

The Ambivalent Aftermath of Harry Potter: Has Our Beloved Series Been Affected?

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Writing 101: Meddling Muggles

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My aunt, the Professor Trelawney to my father's McGonagall, was the eccentric woman who first introduced me to J.K. Rowling's magical world. During my first visit to her home in Wisconsin, I was immediately drawn to the stacks upon stacks of books gathered in the living room. Among them, a lovely hardcover with the embossed golden letters of "Harry Potter" stood out to my second-grade self.

From there, I fell in love. When I finally finished the concluding chronicle to brave Harry's journey, I could no longer live vicariously through my favorite teen wizard.

I craved more.

Wanting more of the Harry Potter world was a common issue within *Harry Potter's* massive fandom, evidenced by thousands of fanart and fanfiction. Purposefully or not, its author and various executives capitalized on this desire, spinning out a 25-billion-dollar franchise. The aftermath of the *Harry Potter* books' success – J.K. Rowling's tweets, the boom of consumerism through Universal Studios, and the spin-offs – is a controversial aspect that has greatly tainted the legacy of Rowling's novels. By analyzing the effects of these new outgrowths, *Harry Potter* provides a lesson of integrity for creators hoping to preserve their creations' legacy.

A New Kind of Celebrity

In 2000, *Harry Potter* became a sensation, launching J.K. Rowling into stardom. Many avid fans are familiar with the 54-year-old British author's origin story. Rowling started out [as a single mother on government assistance](#), experiencing rejection after rejection from publishers everywhere. In 2004, Rowling became the world's [first billionaire author](#) and has received numerous [accolades](#) for her work.

With such success, Rowling has been inevitably pushed into the limelight. Millions of adoring, loyal fans are inspired by her actions and follow her every word. This devoted fanbase has provided Rowling the power and privilege of influence. Though her undisputed expertise is in spinning stories and enchanting readers with her boundless creativity, she is now able to offer all opinions to her fervent following through social media.

Boasting 14.6 million followers on [Twitter](#) (which seems to be Rowling's favorite platform), J.K. Rowling tweets to her heart's content about topics ranging from her own books to politics to casual tidbits about her life. These short posts on Twitter have caused great divide between fans.

Many praise Rowling's constant use of Twitter. *Bustle* hails Rowling as ["the ultimate role model,"](#) citing her strong feminist nature and advocacy for self-love. In support of this perspective, Inc.com gives Rowling rave reviews for her fearlessness and constant use of Twitter to [keep her fans loyal and engaged:](#) "ultimately, Rowling



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Before attending Duke, I took a gap year, during which I experienced various cultures across the world - I lived in Japan, taught English in China, and backpacked through

Europe. Among the many differences, the presence of the massively popular children's series *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling held true as a commonality.

Given my interests in behavioral science and entrepreneurship, it is fitting that I have taken a deeper look at J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, which has taken the younger generation by storm. I have always valued the ability to understand people and consumers, and strive to recognize what drives and incentivizes others' actions.

Taking Professor Andres' Writing 101: Meddling Muggles course provided me the wonderful opportunity to glimpse back into my childhood, reflecting on a childhood favorite. The *Harry Potter* series was one of the first lengthy fictional series I read, and I absolutely adored the main characters, idolizing Harry Potter's bravery, Hermione's cleverness, and Ron's humor.

While my experience with the *Harry Potter* books has been innocuous, leading to a lifelong appreciation of fiction, this paper has allowed me to take a multifaceted look at the ramifications of the *Harry Potter* series.

My deepest thanks to Professor Lisa Andres for her championing of divergent thinking - she really is the epitome of a Ravenclaw. I would also like to express my gratitude for Professor Sheryl Welte Emch and the *Deliberations* editorial board for their meticulous edits and this wonderful opportunity, bringing about a more polished form of my work.

is a master marketer...she understands the balance.” These perspectives reveal Rowling’s positive presence.

Rowling’s unique positioning as a literary celebrity has also made her the center of various scholarly reviews and studies. For example in a University of Cumbria [study](#), “Blogging and Tweeting in the Classroom: Exploring How Effective Use of New Media Can Help Teaching and Learning in Primary Schools,” teachers analyzed the educational use of social media to engage and teach children in the classroom, particularly referencing J.K. Rowling’s tweeting. During an activity in which teachers tweeted J.K. Rowling some pictures of their class playing with wands and reading, the author tweeted back with excitement and support. As a result, the study concludes that there is “sufficient evidence of social media facilitat[ing] learning for children in positive ways.” J.K. Rowling leverages the inherent interactive aspects of social media to connect with her fans and encourage their learning.



Rowling’s popularity and consistent social media use, however, has made her the subject of scrutiny. In another case study from Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, Martens discusses Rowling’s online persona: “[it is] worth it for literary celebrities to take on different roles in different digital areas, in order to increase their status and authenticity, and thus their brand.” Though this holds true, Martens warns that “J.K. Rowling is not necessarily the be-all and end-all that an author should aspire to be.” It bodes well for authors to abide by Martens’ advice. As a modern “literary celebrity,” Rowling has made plenty of social media mistakes:

Last year, J.K. Rowling tweeted out vocal support for a [British researcher who lost her job](#) due to anti-transgender views. With J.K. Rowling’s help, the entire situation became international news in a heartbeat, and various LGBTQ+ groups [criticized her heavily](#), saying that she’s “ruined the books.”

It’s instances like this that have made some people vehemently against J.K. Rowling’s use of social media. In Slate’s caustic take on J.K. Rowling’s twitter obsession, Heather Schwedel [follows the dawn](#) of Rowling’s twitter feed which devolved into the downward spiral that it has become. Schwedel laments, “she [used to be] the platonic ideal of the author-tweeter, only poking her head up from her self-imposed exile (writing stories for us, her fans).”

Schwedel isn’t the only one with this opinion. Author Joanna Trollope [likens J.K. Rowling to Kim Kardashian](#) “because of her ‘insatiable’ appetite for social media.” On the other hand, Trollope places herself on a supposed high ground, claiming that she “deliberately chose to stay away from social media because she expressed everything she wanted to in her books.”

“Creating this mass following and tweeting several times a day is like wanting to be [the pop star] Cheryl or Kim Kardashian. Some writers like JK Rowling have this insatiable need and desire to be out there all the time, and that’s entirely driven by their ego.” -Joanna Trollope

Some fans agree with this sentiment. The Washington Post cites [numerous memes](#) that reveal exasperation towards Rowling’s retroactive editing.

However, not all her offhanded remarks have been innocuous. Rowling threw the fandom into chaos when she brought the touchy subject of sexuality into the picture.

Even though Rowling announced Dumbledore as gay, it’s clear through perusal of the books that there is not a single mention of Dumbledore’s sexuality. Even in the eventual spin-offs of the Fantastic Beasts franchise, which gave a close look

into Dumbledore and Grindelwald's past, there is little overt indication of Dumbledore's sexuality.

It feels cheap. It feels easy. It feels disingenuous. It's not the celebration of diversity and minorities I believe J.K. Rowling champions. Including diversity at the forefront of the series is not the issue. It is Rowling's execution that is the issue. Diversity and inclusion shouldn't be used for the sake of appearing progressive.

More recently, while the globe protests for Black rights and battles a pandemic, J.K. Rowling took to Twitter insinuating her belief that transgender women are not real women. Soon after, she published a 3690-word essay to further describe this belief. Her untimely opinions during a period of social turmoil have negatively impacted the lives of discriminated groups.

In response, numerous people raised on the Harry Potter books rose against its author. Prominent figures everywhere have condemned Rowling's remarks, revealing that her callous words lead to murder and acts of [hate](#).

Additionally, Daniel Radcliffe, beloved for his portrayal of Harry Potter in the films, imparted his [sincerest apologies](#) on the author's behalf to the trans community. He implored fans to separate J.K. Rowling's opinions from the books:

"If these books taught you that love is the strongest force in the universe, capable of overcoming anything; if they taught you that strength is found in diversity, and that dogmatic ideas of pureness lead to the oppression of [vulnerable groups](#); if you believe that a particular character is trans, nonbinary, or gender fluid, or that they are gay or bisexual; if you found anything in these stories that resonated with you and helped you at any time in your life—then that is between you and the book that you read, and it is sacred. And in my opinion, nobody can touch that. It means to you what it means to you and I hope that these comments will not taint that too much."

For some readers, J.K. Rowling's personal beliefs have intertwined with the messages communicated by Harry Potter in ways that have tarnished the sanctity of the books. Hers is a cautionary tale of how creators, even those of children's books, can drastically shape the lives of the younger generation. It is my hope that readers will cherish the fundamental ideas of her books and champion diversity.

Accio-ing a Generation of Consumers

While Rowling's overwhelming internet presence has primarily influenced young generations, the commercialization of Harry Potter is even more all-encompassing, affecting readers regardless of age.

As a child, I longed for physical representations of my love for Harry Potter. From Lego toys to video games to home decor, I felt giddy joy at the newest addition to my collection.

Similarly, fans absolutely love the various Harry Potter-related merchandise. The enthusiasm and anticipation are

clearly evidenced by the Reddit threads, Tumblr posts, and [YouTube videos](#).

Articles upon articles advertise "[perfect gift ideas](#)" for the "ultimate HP fan." According to *Harry Potter* wholesalers, the consumer trend continues: "*Harry Potter* has really broad appeal to a diverse group of customers."

All of this consumerism has made J.K. Rowling richer and richer. Putting her newfound affluence to good use, the



writer [donated 160 million dollars](#) and founded Lumos, an international non-profit organization to help disadvantaged children. Lumos reunited hundreds of children in Haiti with their families.

Despite this redistribution of money, there is no doubt that the consumerist culture Harry Potter denounced has tremendous repercussions.

Money-hungry executives have cleverly assembled a rampant consumerist culture, eagerly received by impressionable teens.

Most prominently of these moneymakers is Universal Studios' Harry Potter theme park. In 2010, Universal Studios Orlando debuted its first Wizarding World of Harry Potter. From 2010 to 2016, attendance to Universal Studios' theme parks rocketed [80% to 47.4 million](#). Though the studio spent 256 million dollars on the new addition, there's no doubt that *Harry Potter* was a great investment.

Universal Studios was almost bankrupt before getting the rights to the Wizarding World, bringing in enough revenue to save the park and compete with Disney World. According to Sam Gennawey, a theme park historian, the Wizarding World "saved the theme park industry [and] Disney is still trying to catch up."

The shops of fiction-turned-reality Diagon Alley at Universal's are packed with an endless, expensive selection -- \$50 wands, \$200 robes, and more -- and endless crowds.

Some readers believe this is entirely hypocritical because an important theme of J.K. Rowling's closing seventh book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, is that material objects do not determine one's value. Dr. Justine Toh at Macquarie University delves into this critique, identifying the Horcruxes

as prime evidence. In the seventh book, Harry and his friends hunt after Voldemort's Horcruxes, which were magical objects that contained parts of Voldemort's soul. Half of these objects belonged to the founders of Hogwarts houses who were famous and illustrious, symbolizing Voldemort's wish to be connected to great wizards and "establish his identity as the greatest sorcerer in the world." Toh asserts that "the recognition that objects have meaning and value beyond their use, that they act as markers of status, and are key to fashioning one's identity suggests a compelling critique of consumerism going on within J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series." Voldemort's obsession with the Horcruxes echoes the real world's infatuation with luxury products.

In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Toh's belief is echoed when Dumbledore explains the effect of Horcruxes on Voldemort: "Without his Horcruxes, Voldemort will be a mortal man with a maimed and diminished soul." By abandoning his soul in favor of material objects in the form of Horcruxes, Voldemort is a representation of the harmful consequences of placing too much emphasis on "stuff."

On the other hand, our brave protagonist actively works to destroy the Horcruxes. Additionally, Harry, Hermione, and Ron undergo a critical choice – should they search for the Horcruxes or the Hallows, material objects that would make them the Master of Death? Persisting with the theme of denouncing materialism, Harry and his friends decide to pursue the Horcruxes.



Another example of Rowling's argument against consumerism lies in the Weasley family, Rowling's representation of a happy family unit. From the very beginning, it's clear that Ron's family doesn't have much money. The Malfoy family, elitist and purist, is the Weasleys' foil.

In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Draco Malfoy, readily taking the role of bully, sneers at Ron's lack of wealth, saying, "My father told me all the Weasleys have red hair, freckles, and more children than they can afford... You'll soon find out some wizarding families are much better than others, Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there."

As readers, we view the world through Harry's eyes and sympathize with his experiences. Our protagonist immediately makes the right decision, revealing the importance of good values over material objects. This is the decision and mindset Rowling encourages by using Harry's perspective.

Furthermore, it's clear where our loyalties should lie when the series comes to a close. At the end of the series, we feel a tug at our heartstrings when Molly Weasley, Harry's adopted mother, endearingly gifts Harry his coming-of-age present on his 17th birthday, even with her family's conditions:

"I'm afraid that one isn't new like Ron's, it was actually my brother Fabian's and he wasn't terribly careful with his possessions, it's a bit dented on the back, but –' The rest of her speech was lost; Harry had got up and hugged her. He tried to put a lot of unsaid things into the hug and perhaps she understood them, because she patted his cheek clumsily when he released her, then waved her wand in a slightly random way, causing half a pack of bacon to flop out of the frying pan on to the floor." -Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

The Weasleys teach readers the importance of relationships over money – they were always there for Harry, and no amount of money could create the warmth and comfort they provided. What impressionable young children learn from the role models of Harry and the Weasleys is clearly contradicted by the materialistic culture in real life.

In addition to the lessons in the books, numerous studies also reveal the negative influence of consumerism that's sprouted from *Harry Potter*. In a [study](#) from the *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* journal analyzing corporations' role in the *Harry Potter* merchandise boom, professors Waetjen and Gibson attest, "the current explosion of Potter-inspired merchandise is, to be sure, a textbook case in the commodification of children's culture and the proliferating sins of hyper-commercialism." They argue that the consumerism exploiting children's interests is so intrusive that it alters their worldviews. In particular, mass consumerism [impacts](#) impressionable children's reliance on material objects and their concept of happiness.

It's not just the western world that's experienced this wave of consumerism. In the *Chinese Journal of Communication*, John Nguyet [investigates](#) how the *Harry Potter* craze has affected consumerism in China. He observes that "China joins the global emergence of "commodities" designed with a capacity to stimulate rather than satisfy longing, that is to say, to produce serial pleasure."

Rampant consumerism continues to eat into our ever-decreasing pool of scarce resources. This hyper-commercialism has been completely woven into the fabric of the *Harry Potter* world. Despite the do-good lessons in her

books, Rowling has done little with her platform to nurture generations mindful of sustainability.

Though Rowling has compassionately distributed wealth to those in need, consumerism clearly has negative effects on children and has written over the original themes of the books. The materialistic culture and corporations continue to take advantage of the child consumer, engulfing adoring fans and destroying our environment. With risks that impact the future of humanity, creators must protect their brands and resist the urge of hyper-commercialism.

Where the Magic Leaves Us

The byproducts of *Harry Potter* are examples of the issues surrounding a completed work that continue growing and expanding past its natural limit. The consumerism and retroactive editing sullied the series, which would have continued to live on in the hearts and minds of fans, without the interjection of new products. Though *Harry Potter* has undoubtedly taken its place among classics such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, I cannot help but wonder how different the life cycle and status of the series would have been without external intervention.

Nonetheless, I'm still grateful that my aunt introduced



me to these magical adventures. As they did for me, the books have enchanted and inspired millions of readers around the world. Unfortunately, the aftermath of *Harry Potter* has greatly impacted the series and serves as a cautionary note for future authors. External influences should be careful not to sully the lessons and magic of books. Regardless of the creators' personal beliefs, I hope we the readers can interpret and recall the books' messages and, most importantly, follow in Harry Potter's courageous steps in our own day-to-day lives.

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