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You Think You Do, but You Don't: An Investigation of Fandom and Nostalgic Media Through an Analysis of World of Warcraft Classic

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YOU THINK YOU DO, BUT YOU DON'T: AN INVESTIGATION OF FANDOM AND
NOSTALGIC MEDIA THROUGH AN ANALYSIS OF WORLD OF WARCRAFT CLASSIC

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze the fan culture of the video game, *World of Warcraft,* to analyze the motivations, reactions, and reasons of play, to examine *World of Warcraft: Classic* as a form of nostalgic media, and to study its fandom through an ethnographic lens. This study utilized a fusion of the following methodologies: cyberethnography, ethnography, and visual ethnography. The author recorded gameplay footage of *World of Warcraft, and World of Warcraft Classic*. After this, an ethnography was conducted at the 2019 Blizzcon convention, in which observation shots and interviews took place. This footage was edited together to form a visual ethnography medium, in which the data and findings are presented. The results are that the popularity around *World of Warcraft Classic* is not because of the game itself, but rather the idea that it was a step in the right direction to giving the fans a sense of agency and say in the game's future development.

Keywords: video games, world of warcraft, fandom, ethnography

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

"No, and, by the way, you don't want that. You think you do, but you don't." (Brack, 2016).

Video games have cemented themselves in the popular culture media sphere. Fans of video games purchase clothing representing their favorite video games. They upload videos of their gameplay to the Internet and watch live broadcasts of their favorite content-creators playing video games. Fans attend conventions and often cosplay as a character from their favorite video game. As the video game industry continues to expand, games have become more sophisticated each year. Gamers anticipate future innovations and updates to franchises they know and love. *World of Warcraft (WoW),* a video game franchise that launched in 2004, went a different direction in 2019. *World of Warcraft*, asks the question: what happens if you go back to how things were?"

The story of *World of Warcraft* takes place in the game's virtual world of Azeroth. Two opposing factions, the Alliance and the Horde, are at constant war to conquer more land for themselves. Upon first opening the game *World of Warcraft*, players first create their in-game character. After choosing their faction, character race (such as a goblin or human), name, and customizing the appearance of their character, players press "Enter World" and begin their adventure. The overarching goal in *World of Warcraft* is to complete objectives, referred to as "quests" to receive experience points to level their character to level 60. Players of the same faction can work together to fight the opposing faction. They also work together in fighting off threats in the world of Azeroth to progress their character's level and obtain powerful armor and abilities. Upon reaching level 60, players are eligible to work together to fight powerful monsters in challenging situations, in hopes of obtaining the most powerful armor and items the game has to offer. These challenges, referred to as "raids," sometimes can seem impossible. Nevertheless,

the prestige and accomplishment of defeating a raid are one of the several challenges players strive to complete.

The design and formula of *World of Warcraft* were significant innovations for the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) genre. Three years after first launching in 2004, the game reported a player base of over nine million players around the world (Boudreau 176). The game's rapid success came from the immersive world, rich detail, and compelling gameplay for players of various skills. Raids, for instance, had a "Normal" and "Heroic" difficulty, with the "Heroic" difficulty being significantly more challenging, but with far superior rewards. After three years since *World of Warcraft*'s initial release, most players achieved the maximum level of 60, as well as completed the raids. In 2007, Blizzard Entertainment released their first *World of Warcraft* expansion: *The Burning Crusade*. This expansion increased the maximum level to 70, adding more content for players to progress through. These expansions have continued to release almost every two years, with seven expansions published since 2004. The eighth expansion, *Shadowlands,* was announced in 2019, with the release date scheduled for late 2020.

Although Blizzard Entertainment continues to release expansions for *World of Warcraft,* the game, once referred to as "the world's most popular MMORPG," has seen a sharp decrease of active players. The nine million active players shrank to just under five million in 2019, illustrating a lack of interest and dissatisfaction. One of the leading reasons behind this is the players describing the lack of challenge and satisfaction the game once delivered. Players refer to their experiences with the original *WoW*, as well as some of the earlier expansions, as the peak of what *WoW* as a video game should be. In 2016, fans took to social media and forums to express their dissatisfaction with the game. Their messages were never responded to by anyone at

Blizzard Entertainment online. However, in the same year, the annual Blizzcon convention took place in November of 2016. During a live Q&A, a fan asked the developers if there were ever plans to make the original *WoW* accessible to players again. The developers scoffed at the idea, responding with, "You don't want that. You think you do, but you don't".

The following year, during Blizzcon 2017, *World of Warcraft: Classic* was announced. The fans got what they wanted. The original *World of Warcraft* was making a comeback. Two years later, in August 2019, *WoW Classic* launched worldwide. Blizzard reported its active player base of *World of Warcraft* tripling.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of my study is to analyze the fan culture of the video game, *World of Warcraft,* to analyze the motivations, reactions, and reasons of play, to examine *World of Warcraft: Classic* as a form of nostalgic media, and to study its fandom through an ethnographic lens.

Rationales

This study is vital for several reasons. There is an abundant amount of scholarship discussing *World of Warcraft*. Over the last 15 years, scholars have analyzed subjects such as players' construction and representation of identity (Bessière et al.; Murphy; Schmieder; J. P. Williams et al.; D. Williams et al.), social dynamics between players (Graham and Gosling; Martončik and Lokša; Sherlock; Petrică; J. P. Williams et al.; Yee et al.; Nardi and Harris; Ducheneaut et al.), and motivations of play (Bardzell et al.; Billieux et al.; Golub; Guo and Barnes; Paul). While there is an abundant amount of research surrounding *World of Warcraft,* each with different aims and goals, a significant portion of research has reported how more players are quitting the game each year. A cited universal reason comes from how the game is

lacking its "satisfaction and magic" it once had in 2004 (Paul 159–60; Petrică 47). Moreover, the community of players expressed their interest to Blizzard Entertainment, the publisher of *World of Warcraft*, to re-release the original version. With the release of *WoW Classic* in August 2019, in this study I will seek to answer a question that has not been investigated: what happens when fans of *World of Warcraft* get the nostalgia they wanted?

It is also important to contribute to the study of fan culture with video games, in this case, *World of Warcraft.* There is an abundance of scholarship exploring how fans of video games and other media participate in the fan culture (Brown et al.; Gray et al.; Hills; Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*; Yamato). Rather than only playing a video game, fans can express their passion for a particular video game through purchasing merchandise, attending conventions, creating their own works of art based on the game, and communicating through social media. This study will contribute to the ongoing research of fan culture, as well as explore the fan culture with a nostalgic form of media.

The video game franchise, *World of Warcraft,* has cemented itself in video game history. The game has become a pop culture phenomenon, with the game spanning across various platforms in addition to the video game itself. The 15 years of the game's soundtrack is made available on services such as Apple Music and Spotify, dozens of books have been published exploring the game's lore, and in 2016 Universal Pictures produced the movie, *Warcraft* based entirely off of the video game's story and universe. With *World of Warcraft* taking place on several platforms, its popularity has made this video game a pop-culture phenomenon. With the game's long history and pop-culture significance, it is essential to analyze fan's motivations and reasons for participating in this cultural phenomenon, especially with the release of *World of Warcraft: Classic.*

Finally, this study is significant for me on a personal level. Video games are a central part of my identity. Growing up, I moved around a lot with my family as part of my dad's job. While this brought a lot of change and uncertainty in our lives, my brother and I developed a bond through the games we played together. Whether it was helping one another navigate through an intense police chase in *Need for Speed* to winning, (but mostly losing) matches in *Rocket League,* I discovered the benefits and positive impact video games had in my life. This discovery continued in playing the video game *World of Warcraft.* After beginning 2012, I have forged friendships with several other players that carried outside the game. *World of Warcraft* has strengthened my leadership qualities, enhanced my ability to listen and retain information quickly, and what I believe to be most impactful, the game has given me experience with how to communicate with people from various backgrounds. The positive impact of *World of Warcraft* and my passion for the game was always something I kept quiet outside the house. No one except my parents and brother knew I played. Like many gamers and "nerds" being passionate about something, I was afraid of being judged by my peers and thought my interest in *World of Warcraft*, amongst other video games, carried no value in the "real world."

In my sophomore year at The College of Wooster, I took my first media studies course, where I discovered that video games were something that scholars researched. My experiences with video games were explained in my Intro to Media Studies textbook. I found theories from scholars explaining the different levels and dimensions which video games operate on. Most excitingly, as mentioned above, I found an abundant amount of scholarship on *World of Warcraft*. Finding out that my passion and hobby was something taken seriously and intensely researched on an academic front, was surreal. I want to contribute to this field of study and analyze something which I have been passionate about all my life.

Definitions

Several key definitions are critical to the understanding of this study. *Fandom* is a community of people sharing a passion in a particular medium. Fan culture is an example of "participatory culture" (Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers* 1–3). That is, fans can participate in the fan culture of a video game in more ways than just playing the video game.

Video games are an interactive form of media involving video, traditionally played on the television (Wolf, "What Is a Video Game?" 3). With the advancements of technology, video games now take form on phones, computers, and, most recently, smartwatches.

A *massively-multiplayer-online-role-playing-game* (MMORPG) is a game that takes place in an online world, inhabited by other players playing the game as well. The "role-playing game" element defines the video game as a game where players play as a fictional character in a fictional world. Characters typically come with a unique backstory, and players must complete objectives with their character in order to advance the story and improve the level and power of their in-game character.

World of Warcraft (*WoW*) is an MMORPG that takes place in the virtual world of Azeroth. The game's story revolves around an ongoing war between two factions: the Horde and the Alliance. Upon first playing the game, players choose a faction and select and customize a character. New characters start at level one and strive to reach the maximum level, which right now is 120. The initial release of *WoW* in 2004 is commonly referred to as "vanilla," with the current version referred to as "retail." *WoW Classic* is *World of Warcraft* "Vanilla" remastered.

Method

The method of my study consisted of a fusion of three research methods. The first part was a cyberethnography of *WoW Classic*. I immersed myself in *WoW's* online culture, through

collecting messages from players in the game itself, as well as gathering blog entries, conversations, and other written and visual pieces about *WoW* online. The second piece was an ethnography of the fan culture of *WoW* and *WoW Classic in*-person at the 2019 Blizzcon convention. Similar to my cyberethnography, I filmed my observations, as well as record interviews with fans to learn about their thoughts and feelings surrounding *WoW* and *WoW Classic*. Additionally, I interviewed fans attending the convention to learn about their thoughts and feelings surrounding *WoW* and *WoW Classic*. The final piece was a visual ethnography I produced in the form of a documentary film. This film encompassed my experiences and process of data collection and drew conclusions based on my findings.

Conclusion

In Chapter I, I introduced the purpose of my study; to analyze the fan culture of *WoW* and *WoW Classic*. I provided rationales signifying the importance of this study, provided background information on *World of Warcraft*, defined key concepts found in the purpose statement, as well as stating the methodology of how my study will be executed. Chapter II will provide a sophisticated overview of past scholarship pertaining to my study. The following chapter, Chapter III, will be a detailed description of my research methodology. Chapter IV will serve as a reflection of the processes and findings of this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

"Cookies'N Cream is actually my favorite dessert, but I understand that for some of you, your

favorite flavor is vanilla" (Brack, 2017).

The History of Video Games

The history of video games begins with physicist William Higginbotham, an electronics specialist, who led production in the electronic instruments for the atomic bomb in WWII. Higginbotham later headed an instrumentation group at the Brookhaven National Laboratory in 1947. Annual exhibits were held to promote the laboratory's achievements and latest discoveries for the public to view. To captivate visitors and make the displays more engaging, Higginbotham led his team in creating an interactive representation of his work. This representation, created in 1958, became the world's first video game, *Tennis for Two*. (Tretkoff). Higginbotham's video game was the first of what would be many video games to be developed out of laboratories.

Between the 1960s and 1970s, universities began engineering video games in their laboratories (Lowood 5). During this time, computers and the hardware needed to operate them were not only the size of several refrigerators, but they cost a fortune. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) had a PDP-1 computer in their laboratory, with a purchase price of $120,000. It was on this computer that the video game, *Spacewar!,* was programmed by Steve Russell (Graetz; Spicer et al.). The game was comprised of two players, each controlling their spaceship by toggling console switches from the PDP-1. The object of the video game was to shoot down the other player (Graetz; Lowood 7). *Spacewar!* plays a significant role in the history of video games, as its development showcased just what was possible to develop on a computer. The concept of using computer hardware to program a game or any means of entertainment was unheard of (Lowood 7).

Because video games were only able to be developed and played in laboratories, they were not easily accessible to the public. Nolan Bushnell observed this gap of accessibility to playing video games and led the development of the video game, *Computer Space.* Bushnell loved *Spacewar!*, but was frustrated with the limited amount of time and inconvenience it was to play. *Computer Space* was designed to be a coin-operated arcade console of *Spacewar!* (Edwards). Much like the pinball machines at the arcades, Bushnell's vision was to integrate his arcade consoles into that environment. This project never went into full motion, as the operation costs far outweighed any potential profit from (Edwards; Lowood 10). Despite the commercial failure, *Computer Space* holds its place in video game history as being a significant innovative step forward in the advancements of video games. *Computer Space* was the first video game to include a coin slot, which marked the beginning of an era of coin-operated arcade video games (Wolf, "Arcade Games of the 1970s").

Bushnell and his colleague Ted Dabney later co-founded Atari in 1972. Their first project, *Pong,* became one of the most important artifacts in video game history. Bushnell appointed Al Alcorn, an electrical engineer, to create a "simple tennis game" (Lowood 13; Kent 77–79). Bushnell's intent was that this project would serve as a training exercise for Alcorn, to learn about programming video games and how they work. *Pong* was first released at bars as a coin-operated arcade console. To Atari's surprise, the game became immensely popular. Bushnell thought people would value a more complex game rather than a simple table tennis simulator (Kent 82–82).

Due to the success of arcade video games, companies began developing the hardware to put these games in the consumers' homes. This invention would later be known as the "video game console" (Herman 53–54). The idea of the video game console came from Ralph Baer, a

television engineer who was interested in the possibility of creating an interactive experience with the home television (Herman 53–54). Baer's prototype video game console, the "Brown Box," was, in fact, a brown box that could play a basic volleyball and ping-pong game. While the graphics and controls to play the game were not unique, the idea of a home video game console was nonexistent. TV manufacturer, Magnavox, licensed the Brown Box in 1971. Just a year later, Magnavox went on to rebrand and later announce the "Odyssey," the first-ever video game console for a home television (Herman 54). The Odyssey included 12 "circuit cards," each being a different video game. One of these games was a table tennis game similar to Atari's arcade video game *Pong*, without some of *Pong's* core features. While not as sophisticated, this game included on the Odyssey is what made the console so successful. People could now play *Pong*, or at least something similar to it, without having to leave their homes (Herman 55).

In response to the game's success on the Odyssey, Atari responded with a home version of *Pong*, which, unlike the Odyssey's version, had advanced graphics, a score counter, and responsive controls. The arcade game, *Pong,* launched a consumer craze and was now available in the comfort of people's homes. Atari partnered with the department store, Sears, and would sell upwards of $40 million worth of at-home consoles (Herman 55). Atari's enormous success launched a movement of video games and video game consoles in the marketplace.

Atari's lead in the video game market did not last long, as other companies began releasing their versions of home video game consoles, with enhancements and improvements. Fairchild Camera and Instrument, was one of the first companies to release a video game console that played games from interchangeable cartridges, named the Fairchild Channel F. This revolutionized the video game industry, as well as raised the consumer standards of what a home video game console should be. That is, instead of investing in a console that only came with a

preset number of games, and a cumbersome method of changing between the games, consumers were introduced to the concept of being able to seamlessly switch the game they wished to play (Kent 150–51). In response, Atari hastily released their console with interchangeable cartridges: The Video Computer System (VCS), which was later named the Atari 2600 (Kent 162). In addition to bringing cartridges to its system, the console also featured swappable controllers (Herman 57). This innovation created a seemingly endless number of possibilities for the games the console could play. This concept led to the formation of Activision, a video game software company that released games exclusively to the Atari 2600 (Herman 58).

After Atari's success, many video game companies began producing their versions of home consoles. This marked the creation of video game software companies. In 1983, there was an excessive amount of video game consoles and software available for the consumer. In addition to the high inventory, in several cases, each video game system did not have much uniqueness as compared with its competitors. They were instead imitations of games and concepts that already existed and had a history of being successful, such as *Pong* or *Computer Space* (Herman).

The oversaturated market of repetitive spinoffs of video games led to "The Video Game Crash" (Wolf, "The Video Game Industry Crash" 105). In addition to the imitations and redundancy of the video games, many lacked any refinement or quality to them. Atari, the company that monopolized the video game industry, soon became the leading ship to sink. Their console, the Atari 2600, had no form of protection against games developed for the hardware. This flaw allowed for any software company to create and distribute a cartridge for the console, regardless of the game's quality and depth, and worse for Atari, without their approval. Their system, brand, and sales plummeted, along with their competitors (Herman 57–58).

It was not Atari, Magnavox, Fairchild, or any corporation that caused the crash that would bounce back and later revitalize the video game market. In 1985, Nintendo, a video game console developer based in Japan, introduced its console, the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), to the United States (Kent 475–76). The once-reluctant market towards video games eventually came around to Nintendo's video game console. The NES was unique, with a "Zapper light gun" and a robot, named "R.O.B" (Robotic Operating Buddy) to give games a unique feel and experience, thus setting the NES apart from any previous video game console (Kent 476). Apart from Nintendo's innovation, the NES had the 10NES lockout chip. This chip was fitted in every NES to make only games licensed by Nintendo playable (Arsenault 110–11). Because of this, Nintendo had full quality control of their games. This restriction on software companies sparked controversy, as they argued there would be a loss in freedom of creating the game the company wanted to make (Arsenault 110–11). Regardless, Nintendo became the next leader in monopolizing the video game industry and ended the downfall of video games.

Beginning in the early 1990s, Nintendo began competing for its top spot in the industry, with Sega and their Genesis video game console (Leonard 119). For a glimpse, Sega controlled more than half of the video game market with their flagship title, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, a rival to Nintendo's *Super Mario* series. Sega would soon become a software company exclusively, as Nintendo continued to innovate and create more sophisticated consoles with advanced hardware (Alison 149). In 1994, Sony would begin its competition with Nintendo by releasing the PlayStation console (Spicer et al.). The PlayStation console read games on CD-ROMs rather than cartridges. This change allowed games to be larger in file size, as CD-ROMs could hold more data (Therrien 121).

Video games on CD-ROMs also became popular on PC's, which opened up a new type

of video game genre, Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) games (Therrien 121–23). *Ultima*

Online, one of the first 3-D, commercial online games, had over 40,000 registered players

(Boudreau 175). The success of this game came from the 3-D graphics creating an immersive

virtual world, and the level of social interaction and community made this game the "grandfather

of modern MMOs" (Messner). Following *Ultima Online,* came the MMO *Everquest* in 1999.

Everquest featured sophisticated character customization for the player, and the game's

challenging nature required players to cooperate to complete tough challenges (Messner;

Boudreau 176). In 2004, *Everquest* had 450,000 subscribers (Boudreau 176).

As the excitement and desire to play MMOs continued to grow, several MMO games

were released between 2001-2004 in an attempt to compete with *Everquest*. No MMO, however,

had as much an impact on the industry as Blizzard Entertainment's MMO, *World of Warcraft,*

did when released in 2004 (Boudreau 176; Messner). *World of Warcraft* featured an immersive

world, rich detail, and offered compelling gameplay for players of all skill levels. Previous

MMOs often required players to be "the best" to have any chance at succeeding in some of the

final challenges the game offers (Boudreau 176; Messner). *World of Warcraft* had multiple

difficulties of the same challenges, allowing players to experience the entirety of the game, at

their desired pace and playstyle. Three years after the release of *World of Warcraft*, the game

boasted a subscriber account of 9 million players around the world (Boudreau 176). This

cemented *World of Warcraft* as a cultural phenomenon, and as the iconic MMO.

During the MMO craze on PCs, the video game console market began to solidify itself

with three major companies dominating the market: Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft. Each of

these companies has a unique line of video game consoles. As of 2019, Nintendo is on their 17th

console, Sony is selling its 10th version of the PlayStation, and Microsoft is selling its ninth version of the Xbox. Aside from the shape and design of these consoles, the decision of which one to buy for a consumer depends on what video game(s) they wish to play. While software companies publish video games with different versions for each console, there has also been a trend in video games being "console exclusives," meaning that they only are available on a specific console. PC gaming has also taken a strong stance in the marketplace, allowing games to be played in higher resolutions, level of detail, and responsiveness (Villas-Boas). The difference, however, is that PC gaming is significantly more expensive, as opposed to purchasing a video game console. This significant price difference comes from the components and hardware being far more advanced, at double the price of a console (Villas-Boas).

With the advancements of hardware in consoles and PCs, video games have, over time, become more complex, detailed, and immersive. In addition to the improvements to gameplay, the distribution of video games has also evolved from cartridges and CD-ROMS to digital downloads. This advancement has improved the accessibility of video games to consumers and developers alike. Consumers now can download any video game they want from the comfort of their homes. Developers also save money by not publishing as many copies of a game, and they can update and fix any glitches to the game. While more convenient to consumers, these enhancements require a fast internet connection. In addition to a brief overview of the history of video games, it is vital to understand how video games operate as an interactive form of media.

<div align="center">**Description of Video Games**</div>

Gamic Actions

Video games are a form of media structured around actions from the game's software, and actions controlled by the player. This unique structure is what makes video games a

sophisticated form of media compared to media such as film (Galloway 2–3; Frasca).

Specifically, video games have "four gamic actions" (Galloway 17). The term "actions" is used

to recognize that video games are "an action-based medium" (Galloway 3). Video games must

be played and given actions by the user in order to operate and progress as a form of media. This

leads to the first two "gamic actions" in video games: operator acts and machine acts. An

operator act is an action done in a video game by the person playing the game. In Pacman, for

instance, an operator act would be moving the joystick to the left to direct Pacman to move left.

Machine acts, on the other hand, are actions that the video game does by itself. Continuing with

the Pacman example, the score counter is an example of a machine act. The score counter

increases each time Pacman eats a pellet, but the user is not directly increasing the score counter

with the joystick. The machine is acting on its own to show the player information, in this case

displaying the points they have accumulated.

The other two "gamic actions" are diegetic and nondiegetic (Galloway 7). A diegetic act

is an action that takes place within the game's world, such as rain, a character walking,

interacting with other characters in the game, etc. A nondiegetic act is an action that occurs

external to the game's world. Pressing a button to bring up the "Pause" menu on a video game, is

a non-diegetic action. This is because the "pause" menu is not something that exists within the

game's world.

These four "gamic actions" can also be combined in specific ways to fully describe a

particular action in a video game. Specifically, operator and machine actions can pair with

diegetic and nondiegetic actions. Therefore, gamic actions can be: diegetic machine acts, diegetic

operator acts, non-diegetic machine acts, and non-diegetic operator acts (Galloway 17). A

diegetic machine act, for example, can be an airplane flying over the player in a video game. It is

a diegetic act because the airplane exists within the game's world, and a machine act because the game is controlling the plane, not the user. These classifications are used to describe any action in a video game and are essential to recognize as they highlight the complexity of video games as a medium. The gamic actions in video games, are what separates this medium from other traditional forms of media.

Simulation, Not a Representation

An essential distinction between video games and other forms of media is that video games are "simulations" rather than "representations" (Frasca 222–24). Video games involve the player in determining the outcome, unlike a film. For example, watching a film showing a car parking in a garage is a fixed outcome, a "representation." One could watch the scene several times over, and the outcome will stay the same. In a video game, if a particular objective requires the player to park a car in a garage, the outcome is unique and dependent on the player. One could repeat this "simulation" several times and always park the car without error. However, the speed of the car entering the garage and the angle of the car when the it stops, are all variables dependent on the user's action. The variability and choice a player has in video games allow the player to explore different outcomes and face different consequences in a safe environment (Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers* 218).

Video Games as a Pop Culture Phenomenon

Integration with other forms of Media

Beginning in the 1980s, as video games became a widespread phenomenon, other forms of media sought out to integrate themselves with the video game craze. In the early 1980s, *Pacman* was introduced as a Saturday morning cartoon on television (Picard 298). The show benefited the television producers, as they were reaching out to an already captivated audience.

Simultaneously, the video game industry was beginning to cement itself as a pop culture phenomenon.

In addition to expanding into other media platforms, video games also were created from existing media. The most notable example comes from the *Star Wars* movies, where the memorabilia, toys, and video games combined made more money than the actual films themselves (Picard 299). Video games that came from cinema such as *Star Wars* were successful in part to allow the fans of the film to participate even further in the fan culture of the film. In the video game *Star Wars Battlefront II*, players were able to experience the events that took place during the movie, *Star Wars Revenge of The Sith*, from the perspective of a clone trooper. Movies, therefore, can be catalysts for making video games popular.

In addition to the various forms video games can take on, in 2011, a new form of media was introduced for video games exclusively. *Twitch*, an online streaming platform, is a service that allows a user to broadcast their gameplay live on the internet. Users who broadcast their gaming sessions are known as "streamers." Twitch allows the streamer's audience to interact with them and each other in a chatroom. Streamers can make money through "donations" from viewers, who donate to show support, or often to achieve a certain rank in which the streamer (depending on how popular) will respond and interact directly with the viewer. The popularity of a stream can differentiate depending on the audience's interest. People watch for various reasons, such as the skill of the streamer in the game, their personality, and the way they interact with their audience. *Twitch's* streaming service has rapidly evolved into a critical player in the media industry, with an average of over 700 million hours watched per month (Hsu). In addition to the interactivity, the popularity of watching streamers also is a result of the convenience for viewers. *Twitch* is available to view on smartphones, tablets, computers, and most smart TVs.

Additionally, there is no subscription or cost associated with consuming live streams, apart from internet access and the cost of the device itself. Therefore, this platform can reach a bigger audience. *Amazon* acquired *Twitch* in 2014 for $970 million, making a stance that this form of media consumption is the future of live media (Weinberger). Facebook, Google, and Microsoft even launched their own streaming platforms, in an attempt to cash in on the phenomenon that is streaming.

Following the astonishing rate of success with streaming, "Esports" has become the next media product to enter the stage. Esports, (electronic sports) are broadcasted competitions between gamers of the highest level in a particular video game, competing against one another (Brown et al. 419–20). Competitions can be viewed on streaming platforms such as Twitch, but can also be viewed live in venues such as the TD Garden. (Brown et al. 419–20). Esports, much like sports in the media, give viewers a premium representation of what it looks like when playing a particular game. Everything from what strategies the competitors use, what gaming peripherals they have, and how they were able to become the best. The Esports industry is valued at $900 million, with sponsorships, advertising, and sold out venues (Brown et al. 422–23). With this new form of media, video games themselves have become media that is entertaining to spectate, cementing video games as a pop culture phenomenon found across a majority of the media sphere. The popularity of video games drew several fans to form communities surrounding their favorite video games.

Fandom

To understand fan culture in video games, specifically *World of Warcraft,* it is essential to first define "fandom." Fandom, as defined by Henry Jenkins, "refers to the social structures and cultural practices created by the most passionately engaged consumers of mass media"

(Jenkins, "Fandom, Participatory Culture, and Web 2.0 -- A Syllabus —"). To unpack Jenkin's definition, fandom is a term to describe the actions of fans, in addition to consuming the media text. Jenkins refers to the 1960s tv series *Star Trek*, to provide an example of fandom. Fans of the series created online discussion forums to "debate interpretations" of the episodes (Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers* 138). In this example, we see fans engaging with the media, *Star Trek*, beyond watching the episodes itself. They are participating in "*Star Trek* Fandom" (Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers* 138). The ways in which people can participate in the fandom are nearly infinite. Sketching a photo of a character from a movie or video game, writing fictional text based on a media text, referred to as fan fiction, are just a few examples of how fans engage in fandom.

Video game fandom, allows people sharing the same interests, passion, and love for a video game to meet one another and enrich their experience as a member of the gaming community (Gray et al. 1–3). Fandom communities of video games engage with one another in online communities such as forums and social media groups. The game publisher or third party sources host these online communities in large conventions. Blizzard Entertainment, the publisher of *World of Warcraft*, has an entire section on its website labeled "World of Warcraft Forums." The forums have a wide variety of topics, including technical support with the game, news about upcoming content with *World of Warcraft*, Guild recruitment, the lore surrounding the game, and even an "off-Topic" section for people to discuss things not related to the game. Official Forums such as the *World of Warcraft Forums* are often the most popular, as they are more well-known and accessible to fans of the game.

Additionally, these forums are often moderated strictly by official employees of Blizzard Entertainment. The moderation is done to help maintain a "friendly environment" (Blizzard

Forums). The downside of this, however, is there is a bit of censorship as to what one can post

and discuss on these forums. Forming a petition, for example, is against Blizzard's code of

conduct. Creating a petition for Blizzard to launch *World of Warcraft: Classic* would have been

taken down from the forums. Certain words are immediately censored on posts, such as the word

"jiggle" (kelmach82).

Aside from official forums by game publishers, forum communities launched on other

websites not affiliated with Blizzard. The World of Warcraft subreddit, for example, has just

over a million members since being founded in 2008. Like the official *World of Warcraft*

Forums, the subreddit has its rules and code of conduct, but the enforcement and policies differ.

For example, the subreddit has a whole section regarding spoilers. "If something has happened in

a released trailer, or if something is directly mentioned at Blizzcon, it is not a spoiler."

(LadyMirax).

It is important to make a distinction here that on non-official forums such as the subreddit

mentioned above, the moderators are unpaid, as it is a volunteer position (Renfro). Additionally,

becoming a moderator of the *World of Warcraft* subreddit, for example, requires an application,

experience, contribution to the subreddit as a member, and endorsements. This process, much

like applying for a job, is done out of an individual's passion for the game and its community

(Fortnite Player). The official *World of Warcraft Forums*, on the other hand, are moderated by

Blizzard employees, with the job existing to promote engagement around the game, but also to

strive to keep Blizzard and *World of Warcraft* portrayed in a positive light. The bias control here

is where non-affiliated forums such as the *World of Warcraft* subreddit receive more attention, in

that the community and those who run it are not under pressure or bias from the corporation.

In addition to forums, fans of video games such as *World of Warcraft* share their experiences and commentary about games on their social media platforms. Players often will upload videos, or screenshots of their experience while playing the game. Twitter, for example, is a common platform for people to upload screenshots or small clips of player's "epic moments" or achievements during gameplay. This process became so popular that Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft's flagship consoles integrated a service in which players could seamlessly upload images or video clips of their gameplay directly from the game itself. The increased buzz around the games to the video game industry's delight and created a new way for fan communities to share their gaming experience. *World of Warcraft* also introduced a setting labeled "Twitter Functionality" in which players could upload screenshots of themselves playing the game and tweet directly from the game.

In addition to the fandom communities which take place online, fan communities had existed and taken place in the real world before these online features were even accessible. This phenomenon started with game shops, hosting meetups, and events. *Magic The Gathering*, a fantasy trading card game, was one of the first to pioneer this idea, with communities organizing events and competitions for fans of the game to attend to compete and meet others who carry an interest in the game, thus participating in the fandom. These "meet-ups" for fans have taken form with video games as well. The 2001 Nintendo Gamecube video game, *Super Smash Bros. Melee,* features fan-organized tournaments and competitions around the world, ranging from casual environments to weekend tournaments with an entry fee and prize money for the winner. *Pokemon Go*, a mobile video game for iOS and Android smartphones, has also generated several fan communities of players around the world, to play the game together, trade Pokemon and items, and to compete with one another.

Another form in the real world that fan communities engage in takes place in the form of conventions. E3, the electronic entertainment expo, started as a convention with limited attendance, primarily for investors and corporations. It functioned as a way for developers and publishing companies to showcase and pitch their video games and hardware in hopes of making a deal with a buyer to produce and market the product. In the first few years of these conventions, information and details about these products began leaking into the public, which generated a lot of excitement and engagement from fans. This benefited everyone, as the corporations were generating more revenue as a direct result of the excitement, and the fans had something to look forward to. E3 then evolved into a bigger expo, with more tickets available for fans to attend, to generate even more buzz around the video game products. This ignited several annual conventions, including *Comic-Con*, and for games like *World of Warcraft*, Blizzcon.

In addition to the presentation of video games, media, and electronics, conventions like Blizzcon have created events and space for the fans attending. Cosplay, creating a costume to resemble a character from a movie, television show, comic, or video game, has become a phenomena in fandom, with Blizzcon featuring a cosplay competition and photoshoot for fans at the convention. There are also fan-made art exhibits on art made by fans on games such as *World of Warcraft,* as well as fan-made films. These conventions have become a way for the fan community to celebrate the video game, or media the convention is representing, while bolstering the attention from the press.

CHAPTER III: METHOD

"You think that you want this, and I think maybe you do" (Brack 2019).

To investigate the fan culture, and to analyze the motivations and reasons for play of *World of Warcraft,* and *World of Warcraft Classic,* I conducted a fusion of three methods: cyberethnography, ethnography, and visual ethnography. In this chapter, I will explain the reasons and processes behind each method.

The first part of my method is my cyberethnography. Cyberethnography is a method adapted from the *traditional* ethnography method. Similarly to how an ethnography is conducted by immersing oneself in an environment, cyberethnography studies an environment which exists digitally online (Rybas and Gajjala). I immersed myself in both WoW and WoW classic's virtual online worlds. I recorded my gameplay and commentary by using my computer's built-in game-capture card. In doing so, I was able to document my personal thoughts and reactions during play, as well as record messages and text from other players around me in real-time. Since World of Warcraft has two factions that are unable to communicate with one another, the population on a given server is split. I created a character on each faction and played each for at least 10 hours, on the same server. This ensured that I would be able to be immersed in as much of the server population as possible.

The second part of my method is the ethnography piece. I was awarded Copeland Funding to assist in sponsoring a trip to attend the 2019 Blizzcon Convention in Anaheim, CA. Blizzcon is an annual gaming convention hosted by Blizzard entertainment. The primary purpose of the convention is for Blizzard to announce new video games, as well as updates to existing ones, including *World of Warcraft.* During my time at Blizzcon, I filmed my entire experience at the convention to capture the culture and environment I was immersed in. I achieved this by

capturing observation shots, as well as shots of me describing my surroundings and experience at the convention.

The third piece of my method is my visual ethnography work. Visual ethnography work is the implementation of imagery in ethnography work to showcase research and findings (Schwartz). I edited the footage from both my cyberethnography and ethnography work with additional layered voiceovers and infographics to create a film. Chapter IV serves as the film piece of my study.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

Link to Film: https://vimeo.com/407451857 or https://vimeo.com/dschulz

  For the best quality, please view the film using the provided links above. It is recommended to listen with headphones, or high quality audio equipment to experience the whole range of the film.

CHAPTER V: REFLECTION

"I think things might be looking up for Azeroth. I mean, all these threats have been taken

care of. Just sunny days and clear skies ahead. I mean, personally, I can't think of any

unaccounted-for loose ends, or anyone who might be lurking in the shadows, thirsting for

revenge," the hall became pitch-black, as the game director of the *World of Warcraft* franchise

asks in the dark, "can you?" Suddenly, projectors all over drop down, and a cinematic starts

playing. Over 20,000 of us made it into the main stage, but there was total silence. We were all

watching with our hearts stopped, realizing this was the cinematic to the next *World of Warcraft*

expansion. The camera slowly pans down from the sky, revealing the peak of a tower we all

knew: Icecrown. The silence was broken; there was an enormous exhale of relief, coupled with

roaring cheers. *World of Warcraft*, the game that for years has left everyone disappointed, was

finally going back to its roots; back to the *World of Warcraft* everyone missed.

Cyberethnography on WoW Classic

My process of data collection begins with my cyberethnography on *WoW Classic*. This

process started the night that *World of Warcraft: Classic* went live on servers in August 2019.

After I managed to log into the server after waiting hours, the first two weeks playing was filled

with surprises from a data collection standpoint. My biggest surprise was observing how

engaging the community was in the virtual world. Similar to the atmosphere at Blizzcon, it

almost was as if the in-game sun was shining on every player, making everyone almost too nice.

This feeling that seemed a tad artificial, seemed to come from the excitement and craze about not

only *WoW Classic* being out, but being logged into the server after waiting for hours.

In addition to the positive atmosphere, people without even being prompted voiced their

emotions, opinions, and thoughts about their experiences with each quest they embarked on. This

was very unexpected, as typically with WoW expansions, as soon as they go live it becomes a race to the new max level, with no time to talk to others. Because of the amount of time it takes to level to 60, I found players to be more relaxed, taking the time to enjoy the scenery and actually read the quests they were progressing through.

In order to conduct a cyberethnography on *WoW Classic*, I myself needed to play through the game, interact with the text myself. Having never played *Vanilla,* this experience was completely new and unique to me as well. The way the virtual world looked, the style of gameplay, was all completely new. I had trouble locating certain items, navigating from one city to another, and above all else: being patient. *WoW Classic*, taking from *Vanilla*, is a much slower-paced game, with even more severe consequences. In other words, a quest that in *Retail* takes 15 minutes to complete, takes doubled, if not triple the amount of time in *WoW Classic*. Playing for 10 hours a week on average has been cited to take five months to level to 60, with 20 hours a week taking just under three months. All this to say, *WoW Classic* is not casual-friendly. This contrasts with the retail version, where several in-game mechanics have been put in place to allow casual players to experience all the game has to offer. Despite this, I met many players while playing *WoW Classic* whose goals were just to experience the game, and not to achieve the max level. Like myself, these players created new characters, took more time with questing, and were not a part of a serious guild interested in completing the end-game challenges and content.

As mentioned previously in this section, I was shocked at just how many people logged in to play *WoW Classic* during the launch. With the state of retail, I did not expect a magnitude of players to return and try *WoW Classic*, without at least waiting to see if it was good. On servers that hold 10,000 players at once, I found myself in login queues stuck in line as the 15,000[th] person waiting to log in. This was a surprise that no one fully expected. Blizzard quickly

added more servers, but it was still around maximum capacity. Over time, the player base

dropped to a manageable number, with the login queues dropping from over five hours to just

under an hour.

The message was clear: fans were happy to play *WoW Classic.* Two months later, *WoW*

Classic was updated with what Blizzard referred to as "phase 2". This update mimicked an

update that took place during Vanilla, with more endgame content for players to experience.

After observing the insane levels of excitement and positive reception with *WoW Classic*, I

expected the implementation of "phase 2" to be just as well-received. But here, I found myself

surprised again. Players voiced their concerns about the environments being overpopulated in

relation to available resources. There were more people playing *WoW Classic* than people who

played *Vanilla* back in 2004. Because *WoW Classic* is almost a complete clone of *Vanilla*, the

design and game is built for the number of active players at the time. This same environment has

been taken up to *WoW Classic*, where even more players are playing. A quest, for example, to

kill four boars, could take hours, if there are hundreds of people in one area searching for only

four boars. Because of this, the conversation about the direction of *WoW Classic* faced

negativity, and the player base of the game has declined. Perhaps some of these players were like

myself, who casually played in the first few weeks and have stopped, but the interest is starting

to fade. The mixed feelings and uncertainty surrounding *WoW Classic*, left fans wondering what

the future of *World of Warcraft* would be. In particular, the next expansion of *World of Warcraft*.

With Blizzcon right around the corner, the stage was set for this to be answered.

Observations at Blizzcon

No amount of research or overthinking could have prepared me for my experience

attending Blizzcon. Perhaps the biggest surprise was my experience engaging with thousands of

World of Warcraft fans*,* and listening to and observing their perspectives on *World of Warcraft and World of Warcraft: Classic*. Gathering this information, however, was not as easy as just pulling people aside during the convention. The biggest aspect of Blizzcon that I did not expect was how people, including myself, stuck to a strict, and often rushed schedule. There was no time during the convention to stand around, eat food or take a break. If you did, you would miss being able to get a seat at the presentation or panel you wanted to see. Blizzcon opened the first day with the opening ceremony at 11:00am, which meant myself and thousands of other people arrived at 7:00am waiting for the doors to open. I was under the impression that this would be an opportunity to talk with some people around me and interview them while standing around for hours. Little did I know that even standing in line was an event in itself. Inflatable beach balls were being thrown around; people who chanted "for the horde" were met with chants of "for the alliance!" Tall people served as scouts, letting everyone beneath them know what was happening at the front of the line.

Two hours went by, and one by one the doors to enter the halls opened. People ran (sped-walked) in a giant free-for-all to the mythic stage, where the opening ceremony was set to take place. Although my group and I did not have the best seats, we had the privilege of sitting together in the mythic stage, which was more than what could be said for at least 20,000 other people. Once we got in, we had another two hours to kill, and a million thoughts raced in my mind. On the one hand, I knew that I was here for my I.S, but the excitement of what was about to be unveiled was overwhelming. Although we had two hours, there was still much to do. After waking up early and waiting in line all that time, we finally secured our seats. These seats would be our temporary home for the next three hours. With this in mind, each group, including mine, had one or two brave souls venture out to supply everyone with food and beverages. I had no

food for the first three hours I woke up that day. Yet, just like the thousands of people there, it was almost as if I forgot food and water existed. We were so amped up with adrenaline of the convention, that my basic needs seemed to be inconsequential to everything else that was taking place.

After the opening ceremony, new games and updates to existing video games were announced, including an expansion to *World of Warcraft.* The rest of the convention consisted of panels, demos, and merchandise all surrounding these new video games. There were always at least five things going on at the same time, and it was impossible to see everything at the convention. Visiting the shops, buying fan merchandise, attending panels from game developers and voice actors, or even buying food had enormous lines.

I underestimated how significant my ethnographic research at the convention would be. In this universe with over 40,000 fans of Blizzard video games, I was exposed to sights and sounds I never thought existed. There was always something to film, whether I was walking between halls to attend a panel, or even when I went outside to catch some fresh air. More than half of the people attending arrived in various cosplays of their favorite characters. People set up trading booths to trade collectible pins and other memorabilia with one another. There were zones from *World of Warcraft* and other Blizzard games that were replicated for fans to hang out in and enjoy at the convention. Every line I stood in by myself, I struck up a conversation with dozens of people around me. It seemed like everyone, including myself, was more outgoing, and true to themselves than normal. We were all able to express our shared passions, ones that we were normally forced to keep quiet.

Walking from my hotel to the convention center, wearing my *World of Warcraft* 15th anniversary shirt, made me feel vulnerable as cars flew by the opposite way on the busy streets

of Southern California. Once I scanned my wristband, and stepped through the entrance to Blizzcon, I felt more safe, and confident expressing my passion for *World of Warcraft* than I have in my entire seven years of playing. This excitement and abundance of confidence I gained, and witnessed thousands of others feel, led me to understand a leading reason why so many people attend this convention. Attending Blizzcon is not so much about being "the first" one to see the latest game announcements live. Rather, it's about celebrating your hobby, passion, or at the very least, interest in Blizzard games, such as *World of Warcraft*. The convention provides an inclusive space for fans to express themselves and support each other and the surrounding community.

Attending Blizzcon not only enriched my independent study, but provided me the confidence to be more comfortable with my identity as someone who plays *World of Warcraft*. This opportunity, as significant and impactful as it was, is typically not financially accessible. Booking travel and a place to stay in Los Angeles is costly. The airlines, hotels, motels, and Airbnb's all artificially raise their rates the weekend of Blizzcon, knowing every room will be bought at any price. The ticket to Blizzcon alone, starts at just over $200. The significant cost associated with attending Blizzcon, therefore, restricts several demographics and groups of people from attending. It is, therefore, safe to make the assumption that most people who attended Blizzcon are privileged and have the means to spend a weekend in California.

Interviews

Despite the flying pace of everything to do at Blizzcon, interviews did take place during the evenings after the doors closed for the day. Going into the interview process, I expected, and did hear several unique perspectives on *World of Warcraft*, as well as captivating stories on how people became interested in *World of Warcraft*. While responses were often very different from

one another, themes of prestige and exclusivity were discussed in each interview. People I

interviewed who played *World of Warcraft* since the initial release in 2004, were proud to boast

themselves as being a part of the community since the beginning. Playing since Vanilla is a

milestone and achievement that has been unattainable since the *Burning Crusade* expansion in

2007.

As previously discussed in the previous section, attending Blizzcon is a very exclusive

event, with a high price being one of the main factors limiting attendance. For the fans I

interviewed, attending Blizzcon was exclusive in their eyes, but also in most cases a way for one

to demonstrate just how much of a fan of Blizzard games they are. Buying exclusive, limited

quantity *World of Warcraft* merchandise, was also another way fans participated in the fan

culture at Blizzcon. The reasoning behind this ranged from wanting to buy it because of

exclusive an item was, to "not really knowing why" and feeling almost forced to buy

memorabilia as a result of being at Blizzcon and having the opportunity to.

As surprised as I was with the data I gathered at this point, it would be the interview

responses and observations I collected on *World of Warcraft: Classic* that would be the most

significant and compelling. In terms of my interview responses with *WoW Classic*, I expected

responses to focus on whether or not the game felt nostalgic. Reflecting back now, I was

expecting to hear and see *WoW Classic* being referred to as its own medium, something as

impactful and popular as the current version of *World of Warcraft.* This mindset I had was from

the data I gathered.

People I interviewed expressed their excitement, dislike, some even explained how they

"couldn't care less" about *WoW Classic.* Regardless of the response, each interview had a

common message: it's not about *WoW Classic* being released that makes it exciting, it's about

how the fans use the remastered game as a tool to communicate to Blizzard what they want in the next *World of Warcraft.* Since *World of Warcraft* initially launched in 2004, there have been 15 years of updates, including six expansions, with an abundant amount of content. As previously described in detail in chapters one and two, the reason behind the game's decline in its player base has been attributed to the game-changing and removing mechanics players miss.

Visual Ethnography

Creating a documentary showcasing my data proved to be the most challenging portion of my study. Because the footage I captured was documenting my experience in the moment, each scene was one take. That is, I was unable to stage scenes over again if there was an issue with the shot. With this in mind, I recorded an overwhelming amount of footage: 48 hours of gameplay footage from World of Warcraft, and 9 hours of footage from Blizzcon 2019. While it wasn't too difficult to record more footage, reviewing it and editing it was tedious and challenging. There were several moments while editing where it took hours just to find a particular moment.

Another challenge with the film involved storyboarding. The two routes I spent time comparing were either to move in a linear start to finish sequence, or to organize the film by themes and similarities in data. I decided to proceed with the linear sequence. As I reflected and analyzed more of the footage, a significant part of my data and findings came with my personal experiences and reactions.

The main goal of my documentary was to represent the level of immersion and detail fans of *World of Warcraft* experience playing the game, and attending the convention. To capture this for my film, my leading tactic was to incorporate the game's soundtrack within my documentary. In doing so, I believe my film is able to set the tone for the level of passion myself and fans have

for *World of Warcraft*. Another aspect I aimed to represent in detail was the fans at Blizzcon, through observation footage and interviews. While I believe my observation footage was a success, I found gathering fans for interviews to be very tricky. The interviews I did capture that were incorporated in my film, were paired with soundtrack and visual overlays, to help with the theme of immersion.

WoW Classic is not the answer and "fix" to the game, but its release spoke to the fans and gave them a voice to send a message to Blizzard. That is, retail *WoW* was at an all-time low with active subscribers. Fans wanted the game to "go back to its prime," and the overwhelming popularity with *WoW Classic*'s launch in August shocked Blizzard. *Fans* were excited to play WoW Classic because it was the first time they could go back and play the version of World of Warcraft that they fell in love with. The number of players that logged on to play the first few weeks, surpassed Blizzard's expectations. These same players, whom I interviewed and observed at Blizzcon, however, were not at Blizzcon to hear about what Blizzard would do next with WoW Classic. The lines to demo WoW Classic content were the shortest lines at the entire convention. These fans wanted to attend the panels and play the demo on the recently announced expansion: *World of Warcraft: Shadowlands*. Because when the cinematic showed the peak of Icecrown, an iconic symbol and relic of World of Warcraft, Blizzard broke the fourth wall, showing their intentions of wanting to bring the game back to how people wanted. Fans finally felt as if they had agency, as if they had a voice that Blizzard seemingly validated in the form of a trailer for the new expansion.

Conclusion

What happens when we go back to how things were? For me, and other fans of *World of Warcraft,* we begin by feeling overjoyed and enthused. But there is a reason why I burned out

playing *WoW Classic*, why *WoW Classic* was barely addressed at Blizzcon, and why the fans I interviewed weren't excited to talk about it. The game isn't new. Rather than Blizzard getting retail *WoW* "right," they had to re-release their original formula from 2004. The hype and excitement surrounding *WoW Classic* brought back a huge portion of *WoW's* player base. With the popularity slowly rising once more, Blizzard capitalized on this chance to continued rising popularity with the announcement of *Shadowlands* at Blizzcon.

  The fans of *World of Warcraft* messaged their opinions surrounding the game with their wallets. Subscriptions spiked after *WoW Classic* launched, and have continued as the *Shadowlands* expansion is set to release by late 2020. This study provides an example of how fans and consumers can influence a company's decisions by choosing whether or not to buy the product and consume the medium. Looking outside of *WoW*, everyone is a fan of something. It is important to understand our roles as "fans" and our relationship with the media.

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