episode. And the remaining three codes organised content not related to the final episode. Additionally, the code 'fan retweet' was assigned to tweets retweeted by @ABCFp11 and @imarleneking but originally posted by fans. The tweets assigned this sub-code were also assigned one of the six previously mentioned sub-codes and will be further used to answer the third research question. Furthermore, to answer the second research question I investigated only the tweets in the sub-code 'paratext that extends narrative'. And to answer the third research question I assigned two other sub-codes, similar to the 'fan retweet' code, that include invitations to the audience to participate by the network or producer in either finale related subjects or other *Pretty Little Liars* subjects. These tweets were considered paratext or not paratext, and assigned one of the main sub-codes as well, depending on what else each tweet included.

4. Results

The tweets that have been discovered through my research can be in different ways considered paratext and work with the different functions of transmedia marketing strategies. The first subsection will present the results for the first research question, the second subsection will present part of the results for the second research question, and the third subsection will continue to present results for the second research question and also the results for the third research question.

4.1 What type of paratexts do the tweets present?

The tweets that are regarded as paratext either do or do not extend the narrative. In the selected time period I. Marlene King tweeted six tweets and @ABCFp11 48 tweets that in different ways extend the narrative experience. Firstly, the official hashtag #BigAREveal that was present in

numerous tweets about the final episode, not only the ones that extend the narrative, extends the narrative. But since the hashtag can be considered an episode tagline it will not on its own in tweets be regarded as paratext that extends the narrative. The hashtag was introduced by ABC Family a few weeks before the final episode. It suggests to the audience that either Big A, the main perpetrator of the show, will be revealed, or that there will be a big A-reveal. How to interpret the hashtag was not explained by the show's executive producer (@imarleneking 09:04 18 February 2015). There were several tweets that elaborated on "Big A Reveal", for instance @ABCFp11's first tweet the day after the release of the season five penultimate episode said, "If you've ever wondered who A is, next week's spring finale will blow your mind. #BigAREveal" (4:00 18 March 2015). The tweet announced to the audience that a large piece of narrative unfolding would take place in the following episode. The tweet had an attached picture of the hooded perpetrator, A, and the hashtag #BigAREveal, suggesting that the episode would possibly include A being unmasked.

Secondly, there was a number of tweets that included pictures that can be regarded as extending the narrative experience.



Source:
@ABCFp11.
15:15 -
22 March
2015.



Source:
imarleneking. 15:14
20 March 2015.
Instagram via
Twitter.

In the picture above to the left there is a letter block displaying that there are two days until the episode release, and to the right the first of two pictures of dollhouses posted by I. Marlene King. Letter blocks were used in several pictures tweeted by @ABCFp11 and @imarleneking, in tweets retweeted by fans and additionally in the episode promo. Letter blocks can be a simple coincidence, however if analysed as paratext it holds a strong significance. The pictures of dollhouses emphasise the episode title ('Welcome to the Dollhouse'). If looked at close the walls behind the dollhouse in the above photo have what seems to be the same wallpaper as in the dollhouse, strongly implying with the episode title that the girls will enter an actual dollhouse. Additionally, there were tweets with a photo of the *Pretty Little Liars* girls wearing orange jumpsuits. These pictures extend the

narrative because the girls are not inside a prison but outside or in what appears to be their bedrooms but without their own things inside — a life sized dollhouse.

Furthermore, in the @ABCFp11 twitter flow there were retweets by fans where the audience suggests who they think A is. Several of the show's characters were mentioned, however not all. This can be a way for the network to send the audience clues. The names chosen may either suggest who A is, or the fact that they are mentioned could suggest the opposite.

60 tweets are paratext but not considered to extend the narrative experience and are to the most part fan retweets about how the audience is feeling toward the upcoming episode. @ABCFp11 and @imarleneking posted 18-23 March together 103 retweets from fans in which fans are active in creating paratext. The tweets state how the audience is excited and cannot wait until the final episode, some fans have even taken extraordinary measures such as gotten cable to view the episode on the release date or re-watched all the old episodes to find clues. In addition, the few tweets assigned this sub-code that are not fan retweets are either I. Marlene King writing that she is excited or fan rewrites, which have the same effect of framing as the fan retweets. Tweets that restate that it is an important episode are also included in this sub-code.

Since it is paratext that I am investigating I will not go into detail about tweets not considered paratext. However, it is important to point out that there were tweets surrounding the episode 'Welcome to the Dollhouse' that were not paratext. For instance tweets that simply count down the days left to the episode release or when @ABCFp11 invites the audience to participate when asking "Who do you think A is? [...] #BigAReveal" (23:44 - 21 March 2015). The tweets are about the season five final episode and are included in the transmedia marketing of the show, however they are not paratexts. The tweets do not *present* the episode or extend its narrative.

4.2 How are paratexts used in transmedia marketing strategies?

Transmedia marketing strategies work to channel the conversations of the fans through audience participation and by extending the narrative, thus creating a process of self-promotion. In this section I will present the results for how paratexts are used to extend the narrative in transmedia marketing strategies for the *Pretty Little Liars* season five finale and in the next section how paratext and audience participation works in transmedia strategies.

54 tweets were regarded as paratexts that extend the narrative. These tweets work as transmedia marketing strategies through keeping audience attention on the show by allowing the audience to move into the diegetic world of the show. Paratexts surrounding the final episode

strongly present the text with a certain theme; to play. To play with dolls in dollhouses or to form words with letter blocks. The theme of play is revealed to be the leading theme in the episode when 'Welcome to the Dollhouse' takes place in a life sized dollhouse. In the episode promo and in photos attached to tweets there are letter blocks spelling "i am A" (@pll4eve. 13:21 - 18 March 2015). This suggests that there may be a large clue in letter blocks in the episode. In 'Welcome to the Dollhouse' the character Spencer, who has on several occasions in the show played scrabble — a game using letters — sees a row of letter blocks in a playroom of the life sized dollhouse. She does not discover it at the time but later rearranges the letters to form a name — Charles. Here an observant viewer has the opportunity to themselves rearrange the letters and come to the same solution as Spencer, but before. This is an example of how paratext can extend the narrative experience, allow the audience into the diegetic world and to solve a diegetic mystery before the characters do.

Furthermore, if the paratexts from @ABCFpll and @imarleneking are compared the photos tweeted by I. Marlene King were not of a direct advertising nature which @ABCFpll's photos clearly were. The producer posted several photos that were privately taken and appearing without the name of the show or the official hashtag. These photos were however, still part of the transmedia marketing strategies since they kept attention on the show. But since the photos were "unofficial" they can possibly promote a feeling of inclusion instead of commercial coercion in the audience — because they were given exclusive information from the show's producer — cultivating a loyalty with the audience.

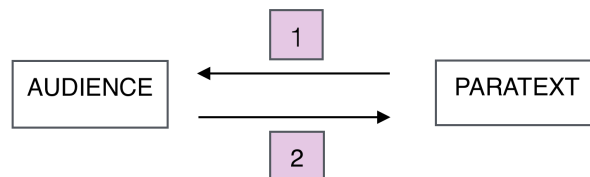
4.3 How does audience created paratexts function in transmedia marketing strategies?

Before the release of 'Welcome to the Dollhouse' @ABCFpll invited the audience to interact with them. 9 invitations related to the final episode were discovered. The audience was for instance encouraged to create their own A theories and guess who A is, or simply asked questions such as how they were feeling about the upcoming episode. Retweeting the audience's tweets or simply by speaking directly to the audience the network and producer show the audience they are heard and matter; a great factor in creating loyalty between audience and industry and thus audience and show. This loyalty in the audience is also rewarded and further established when @ABCFpll and @imarleneking release clues and sneak peek photos. Additionally, when asking the audience questions about the episode the network and producer start a process of self-promotion of the show.

In my discoveries the audience would reply to the questions asked and then @ABCFp11 retweeted several of those tweets. The retweets from fans are regarded as paratext.

Although most of these fan retweets do not reveal new information concerning the episode, they do help the network frame the way the audience feels about the upcoming episode release, and thus they present the episode a certain way. Twitter users following @ABCFp11 would during this week receive a large number of tweets from other fans being excited about the episode reminding them that this is an episode to be excited about, an episode unlike any other. The fan retweets are paratexts themselves and cultivate expectation in other fans, creating a paratext loop of self-promotion of the show. The figure below shows a small portion of Figure 1.

Figure 2.



1) The audience takes part of paratext; what the episode is about and are asked to participate. The audience share their excitement or answers resulting in, 2) the audience creating paratext. Which leads back to 1).

Thus audience participation in paratext works to frame the episode and create buzz. Invitations to participate from the network and retweets by the network cultivate a loyalty between audience and network, together starting a process of self-promotion of the show.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Paratext is a separate entity that interacts with the audience and industry about the text. It functions in transmedia marketing strategies by attaining audience attention on the show and cultivating a loyalty between media industry and audience, and thus audience and show. The tweets from @ABCFp11 and @imarleneking supplied paratexts that extended the narrative experience by allowing viewers to enter the diegetic world of the show. The tweets also supplied paratexts that did

not extend the narrative but that presented the episode by framing it a certain way. The tweets that did not extend the narrative were mostly tweets from fans that shared their excitement, retweeted by @ABCFp11 and @imarleneking. Furthermore by inviting the audience to participate in discussions the network began a process of self-promotion of the show and cultivated loyalty between themselves and the audience.

In conclusion, by using social media in marketing strategies *Pretty Little Liars* becomes ubiquitous. It is present between episodes and during season hiatuses. The narrative world is never gone and is therefore not forgotten by the audience. The network ABC Family and *Pretty Little Liars*' producers "have not only understood the importance of the show in advertising actions, but they have also converted the internet in[to] the strategic center from which each and every one of the advertising devices start." (Ramos-Serrano and Lozano-Delmar 2010: 431) And have thus created a highly successful mechanism for promoting the show, a mechanism that to a large extent consists of self-promotion through tweets from fans.

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Appendix

Coding schema for tweets 18-23 March 2015

@ABCFpl

Content	Number
All tweets	227
Paratext that extends the narrative	48
Paratext that does not extend the narrative	60
Finale related non-paratext transmedia marketing	46
Photos or mentions of the previous episode	21
<i>Pretty Little Liars</i> in general, not final episode related	27
Other, non <i>Pretty Little Liars</i> related	25

@imarleneking

Content	Number
All tweets	75
Paratext that extends the narrative	6
Paratext that does not extend the narrative	4
Finale related non-paratext transmedia marketing	6
Photos or mentions of the previous episode	1
<i>Pretty Little Liars</i> in general, not final episode related	5
Other, non <i>Pretty Little Liars</i> related	17

Specific sub-codes. All below tweets are also counted for in the above schema.

@ABCFp11

Content	Number
Fan retweet	98
Invitation from the network to participate finale related	9
Invitation from the network to participate general <i>Pretty Little Liars</i> not final episode related	9

@imarleneking

Content	Number
Fan retweet	5
Invitation from the producer to participate finale related	0
Invitation from the producer to participate general <i>Pretty Little Liars</i> not final episode related	0