

DOI 10.51558/2490-3647.2023.8.3

UDK 794:004]:316.774

Primljeno: 16. 10. 2023.

Pregledni rad  
Review paper

**Borislav Vukojević, Miloš Španović**

## **INTERPLAY BETWEEN MEDIA AND PLAYER ENGAGEMENT: A STUDY OF MEDIA'S EFFECT ON THE WORLD OF WARCRAFT GAMING EXPERIENCE**

In the dynamic realm of online gaming, sustaining player engagement and immersion within a virtual environment is paramount for both the player community and game developers. World of Warcraft (WoW), a prominent massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG), has experienced considerable evolution since its inception in 2004. As gaming technologies advance and player expectations shift, a variety of media platforms, such as forums, social networks, and streaming services, have surfaced, playing a pivotal role in augmenting the WoW gaming experience. This study delves into the impact of different versions of WoW on the players' content experience, focusing on how these media platforms influence player engagement, communication strategies, and problem-solving approaches. Employing qualitative research methods, particularly in-depth interviews, this paper weaves a comprehensive narrative that sheds light on the intersection of technological evolution and gaming experiences. Our findings indicate that the specific version of WoW plays a critical role in shaping player interactions and problem-solving methods. The Classic WoW iteration fosters a sense of community and interaction, necessitating collaboration and the use of external resources. In contrast, Modern WoW has streamlined gameplay mechanics, thereby reducing the emphasis on collaborative efforts and the role of community within the game. This research underscores the fluid nature of social dynamics within the game, evolving in response to the changing preferences and expectations of the player base.

**Keywords:** World of Warcraft; video game studies; technological determinism; media studies; player experience

## INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of online gaming, staying engaged and immersed in a game's virtual world is of paramount importance for both players and game developers. World of Warcraft (WoW), a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG), has experienced significant transformations since its inception in 2004.<sup>1</sup>

As gaming technologies and player expectations have advanced, different versions of media<sup>2</sup> have emerged to support and enhance the in-game experience. This paper explores how various versions of game, including forums, social media, and streaming platforms, influence the content experience for WoW players. By examining the impact of these media on player engagement, communication, and problem-solving, we aim to provide a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between game design and the media landscape in shaping the WoW community.

Additionally, in this paper, we employ innovative methods through an in-game in-depth interview approach. By weaving players' experiences together, we create a novel narrative that can contribute to understanding how technology, or the development of technology, impacts the gaming experience.

In the first part of the paper, we examine communication theories and how we can use them in order to offer discussion of the results. After we describe the 3 main research questions, attention shifts toward methodology and the main part: the story. We combine all aspects at once, starting from the main conclusions (in table) and going back to the contextual elements. Through communication, communities, in-game help, we try to offer the experiences that shows how different versions of WoW impacted the experience in-game, resulting with completely different outcomes. How technology shaping the gaming experience?

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *Technological Determinism: Framework for analysis of game experience*

Technological Determinism (TD) is a theory that suggests technology is the primary driver of social, cultural, and economic change, with human agency and social

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1 There is huge amount of expansion for WoW during the 19 year period. Last expansion is called Dragonflight, released in October 2022.

2 In this paper, term „media“ is not limited on media as channels, but as game itself. Different version of WoW can be considered as different media.

structures playing secondary roles (Smith & Marx 1994). TD can be traced back to the works of scholars such as Karl Marx, who argued that technological innovations and the means of production shape social and economic relations. This perspective has been debated and critiqued by scholars who argue for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between technology and society.

Harold Innis, a Canadian economic historian, contributed significantly to the development of Technological Determinism through his work on the “bias of communication”. Innis argued that different communication technologies (e.g., oral, written, or electronic) possess inherent biases that influence the organization and development of societies. According to Innis, these biases are shaped by the characteristics of the medium (e.g., durability, reach, and speed), which in turn affect the structure of social institutions and cultural practices. Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian media theorist, expanded upon Innis’s ideas and further developed the concept of Technological Determinism (McLuhan 1964). McLuhan’s famous aphorism, “the medium is the message,” suggests that the form of communication (i.e., the medium) is more important than the content it conveys. According to McLuhan, different media have distinct effects on human perception, cognition, and social organization, and these effects are independent of the specific content transmitted through the medium.

Two primary forms of Technological Determinism exist: hard determinism and soft determinism (Chandler 1995). Hard determinism posits that technology develops autonomously and is the sole driving force behind societal change. In contrast, soft determinism acknowledges that technology can influence social change, but human choices and social factors also play a role in shaping the development and impact of technology. In communication and media studies, TD has been influential in explaining the transformative effects of new communication technologies on society (Winston 1998). Critics of TD argue that it overemphasizes the role of technology and underestimates the importance of human agency and social context in shaping the development and impact of communication technologies. The idea of TD is used in this paper to provide context for exploring whether technological components of WoW affect game experience and whether the medium of MMORPGs, who represent social environment for players, drives players’ behaviour, their social interactions and communication.

### ***Background of World of Warcraft***

World of Warcraft (WoW) is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) developed and published by Blizzard Entertainment in 2004. This game

is the fourth installment in the Warcraft series, which began with the real-time strategy game Warcraft: Orcs & Humans in 1994. WoW is set in the high-fantasy world of Azeroth, where players create their own characters and embark on quests, explore the vast open world, and interact with other players.

Since its release, WoW has become one of the most successful and influential MMORPGs in the gaming industry (Yee 2006). The game had over 12 million active subscribers at its peak in 2010, with players from various cultures, age groups, and backgrounds. The game's longevity and success can be attributed to its engaging gameplay, a massive and diverse player base, continuous content updates, and a strong sense of community (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, & Moore 2006). Also, the structure, complexity and nonlinearity of WoW's world and culture places it beyond the category of 'just' video games and into the category of virtual worlds.

WoW's gameplay is focused on character progression, allowing players to level up, acquire new skills, and obtain better equipment to face increasingly challenging content. The game also emphasizes social interaction, with players forming groups and guilds to collaborate on quests, dungeons, and large-scale player versus environment (PvE) raids or engaging in player versus player (PvP) combat (Nardi 2010).

WoW has undergone numerous expansions and updates over the years, changing the game's mechanics, graphics, and content to adapt to evolving player expectations and technological advancements. In 2019, Blizzard Entertainment released World of Warcraft Classic, which recreated the original game experience from 2004, allowing players to revisit the roots of the MMORPG. This release highlighted the differences between the original and modern versions of the game, sparking discussions about the impact of game design on player experience and community dynamics.

Academic research on WoW has focused on various aspects of the game, including player motivations (Yee 2006), social interactions (Nardi 2010), gender representation (Eklund 2011), and the impact of game design on player behavior (Ducheneaut et al. 2006). These studies contribute to a better understanding of the factors that shape the gaming experience and the social dynamics within online gaming communities.

Academic research has also focused on flow and immersion in video games (Michailidis et al. 2018). The study suggests that the distinction between flow and immersion in the context of video games is not clearly substantiated by current research. The authors argue that more evidence is needed to justify treating these two concepts as distinct phenomena in video game studies. Studies have examined the transformative experiences in virtual reality (VR), including the enhancement of narrative experiences in art exhibitions (Yu Jian 2023), and the influence of VR on meaningful work and social interactions, especially for people with disabilities (Davis &

Chansiri 2018). There is also research on the impact of VR on storytelling and live performances, offering new platforms and enhancing the experience for audiences and performers (Lyons et al. 2021). Furthermore, the concept of virtual capitalism and how digital communication shapes global corporations has been discussed (Nolan 2016). Additionally, the role of VR in cultural and heritage interpretation has been highlighted (Ch'ng 2018).

In addition to the aspects previously mentioned, WoW has also been studied in the context of its economic system, with players participating in a virtual economy that includes trading, crafting, and auctioning of in-game items (Castronova 2005). World of Warcraft (WoW) is a landmark in the world of online gaming, renowned for its expansive universe and immersive gameplay. Scholarly studies have extensively examined WoW, exploring aspects such as culture, role-playing, group formation, connections with external social actors, and economic markets within the game (Bainbridge 2015). The game's success can be attributed to its refined formula, which includes a balance of socialization and in-game literacies, diverse player groups, and the impact of player-versus-player combat. These elements combine to provide a rich, collaborative environment where players can form self-organizing groups to achieve objectives, fostering understanding and tolerance among diverse backgrounds (Nardi 2006).

The social landscape of WoW is notable for enhancing real-life social interactions, challenging the stereotype of the 'lonely gamer'. This enhancement is consistent across various demographic groups, including different genders and cultural backgrounds (Schiano et al. 2011). Additionally, the game serves as a digital microcosm that reflects and influences broader social and cultural patterns. For instance, avatar suicide videos in WoW have emerged as a genre that reflects deep connections players develop with their virtual selves and the community, highlighting the game's profound impact on personal identity and social dynamics (Lau 2017).

Furthermore, WoW has been used as a platform for research in areas such as learning, collaboration, and leadership. Researchers have explored how players develop problem-solving skills, teamwork, and communication strategies within the game environment, providing insights that can be applied to other collaborative settings, such as the workplace or educational contexts (Reeves, Malone, & O'Driscoll 2008).

### ***World of Warcraft Classic Version in 2019***

World of Warcraft Classic, released in 2019, is a faithful recreation of the original World of Warcraft game, which was first launched in 2004. The Classic version was developed in response to the demand from players who were nostalgic for the early

days of the game and preferred the slower pace, more challenging content, and stronger emphasis on social interaction that characterized the original version. The release of WoW Classic allowed players to re-experience the game as it was in its earliest stages, before any expansions or significant updates were introduced.

WoW Classic features the original game's content, including the level cap of 60, the original playable races and classes, the original world map, dungeons, and quests. The game design and mechanics have also been restored to their original state, requiring players to invest more time and effort into leveling their characters, acquiring gear, and forming groups for dungeons and raids. This has led to a renewed emphasis on social interaction, communication, and collaboration among players.

Academic research on WoW Classic has focused on comparing the player experience in the Classic version with that of the modern version, examining differences in player motivations, social dynamics, and the impact of game design on player behavior (Rigby & Ryan 2011). These studies contribute to a broader understanding of the factors that shape the gaming experience and the role of nostalgia in driving players' preferences for particular game versions.

World of Warcraft (WoW) has maintained its relevance as a subject of academic inquiry, particularly in examining the media's influence on gaming experience, due to its longevity, massive player base, and evolving game design. The game's transformation over time provides a unique opportunity to analyze how changes in media technology and game mechanics have impacted player engagement, social dynamics, and overall gaming experience (Kowert, Kaczmarek, & O'Donnell 2014).

WoW has been used as a platform to study the effects of game streaming on player behavior, with researchers examining how platforms like Twitch have fostered new forms of player interaction and created communities centered around gaming content (Hamilton, Garretson, & Kerne 2014). The growth of eSports has also led to increased interest in analyzing how the competitive gaming scene has influenced player motivation, skill development, and engagement with the game (Hilvoorde & Pot 2016).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**Research Question 1:** The extent to which WoW's medium has directed the gaming experience towards communication, community, and mutual problem solving can be examined through the lens of four theories: social identity theory, which explores how players identify with in-game communities; the theory of collective intelligence, considering how players collaborate to solve complex challenges; communication theory, analyzing the nature and effectiveness of player interactions; and game design

theory, assessing how the game's mechanics and narrative structure encourage community building and cooperative problem-solving.

**Research Question 2:** The involvement of players in classic and modern versions of WoW likely varies due to changes in game mechanics, community culture, and overall gaming environment. In the classic version, the need for collaboration in raids and dungeons might have fostered a stronger sense of community. In contrast, modern versions, with more streamlined gameplay and accessibility features, might attract a different kind of player engagement, focusing more on individual achievements and less on community-driven activities.

**Research Question 3:** It is possible that modern versions of WoW have shifted the focus towards more independent problem-solving, potentially reducing the importance of communication with other players. This could be due to the introduction of features like automated matchmaking for dungeons and raids, and the availability of more in-game resources and guides, allowing players to progress without extensive interaction with others. However, the extent of this shift would need to be empirically validated through player surveys and in-game data analysis.

## METHODOLOGY

To comprehensively address the research questions, we employed a qualitative ethnographic approach, primarily utilizing structured in-depth interviews. A total of 19 long-term World of Warcraft (WoW) players, aged 18 to 45, participated in this study from January until April 2023. The gender distribution was 95% male and 5% female. The interviews, consisting of 10 open-ended questions, aimed to explore players' experiences and perspectives. The average duration of each interview was 30 minutes.

Interviews were conducted in various formats: one in-game, three via Skype, ten through Zoom, and five using other online platforms (Google meet, MS Teams etc). This diverse approach enabled us to engage with participants in environments where they felt most comfortable, enriching the quality of the data collected.

We employed semantic thematic analysis to analyze the interview data, using MaxQDA software. This analysis identified six main themes: Navigation in-game, Community, Communication, In-game Help, Group Finding, and Out-of-the-Game Help. To quantify the significance of these themes, we adopted a three-point Likert scale, categorizing the variables as 'not important', 'moderately important', and 'very important'. This scale was also used to assess the difficulty level of in-game activities, with categories ranging from 'too easy' to 'too difficult'.

The coding scheme of these variables was carefully designed to reflect the nuances in players' responses. For instance, 'extremely important' was coded to represent critical elements in the game, while 'non-available' indicated features or aspects that were absent but desired by players.

To ensure the reliability of our thematic analysis, we measured intercoder agreement during the coding process, achieving a 71% agreement rate. This rate indicates a substantial level of consistency in the interpretation of the data among different coders, thereby strengthening the credibility of our findings.

The detailed breakdown of the identified themes, along with their respective coding and significance, are available in tables and figures. This structured and detailed methodology provided a robust framework for analyzing the intricate experiences of long-term WoW players, enabling a deeper understanding of their gaming experiences and perspectives.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS ABOUT RESULTS

In order to have a comprehensive perspective, we will divide our discussion about results in 4 parts, using the following table of results:

**Table 1:** Matrix of main results

	Classic WoW (vanilla)	WoWk WoW (groundbraking version)	Modern WoW (from Legion version)	Comments
<b>Navigation in game</b>	Extremely hard	Hard	Extremely easy	Adctors were must-have in classic WoW, today are not that important
<b>Community</b>	Extremely important	Important	Extremely non-important	Classic WoW was unplayable without community, today is possible
<b>Communication</b>	Extremely important	Important	Extremely non-important	All-chat and so called Banners chat were so important in Classic WoW
<b>In-game help</b>	Non-available	Somewhat available	Extremely available	There was no in-game help in Classic, players need to find a path for themselves
<b>Group finding</b>	Extremely hard	Hard	Extremely easy	Group finding were dependant on communication, today is completely optional
<b>Out-of-game help</b>	Extremely important	Important	Extremely non-important	Wowhead, thottbot were must-have in Classic era, today they are incorporated in-game

For the purpose of this paper, we have divided the WoW into 3 categories: Classic WoW, Wrath of the Lich King as groundbreaking version and Legion as modern WoW experience. In following analysis, we will give our explanations about this in more detail. Also, we will offer our stories about the value of variables which are presented in the table (extremely important-important-nonimportant).

Our respondents claimed that WotLK was groundbreaking expansion, as it is illustrated by Respondent 11:

*Classes got dumbed down and easier to play in WotLK and every expansion proceeding that I believe they've gotten even more dumbed down. Most classes nowadays are just "build this one resource to spend on other cooldowns".*

### ***In-game navigation and help***

Finding the path to your current objective can be hard in MMORPG games. Quest is often presented to the player in written form, understanding his willingness to explore this part of the genre, and engage in absorbing this information in detail. There is nothing wrong with this format, since it encourages role-playing aspects of the game, and helps generate a larger picture of the world. As such, quests and storytelling are an important part of the gameplay and enjoyment of the game. However, a lot of players do not engage in this detail-oriented approach to playing and prefer reaching their objective quickly. This hyper-efficient approach to the game generates a need for tools to navigate from point A to point B quickly. World of Warcraft's complexity, with a large world, many zones, and multiple layers of dungeons, combined with complicated capital cities and many thousands of quests, creates a maze that can be challenging even to the most experienced of gamers.

*The game "hides" some concepts and makes certain things harder without the use of external tools, but with some note keeping and world exploration you can spot the patterns and know where you can find which farming ingredients/enemies, where the dungeons are, etc.,* claims Respondent 7.

To ease exploration, and speed-up progress in the game, add-ons are created with each expansion. These add-ons are usually originally created by the community, but with the longevity of the game such as World of Warcraft, and ever-lasting communication between the creator of the game Blizzard and the community, many changes and ease-of-access tools were added to the game itself. These add-ons in a sense became part of the experience and regularly used commodities, and if they were preferred and used by the majority of the community from one expansion to the next one, they would usually become part of the game.

A lot of these "quality of life" changes impacted the game in such a drastic manner that many players from the early days do not recognize newer expansions as part of the same saga. Players' immersion in the world is drastically reduced by the introduction of these options and streamlining the objectives of the game.

And this isn't where addons stop since they serve many different functions apart from the aforementioned, such as tweaking User Interface, communication options, aesthetics of the game, etc.

As they said, the game was extremely complex but fun. Respondent 6:

*I remember the first character I made was a night elf hunter on the Aggramar realm. I pretty much spent my time goofing off in Goldshire. I didn't even know what a quest was until I was level 40. I literally grinded mobs up until then. Even worse, I mostly meleed the mobs as a hunter!! I was the definition of a noob.*

## **Community**

In original editions of the game, social factors played a major role in who you were in World of Warcraft. Even a child, or person facing a major language barrier could play the game if helped by someone they know and understand. When you would find yourself isolated in an unknown spot, and facing an impossible challenge such as leveling too high level, or an enemy ganking you, your only option was to ask for help. And help would arrive, usually in form of a bored high-level player, or a random passer-by who understands your struggle. "Knowing a guy" was important, and often brought information, profit, or other boons. YOU being "Known" was also extremely important, and a major flex option when showing off prestigious gear, kill count, or a title hard to obtain. Guilds were a major driving force behind late game progression, while zone chats were a place to take a break, socialize, and find gossip, trash talk, and banter. The community was one of the founding pillars of Classic WoW, which lost importance with each following expansion. Stormwind gates, Barrens, and Durotar were gathering places for weary gamers in the late hours of the day.

As our in-depth interviews shows, the main focus of the players in early days was to „advance as a community“ (Respondent 18):

*Classic WoW and TBC kept you quite under pressure to play a lot in order to stay in touch with current events. If you wanted to spearhead servers PVE progression, or be on top in PVP world, you had to farm a lot, follow trends other players follow, and deliver decent gameplay. A lot of gameplay models used in Vanilla and TBC are sturdy, grindy and for some even tedious. However, if you didn't want to be this committed, game was reasonably paced and pleasant to experience.*

Results of in-depth interviews shows that one of the main reasons to start playing WoW was „to make friends“ (Respondent 8):

*Another motivation for me is the ability to make friends with others. Joining a raiding guild and getting to hang out with people twice a week is a good feeling. It is a consistent way to stay social since the older you get the harder it is to plan hanging out with your friends in real life. I've made a lot of long term friends over the years through this game.*

However, in modern version of WoW, the game lost the complexity, thus resulting with (Respondent 12):

*From someone who experienced it more from the outside of the player base, i would say Blizzard dabbed a lot into models that simplified the game, while making other parts of gameplay more prominent (making certain element of the game super grindy because it caters to part of population which likes such gameplay).*

Respondent 19 claims that WoW was not only building community in-game, rather it could offer off-line experience and sense of community:

*My brother used to play it and sometimes I would sit next to him and watch. All of these characters, spells, mounts, and the big open world really captivated me.*

### **Communication**

Chatting, writing, and hanging out were major aspects of the WoW. The symbolism behind sending a fellow player bottle of alcohol in-game, and a kind note via mail, reached further than text indicates. Zone chats and guild chats were ever-flowing ways of finding out more about the game, and when facing a challenge, a person's natural response was asking for help. And as chat and communication options grew and improved in mechanics, opening a chatbox became increasingly hard and unnecessary for players over the years. Other "quality of life" changes made chatting redundant. The crazy pace of grinding to progress, finish dailies, and obtain top-gearscore items, in combination with automatization and simplification of the game, made chatting and communication tedious waste of time.

The help of others was extremely important in the early days, says Respondent 10:

*I have to say no without that and/or player support it would be just about impossible to play without some kind of quest guidance. Wow is a large place and to keep track of everyone and everything in it would be extremely hard.*

Communication was mandatory in the early days of WoW, in modern WoW it is a matter of personal preference (Respondent 1).

*You sign up for a random dungeon in the LFG tool, join a party, and no one even talks to each other. Why? because the content doesn't require any communication and everyone is just playing on autopilot. People just want to get in and get out because a majority of players already know how to play their class/ already know the content so they don't need to communicate anything.*

### **Group finding**

WoW was designed as a social game, where a large part of the content can not be finished or reached without utilizing the group gameplay setting. A lot of quests were designed for more than a single player, and could only be soloed by a select few classes that as listed perks had precisely this factor - solo potential. Every expansion brought a large number of 5-man dungeons with the intended purpose of leveling, gearing up, and serving as end-game content from which the player progresses toward the raid environment. And while the hardest raids over the years preserved the purpose of guild setup to clear them, dungeons became increasingly easy and accessible.

Everything was simplified in modern WoW (Respondent 13):

*The original Wow was fun to play in a short time with little support you could get a character up in levels and just have fun, but all things must change if it does not you loose customers and sales I mean you can only farm so much. I get the reasons for the expansions and new content the problem I have as a causal is 1. Sometimes after we work so hard to get a point you bring out an expansion and wham.*

### **Out-of-game help**

Players often can not rely on other mentioned tools and aspects of the game. Sometimes, no friends of yours are online. Often, no one knows the information you need out of their head. The content upon release used to be "hidden" in a sense in World of Warcraft. You did not know an item existed until you would get it. Navigation was rudimentary. When all these hardships would gather upon you, you always could "find a friend" online, outside of the game. One alt-tab away was the help. Hopefully. With data mining being less popular or straight-up unavailable, and end-game content something less coveted by players, a lot of details about the game were behind the fog of war and left to players to explore. Still, community projects, forums, and websites were doing their best to bring this information to players. Thottbot, Allakhazam, WoWHead, IcyVeins, ArenaJunkies, ElitistJerks,

and others, all served the same purpose of making the content accessible to players. And considering that addons still didn't exist or weren't that popular, these hubs were the main information tools for players when their in-game resources fail them.

The main category of addons were so called Quality of life addons, says Respondent 14:

*Personally I used a moderate amount of Quality of Life based addons. Trinket-Menu, etc. I never liked quest helping addons because I preferred exploring the world and reading in order to stay in contact with the lore.*

## CONCLUSION

The main conclusion of our analysis is that the medium greatly influences the development of the gaming experience, which we have demonstrated using the example of WoW. Our experience as both authors of this paper and (long-term) WoW gamers coincide with the experience of the respondents. In this study, we did not engage in the ethnography of personal experience; however, we can affirm that our experiences significantly concur with the testimonies of the participants.

To what extent has the medium (a particular version of the game WoW) directed the gaming experience towards communication with others, the community and mutual problem solving? It seems that version of WoW is the main factor for communication and problem solving. Classic WoW directed people one to another, regardless of their personal preferences and state of play. Modern WoW still brings communication, but with a choice. This conclusion suggests that the specific version of WoW plays a crucial role in shaping communication and problem-solving among players. While Classic WoW fostered interactions between players irrespective of their personal preferences and gaming progress, Modern WoW offers a more flexible approach, allowing players to choose when and how they engage in communication. This distinction highlights the evolving nature of in-game social dynamics over time as the game adapts to changing player expectations and preferences.

How were the players of the classic and modern versions of WoW involved in the game? Classic WoW required help by others and external sources, deepening the communication and sense of community. Modern WoW versions use simplified game mechanics and navigation, thus lowering the importance of community. The Classic WoW version necessitated assistance from other players and reliance on external resources, thereby fostering a deeper sense of communication and community among gamers. In contrast, Modern WoW streamlined game mechanics and navigation, re-

ducing the need for player collaboration and, consequently, diminishing the prominence of community within the game.

Can it be said that modern versions significantly reduce the importance of communication, in favor of independent problem solving? Definitely yes, showing that game itself can direct people in different behaviours. Classic WoW directed players on community, Modern WoW directing people to be more individualistic and independent of others.

The primary limitation of this study lies in the relatively small sample size of in-depth interviews, coupled with the minimal uptake of in-game interview methods by participants. Despite this, it is important to recognize the unique value in-game interviews offer in qualitative research, particularly in studies focusing on digital gaming environments.

Conducting interviews within the game setting can significantly enrich the data quality by allowing researchers to observe participants in their natural gaming environment. This method facilitates a deeper understanding of players' behaviors, interactions, and emotional responses in real-time, offering insights that might not be as readily apparent in traditional interview settings. In-game interviews also enable participants to directly demonstrate and discuss specific game elements, fostering a more dynamic and illustrative conversation.

Although only a small portion of our interviews were conducted in-game, these sessions provided valuable context and depth, underscoring nuances in player experiences that might otherwise be overlooked. Future research could benefit from a greater emphasis on in-game interviews to harness these advantages and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the gaming experience.

## APPENDIXES

### *Appendix 1*

#### *In depth Interview*

**Topic:** Using different media to stay engaged in the game: How media can influence the content experience for players of World of Warcraft

**Intro:** World of Warcraft (WoW) is one of the first MMORPG games to gain global popularity. From its classic version in 2004 to the new edition from 2020, the game has gone through a drastic revolution. Dear friend, I would appreciate your time to answer following questions as much as detailed you can. My research depend

on that, so please, I need you! Feel free to add your stories, comments, anecdotes and whatever you feel it can be useful.

The following questions were designed to explore various aspects of players' experiences and perceptions in World of Warcraft. Each question aims to uncover specific elements of the gaming experience related to media influence and player engagement.

**Question 1:** I saw that you played almost every expansion of World of Warcraft. What was your main motivation to start playing WoW and to continue playing?

**Question 2:** Can you remember your first days playing vanilla WoW? Was it hard for you to get engaged in game, or you needed help from friends, community, internet etc?

**Question 3:** In short, can you describe your gaming experience playing WoW until WotLK (which media you used to help you navigate, was it too hard, was it slow etc)?

**Question 4:** In short, can you describe your gaming experience playing WoW from Legion (which media you used to help you navigate, was it too hard, was it slow etc)?

**Question 5:** If you remember your first years playing WoW, can you describe your method of playing (using guides, addons, forums, chats etc) or you played without any external or internal help?

**Question 6:** Can you identify, from your experience, in which expansion you felt the things changed? For example, when you were playing and felt that game is easier, that you don't need external or internal help from others?

**Question 7:** If you go back in your first days, even if you are not played like that, but lets imagine you played vanilla WoW depending just on ingame information. Would it be possible to play like that, without guidance on quests, where to pick up quests, where flight paths are connected etc?

**Question 8:** From your today's perspective, can you compare complexity of original WoW with Shadowlands?

**Question 9:** If it is your choice to play Shadowlands completely alone, without any external or internal help, how enjoyable for you it would be?

**Question 10:** In the end, can you describe your thoughts about communication trends in different versions of WoW? Can you say that in vanilla communication was „must have“ feature to be able to play and solve problems?

## Appendix 2



Picture 1: In-game in-depth interview

## Appendix 3

### Short explanations of WoW slang used in the ethnographic narrative

*Dungeon* - An underground area with enemies, loot, and challenges, usually cleared by a party of 5 players.

*Raid* - A challenging zone, usually cleared by a group of 40 or 25 players.

*Noob* - Inexperienced player, playing the game in the “wrong” way.

*Mount* - A rideable creature or vehicle for faster travel.

*Grind* - Repetitive gameplay to gain experience, gold, or items.

*PUG* - Pick-Up-Group, players teaming up for a temporary mutual activity.

*Transmog* - Changing the appearance of gear without changing stats.

*Class* - A type of character with unique abilities and strengths.

*PVE* - Player vs. Environment type of content.

*PVP* - Player vs. Player type of content.

*Attunement* - Requirement to enter certain dungeons or raids.

*Addon* - Player-created modification to the user interface or gameplay.

*Expansion* - Additional content to the base game.

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## IZMEĐU MEDIJA I ANGAŽOVANJA IGRAČA: STUDIJA O UTICAJU MEDIJA NA ISKUSTVO IGRANJA WORLD OF WARCRAFTA

### Sažetak

U dinamičnom svijetu online igara održavanje angažovanja i igranja igrača u virtualno okruženje od suštinskog je značaja kako za zajednicu igrača tako i za razvojne programere igara. World of Warcraft (WoW), istaknuta masovna multiplayer online role-playing igra (MMORPG), doživjela je značajnu evoluciju od svog nastanka 2004. godine. Kako se tehnologije igara razvijaju i očekivanja igrača mijenjaju, pojavile su se različite medijske platforme, kao što su forumi, društvene mreže i streaming usluge, koje imaju ključnu ulogu u unapređenju iskustva igranja WoW-a. Ova studija istražuje uticaj različitih verzija WoW-a na iskustvo sadržaja igrača, fokusirajući se na to kako ove medijske platforme utiču na angažovanje igrača, strategije komunikacije i pristupe rješavanju problema. Koristeći kvalitativne metode istraživanja, posebno dubinske intervjuje, ovaj rad nastoji izgraditi sveobuhvatnu naraciju koja osvjetljava raskršnicu tehnološke evolucije i iskustava u igrama. Naši nalazi ukazuju da specifična verzija WoW-a igra ključnu ulogu u oblikovanju interakcija igrača i metoda rješavanja problema. Iteracija klasičnog WoW-a podstiče osjećaj zajednice i interakcije, zahtijevajući saradnju i korištenje spoljnih resursa. Nasuprot tome, savremeni WoW je pojednostavio mehaniku igranja, smanjujući naglasak na zajedničkim naporima i ulozi zajednice unutar igre. Ovo istraživanje naglašava fluidnu prirodu socijalne dinamike unutar igre, koja evoluirala kao odgovor na promjenjive preferencije i očekivanja igračke baze.

**Ključne riječi:** World of Warcraft; studije video igara; tehnološki determinizam; studije medija; iskustvo igrača

Adrese autora

Authors' address

Borislav Vukojević  
University of Banja Luka  
Faculty of Political Sciences  
borislav.vukojevic@fpn.unibl.org

Miloš Španović  
freelance researcher  
sshpanac@gmail.com