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De La Salle University

The Dimensions of Co-Authorship in a Playthrough Experience of Guild Wars 2

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ABSTRACT

Let's Plays and playthroughs have grown significantly throughout the past decade yet is still relatively unexplored. This study adds to the existing literature by focusing on Wooden Potatoes, a medium-sized *Guild Wars 2* YouTuber, and his playthroughs of the *Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire* expansion. The study examined how Wooden Potatoes related gameplay, design, and narrative in his videos and how he commented on his playthroughs. The findings of this study showed how YouTube gamers such as Wooden Potatoes have dimensions of co-authorship. This co-authorship operates on three levels: as a gamer, as a fan, and as a YouTuber. As *Guild Wars 2* is a theme park type of MMORPG with a branching hypernarrative, the research also explored a player's mental schema through Wooden Potatoes commentary. Due to both in-game and external influences, the mental schema of Wooden Potatoes was affected and thus contributed to influencing his playthrough experience and commentary as a co-author. Finally, the findings of this study show that player values and experience are affected by the levels of co-authorship and vice-versa.



INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Let's Play phenomenon has grown significantly in popularity throughout the world (Finniss; Dawson). Let's Plays, a subgenre of playthroughs, are online videos of people playing video games with humorous commentaries that aim to entertain an audience; with gamers often poking fun at the game or task (Finniss; Zariko 15, 22).

This thesis seeks to contribute to the literature of game studies, fan studies, and new media studies by showing the how the dimensions of each interact in an online playthrough. This purposeful study shows how the dimensions of being a gamer, fan, and YouTuber interact and how they help co-author both the online playthrough and YouTube video. The study helps expand our understanding of these small to medium-sized YouTubers and how these different dimensions co-author a playthrough video.

This study focuses on the YouTube playthroughs of Wooden Potatoes; a longtime player and fan of *Guild Wars 2*. This is because small to medium YouTube channels such as that of Wooden Potatoes help bring in players and build a community for the game (Hudson). Wooden Potatoes as an MMORPG player has specific traits that show an interest for the well-being of the game and the community (Daneva 61; Hopp et al. 472; O'Connor et al. 470; Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 162). Wooden Potatoes was chosen particularly due to his tenure, expertise, and focus on the *Guild Wars* franchise, even promoting ArenaNet's latest expansion *Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire* (Wooden Potatoes'



“*Get Path of Fire*” Contest) despite not being an ArenaNet employee. The hypertextual affordance of *Guild Wars 2* and the relationship of ArenaNet with YouTube gamers such as Wooden Potatoes provide insights on both the relationship between gamers and companies as well as the player’s mental schema. By studying Wooden Potatoes and his relationship with ArenaNet, their dynamic can be an example on how both companies and YouTubers can have a positive relationship with regards to online playthrough videos.

WHAT IS A PLAYTHROUGH?

A playthrough is when an individual posts footage of their gameplay online showcasing portions of a game or the complete game from start to finish (“Playthrough”). These videos are casually referred to as a playthrough by both viewers and players regardless if it is posted online or not. Some playthroughs have commentaries while others are completely silent or have background music. Other playthroughs use text to substitute for an active narrative voice. Some playthroughs show the face of the gamer in the clip while showcasing their reactions to what they are playing. These playthrough range from speed runs, tutorials, blind plays, competitive gameplay, or simply just complete footage of the game. Walkthroughs are a specific type of playthrough that involve teaching others how to pass a level in a game (“Video Game Walkthrough”).

THE LET’S PLAY PHENOMENON

Traditionally, gaming was either done alone or with a few friends. When it was done as a social activity, people would comment on the game, joke around, or comment



about what was happening to them or each other. With the advent of YouTube, it allowed people to relive those moments of their childhood while also bringing in an element of its own.

The term “Let’s Play” is widely believed to have come from the Something Awful’s community’s *Let’s Play Oregon Trail* forum; while the Let’s Play format can be credited to a man named Sawyer (Klepek; Karlsson; Zariko 35). As early as 2004, Sawyer posted screenshots of *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* with his humorous commentary on his website effinslowbeef.com (Klepek). He eventually migrated to Something Awful and decided to post a YouTube video of his playthrough with his commentary in the forums. This opened the idea of having “a voice that amplified the connection between the commentator and the spectating audience” helped boost the increasing popularity the Let’s Play phenomenon and established as a YouTube staple (Klepek; Karlsson; Zariko 35-36).

According to Wired.com, the Let’s Play phenomenon creates a “proxy community” by creating “mediated relationships” and “a space for people to see themselves more clearly and a sense of connection with the broader world” (Muncy). Indie games such as *Five Nights at Freddy’s* and *Five Nights at Freddy’s 2* were launched into the spotlight by the Let’s Play community because its design and set up made it ideal for individuals to stream and to watch. According to Polygon.com, people enjoy watching people panic, scream, and react to the game that is being played in this case *FNAF* and *FNAF2*. They also noted that “there [was] a performative aspect to playing horror games” as well as the game itself (DanielleRiendeau).



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According to a report by CNN.com, YouTube's most popular channels are not celebrities but YouTube gamers. In fact in 2016, viewers spent over 2.5 billion hours just watching Let's Play videos, walkthroughs, and playthroughs (Dawson). Let's Play is not the only gaming content that has gained heavy ground on YouTube. YouTubers that provide comprehensive walkthroughs, game tips, and tricks have over millions of views and followers. (Dawson).

In 2011 Shear and Kan launched the live streaming platform Twitch. Less than a year after its launch, the user base of the site jumped to over 16 million with a growth rate of 11% per month. According to their internal stats as of 2014, e-sports, *Minecraft*, speed runs of games, and creative game experiments dominate the site's content and fan base (Stark). It was later acquired by Amazon and is now reaching an audience of over "185 million" viewers as of 2017 ("Gaming Video Content").

According to SuperData.com as of 2016, the audiences of both YouTube and Twitch for "gaming video content" dwarf "HBO, Netflix, ESPN, and Hulu[s] combined". For YouTube, its audience size is "517 million" for game content alone while Twitch has an audience reach of "185 million" ("Gaming Video Content"). With this phenomenon, game companies have been sending these players pre-releases of their game and financial incentives in order to gain the attention of their millions of followers (Hudson).

Game channels such as Pewdiepie, Markiplier, and VanossGaming are raking in millions of dollars with their gameplay videos (Lynch). With a demand for video game



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playthroughs from fans and financial backing from YouTube, Twitch, and corporate sponsors, many individuals have quit their full-time jobs to become full-time gamers. While most individuals do this as a hobby, others “turned their passion into their paycheck” and profession (Johnson and Woodcock, “It’s like the Gold Rush’: The Lives and Careers of Professional Video Game Streamers” 22). According to SuperData.com, “advertising will [still] earn” content creators “\$1.6 billion” while their total revenue is estimated to bump up its “earnings to \$3.2 billion this year” (“Gaming Video Content”). According to Forbes.com, in 2015, PewDiePie when he was just at his 40 million subscriber count, earned “\$12 million” thanks to advertisers and the support of his loyal fans (Berg). In 2016, TIME Magazine listed him as part of the TIME 100 as the “most watched person in YouTube” (“Felix Kjellberg (A.k.a. PewDiePie) by Trey Parker: TIME 100”).

The popularity of these games do not just stay on YouTube or Twitch but spill over onto the real world. Gaming events also known as eSports are gaining popularity worldwide with arenas hosting these events being completely sold out. It is estimated that by 2019 the audience of eSports would exceed 430 million people worldwide (Dawson). In fact in 2013 alone, Riot Games broke records when over 32 million people watched the *League of Legends* finals on Twitch. This was almost four times more than that of their previous record which was a mere 8.2 million in 2012 (McCormick).



THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

As stated by the *New York Times*, video game playthroughs, walkthroughs or Let's Plays can be used as a means of boosting a game's popularity, but it is a double-edged sword. For some gaming companies, Let's Plays can result in instant financial success while for others it can mean financial doom (Hudson). Because of the advent of Let's Plays on YouTube, indie developers are able to sell hundreds of thousands of games like *The Stanley Parable* which was able to reach a "100,000 customer" mark (Rigney). But not everything is fun and games, as these Let's Plays fall under a legal grey area (Rigney; Wilde). In 2016, the developer of *That Dragon, Cancer*, filed several copyright complaints against some YouTubers who were posting the entirety of the game online with little to no commentary. The developer requested that the YouTubers post links to the official game site, encouraging them to play the game while sharing their own stories, or donating in order to support the developers. As *That Dragon, Cancer* is a story-based game "once you've seen the story, there's little impetus to actually buy the game" (Dransfield). Unfortunately, this model did not work out as they only received \$1 dollar in donations (Nutt).

It also brings up the issue of copyright and the rights and ethics of video streamers. "Fair use is any copying of copyrighted material done for a limited and 'transformative' purpose, such as to comment upon, criticize, or parody a copyrighted work" (Wilde). People often assume that if they add commentary, show their face, it falls under fair use.



But it is a difficult position as not all videos are created equal with some individuals adding their own twist to videos and others just saying a few lines of comments during the streams (Clark). An article written by Ivan O. Taylor “examines three gaming videos according to all four criteria [of copyright law] and concludes that Let’s Plays ‘could very well fall under the protection of the fair use doctrine’” (Clark). Yet despite this, Let’s Play videos are in danger of being destroyed completely.

According to Lee, the law was originally crafted to protect copyright holders. But now it is being used to suppress “criticism of the underlying content and stop free speech” (D’Anastasio). As commentary and personal opinion is at the heart of playthroughs, people question if the DMCA is protecting copyright or is being used as a means to censor free speech. In 2017, a Digital Millennium Copyright Act or DMCA copyright case was filed against PewDiePie by Sean Vanaman after the famous streamer “said the n-word on a stream” (D’Anastasio). Despite the game that was being streamed by PewDiePie not being Vanaman’s, the case was made against him and the copyright takedown was issued (Clark).

In the case of Nintendo and Sega, they have been handing out copyright strikes to YouTube accounts that showcased Let’s Play videos of their games (Rigney). A copyright strike means a company or an individual sent YouTube a request to take down the video due to copyright infringement (“Copyright strike basics - YouTube Help”). This move alarmed many content creators especially since these strikes can get them permanently banned from the platform. Even if YouTubers utilize footage for their intended purposes,



companies still hand out these strikes which can result in a deleted YouTube channel (Rigney). In light of the popularity of Let's Plays, the gaming company Nintendo has created a program in order for them to allow streamers to promote their games while limiting channel rights to the ad revenue (Clark). The future of video game copyright is still uncertain with certain companies encouraging the playthroughs while others suppressing them completely (Clark). But despite this, the video game community continues to grow on YouTube and on Twitch.

DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY

According to an article published in 2013 by Polygon.com, YouTube gamers are unique because they are not just “role models” but people you can talk to (Wadeson). They are individuals who focus on building and “interacting with their online communities”. They are “passionate amateurs” who enjoy making their audiences laugh and connect with them on a deeper level. They even post vlogs about their personal lives and do not put up professional appearances like traditional game publishers (Wadeson). Drift0r is one of the successful YouTubers who provides game tips on *Call of Duty*. Because of his channel, it allowed him to quit his job and work full time as a content creator (Dawson).

According to the *New York Times* article *Using YouTube as an Accelerant for Video Games*, it is the small and medium channels in YouTube that help bring in players



and build a community (Hudson). This is because players who have small to medium sized channels often put focus on the “narrative content” and the game itself (Zariko 59).

In the case of *Guild Wars 2* particularly, ArenaNet has a partner program which helps build the *Guild Wars 2* player base and serves as advertising for the game (“ArenaNet Partner Program”; “Partner Program”). In fact, ArenaNet, the company behind *Guild Wars 2*, lets the *Guild Wars 2* community run the game’s Official Wikipedia page with a rule that states only objective information should be placed on the page. They stated that the community can do so much more for the game than the developers can contribute. The wiki can even be accessed from the game itself (“Guild Wars 2 Wiki: FAQ”) and developers also contribute to the site regularly (“ArenaNet”).

GUILD WARS 2

Guild Wars 2 is a game that was released in 2012 and garnered many awards when it was initially released. Its gameplay, graphics, and in-game world captivated the gaming community making it a highly acclaimed game during its release (“Awards & Accolades – GuildWars2.Com”)

Because of its excellence as a game and as a Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game, or MMORPG for short, it was declared as the number one video game of 2012 by Time magazine, Imagine Games Network, and GameSpot. It was awarded the title of Best MMO in 2012 by Ten Ton Hammer, Imagine Games Network, and Game Informer. For its story, it was awarded by Destructoid as the best RPG of 2012. While for



its spectacular graphics and art direction, it captivated even NBCNEWS.com (“Awards & Accolades – GuildWars2.Com”).

Awards & Accolades

Experience the revolutionary online role-playing game that has captured the imagination of gamers and critics around the world!



techradar The Best MMOs of 2018	PC GAMER The best MMO around
MMORPG The best of the best	IGN Best PC Game, Best MMO, Best PC Graphics Editor's Choice
IGN Game of the Year 2015	GAME SPOT PC Game of the Year - 2012 Editor's Choice
TIME #1 Video Game of 2012	gameinformer Best RPG of 2012
NBCNEWS.com Best Art Direction	gameinformer Best MMO of 2012

(Figure 1: Awards & Accolades)

Even game review YouTubers such as Angry Joe gave it high praise when the game came out (*Guild Wars 2 Angry Review*). He compared it to many MMORPGs such as *World of Warcraft*, *Star Wars the Old Republic*, and stated that *Guild Wars 2* was the superior game.

What makes *Guild Wars 2* unique is that it has no subscription fee as they believe in a “buy to play model” (O’Brien). Initially, players just had to purchase the core game



in order to access all the features. But in 2015, they made the core game free to play with a few restrictions made for free accounts (O'Brien). This gives players the option to purchase their two expansions *Heart of Thorns* and *Path of Fire* as additional content to the game. With the purchase of the expansions, players could unlock all features in the game and were no longer restricted by the limitations given to free accounts (*GuildWars2.com*).



(Figure 2: Living World Season 4: Episode 2)

There are three primary areas in *Guild Wars 2* namely Player versus Player, World versus World, and Player versus Environment.

PLAYER VERSUS PLAYER (PvP)

In Player versus Player, ten people battle in teams of five in order to win the game. Players must capture points and the first team to five hundred wins the game. Each map



has unique mechanics and layouts that can help provide an advantage or disadvantage to a team depending on their build (“Player versus Player”).



(Figure 3: PvP Map Instructions)

In the case of the *Revenge of the Capricorn* map, teams of five must work together, not only to capture and protect points but also capture a fifth point. This point is called the bell which gives a team 25-100 points depending on how many times they were able to capture it (“Revenge of the Capricorn”).



(Figure 4: People contesting a point)

A common strategy in the game is to hold “home” which is the nearest point to your team’s home base where you will respawn if you die and the point at the center of the map called “mid”. The point farthest from your base is called “far”. Although these are not the official terms, these are the working terms used by PvP players for map points and rotations. Players must work together to kill the enemy team while “holding” or maintaining control of their points (“Rated PvP Basics”).



(Figure 5: Winners and final score)

Once the game is over, teams are awarded experience points for their PvP level and for their selected reward track; which grants players items when filled (“Player versus Player”).

WORLD VERSUS WORLD (WvW)

World versus World pits players against each other based on the server they are in. Armies of players group together and fight it out on different maps trying to gain control of the entire area. They lay siege to castles, destroy bosses, and kill other players (“World versus World”).



(Figure 6: Mist Warriors in Rata Sum)

If you go to any of the capital cities in Tyria, a continent within the world of *Guild Wars 2*, you will see non-player characters (NPCs) recruiting players for the Mist War; which is another name for World versus World or WvW for short. They give players a brief introduction to World versus World (“Mist Warrior”).



(Figure 7: World versus World Panel)

The actual game mode can be accessed via a castle-shaped icon on the upper left corner of the screen. It is right beside the Player versus Player or PvP icon. Players can select one of the five maps during a skirmish and help their team capture castles, bases, and defeat bosses. Players are divided based on their server for the duration of the game. Each color represents a different server and the control of the map (“World versus World”).



(Figure 8: World versus World all maps)

Once inside a World versus World map, players can opt to roam around the map as an individual or find a group within the map. As an individual, a player can then take on NPCs carrying supplies for the enemy team, defeat NPC sentries, and claim areas for their team. Players can also opt to revive injured allies while killing enemy players. If a player is able to find a commander or a large group, they can build catapults, siege hammers, and attempt to break into fortresses. This group of individuals must then fight off enemy players and NPCs who are attacking them from the fortress. They must successfully conquer the fortresses' boss in order to claim the area as their own. They must also defend it from the other teams that might besiege their newly claimed area ("World versus World").

PLAYER VERSUS ENVIRONMENT (PvE)

The Player versus Environment mode, which serves as the core game, includes the main storyline of *Guild Wars 2*, the Open World, fractals, dungeons, and raids.



In *Guild Wars 2*, character creation is important as it will affect every aspect of your story from level 1 to level 30. The race, class, and choices for your character's personal background will affect its dialogue and the branching story later in the game (“Character Creation”).



(Figure 9: Story panel – Character biography)

For example, if the player chooses the nobility path for his human character, that person will experience a storyline that centers on that particular lifestyle (“Character Creation”).



(Figure 10: Personal Story – Choices available.)

Each path is different as there are branching options which the player must choose one experience over the other. These branching options give the game a high replay value and provide a more personal and unique character experience (“Character Creation”).



(Figure 11: Personal Story – Making the choice)

If you choose as a Sylvari, a playable race of plant like creatures, in the *Heart of Thorns* expansion you will hear the voice of Mordremoth the dragon during gameplay (“Mordremoth”).



(Figure 12: HoT – Sylvari dialogue part 1)



(Figure 13: HoT – Sylvari dialogue part 2)

In *Path of Fire*, players have to fight a god named Balthazar. If a player chose Balthazar to bless their human avatar, the dialogue would be slightly different compared



to that of a character that was blessed by another god (*Is There Unique Dialogue in Path of Fire for Humans Who Chose Balthazar as Their Starting God?* • *r/Guildwars2*). NPCs, characters, in-game chatter, and events will also slightly differ because of your in-game racial background and in-game class. You will have additional dialog and different in-game Easter Eggs depending on your race, class, and in-game choices.

From level 30 onwards, the player will make a decision on how to approach saving Tyria from the Elder Dragons. The player must choose between the Vigil, the Order of Whisperers, and the Priory. Each faction has a different approach on how to defeat the Elder Dragons but in the end, they must unite in order to overcome the threat (“Personal Story”).

The in-game world of *Guild Wars 2* is highly dynamic and interesting as it shapes and evolves with or without player interaction in an area. Areas can be controlled by either allies or enemies depending on player activity success or failure (*Guild Wars 2 Angry Review*).

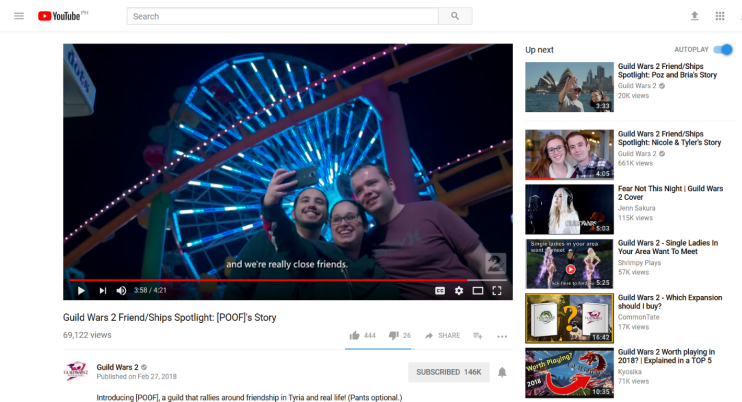
THE GUILD WARS 2 COMMUNITY

Guild Wars 2 has the friendliest MMORPG community due to its design as item drops and gameplay promote collaboration (*Guild Wars 2 Angry Review*). Instead of only one person getting all the loot from an in-game enemy, all players who helped fight that enemy will get rewarded. Each player is rewarded according to how much they helped during the battle phase. This helped create and foster the friendly community that *Guild*



Wars 2 has today. “This game truly puts the MMO in MMORPG because unlike other MMORPGs” they focus on teamwork and team play (*Guild Wars 2 Angry Review*). Players are rewarded for helping each other in the world and sometimes simply choose to help others with no benefit to themselves (*Guild Wars 2 Angry Review*; “Player Versus Environment”).

People of an MMORPG community tend to be highly dedicated, vocal, and supportive of the game and each other (O’Connor et al. 470; Hopp et al. 469). In *Guild Wars 2*, individuals who form guilds and bond in-game can forge friendships in real life. There are cases of *Guild Wars 2* players meeting in-game and getting married because of their connection to the MMORPG (*Guild Wars 2 Friend/Ships Spotlight: [POOF]’s Story*; *Guild Wars 2 Friend/Ships Spotlight: Nicole & Tyler’s Story*).



(Figure 14: *Guild Wars 2* friendship spotlight)

With the advent of participatory culture, streamers and gamers are brought to star status within the community. There are some that might consider this as “playbour”, a



term “coined by Julian Kücklich”, as they help promote a particular corporate entity through their videos and other fan works (“Playbour’ - exploitation or civic possibility? Questions from the Future Laboratory”; Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 165). However, in an MMORPG, players “feel... a sense of ownership” towards the game and the world which is why they do not feel that it is labor (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 160).

Players such as Wooden Potatoes, Bog Otter, AyinMaiden, Aurora Peachy, and Sindrener stream and post *Guild Wars 2* gameplay, tips, and feature in-game items. People send them gifts, join their in-game guild, and even support them on Patreon, a crowdfunding site for content creators. Their popularity did not only attract the attention of the community but the developers as well. This is because these players provide insights on the game, introduce a fresh perspective or bring to light a particular issue regarding the game itself. Because of their videos, players such as Wooden Potatoes ended up partnering with the *Guild Wars 2* developers in promoting the game (“Partner Program”). They receive an allowance of gems, an in-game currency usually acquired with real money, and a commission if people purchase the game through their affiliate links (“ArenaNet Partner Program”). These players do these things for fun, for financial reasons, and in order to help the player community. But as a result, they also help improve and promote the game they love. Sometimes developers pay homage to these *Guild Wars 2* YouTubers such as Dulfy (“Siegemaster Dulfy”) and Wooden Potatoes (“Maguuma Burl”), by putting Easter Eggs about them in the game.



What is unique about the *Guild Wars 2* YouTubers is that ArenaNet has a partner program which allows YouTubers and content creators on Twitch, also known as Twitch streamers, to promote their gameplay and this partnership program provides benefits for these players (“ArenaNet Partner Program”; “Partner Program”; Ortiz). As we live in a day and age where lines between producers and consumers are blurred, players of a game often echo news and announcements from official sources that get trickled down into the community itself.

Players such as Wooden Potatoes serve as a channel of information to majority of the community regarding the developer’s response because he features interviews from developers in his YouTube channel asking them for information regarding community concerns, game updates, and so on. Like most YouTube partners, he is not part of the official ArenaNet team and he has a job. He earns from the partner program of YouTube and from the partner program of ArenaNet; which lets him earn money when someone purchases the game using the links on his channel. His channel helped promote the latest *Guild Wars 2* expansion *Path of Fire* by holding a contest for players to promote the game on YouTube (*Wooden Potatoes’ “Get Path of Fire” Contest*).

These *Guild Wars 2* YouTubers are quite unique in terms of the content they produce and the playthroughs they showcase. These YouTubers were able to fill in the gap regarding *Living World* season 1 which ArenaNet did not. Unlike the current *Living World* seasons, *Living World* season 1 was a live event that only happened once. The developers destroyed and rebuilt an entire in-game city during the process of the event to



make it appear as if it was happening in the world of Tyria. Unfortunately, during that time, ArenaNet had no intentions of having expansions or having players replay the first season as it was a live event. This resulted in many new players not having the experience of *Living World* season 1. Many players clamored for the developers to restore *Living World* season 1 and make the event playable (*The Return of Living World Season 1 is IMPORTANT; Living World Season 1 instances?*).

However, Wooden Potatoes and many other YouTubers collaborated using their own gameplay, the information in the *Guild Wars 2* Wikipedia, and the official cutscenes that they recorded during *Living World* season 1 in order to create a film that helped inform the rest of the community on what happened during *Living World* season 1 (*Guild Wars 2 - The Complete Season 1 Movie (Enhanced)*).

Showcasing gameplay through playthroughs is an excellent way to promote the game, help other players play the game better, inform the community, and is also good feedback mechanism for developers. Gamers from the *Guild Wars 2* community not only look at games from an entertainment perspective but also talk about the game critically commenting on what is good, what needs to be improved, and how to go through a particular area in the game.

As small to medium-sized YouTubers are credited to accelerate the growth of games (Hudson), this study seeks to explore how a small to medium channel such as that of Wooden Potatoes, a significant figure in the *Guild Wars 2* community, comments on



his playthroughs and relates gameplay design and narrative. Therefore, the following are research questions that this paper seeks to address:

RQ1: How does Wooden Potatoes in his playthroughs relate gameplay, design and narrative?

RQ2: How does Wooden Potatoes comment on his playthroughs?



REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

WHAT IS A GAME?

A game is a form of “interactive entertainment” where “players must overcome challenges” (Rollings and Adams 35) while “struggl[ing] toward a goal” (Costikyan 21) in a world that is “confined by rules” (Avedon and Sutton-Smith 405; Mortensen 17) and meet a “victory condition” (Rollings and Adams 35; Rapatan) that results in an “unequal outcome” (Fullerton; Jesse Schell 43; Rapatan).

HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES

The history of video games and its development have only been quite recent with its history only spanning a few decades (Lee). Early signs of the medium began in the early 1950s where people began to experiment and push the limits on computer capabilities. During the Canadian National Exhibition, a Canadian engineer by the name Josef Kates showcased Bertie the Brain; a computer specifically designed to play tic-tac-toe with the exhibit’s guests (Simmons 17).

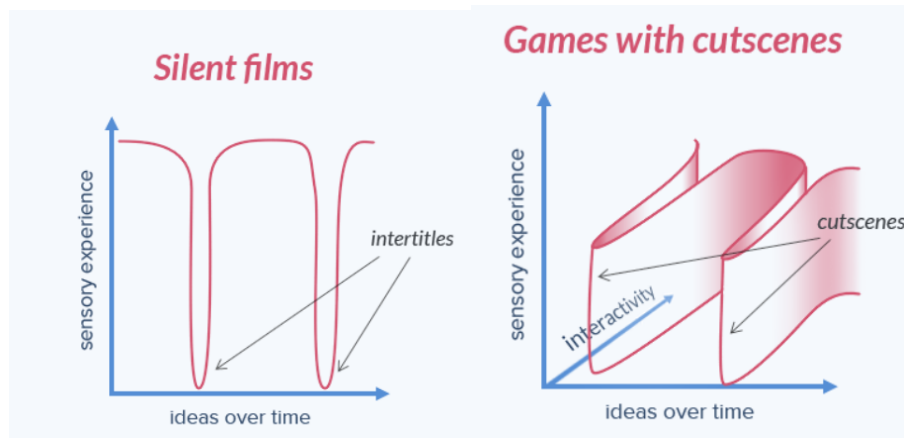
Later on in 1958, in the Brookhaven Laboratory, thousands of people came to view an interactive display called *Tennis for Two*. It was an experiment by William Higinbotham which featured the ability to control gameplay on a screen (“Video Games - Did They Begin at Brookehaven?”). *Tennis for Two* served as a benchmark and an inspiration for the development of the medium; yet it is not seen as a video game by a lot of people today. (Wolf xvii)



It was only in the 1970s where video games started to take shape as medium. The advancements in computer technology, art, music, and the rise of consumer demand provided the boom which allowed gaming to sky rocket. As the medium developed, many game developers who licensed series from TV and film franchises decided to integrate the appeal these mediums brought. Gaming then took inspiration from TV and film and integrated many of their conventions into the medium. “By the 1990s, video games had title screens, end credits, cutting between different sequences, multiple points of view, multiple locations, and increasingly detailed storylines” (Wolf 17-20).

GAMEPLAY VS NARRATIVE

For the past three decades, the structure of stories in games have remained the same (Grip, “The Self, Presence and Storytelling” 3). Lee calls this the “silent film period” of the gaming industry and compares games with cutscenes to silent films.



(Figure 15: *Silent films = games with cutscenes*)

Lee argues that literature, cinema, and other media forms have already figured out a formula that works for narrative, yet games fall short which is why this results in “dissonance”. “Dissonance” causes three types of conflict within the player’s mind: switching between game mode and story mode, conflicting narrative and experiences, and conflict in presenting perspectives (Lee). Thus, narrative in games has become a major bone of contention for game scholars (Lindley 1; Simons 1). Two groups, known as narratologists and ludologists, heavily debate if narratives have a place in the study of games considering the nature of both (Simons 1-3).

Narratologists generally argue that games can be viewed as a new type of narrative form and can be studied as such (Zagal 16). This is because they believe that narrative provides players the drive and gives them a “framework” (Rapatan) to progress



through the game (Simons 11-12). Thus, scholars such as Janet Murray push for games to follow these narrative forms (Jenkins, “Game Design as Narrative Architecture” 2).

“The narratologist or a historian looks at the final state a protagonist actually arrived at, and then asks herself how he or she got there and what choices the protagonist has actually made” (Simons 12).

Ludologists, game scholars who prioritize gameplay in their research, argue that “games are not narratives” due to the current and “widely accepted definitions of narrative provided by narratology” (Frasca 6). Juul also argues in his article *Games Telling Stories?* that it is not possible to have simultaneous interaction and story due to the way stories and interactive gaming is structured.

They also argue that because when a story transfers mediums, specifically a story from a game to that of a movie, “the rules of the game get lost” (Juul; Simons 12) a point which is something that is not mutually exclusive to ludologists (Lee; Simons 12; Jenkins, “Game Design as Narrative Architecture” 2).

While both ludologists (Juul) and narratologists agree that there are certain games that do not accommodate narratives in their explicit structure (Jenkins, “Game Design as Narrative Architecture” 2), narratologists argue that lived narratives still exist within the player’s mind (Simons 3). These should be valid as stories and “all games have this kind of narrative” (Lee).

This is where ludologists and narratologists come to disagree. While narratologists consider the player’s experience as part of a narrative (Lee; Simons 2-3), ludologists



would disagree and consider it as experience instead (Simons 2-3). According to Lindley, their disagreement is primarily because of the way certain terminologies are defined and redefined in order to strengthen an argument (1). Lee also argues that our current definitions of narrative are quite eschewed especially considering how narrative has evolved throughout history.

The structure that ludologists provide in order to create an immersive experience is a “game plan to challenge the player” (Rapatan; Simons 2).

“The game theorist [or ludologist] looks at the larger picture, and asks herself at what final states the protagonist could have arrived, what other histories were open to her, and whether the protagonist could have done better than he or she actually did” (Simons 12)

In this sense, it may seem quite ironic that these two factions are fighting considering that narratologists are tackling a specific area within “game theory” (Simons 12); especially since games such as MMORPGs can find their origins derived from MUDs or role-playing games which have hypertextual features (*Machinima*).

THE PLAYER NARRATIVE

According to Aarseth, these hypertextuals can be read from “reader’s perspective and as these are guided by that reader’s interpretive process, often with narrative as guide and goal” (Myers 76). In other words, hypertextuals can provide a



leeway for interactivity, “self-reflection” (Myers 82), and strike a balance with the need of interactivity for gaming (Lindley 7-9).

With MMORPGs and RPGs, players form “inner narrative models” (Lindley 21-23); commonly known to psychologists as schemas (Salen and Zimmerman 2). A schema “refers to how the mind acquires, represents, and transforms knowledge (Salen and Zimmerman 2-3). These players then relate their stories as if the events had actually taken place (Zariko 152-153; Shinkle 2). This is why Shinkle argues that games go beyond “simulations” as players feel that games “are real life activities: image-stories that [they] interact with in real time, on a physical plane” (5). In case of *Screening Embodiment: Let’s Play Video and Observable Play Experiences*, Zariko focused on two YouTubers namely: Markiplier and ChristopherOdd on their Let’s Play videos regarding the horror game “*Alien: Isolation*” (122). She discovered that players place themselves in that moment thus “incorporate[ing] it in [their] lived experience” (152-153).

Narratologists have long considered the player’s experience in the game as part of the game’s narrative (Simons 3) while in the case of a hypertext narrative, it can be considered as a form of authorship due to the “readers interpretative process” and “perspective” (Myers 76).



PROVISIONS OF THE HYPERNARRATIVE STRUCTURE FOR GAMES AND THE PLAYER NARRATIVE

The linear mode of narrative has long dominated narrative styles in games (Lee; Schreiber) which is possibly why there has been such a severe lack of progress in the medium when it comes to storytelling (Grip, “The Self, Presence and Storytelling” 19). This method is cheap and “easy to apply” but does not provide good gameplay (Schreiber). This kind of storytelling and method creates a natural barrier between story and game mechanics as it limits the player’s choices, the story, and the game (Schreiber).

As gaming may be stuck in certain modes and aspects because of the linear storyline, hypernarratives are pushing the boundaries of literature and even web. Lindley argues that by utilizing hypernarrative in game design, this would provide an avenue to satisfy both inherent requirements of narrative and of gaming (7-9). This is because branching provides a player with the ability to choose and allows their choices to have an effect on the story and gameplay (Schreiber).

Cicconi classifies hypernarratives into the following categories: tree hypernarratives with false forking (6-7), tree hypernarratives with true forking (7-8), web-like hypernarratives (11-13), and hypernarratives generated through expert systems (10-11). Each category provides varying amounts of user agency, choices, and endings for the hypernarrative (6-13). In *Patterns of Hypertext*, Mark Bernstein provides numerous patterns that are seen in hypertexts today. These dynamic patterns provided by Bernstein



help serve as a basis for developers, writers, and designers in creating their own hypertext narratives and structures for games and interactive stories (Bernstein). They all help in creating a message and elevating the theme of the hypertext narrative (Rapatan). This is because a hypertext narrative oriented structure would provide balance between narrative and gameplay since nodes and arcs would allow story elements to flow naturally (Lindley 18-21).

It is important to note that world building, story development, and NPC character development are equally important to create the ideal narrative in games. Linear, branching, parallel, threaded, and dynamic conversation from NPC characters can be a narrative system for games as they can reveal a lot about the world to the player. Writing dialogue and utilizing a “conversation system” as a narrative in games can effectively be used as a means of storytelling (Schreiber). Thus, Jenkins proposes that game developers move towards environmental oriented storytelling; allowing players to explore the world and utilizing immersive characters to tell the story (“Game Design as Narrative Architecture” 3-5).

GAMEPLAY – THE FOUNDATIONAL LAYER OF GAMES

What is gameplay? Many scholars often try to define gameplay yet there is no definition that has been generally agreed upon by the community (Fabricatore 5). There have been previous writings that suggest a player centered definition which is why Fabricatore came up with this:



“Gameplay as the set of activities that can be performed by the player during the ludic experience, and by other entities belonging to the virtual world as a response to player’s actions and/or as autonomous courses of action that contribute to the liveliness of the virtual world” (5).

Important factors in gameplay are “interactivity” and “activity” (Fabricatore 5) which include game mechanics.

“Game mechanics are rule based systems / simulations that facilitate and encourage a user to explore and learn the properties of their possibility space through the use of feedback mechanisms” (Cook).

However, it must be noted that interactivity or feedback is not enough to make a game. Games must “encourage discovery”, “encourage exploration”, and “provide tool mastery” to differentiate itself from simply being a “feedback mechanism” (Cook). According to the *Self-determination Theory*, “competence”, “autonomy”, and “relatedness” are needs that must be met for individuals to foster positive “growth”, “social development”, and overall “well-being” as these three pillars serve as “the basis for motivation” (Ryan and Deci 68). Internal and external factors come into play when it comes to motivation as “contexts supportive of autonomy, competence, and relatedness were found to foster greater internalization and integration than contexts that thwart satisfaction of these needs” (Ryan and Deci 76).

“Gameplay time is spent repeating the basic mechanics” (Grip, “The Self, Presence and Storytelling” 2) so it is important for game designers to make sure that these



are easy to learn, relevant “throughout the game”, and provide a suitable challenge for the player (Fabricatore 15).

In *The Self, Presence and Storytelling*, Grip states it is crucial for game mechanics to be crafted in a way that players are able to intuitively learn the game (3). This is done by utilizing interactivity “to create a feeling of presence” (8) and by “keep[ing] systems simple, and extending the imagination” (12). “All aspects of the human experience, that have an impact on our ability to process and learn from stimuli, fall within the domain of potential gameplay” (Cook), therefore, must be accounted for in the gameplay’s design (Cook).

Studies conducted by Fabricatore have shown that players often put their focus on these three elements which he considers as the “true cornerstones of game design” (4). First is “playability” which revolves around “the possibility of understanding the performing activities required to win the game” (4). The second element that players put their focus on is “context” which include the goal of the game, design, appearance, and narrative (Fabricatore 4). Third is “gameplay” which Fabricatore considers as the most important of the three (Fabricatore 4).

In his article the *4-Layers, A Narrative Design Approach*, Grip provides building blocks that can help create more effective and immersive games. In his article, the first “layer” that he provides is the gameplay. This layer includes “the game’s world”, “action confirmation”, and a streamlined system and serves as the foundation for the rest of the layers. The second building block provided by Grip is the “narrative goal” which provides



the player a purpose in the game. The third “layer” is the “narrative background” which helps frame the game in the mind of the player. The fourth and final layers is “mental modeling” in how the player will perceive the game.

These “layers” must each be revisited and maintained in order to create a holistic and effective game. Although “there is no silver bullet” in games (Grip, “The Self, Presence and Storytelling” 19), these are the elements game designers can use in order to bring gaming to the next level (Lee; Grip, “The Self, Presence and Storytelling” 19; Grip, “4-Layers, A Narrative Design Approach”).

PLAYERS AND THEIR APPROACH TO GAMES

As players choose “appropriate games to fit their specific play styles and preferences” (Glas 83), Lindley talks about the different player categories and play styles that players choose to veer towards (2). This is because “players may want very different kinds of experience from a game” (Lindley 2).

One of the grouping schemes he introduced in his paper was that of Richard Bartle’s. Bartle grouped players into four different categories namely “achievers”, “explorers”, “socializers”, and “killers”. These are based on how the players approach the game (Lindley 2). Individuals in the “achievers” category seek to fulfill objectives provided by the game. Individuals in the “explorers” category seek to discover “as much as they can about the virtual world, including mapping, geography and game mechanics” (Lindley 2). Individuals who fall under the “socializers” category seek to build



relationships with other players or desire “role-play with other players” (Lindley 2). Individuals who fall under the “killers” category enjoy defeating NPCs, players, and “gain satisfaction from inflicting anxiety and pain on others” (Lindley 2). Researchers such as Lindley, Yee, and Kim enhanced Bartle’s player taxonomy with Lindley refining the taxonomy to cater to story structured games (Lindley 2-13).

It is important to note that the lines set by these categories are not set in stone. “Players may cross over” from one category to another but “one play style tends to dominate the preferences of any given player” (Lindley 2).

OF FANS AND FANS OF GAMES

Regardless of their level of expertise in a game, YouTube gamers are “sometimes called ‘professional fans’” due to their “love [for] video games” and since they provide “their thoughts and commentary” (May 94).

What is a fan? Any person playing a game can exhibit fan-ish behavior. However, in the blog post *When Fandom Goes Mainstream*, Jenkins brings up this subject that concerned fan-culture researchers. He talked about the difference between “‘fans’...[and] casual TV viewers [or in this case gamers] who engage fannishly?” (Jenkins, “When Fandom Goes Mainstream” par. 4). This concern was answered by Busse when she said,

“I want to suggest that we distinguish between fan and fandom as well as acknowledge that there are different trajectories that combine into levels of fannishness. In other words, an intense emotional investment in a media text that is wholly singular may create a fan but does not make the individual part of a



larger fandom, whereas a person enacting fannish behavior may not define him- or herself as a fan. It thus might be useful to consider the overlapping but not interdependent axes of investment and involvement as two factors that can define fannish engagement” (Jenkins, “When Fandom Goes Mainstream” par. 8).

Based on Busse’s suggestion, I have decided to define fan in this thesis as an individual who has both “an intense emotional investment in media text” and “who engages with the larger fandom” or community (Jenkins, “When Fandom Goes Mainstream” par. 8).

“Fans are motivated by epistemophilia—not simply a pleasure in knowing but a pleasure in exchanging knowledge. Baym argues that fans see the exchange of speculations and evaluations of soaps as a means of ‘comparing, refining, and negotiating understandings of their socioemotional environment’” (Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* 139).

During the development of *Star Wars Galaxies*, the developers allowed fans to provide feedback into the game (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 160-162). Ralph Koster, one of the developers, stated that, "There's no denying it—the fans know *Star Wars* better than the developers do. They live and breathe it. They know it in an intimate way” (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 162).

The social structures integrated in MMORPGs can help improve “motivation, replayability, fun, relatedness, and the sense of presence” in a game as long as the



“privacy” of players are upheld and developers are responsive to the needs of players (Christou et al. 732).

THE COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE, EXPLOITATION AND PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

In the game *World of Warcraft*, as of 2010, players have spent “5.93 million years” in the game collectively and have compiled thousands of Wikipedia pages on the MMORPG (McGonigal at TED2010). Pierre Levy called this the “collective intelligence” where individuals volunteer their knowledge in order to benefit their community who have “shared mutual interests”. (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 4, 20).

“These communities are defined through voluntary, temporary, and tactical affiliations, reaffirmed through common intellectual enterprises and emotional investments” (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 27).

Terranova “identified” (54) the collective intelligence as “immaterial labor” (39-42); a part of the “late capitalist cultural economy” (55) where “our social actions are captured and monetized” (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 334). Andrejevic states that this can be a form of “exploitation” where companies such as YouTube “channel the user’s own activity” to further the company’s goals (421); unpaid and from the user’s “free choice” (416-420). While Sotamaa would describe this as “commodified play” where players “give up some rights concerning the products of their playing hours” (399).



However, Jenkins provides a more positive view of the collective intelligence which he termed “participatory culture” (Jenkins, “Interactive Audiences? The ‘Collective Intelligence’ of Media Fans” 1). Participatory culture through new media provided fans access to produce, create, and have a voice in through various online platforms which were formerly exclusive to gatekeepers (Jenkins, “Interactive Audiences? The ‘Collective Intelligence’ of Media Fans” 1). Fans of a game or show are able to promote it and show their approval or displeasure at what traditional media producers are doing with it (Jenkins, “Interactive Audiences? The ‘Collective Intelligence’ of Media Fans” 5). Thanks to the development of new media, the barriers of traditional media have been blurred. Today, fans have the power to “archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media products” (Jenkins, “Interactive Audiences? The ‘Collective Intelligence’ of Media Fans” 12). But as Postigo stated “participatory culture[‘s]... inner workings are subject to the rationale of capital accumulation, commodification and profit” (Postigo, “Playing for Work” 215).

Banks and Deuze state that researchers who discuss participatory culture and the collective intelligence acknowledge that fans understand their participation is free labor and that corporations have this tendency to exploit these fans (17). However, as stated in their article, “co-creative relationships... cannot easily be reduced to one simple manipulation at the hands of corporations and firms” (Banks and Deuze 9-10). Instead they credit “co-creation... [as] a disruptive agent of change that sits uncomfortably with our current understandings and theories of work and labour” (Banks and Deuze 12-13).



This is why researchers such as Sotamaa are clamoring for a different model of ownerships for games (389-399). As the current structure of copyright might not work for games (Coleman and Dyer-Witthford 947-949) due to the “conflict between ‘corporate’ ownership and ‘common’ practice” (Coleman and Dyer-Witthford 945).

THE NEED FOR PARTICIPATORY CULTURE IN MMORPGs

“The games industry, which sees itself as marketing interactive experiences rather than commodities, has been eager to broaden consumer participation and strengthen the sense of affiliation towards the games” (Jenkins, “Interactive Audiences? The ‘Collective Intelligence’ of Media Fans” 10). This is because shape of an MMORPG does not only require the input of not only designers but also players. This involvement occurs within and even outside the game’s boundaries as the needs of an MMORPG differs in terms of design and processes compared to traditional approaches to games in famous design books (Daneva 56). Requirement engineering for MMORPGs games never ends as developers must get the “feedback” of the MMORPG community. This is so that developers can update their game to keep it relevant, “playable”, and fun (Daneva 57). Even game designers must have “intimate knowledge of the game as players themselves” (Daneva 67). This is why game designers would view requirement engineering for games as “a process, as an artefact, and as a relationship between game creators and players” (Daneva 61). An example of participatory culture in MMORPG communities was when game developers from Lucas Arts decided to ask fans for their input on a game. The fans



jumped at it giving feedback and even creating “mods” for the game which helped promote the game and helped the designers in development (Jenkins, “Interactive Audiences? The ‘Collective Intelligence’ of Media Fans” 10).

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MMORPGS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

Massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) and massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) are known for their highly supportive communities (O’Connor et al. 470; Hopp et al. 469).

“A community is a group of people who interact, learn together, build relationships and, in the process, develop a sense of belonging and commitment. Furthermore, in the process, they build relationships based on respect and trust, and feed the sense of a shared history and their own identity” (Sanz-Martos 241).

Games such as *World of Warcraft* or *WoW* are able to gather different individuals and help them form a sense of community from the game or by being affiliated with the game. Many of the individuals who are part of the *WoW* community stated that they were able to find a system of support for both in-game issues and real life from players within the game (O’Connor et al. 470). As a community, the study by Hopp et al. shows that MMORPG players are focused on helping people learn more about the game (472). Players in an MMORPG also inspire new ideas and “come up with unimaginable approaches to in-game situations” that even “challenge” the people who developed the game (Daneva 64). Players also “affect the development of game features that happens



after the release of the game” (Daneva 64). These players also organize themselves differently than originally expected, thus, the developers chose to adjust the game’s features to the way the players used the game (Daneva 64).

YOUTUBE & TWITCH

As it is of primary importance for researchers to understand both the community behind the game as well as the people playing the game (Nascimento et al. 4), it is essential to understand how YouTube and Twitch operate as platforms.

In the article, *Watching People Is Not a Game: Interactive Online Corporeality, Twitch.tv and Videogame Streams*, Anderson talks about Twitch as a streaming site, its use and potential in eSports, and the dynamic relationship between viewers and gamers due to the site’s natural affordances. He concluded that the website’s design provides affordances for streamers and users interacting with each other constantly (Anderson). He also noted the behavior of streamers and the fact that they highlight their identity in their streams (Anderson).

In Twitch, since everything is done live, streams would last roughly 2 hours with streamers posting every day. On the other hand, YouTube gamers would typically release only a few videos per week. This is primarily due to the nature of the medium (Nascimento et al. 5-6). Online sites such as these allow streamers to connect with audiences and enjoy the game together (Anderson). The games posted and streamed by players provide context for the viewer as they show what is going on in the game, the



reaction of the player, and in the case of live streams the “behaviors of the audience” (Johnson and Woodcock, “Fighting games and Go” 11).

Individuals on Twitch would stream as if it were their full-time job; which would range roughly from at least 35 to over 70 hours a week (Johnson and Woodcock, “It’s Like The Gold Rush’: The Lives And Careers Of Professional Video Game Streamers” 13-14). Some individuals would have full time jobs along side their streams thus they would have no time for themselves and completely dedicate themselves to the stream (Johnson and Woodcock, “It’s Like The Gold Rush’: The Lives And Careers Of Professional Video Game Streamers” 13-14).

In the article *Modeling and Analyzing the Video Game Live-Streaming Community* by Nascimento et al., they studied the communities of *StarCraft II* in Twitch. The goal of their research was to the behavioral patterns of streamers how streamers behave, and the uniqueness of Twitch compared to other platforms. They discovered that “spectators have clear behavioral patterns”, the “content produced” on Twitch.tv “is longer and less edited” compared to that of other platforms such as YouTube, “there is a semantic meaning to channel switching”, and they were able to “predict the number of messages sent in chat” and how the content was consumed (8).

However, it was YouTube that first helped popularize gamers and their playthroughs with Internet users viewing pre-recorded gameplay (Johnson and Woodcock, “Fighting games and Go” 9). It is known that popular gaming companies send



their games to prominent YouTubers in order to boost their popularity or for the game to get attention.

“Game companies seek partnerships with the best-known commentators, providing them with early copies of a forthcoming game and inviting them to premier events usually reserved for journalists” (Postigo, “Playing for Work” 211)

While some companies provide these YouTube gamers early access, others give these YouTube gamers financial incentives. Big YouTubers, such as Pewdiepie, can bring the attention of millions of people towards an unknown and obscure game. But according to developers, “creating communities of broader support” is what makes games successful (Hudson). This is why developers turn to small and medium-sized YouTubers in order to help cultivate communities and develop a loyal following for these games (Hudson).

According to Brendan Green, choosing small and medium-sized YouTube channels are the best when it comes to helping develop and create a community of support for a game. This was his strategy which helped his company sell 6 million copies of his game: *Player Unknown’s Battlegrounds* (Hudson).

THE AFFORDANCES OF YOUTUBE AS A PLATFORM

The “architectural affordance” that YouTube provides such as “the video upload”, “the video commenting system”, “the video rating system”, “favoriting the video”, “the subscription system”, and “the advertising system” (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 335, 337-340) allow YouTubers to be producers by mixing “on-



demand”, “crowdsourcing”, and “old-media” models of media production and sustainability (Postigo, “Playing for Work” 214). These YouTubers are incentivized to create videos and post them on the platform as they earn a percentage from ads that are placed alongside their content in the platform (Postigo, “Playing for Work” 212).

“The advertising can take the form of a banner ad, a pre-video commercial, or an in-video box ad. The system monitors unique video views, ad clicks, and other metrics that translate the videos’ popularity (gauged in terms of the number of views) into a monetary figure that can be charged to advertisers and then shared with partners” (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 339).

In the model YouTube provides, the subscriber is “the most common social currency on YouTube” as the secretive advertising and ranking system provided by YouTube is dependent on them (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 338). YouTubers discuss how they must balance between gaming as a passion versus gaming for views, money, and popularity, and how monetary incentives ruins the community due to the way that YouTube’s algorithm ranks and “distributes” videos (Postigo, “Playing for Work” 213). Although the affordances provided by YouTube allow content creators to be financially independent and produce their own videos, they are also subject to the “tastes” of the audience, YouTube, and game corporations (Postigo, “Playing for Work” 213). This is due to the system that favor “commercial content” and YouTube’s goal as a company (Andrejevic 421).



THE BEHAVIOR OF CONTENT CREATORS

This is why Johnson and Woodcock state that “professional gaming” has “become fundamentally ‘recontextualized as performance’ (Feenberg, 1994:124) as well as a deeply skilled technical component” (“Fighting games and Go” 17). A full-time professional gamer must satisfy his audience, cultivate patrons, and create a spectacle that is worthy of being watched by millions of viewers (“Fighting games and Go” 17).

“Humor, swearing, and gossip” are elements that are used in order to engage the audience while making moral choices throughout the game (Piittinen 14). According Piittinen, “swearing informalises... situations”, “gossip” is used to bring to light “power relations and underlying ideologies”, while “humor” turns serious situations into light hearted ones (14). When YouTube gamers need to make moral choices during their playthrough, they use different methods in order to justify, deflect, or engage with audiences regarding their player narratives (Piittinen 14).

Players who do live streams of their gameplay would utilize a “first person” view instead of a “third person” view (Anderson). Players on Twitch would often react or respond to what was going on in game instead of just describing it (Anderson). While YouTube gamers would provide their “status in the game”, voice their “player expectations”, and even discuss issues regarding “usability”, “accessibility and design” (May 99-101).



Like the study by Johnson and Woodcock *Fighting games and Go*, Zariko also talks about the aspect of performance in Let's Plays but also integrates many important factors in her thesis such as the concepts of “affect”, “embodiment”, and does not limit it just to “performance” (28). She states that a Let's Play shows players as the “writer of their own narrative context... that is unique to them” instead of just the game's narrative dragging players along (158). She also stated that “the nature of the game and the designs implemented by the videogame developers must be taken into consideration when the videos are analysed” (158).

These YouTube gamers engage their audiences in such a way that the viewers feel involved in the video through their “commentary”, “performance”, and “reactions”; thus, allowing viewers to live vicariously through the YouTuber (Glas 83-84). The way these YouTubers behave may not always “follow the intended design of a game” and may show “divergent and deviant forms of play” (Glas 84).

However, these individuals do not have any training or background on how to become popular streamers and must be self-taught (Johnson and Woodcock, “It's like the Gold Rush': The Lives and Careers of Professional Video Game Streamers” 12). It is not difficult as it comes as second nature to those who “grew up with digital technology” (Johnson and Woodcock, “It's like the Gold Rush': The Lives and Careers of Professional Video Game Streamers” 12). People decide to watch gamers based on the gamer's “constructed persona and performed character” which allows a channel's fan base to grow



(Pietruszka 68). Each channel has a unique niche and content and the way different YouTubers entertain their fans “vary from one vlogger to another” (Pietruszka 68).

Johnson and Woodcock state that the “motions of play” along with the idea of the “re-aestheticization of competitive gameplay” leads to the broader idea of the “spectacle to professional competition” (“Fighting games and Go” 3-5). Given the history of gaming, a once beautiful artform that became a mere tool (Johnson and Woodcock, “Fighting games and Go” 4), gaming is once again becoming an art form with “performance being at the center” (Johnson and Woodcock, “Fighting games and Go” 17).



SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As seen in the literature, there are three issues that occur: the first is the debate between ludologists and narratologists regarding game narrative (Simons 1-3), the second is the view of participatory culture being viewed as the tendency to be exploitative (Banks and Deuze 17) or as unpaid labor (Terranova 39-42; Andrejevic 416-421; Sotamaa 399) versus an agent of decentralizing power and placing it in the hands of the user (Jenkins, “Interactive Audiences? The ‘Collective Intelligence’ of Media Fans” 1; Banks and Deuze 12-13; Coleman and Dyer-Witheford 945), and the third is the idea of balancing between being a free content creator versus being bound by system in place by YouTube (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 335, 337-340; Postigo, “Playing for Work” 213; Andrejevic 421).

With regard to the first issue, I must first point out that I am in no way re-kindling the debate between narratologists or ludologists. As established by Simons, the arguments that these scholars provide are valid but both are tackling different areas within “game theory” (12). Therefore, the observations made by both parties can thrive based on the games that they study and observe (Jenkins, “Game Design as Narrative Architecture” 2-3). But, the question posed by both parties on whether or not games are narratives has been answered by the papers of Lindley (1) and Lee who state that the answer to this argument shifts based on how they define narrative and how narrative has been defined and understood. Therefore, in the context of this paper, I will consider the player narrative



or mental schema as a form of narrative. This is especially since the structure provided by a hypertext game is narrative based (Machinima), therefore, the structure implies that there is a narrative to be engaged with and a player narrative can develop and form. In this context, I am not in any way disregarding player experience but will refer to player experience as the result of interacting with the game. Simons (2) and Lee state that all games have a kind of narrative where the player is an author. Lemmens (18) stated in his research that, “There is no such thing as a universal narrative. Even within traditional media, narrative occurs in various forms” (Lemmens 18). While Aarseth and Myers agree that “play is self-reflective in that it refers to and represents its own form, its own play (Myers 82). Although the idea of being a reader being a co-author has existed since hypertext (Myers 76; Zariko 142; *Machinima*), it is a struggle that usually occurs between gamers and producers even with content creators making their own videos (Rigney; Wilde; Clark).

With the advent of YouTube, players are no longer just consumers but “co-authors” (Zariko 141) as the nature of “Let’s Play videos allow for a conceptualization of the play experience as a singular, unique story, as told by, not navigated through the player” (Zariko 141). As Zariko stated, Let’s Plays place its focus on the player in the moment not what a “player can do within a game” (161). Therefore, the study builds on the idea that players are co-authors (Myers 76; Zariko 142; Simons 12) as they experience the game and develop a narrative schema (Lee).



In this study, I define co-authorship as the collaborative interactions between different entities resulting in the co-creation of a product. As the player narrative is the result of the co-authorship between the player and the game, the study explores the flexibility of the player's narrative schema, how a player reacts to "dissonance" (Lee) in a game, and how in-game and external elements affect the schema of players. As the player type is key to understanding gamers and their desires (Glas 83-84; Lindley 1-2), the study explores how Wooden Potatoes' discusses his playthrough experience in relation to his player type and how this affects his commentary.

With regard to the second issue on how participatory culture being viewed, because researchers view participatory culture as "immaterial labor" (Terranova 39) the issue becomes that fans work for "free" (Andrejevic 416). However, as Jenkins study provides, participatory culture also gives fans access to power that was once exclusive to "gatekeepers" allowing them to take part in shaping something they love (Jenkins, "Interactive Audiences? The 'Collective Intelligence' of Media Fans" 1; Jenkins, "Interactive Audiences? The 'Collective Intelligence' of Media Fans" 12), thus, it views participatory cultures in a positive light (Postigo, "Converting Play into YouTube Money" 334). Researchers point out that the current systems in place may not necessarily be healthy for the user (Terranova 39-54; Sotama 389; Coleman and Dyer-Witthford 945; Banks and Deuze 12-13) as they have been observed to favor corporations rather than users who generate content (Terranova 54; Banks and Deuze 17).



While games such as MMORPGs need participatory culture in order to maintain their relevance and playability, thus MMORPGs include the input of gamers as part of their systems (Daneva 61). However, since MMORPG players “feel... a sense of ownership” towards the game and the world, they do not feel that it is labor (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 160). Therefore, the study observes Wooden Potatoes, a Guild Wars 2 YouTuber and longtime fan of the game. The study focuses on his thoughts and insights and how he discusses the game in relationship to the greater community and the game’s development.

With regard to the idea of independence through the affordances of YouTube (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 335, 337-340; Postigo, “Playing for Work” 213; Andrejevic 421), content creators have been observed to show both independence (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 339) and dependence on the system provided (Postigo, “Playing for Work” 213). YouTubers have been observed to author their own story (Zariko 158) and create Let’s Play videos for fun (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 339). However, as observed by researchers, channel base their content on their niche market (Pietruszka 68; Johnson and Woodcock, “Fighting games and Go” 17). have been observed to take on roles that are ‘expected’ of them by the audience (Johnson and Woodcock, “Fighting Games and Go” 17), have been observed to diffuse moral choices they make in the game (Piittinen 14), and they build their audience (Anderson; Johnson and Woodcock, “Fighting games and Go” 17) as subscribers are key to a YouTuber’s success (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube



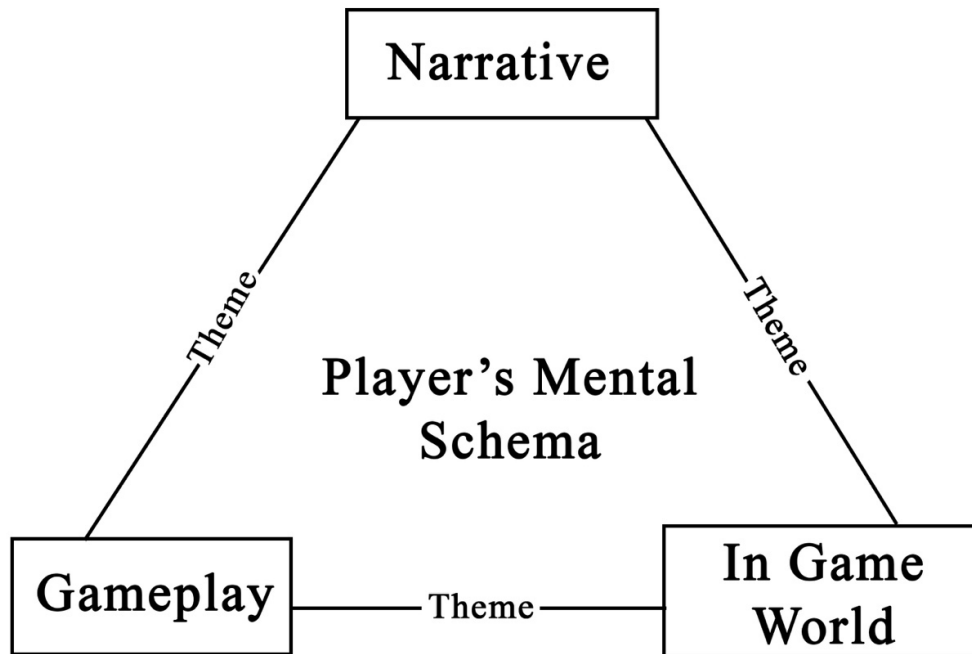
Money” 345). These YouTube gamers engage their audiences in such a way that the viewers feel involved in the video (Glas 83-84). Therefore, this study observes Wooden Potatoes who is a fan of *Guild Wars 2* who started out by posting videos on YouTube and eventually became an ArenaNet partner. The study explores how he presents himself in relationship to his audience and affiliations.

To summarize, the study hopes to add to the literature by exploring the commentary of Wooden Potatoes through the exploration of his player narrative, player schema, exploring how dedicated players comment on a game, and how a YouTube gamer that is corporately affiliated discusses gameplay, design, and narrative. The study also explores how the player type affects the commentary of the playthrough. In relation to the player type, player values are also explored in this study.



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

During the initial stages of the thesis, this conceptual framework was designed. As the study's goal was to see how Wooden Potatoes reflected on his playthroughs, based on the current literature it appeared that gameplay, the in-game world, narrative, and the connecting theme were key to influencing the player mental schema, and would ultimately reflect in the YouTube video the player posted. This alluded more to the technical aspects of the game with player experience being a result of these four elements. The figure was designed to provide better insights on a player's perception of gameplay, the in-game world, and its narrative.



(Figure 16: Conceptual framework)

Theme in this framework generally refers to an overarching message that connects seemingly separate elements namely the in-game world, the narrative, and the gameplay together in the framework. This creates a unified universe for the player to experience throughout their playthrough sessions.

The “in-game world” specifically refers to the visual design elements in the game. This is to prevent it from being confused with game design that may relate to gameplay and game mechanics as well. This includes elements such as the user interface, the



terrain, the character designs, anything in relation to graphics, art, 3d models, textures, rendering, and anything related to the visual design elements of the game world.

Gameplay refers to the game mechanics, simulations, in-game activities, how characters move or interact with the in-game world. Generally speaking, the gameplay defined in this framework will follow mainly Fabricatore's where interactivity and activity are the center of player experience (4-5).

Narrative in this paper refers to both the game's narrative and the narrative experience that a player experiences within the in-game world; as narratologists believe that a player's lived experience can also be considered as a narrative (Lee; Simons 2-3). *Guild Wars 2* has a narrative which is scattered throughout the world and allows players to learn about it organically through the game. It must be noted that though *Guild Wars 2* has a main storyline or narrative path that is connected to the Open World narrative content.

At the center is the player's mental schema (Salen and Zimmerman 2-3) which is shaped by gameplay, the interaction with the in-game world, and the narrative. The shaping of the schema is then reflected in the final video.

All the elements in the framework served as a guide to understanding a player's playthrough and the definitions above generally remained the same throughout the study. However, other factors had to be taken into consideration such as the findings of the thematic analysis were reflected in the revised conceptual framework.



SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study did not cover dungeons, fractals, raids, monthly activities, special events, special achievements, guild missions, special items, meta events, Player versus Player, and World versus World. Although *Guild Wars 2* is a multiplayer game, it is just a part of the experience that Wooden Potatoes has. This paper did not explore the topic on multiplayer experiences as it is too expansive to fully cover in this paper and Wooden Potatoes barely touches it in the samples selected. Nevertheless, it is part of the gamer experience and will be mentioned from time to time throughout the paper. The paper will primarily focus on Wooden Potatoes and his comments regarding his experience and his personal opinion regarding the greater community of players.

The study only covered content from YouTube as that is the primary place where these *Guild Wars 2* content creators and post their videos. Although Wooden Potatoes has a Twitch channel and a secondary YouTube Channel known as Wooden Potatoes 2, the study focused on his main channel where majority of his subscribers were. The study focused only on videos that had audio and commentary and that was part of the week of *Path of Fire* series to help narrow down the data and content. Wooden Potatoes produces a wide variety of content thus by focusing the videos and their creation in a specific time period and topic, the study was able to find a better consistency regarding the data as MMORPGs constantly update and patch the game. The study only focused on the 9



videos mentioned above in order to see for patterns regarding the data. This is because the 8 videos were created in succession and were released during his first playthrough week. This is to better illustrate the patterns and experience Wooden Potatoes had. This is also to keep the data accurate as *Guild Wars 2* updates the game as they receive feedback. The 9th video on the Griffon mount was included as his experience there can be strongly linked to his playthrough and experience in the main narrative. The study did not include the comments that fans and players put in the comment section of YouTube as the focus was on Wooden Potatoes' commentary and his playthrough experience.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As the study was done on a single individual who is deeply immersed in the world of *Guild Wars 2*, results may vary depending on the loyalty and passion of other YouTubers regarding the game. Also, since the videos were not done in real time but rather after the events were experienced, they are highly curated as expected of the YouTube medium. The videos being spoiler-free also limited Wooden Potatoes' footage and his ability to create juxtaposing texts. However, this gave him the ability to be creative in different ways and allowed him to comment on the gameplay, narrative, and in-game world. Another limitation of this study was that the samples selected were produced during the release week of *Path of Fire* and it was Wooden Potatoes first experience, thereby getting his first reactions from these experiences. If he played the expansion more than once, he could probably nitpick and sift through the game a bit



more, but in the samples selected it only encompasses his first playthrough of the expansion. As an ArenaNet partner, he may have also held back on commenting regarding certain experiences considering that there might be repercussions to his account, his channel, and the popularity of the game.

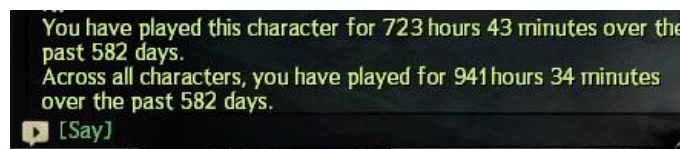


METHODOLOGY

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

In order to properly analyze the content of the data, I utilized the qualitative method of thematic analysis. This was used to help recognize reoccurring themes and patterns in the data as well as bring to light “the relationships between concepts” (Alhojailan 40). This method also helps “manage large volumes of data without losing the context, for getting close to or immersing oneself in the data” (Lapadat 926). I used Braun and Clarke’s “six-phase guide” as a “framework” to ensure data accuracy and credibility (Maguire and Delahunt 3354).

I first “became familiar with the data” (Maguire and Delahunt 3354) by viewing the videos and creating the transcripts for them.



(Figure 17: /age - time spent in-game)

I also played the *Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire* expansion during the initial release and completed a playthrough of the *Path of Fire* story. I have spent a total of 941 hours and 34 minutes in the game over the span of 582 days. Aside from the *Path of Fire* expansion, I have completed a full run through of the core Tyria stories, the *Heart of*



Thorns expansion, and all the *Living World* season episodes until *Living World* season 4 episode 4 with the exception of *Living World* season 1 and the first *Guild Wars* game. These prerequisites were needed to better understand the circumstances of its context of the videos being studied. I went through the game in order to clarify, verify, and validate the data.

I then transcribed the video audio in order to closely scrutinize the information as that is required by this method of analysis. I also viewed the video and took notes during the transcription process regarding the visuals in the text. This is because process revolves around scrutinizing text and the pre-recorded videos by going back and forth comparing them “against codes and categories” in order to develop a well-illustrated study (Lapadat 926).

The initial codes were based on the review of related literature in relation to gameplay, design, and narrative. I also used “theoretical thematic analysis” in order to generate initial codes from the data as well as “open coding” during the process (Maguire and Delahunt 3355). I used Microsoft word, its highlighter tool, and its comment tool in order to properly trace and reflect on each of the data sets. I then began to search for “themes and patterns” within the codes (Maguire and Delahunt 3356). Initially the codes that were generated came from the player and his background, as well as gameplay, design, and narrative. This is because the conceptual framework heavily relied on the idea based on Fabricatore’s (4-5) and Grip (*4-Layers, A Narrative Design Approach*) research regarding the focus of players in a game.



I continuously reviewed the source videos and encoded a transcript while going back and forth between the data sets and taking down notes. I closely scrutinized how Wooden Potatoes talked about gameplay, the design of the in-world, and the story. The verbal queues that I looked at were how the player reacted towards a particular portion of the game, how the player talked about a particular area or issue presented in the video, and the way he used his voice to convey a message. Two of the non-verbal cues that I looked at were how the player moved his avatar during gameplay and how the player juxtaposed video clips with his audio commentary. However, since Wooden Potatoes tends to put random Open World gameplay due to the video's spoiler-free promises, the video was not my primary focus. Instead, I chose to focus mainly on his commentary and the juxtaposition of his commentary with relevant clips.

“In a digital space wherein many hundreds of actions are being performed per minute, the audio feed contextualizes those actions as extensions of the player's body, and said contextualization occurs through the player's body by virtue it occurring through the spoken word” (Anderson).

As *Guild Wars 2* has a branching narrative, I looked at how Wooden Potatoes responded to choices within the narrative, the way the narrative was presented, and his response to the story as a whole. I also noted how he responded to gameplay and how he felt regarding its completion. I also focused on how Wooden Potatoes reacted to the game mechanics, the gameplay, dynamic events, and the way these elements were structured or presented. I also took note regarding how Wooden Potatoes reacted regarding the design



of the in-game world. Most importantly I focused on how Wooden Potatoes shared his findings with the viewers and the things he noticed about the in-game world and its environment.

I constantly went back and forth between the videos, transcript, and notes in order to make sure that the themes and data sets were accurately transcribed and interpreted. By reviewing the data, I noted which themes and patterns emerged from the texts. It must be noted that the themes and codes evolved several times as I refined and linked the categories. This is because the initial themes in the study had codes that would overlap upon “review” (Maguire and Delahunt 3358). This indicated a need for refinement and thus resulted in the following final codes that were used for the findings below.

<p>Theme: Player values</p> <p>Codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concerned with incentive and payoff• Concerned with gameplay and exploration• Concerned with agency, organic learning, and immersion• Concerned with narrative, lore, in-	<p>Theme: Player narrative</p> <p>Codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sub-theme: Encountering elements that broke immersion<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Encountering elements that did not make logical sense○ Gameplay experience did not match narrative
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game world morals and values, and thematic design of the narrative.

- Highlights content and experiences based on values

- Dialogue did not fit scenario
- Dialogue made in a can
- Elements not in their proper place
- Improperly used cutscenes
- Lack of consistency with canon
- Lack of believability

- **Sub-theme:** Encountering elements that resulted in immersion
 - In-game elements that were related to lore and that were narratively connected
 - Logical



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Believable○ Connected by theme● Sub-theme: Schema flexibility<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Elements included by the schema○ Elements excluded by the schema
<p>Theme: Suggestions to better the game</p> <p>Codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Discusses and addresses community concerns● Suggests what the game should address● Checks what the game has addressed● Provides feedback regarding the game● Uses expertise to provide suggestions that will benefit the game and	<p>Theme: Sharing personal thoughts on the game</p> <p>Codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Adds his own analysis to the game<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Injecting ideas○ Provides speculation○ Provides theories● Wants to share his experience and opinion with others



<p>community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sub-theme: Has a sense of ownership<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Defending the game○ Critiques game○ Concern regarding keeping a healthy player base○ More play time for fans and players○ Concerned with the status of the game and how other players feel about it○ Concerned regarding how the developers handle the game	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sub-theme: Engages online discussions<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Speculation and assumptions○ Based on forums and feedback○ Checks data mined info on the game to check for updates and accuracy
<p>Theme: Building the audience</p> <p>Codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage viewers to subscribe to	<p>Theme: Feedback on the game</p> <p>Codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Careful regarding criticism



<p>his channels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultivates patrons and subscribers• Encourages viewers to watch him and support him• Engages audience• Presentation style• Focused on niche market• Plays roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-reflective• Provides feedback constructively• Protects game's integrity• Defends developers• Generous when giving praise
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Thus, based on the codes above, I analyzed “how they interact and related to the main theme... [and] one another” thus “defin[ing] these themes” and their relationships (Maguire and Delahunt 33511). Steps five and six of the process, which involves “defining themes” and providing the “write-up” (Maguire and Delahunt 3354), can be seen in the revised conceptual framework, the findings, and analysis of this paper.

SAMPLING

I utilized a “purposeful sampling strategy” (Tongco 147) for the study. In purposeful sampling researchers must “decide on a research problem”, “determine the type of information needed”, “define qualities of the informants”, “find informants that



have these qualities”, have a “reliab[le] and compet[ent]” informant, “use appropriate data gathering techniques”, and as it is an “inherently biased method”, the researcher must “document the bias” and limit the “interpretations to the sampled populace” (Tongco 151). Purposeful sampling is also done because of the “qualities the informant possesses” (Tongco 147) which is why this method was chosen.

The qualities that were needed for the subject of study as indicated by the literature were the following:

1. Must be an experienced gamer with significant dedication to the game.
2. The gamer must be able to discuss gameplay, design, narrative, and relay a player narrative.
3. The gamer must be a fan of the game he is playing.
4. The game played must have hypernarrative affordances.
5. The game must be an MMORPG due to the nature of MMORPG players and their relationship with developers.
6. The individual must also have a YouTube channel.
7. The individual must have had a significant role or contribution in the game’s community.
8. Have a small or medium sized YouTube channel.

Due to the criteria above, I selected nine videos from Wooden Potatoes’ YouTube channel regarding the *Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire* expansion. I utilized this form of



sampling due to the information that Wooden Potatoes has, the traits he displayed, and the constraints provided by an MMORPG's updates (Daneva 61). I also selected these videos due to Wooden Potatoes participation in promoting the *Path of Fire* expansion (*Wooden Potatoes' "Get Path of Fire" Contest*) and his engagement with the developers and the community. The samples also provided the opportunity to understand the perspective of an experienced player regarding his first playthrough of the expansion and how a small to medium-sized channel produces content that can accelerate game growth.

THE GAME

Guild Wars 2 is categorized as a "Theme Park" style of MMORPG as its creators make the "rides" or provide a main storyline and the players come along for the ride ("The Merits of 'Sand Box' versus 'Theme Park' MMO's"). Within the game there are two major sources of the narrative: instanced story ("Instance") which is considered *Guild Wars 2*'s main story and Open World story ("Open World").

I chose to study *Guild Wars 2*'s primarily because of *Guild Wars 2*'s latest expansion *Path of Fire* and the hypernarrative affordances of the game. The expansion was released on September 22, 2017 ("Beta") and provided an excellent opportunity to get a firsthand reaction and experience from Wooden Potatoes, an experienced player of the game.



(Figure 18: Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire official website)

The game takes place after Living World season 3 where the player has to defeat the god, Balthazar. This takes players to a new region of the world called Elona. Elona existed in the first *Guild Wars* game but the area was only added in *Guild Wars 2* in this recent expansion. *Path of Fire* gives players additional “elite specializations” and mounts; which is a new feature in the second game (“Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire”). According to the ArenaNet developers, they designed the mount system in order to provide the player a feeling of “horizontal progression” throughout the game (“Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire”).

The *Path of Fire* expansion provided a different hypernarrative experience for the player and also provided a unique gameplay experience considering the changes and updates they made in the expansion. These elements were explored by Wooden Potatoes as he provided commentary on his playthrough during the week the game was released.



Thus, he was be able to provide first hand insights regarding the elements in gameplay, narrative, and design elements of the in-game world.

Video Title	Date	Views	Channel
Game Update Notes -- February 6, 2018	March 5, 2018	5	82K
Game Release Notes - January 23, 2018	March 12, 2018	5	126.1K
Game Release Notes - January 9, 2018	February 5, 2018	3	59.7K
Game Release Notes - December 12, 2017	January 23, 2018	6	71.1K
Game Release Notes - November 28, 2017	January 9, 2018	5	103.8K
Game Release Notes - November 7, 2017	December 12, 2017	4	95.7K
Game Update Notes - October 17, 2017	November 27, 2017	4	133.9K
Game Release Notes - September 22, 2017	November 7, 2017	4	107.2K
Game Update Notes - August 8, 2017	November 2, 2017	14	204.1K
	August 8, 2017	14	13.9K

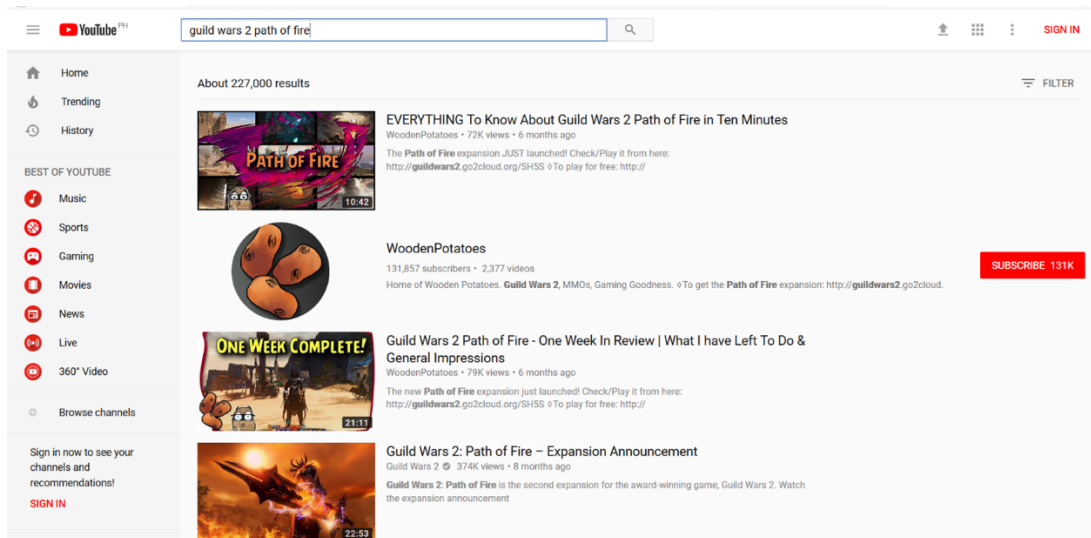
(Figure 19: Guild Wars 2 Release Notes)

THE SUBJECT

Wooden Potatoes is one of the most popular *Guild Wars 2* dedicated YouTubers. During the *Path of Fire* Beta Test Weekends and throughout the release and updates of the expansion, he consistently posted and updated the community regarding the game and its development. This is why I chose to focus on his channel for this study. As the study focused on *Path of Fire*, the latest *Guild Wars 2* expansion, Wooden Potatoes videos served as the best example for this study. By typing “*Guild Wars 2*” in YouTube’s search bar, Wooden Potatoes’ videos tend to appear often in the results. But by adding the words “*Path of Fire*” in the search bar, his channel shows up as part of the recommended videos



even overtaking the official *Guild Wars 2* YouTube account in terms of rank. His videos greatly dominate the search result page when these key words were typed in.



(Figure 20: YouTube search results)

If you ask a *Guild Wars 2* player which channel to watch, they would recommend him as one of their go to YouTubers. Wooden Potatoes is known for his lore videos and his informative news videos. He produces all around *Guild Wars* content and also announces information from the developers to the community. He is known for communicating with the developers on a regular basis and is known for promoting the *Path of Fire* expansion (*Wooden Potatoes' "Get Path of Fire" Contest*). He is a YouTuber that has helped grow the player base of the *Guild Wars 2* community and continues to do so today. Originally, Wooden Potatoes was an independent content creator on YouTube, but eventually, ArenaNet partnered with Wooden Potatoes

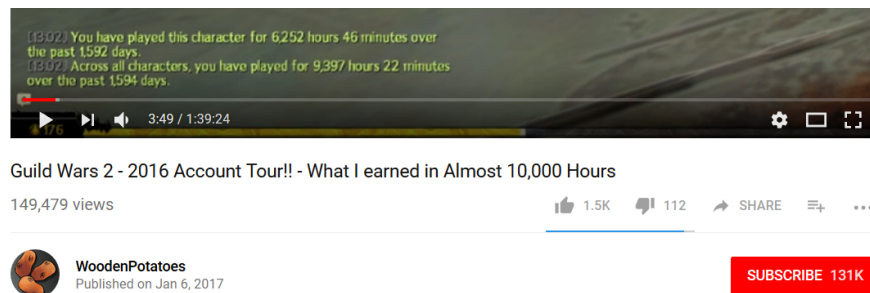


(“ArenaNet Partner Program”) in order to help promote the game, inform the community, and provide updates regarding particular areas in *Guild Wars 2*.



(Figure 21: Wooden Potatoes’ “Get Path of Fire” Contest)

As of January 2017, he had roughly 10,000 hours of playtime and has long surpassed this number as of 2018 (*Guild Wars 2 - 2016 Account Tour!! - What I Earned in Almost 10,000 Hours*).

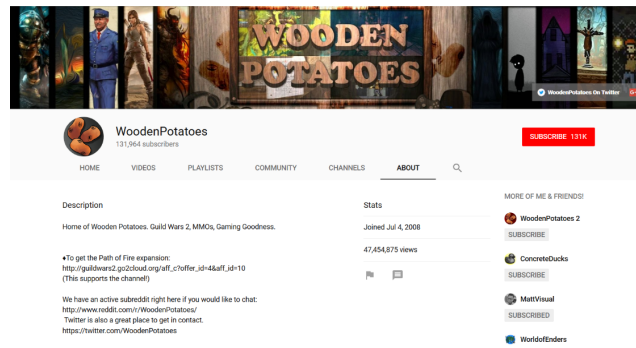


(Figure 22: 10,000 Hours of Playtime)

He has quite a loyal following with his channel garnering over 47 million views and 131,000 subscribers. He has also been an active part of the community for about



seven years (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Overview & Introduction | All The Key Things To Know About Expansion 2*). People have yet to see his face on his streams as he only provides his comments and opinions on his videos. It must be noted that Wooden Potatoes is from the European server of *Guild Wars 2* (*Wooden Potatoes*).



(Figure 23: *Wooden Potatoes' YouTube account*)

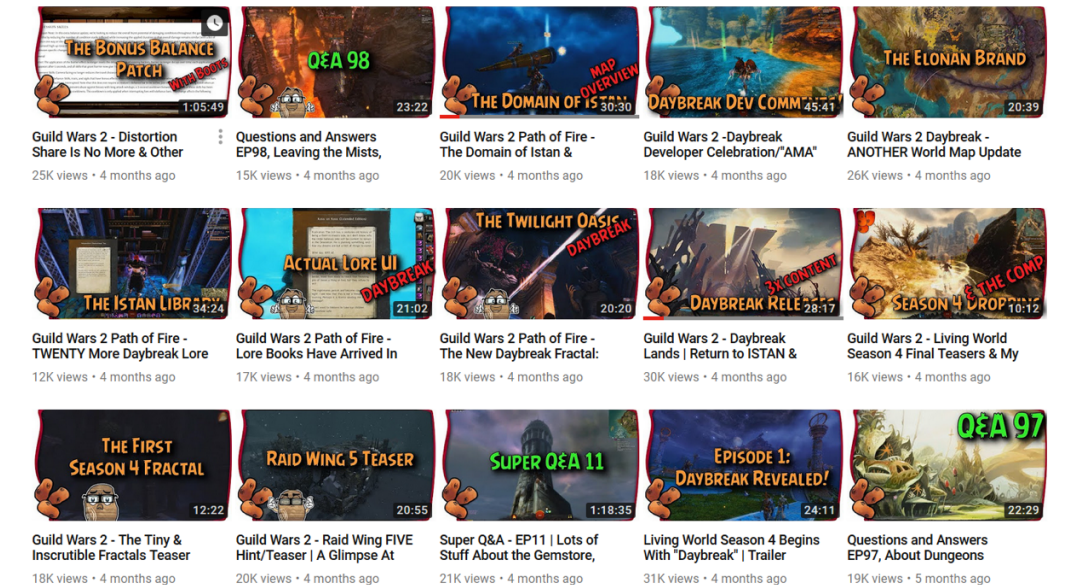
Wooden Potatoes' *Guild Wars 2* experience is not only limited to his hours spent on the game but on how he has progressed through the hypernarrative and story. *Guild Wars 2* was designed in a way that one should be able to experience the main narrative events of the game in a particular order. Since Wooden Potatoes has been playing the game for a long time and has experienced each *Guild Wars 2* event as it was released, he is a player and YouTuber that is ideal for the study. He was even present during *Living World* season 1 which is unavailable to players who did not join the live event. He has also played *Guild Wars 1* which helped kick start his career in YouTube.



His channel is known for a deep background on lore and his playthrough videos are usually highly informative regarding the details of the game as well as its narrative. This made him an ideal subject in this study due to his expertise.

DATA COLLECTION

The data that was gathered came from the official YouTube channel of Wooden Potatoes. Although Wooden Potatoes has released over a hundred videos on *Path of Fire* alone, I selected nine videos from this that would best illustrate the case of the study. During the initial release of *Path of Fire*, Wooden Potatoes released a series of spoiler-free videos of his playthrough. He also produced a video featuring the highlights of the *Path of Fire* core story and as well as a video on the Griffon.





(Figure 24: Wooden Potatoes' channel)

The following videos were selected for the study:

1. *Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 1 | Unlocking Weaver, Raptors, Adventure & Brand NO SPOILZ*
2. *Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 2 | Riding A BUNNY, Dwarven Mines & Tomb of Primeval Kings*
3. *Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 3 | [Open World Spoilers] Augury Rock, Community Update, & Skimmer!*
4. *Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 4 | Exploring the Desolation(!), Riding a JACKAL & The Riverlands*
5. *Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 5 | Palawa Joko's Harem, The Forgotten Lair & Mouth of Torment!*
6. *Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 6 | Exploring Vabbi, Completing the Story [No Spoilers]*
7. *Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 7 | 100% Map Exploration, Zomorros & Palawa Kills Zhaitan*
8. *Holy Crap I Finished The Story | Path of Fire Lore, Reactions & Initial Thoughts [HEAVY SPOILERS]*
9. *Guild Wars 2 - The Lore Behind Acquiring the Griffon Mount | Secret Mount and Extra Story Steps*



De La Salle University

I selected these videos as they highlighted what Wooden Potatoes wanted to talk about regarding his playthrough for that day. These videos included his first-hand opinion regarding the expansion and how he felt about it. During this series, Wooden Potatoes had a play time ranging from six to ten hours per day; not including the time it took for him to acquire the Griffon mount as that video was released later on. After his playthrough, he would produce his commentary regarding the expansion and upload it online.

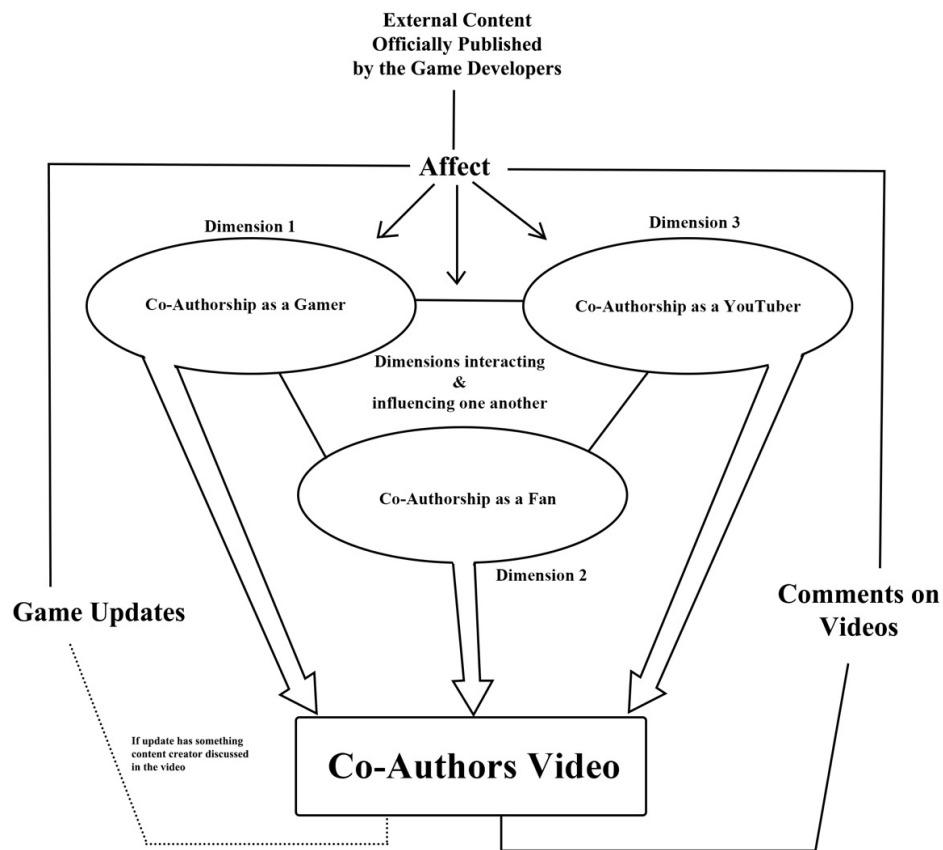


FINDINGS

In general, the findings show that the subject engaged in three dimensions of co-authorship during the playthrough. The first dimension of co-authorship occurs as a gamer; being a player of the game. The second dimension of co-authorship involves being a fan. The third dimension of co-authorship involves being a YouTuber. These dimensions are illustrated in the revised conceptual framework shown below. In the following paragraphs, each of these dimensions will be discussed in detail.



REVISED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



(Figure 25: Revised framework)

In this diagram, it shows the three dimensions of co-authorship in a playthrough video. The dimensions show co-authorship as a gamer, as a fan, and as a YouTuber. This is based on the findings of the thematic analysis regarding how the themes are related to one another and how particular patterns in the data were grouped (Maguire and Delahunt



33511). It must be noted that in this framework, the term gamer specifically refers to the gamer as a player of the game. It must be noted that term gamer will be used interchangeably with the word player throughout the paper.

Dimension 1: Co-Authorship as Gamer includes the influence of player type, player motive, player narrative, and player values. This also includes the player schema in relationship to gameplay, the in-game world, theme, and narrative.

Dimension 2: Co-Authorship as Fan shows how Wooden Potatoes as a fan of the game interacts with the greater community of players and takes on a role as a developer because of his sense of ownership for the game.

Dimension 3: Co-Authorship as YouTuber shows how the affordances of YouTube as a platform affiliations affect his commentary, behavior, presentation, critiques of the game, and the structure of the video.

The figure above shows how the three dimensions interact. All of these dimensions affect interact with the elements of the game and each other even prior to the creation of the video. The interactions of each dimension experienced as a gamer, fan, and YouTuber result in the production of a video in which each dimension then co-authors the final product. Once the content creator experiences feedback from the affordances provided by YouTube or sees an update in the game (regardless of whether or not what they discussed was featured in the update), this affects the dimensions and the next video that is produced. These three dimensions help answer the research questions below.



RQ1: How does Wooden Potatoes in his playthroughs relate gameplay, design and narrative?

The findings of the study show that Wooden Potatoes relates gameplay, design, and narrative as a gamer and as a fan. **Dimension 1: Co-Authorship as Gamer** answers this as he discusses these elements in relation to on his player values. These player values are strongly linked to Wooden Potatoes' player type. While **Dimension 2: Co-Authorship as Fan** answers how Wooden Potatoes as a fan of *Guild Wars 2* take on the role of developer and discusses these elements as if he were developing the game.

DIMENSION 1: CO-AUTHORSHIP AS GAMER

THE PLAYER TYPE AND HOW IT AFFECTS PLAYER VALUES AND PLAYTHROUGH COMMENTARY

The findings of the study show that the first dimension of co-authorship occurs as a gamer. The study also showed that the individual's player type was strongly linked to the values that the player highlighted during the study.

THE PLAYER TYPE

In order to understand this dimension and how it affects the dimension of co-authorship of as gamer, we must first understand the player. As player type tackles player motivation and player values, I utilized the player taxonomy schemes of Bartle and Lindley to provide deeper insights regarding actions and motives of the player (Lindley 2-13).



As player type is dynamic, players move fluidly between one category and another (Lindley 2). Thus, based on the videos selected for the study, Wooden Potatoes fell under these four player types: **explorer**, **achiever**, **audience style**, and **immersionist**. This because he showed motivations, interests, and actions that fit with each taxonomy’s descriptions.

As a player, Wooden Potatoes wanted to know all that there is to know about the expansion, the new mechanics that were implemented, exploring the in-game world map, and the lore and story that the expansion contained. Wooden Potatoes stated that he intended to play “comprehensively” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 1 | Unlocking Weaver, Raptors, Adventure & Brand NO SPOILZ 00:00:46-00:00:52*). Therefore, he fell under the category of being an explorer as he was “driven to find out as much as [he could] about the virtual world, including mapping its geography and understanding the game mechanics” (Lindley 2).

In Bartle’s original taxonomy scheme, explorer encompassed the player’s desire for narrative (Lindley 2). Lindley’s added categories that specifically catered to the narrative; one of which was audience style (Lindley 13). Wooden Potatoes would exhibit traits of this player type as he would often bring up the historical background of a seemingly obscure area, read in-game books, and go through the effort of finding flavor text. Flavor text adds an additional layer of lore and information and serves as an “effect” which is not limited to item descriptions but also includes character dialogue (“Flavor



Text”). The quote below is a sample of how he behaved during the playthrough and shows his desire to learn more about the narrative.

Wooden Potatoes: “The events have been very cool as well like and whenever I found an event I've deliberately slowed down and stopped myself to finish the defense event or finish an escort that I might not have seen before even if it's taking me backwards through an area of the map that I've already been to and for that reason I've got a lot of dialogue. Don't forget a lot of NPCs give ambient dialogue if you stand around them for a while and you know I've been trying to really extract as much as possible...” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 1 | Unlocking Weaver, Raptors, Adventure & Brand NO SPOILZ* 00:19:26-00:20:08).

In *Guild Wars 2*, they have a system called achievements. “Achievements... help gauge what a player has accomplished in the game... Completing an achievement may reward the player with achievement points, a mastery point, an item, or a title” (“Achievement”). During the playthrough, Wooden Potatoes actively sought achievements, made note when achievement points were lacking, and also tried to complete difficult challenges. This is because “achievers [are] driven by in-game goals, usually consisting of some form of points gathering (eg. experience points, levels, or money)” (Lindley 2).

The following example shows how Wooden Potatoes sought these achievements. Here Wooden was Potatoes looking for mastery points to upgrade his mounts. In *Path of*



Fire, mastery points are used for upgrading a player's mounts in order for them to access certain areas. Mastery points can be attained in a variety of ways such as finishing the story, communing, or complete a set of tasks ("Mastery"). Instead of taking the easy route by following the story, which could have given Wooden Potatoes instant mastery points, Wooden Potatoes chose to stay in the Desolation, complete the achievements within the map, and attain all the mastery points in the area.

Wooden Potatoes: "So this is actually a bit of a challenge because I haven't gone to Vabbi yet I really did have to exhaust a lot of the achievements. You know I had to spend a long time going back to say the Elon Riverlands and finding all of the bits of unbound magic to get that mastery or collecting all of the Sunspear armor to get that mastery. Though the Sunspear who was... Who'd lost their armor unfortunately bugged for me and I couldn't quite finish it. Or killing harpies to try and get a rare drop from them so that I could get another mastery point and just like with *Heart of Thorns* it was not the experience that meant anything. It was the mastery points that meant it all and because I've not properly explored Vabbi. I was, you know really stressed to get the most out of the maps in order to finally get this, but I have the Jackal and I have the ability to go through those portals. (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 5 | Palawa Joko's Harem, The Forgotten Lair & Mouth of Torment!* 00:07:10-00:07:49)

Wooden Potatoes also showed signs of being an "immersionist" (Lindley 13). The description of an immersionist was that these individuals seek to "support a player



experience” and that players must spend a significant time in the game (Lindley 13). The example below shows Wooden Potatoes praising immersive and engaging player experiences.

Wooden Potatoes: It is so immersive! It is so awesome! (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 2 | Riding A BUNNY, Dwarvern Mines & Tomb of Primeval Kings* 00:38:21-00:38:22)

As the nature of *Guild Wars 2* provides players with certain amount of agency in character creation, customization, in the hypernarrative, and in its various game modes, this desire is also a product of the game and his interactions with it. Additionally, the description provided by Lindley was that individuals under this player type must “develop a persona” (13). Wooden Potatoes was able to develop his own persona and this was visible throughout the playthrough especially through his player narrative and mental schema (see findings in **RQ2**).

PLAYER VALUES BASED ON PLAYER TYPE

The study showed that values that players highlight in a playthrough are based on their player types. This is because the things that Wooden Potatoes highlighted in his playthrough were strongly linked to the traits he had as an explorer, audience style, achiever, and immersionist player. The following are player values that Wooden Potatoes highlighted during his playthrough:

- **Achiever** - concerned with incentive and payoff.



- **Explorer** - concerned with gameplay and exploration.
- **Audience style** - concerned with the tone of the narrative, the morals and values of the in-game world, lore, and the thematic design of the game and narrative.
- **Immersionist** - concerned with agency, organic learning, and immersion.

Technically speaking, the player values Wooden Potatoes had as an achiever, explorer, immersionist, and audience type player were not mutually exclusive as there were times that traits in a certain player category would spill over and mix and support motives from another category similar to what Bartle observed when he originally conceptualized the player taxonomy (Lindley 2). Explorer also encompasses the values of an immersionist and an audience style player, so for the sake of clarity, I chose to place the player values that were discussed in relation to narrative and immersion under Lindley's taxonomies. Regardless, all of the traits related to his player type affected his player values and ultimately the video he produced.

All these values, were discussed with regard to the dimension of co-authorship as a gamer. As mentioned in the revised conceptual framework, these dimensions interact and affect each other as they co-author the video and the playthrough experience. This is why these values can be seen in the discussion when he was engaging with the community of *Guild Wars 2* players as a fan.

As an achiever, Wooden Potatoes concerned himself with incentive and payoff. Incentive and payoff work hand in hand as incentive serves as one of the motivations for



the players to participate in a certain game mode while payoff will help affirm the player that their experience was worth it. A definition provided by Shor for payoff from his website GameTheory.net is the following:

“In any game, payoffs are numbers which represent the motivations of players. Payoffs may represent profit, quantity, ‘utility,’ or other continuous measures, or may simply rank the desirability of outcomes. In all cases, the payoffs must reflect the motivations of the particular player” (Shor).

Wooden Potatoes discussed these topics extensively in relation to reward, gameplay, and narrative throughout the playthrough experience. The example below shows one of the many instances where Wooden Potatoes as an achiever felt cheated by an in-game experience thus he discusses incentive and payoff. In the example, Wooden Potatoes felt that the payoff and incentive were not tantamount to the difficulty or pleasure of the experience.

Wooden Potatoes: “Behind it there are actually all these little caves you can walk into with various chests and flesh reavers and things to fight. In fact one thing I will say is all these little cubby holes with these small chests, I feel like the chest don't give me quite enough to really make me feel rewarded for having found them. I think what the game needed was an achievement for finding all of them because it makes me sad to realize most people won't come in behind this waterfall” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 4 | Exploring the Desolation (!), Riding a JACKAL & The Riverlands 00:08:53-00:09:18*).



As an explorer, Wooden Potatoes concerned himself with elements concerning gameplay such as pacing of gameplay, balance, replayability, and technical issues within the game. This aligns strongly with the study of Fabricatore (4). In the examples below, Wooden Potatoes discusses pacing and gameplay in regard to the mount system *Path of Fire* introduced. Wooden Potatoes talked about pacing a lot during his playthrough as the terrain, gameplay, and the mounts all contributed to this notable part of his player experience. This helped him see the balance that the game was trying to create with the inclusion of the new mounts. Mounts were also part of the game's new mechanics which is why, as an explorer, Wooden Potatoes was interested in them.

Wooden Potatoes: “This map is basically impossible to traverse without having the Springer. You've got a very limited area of places you can go but because of this because of the nature_of the way that that mount works it involves a lot more slow precision based gameplay where you're lingering in areas for longer as you're lining up specific jumps... It's very different to the first map and it really has meant that in some ways this map has given me more cause to actually fight and not just run past mobs than I've even experienced in like Heart of Thorns and 2012 *Guild Wars 2*. Sooo really slows the exploration down but in a fun way” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 2 | Riding A BUNNY, Dwarven Mines & Tomb of Primeval Kings* 00:07:13-00:07:33, 00:13:45-00:14:00).

As an audience style player, Wooden Potatoes concerned himself with the tone of the narrative, the morals and values of the in-game world, and the thematic design of the



game and narrative. In the example below, Wooden Potatoes showcases the traits of an audience style player while discussing the tone of the narrative.

Wooden Potatoes: “Ok it relates to some ghosts that are behind Dunkoro... Now, I've talked many many many many times about the tone of *Guild Wars 1* and especially when it gets most grim in the first game. Ah these intractable objects you can find in the Crystal Desert that when you click these bleached bones you've got these stories. These stories of the men and women who died there and the suffering they went through before they met their end and they are dark. Probably the darkest of them all depicts infanticide whereby a father, I believe, it's a father has just lost his mother... His wife sorry to starvation... or to predators or something... and now he's alone with his two children and he chooses to poison his own children so that he doesn't have to watch them suffer anymore before offing himself as well. Like it's that dark! This is the kind of stuff that we were dealing with in the first game and I've always lamented the loss of real kind of grim stories like that. Not that the entire game needs to deal with them but I've lamented the loss of those because *Guild Wars 2*'s tone very consistently has never hit those kind of levels. *Path of Fire* as I mentioned earlier kinda does and what I was really happy to see is here at the Lair of the Forgotten that story! That exact story! That's just one bleached bone of many! Right, the ghosts from that story! The children! The ghosts of the children from that story are here at the lair of the forgotten and they talk about their experience and they allude to it and



Guild Wars 2 now has dealt with that same subject material and for all the complaints I've had in the past... Aww.. *Guild Wars 2* doesn't you know go dark enough bla bla bla bla bla. You know I can't think of any better way for people like me to have an opinion like that to have been addressed and for them to say no look we will continue dealing with stories like this and they have here. And they have many times in *Path of Fire*"(*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 5 | Palawa Joko's Harem, The Forgotten Lair & Mouth of Torment!* 00:25:08-00:27:01).

As an immersionist, Wooden Potatoes concerned himself with elements regarding agency, organic learning, and immersion. Throughout the playthrough Wooden Potatoes would mention elements in the game that provided him with an immersive experience such as the thematic design of the in-game world, gameplay, and its connection to the narrative.

In short, the dimension of co-authorship as gamer is based on an individual's player type. These traits affect Wooden Potatoes' value system and determine the content and commentary of his playthroughs. In addition, the player type provides insights regarding the decisions and statements that players make during the playthrough. In the case of Wooden Potatoes, his discussions revolved around the experiences that affected or supported the values he had as a gamer. Thus, Wooden Potatoes relates gameplay, design, and narrative as a gamer in relation to his player values and player taxonomy.



DIMENSION 2: CO-AUTHORSHIP AS FAN

Players in an MMORPG come up with unique solutions and suggestions that can potentially affect future of game development due to their “intimate game knowledge” (Daneva 64, 67). According to Ralph Koster, sometimes fans are more familiar with the game than the developers themselves (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 162) and because MMORPG development includes the player perspective in their patch updates, it becomes natural for players to be part of this process consciously and unconsciously (Daneva 61).

TAKING ON THE ROLE OF A DEVELOPER

Throughout the playthrough, the study has shown that Wooden Potatoes takes on this role as a game developer despite not being an official developer of ArenaNet. As a veteran of the game, Wooden Potatoes utilized his passion and knowledge by lending his suggestions, feedback, and concerns in his videos. Wooden Potatoes approaches certain topics as a fan but the way he projects his image to the viewers is that of a teacher, guide, and mentor. Or in this case, as a developer. This aligns with the research of Johnson and Woodcock in *Fighting games and Go* as these individuals take on roles when on camera (17). This is because Wooden Potatoes exhibits levels of ownership and concern for the game. Wooden Potatoes showed these following traits and behaviors as he played a role as a developer when he relayed gameplay, design, and narrative in his playthrough:

1. Has an understanding of the game and its playerbase



As Wooden Potatoes has been playing *Guild Wars 2* for so long he has developed an understanding of the player base and the game. Thus, he has the ability to predict the movement of the player base and can estimate how the player base will behave. The following statement made by Wooden Potatoes can be observed in the servers when new content for the game's main narrative is released.

Wooden Potatoes: “Now, there are obviously a lot of extra things to do and I'm thinking of doing another video for you all talking about where I plan to go from here because I think that's an important discussion to have. A lot of people will come in, play the story, do vague map comp and then disappear but there's so many exciting things left remaining and I figure that could be a whole topic in and of itself” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 7 | 100% Map Exploration, Zomorros & Palawa Kills Zhaitan* 00:00:38-00:00:55).

He integrates this knowledge in the playthrough and discusses gameplay, design, and narrative in relation to the player base and its movement.

2. Keeps track of the developers work, looks at how they think, and how it is applied to the game

Wooden Potatoes also keeps track of the ArenaNet developers and looks at how they work, how they think, and how the developers apply their knowledge to the game. Thus, in his discussions he talks extensively about what the developers did. In the



example below, Wooden Potatoes discusses what the developers did as they made the expansion.

Wooden Potatoes: And the devs spent their time on this expansion making something purely for veterans of the franchise without expanding things, without looking too much to acquiring new blood, and it's actually paying off for them in giving them new blood because so many people have enjoyed their experience and they're sharing it and people are enthusiastically up voting and so forth”(Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 5 | Palawa Joko's Harem, The Forgotten Lair & Mouth of Torment! 00:01:27-00:02:32).

3. Keeps track of the game's progress

Wooden Potatoes also analyzes and keeps tabs on the game's progress. Since he has played both games, he knows how the game has evolved through the years, what has been updated, how the story has progressed, and keeps track of what the developers did. The example below showcases Wooden Potatoes tracking these changes in respect to game mechanics and how he felt when they came back.

Wooden Potatoes: “So those veteran players who have done all the story, you know we're being reminded of something that was quite a few years ago now. And I know that there'll be a lot of *Path of Fire* only players who are experiencing this and that will be lost on them but there's some nice callbacks there and they do another one at the end of the story as well where we do the combo attack with



Aurene which we had just learned about in season 3 in the Bitterfrost Frontier patch and it was so good to see that come back. These things put such big smiles on my face” (*Holy Crap I Finished The Story | Path of Fire Lore, Reactions & Initial Thoughts [HEAVY SPOILERS] 00:13:28-00:13:52*).

4. Shows concern or appreciation for the game while providing his critiques, solutions, or suggestions

Wooden Potatoes showed this behavior because as he was playing, he would express his concern about the choices in design, narrative, and gameplay whenever he felt that there was something to be improved, changed, or when there was something that developers should continue to implement and pursue.

The statement below shows this in reference to the newly implemented mastery system. There were some mastery points that were significantly immersive while other mastery points were easy and almost boring to attain.

Wooden Potatoes: “I was hoping that because they had more time on *Path of Fire* that... most masteries would be like this...this is a mastery point where you speak to an NPC and it basically triggers a quest that takes you across the entire map and it's like this extra thing you're doing while exploring. You're not just looking for POIs and vistas and stuff, you're also looking for these little things to collect to get this mastery point. So they are doing some fun mastery points like the chef one- like that one I just talked about but not enough. Most of them are



just glorified skill point, hero challenge communes, and there's a lot of that copy-pasting going on more than I... I guess I would have wanted” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 3 | [Open World Spoilers] Augury Rock, Community Update, & Skimmer!* 00:06:32-00:06:36, 00:06:54-00:07:19).

Wooden Potatoes was concerned about player incentive and game relevance which is why he provides a critique. He noted that players are more incentivized to play game modes that are connected to the main narrative and to achievements. Instead of building on previous mechanics, the adventure served as a new game mode and was not connected to the mastery system which disinterested players including him.

Wooden Potatoes: “The other thing of course that came and the map that I did play a bit of was the adventure. So I did a bit of I mean I did it once so there is no incentive whatsoever to do this adventure. There's no part of the story that ever takes you over to it there are no NPC's, there there's nothing really that guides you there unless you really care about the achievements. And I think that's a shame. In *Heart of Thorns* they put mastery points on adventures so everybody interfaced with them at least a little bit. Now that drew some complaints, but I believe that's because they put mastery points on the higher tiers of the adventures so you actually had to like pay attention and really grind on them if you will. You had to learn them and people don't like that. People don't like having to invest themselves into sort of a different format of the game. So when it comes to *Path of Fire* they took all those mastery points out and at the same time they made getting gold...



Sorry... Bronze, silver, and gold really easy. I think they only had to do one of those so my experience of the adventure was this go to the adventure just for the fun of it. Try it out once on just a random route and I instantly got gold and I've instantly felt myself having no desire to ever do that adventure again now.” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 1 | Unlocking Weaver, Raptors, Adventure & Brand NO SPOILZ* 00:14:10-00:15:17).

As an experienced player, he notices gaps in logic within the narrative experience and tried to propose solutions that will help better the game. In the videos, he points out several things that left him hanging and covers these plot holes with one-liners that would keep fans satisfied yet still in the dark. This is the case with Rytlock’s sword. Here, Wooden Potatoes utilized his knowledge on the character’s background to interject information about the item and include bonding moments with this character.

Wooden Potatoes: “I’ll note back on the Sohothin thing that Rytlock gave it to us. They never took the time at this moment in the story to tease us about the origins of Sohothin. Like I think a little line right here where when we claim the sword of Rytlock. We say, ‘Where did you get this anyway?’ and he says later cub.’ I think that would have been so good! They don't even do that!” (*Holy Crap I Finished the Story | Path of Fire Lore, Reactions & Initial Thoughts [HEAVY SPOILERS]* 00:33:07-00:33:27).



He also notes several loose ends regarding characters in the narrative and provides his suggestions regarding execution and pacing as well as providing additional input from the officially released novels.

Wooden Potatoes: “They could have gone further definitely and I think that Destiny's Edge... Original Destiny's Edge really deserved to have a bigger role here. And in fact you might even see it in the footage in the background here. I really think Zojja needed to be at this scene to see Big Snaff. I really think that you know some discussion from Rytlock a bit more about what happened in the novel here. Because this is the emoti... what you're watching here should be the emotional climax and the closing of the book for Destiny's Edge original and they weren't here.” (*Holy Crap I Finished The Story | Path of Fire Lore, Reactions & Initial Thoughts [HEAVY SPOILERS]* 00:12:14 -00:12:46).

He would also bring up little details in order to improve the game. A suggestion he made was based on his experience was in regard to the achievement system. This was seen in the *Path of Fire* updates, however, it goes beyond the scope of the study on whether or not he actually contributed directly to this change made in the game.

Wooden Potatoes: “Also for what it's worth one of the things I've always said expansions should do is expand on the core category of achievements and I was really disappointed *Heart of Thorns* didn't like... They never added Mordrem Slayer for example. They never added a new version of that dynamic event completion achievement where you've just got to do lots of events. They've done



that for *Path of Fire*! This is another example where *Path of Fire* is bigger than the previous expansion. They took the time to add an achievement for killing Branded and killing Awakened and killing varieties of desert predators and so forth and I was really geeking out to see that in addition to adding even Giants in these areas” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 2 | Riding A BUNNY, Dwarvern Mines & Tomb of Primeval Kings* 00:18:03-00:18:37).

He was also concerned about how *Guild Wars 2* balanced the game with regard to the new mounts, the new professions, and so on. In the example below, he was concerned about certain areas of the map being overlooked by players as it was detached from the main narrative and viewed only as an extra despite being a beautiful area.

Wooden Potatoes: “My main fear is that all those beautiful extra areas most people won't end up going to because there's no good enough reason to check them out; but with the new achievement UI thing, hopefully more people are invested in that side of the game and we will see that they get as much exploration as they deserve” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 1 | Unlocking Weaver, Raptors, Adventure & Brand NO SPOILZ* 00:03:56-00:04:12).

5. Showed concern regarding the health of the playerbase.

Another concern that he had was how to grow the player base. As the health of an MMORPG depends on the community and number of players, Wooden Potatoes held a



competition for YouTubers to talk about *Path of Fire* in order to increase the number of community members.

Wooden Potatoes: “Normally I don't talk about this kind of stuff but as you guys know I'm doing a competition right now to try and grow the *Guild Wars 2* scene to hopefully make people take a look back at this product that they probably dismissed way back in 2012.” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 5 | Palawa Joko's Harem, The Forgotten Lair & Mouth of Torment!* 00:01:27-00:01:39).

In the statement below, Wooden Potatoes discusses the way the developers of *Guild Wars 2* presented the Griffon mount and how it was perceived by the community. Because of the way the *Guild Wars 2* treated the Griffon mount, it resulted in players staying longer which is beneficial for the game. Although it was not explicit in the quote, the following statement implies that Wooden Potatoes understood the need for the game to have a significant number of people playing the game. Thus, it shows concern for the health of the playerbase.

Wooden Potatoes: “But what we're actually seeing in the community is everybody's generally really excited to do it because we view it as a bonus now. We view it as an extra thing and that means of course that ArenaNet can keep the player base in the game for longer and that's a powerful thing” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 3 | [Open World Spoilers] Augury Rock, Community Update, & Skimmer!* 08:40-8:50).



As a fan, Wooden Potatoes takes on the role of a developer because of the “sense of ownership” (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 160-162) he has towards the game. He keeps track of the developer’s work, the changes that were made in the game itself, and provides his critiques, concerns, and solutions for the game and its community. This is how he relates gameplay, design, and narrative in his playthroughs as a fan. By taking on the role of a developer, Wooden Potatoes is able to voice out his concern and solutions based on his experience and expertise in the game.

RQ2: How does Wooden Potatoes comment on his playthroughs?

The findings of the study show that Wooden Potatoes comments on his playthrough as a gamer, as a fan, and as a YouTuber. **Dimension 1: Co-Authorship as Gamer** shows this as he discusses his playthrough in light of his player narrative. It also shows how his mental schema interacts with the game’s narrative structure, plays a key role in his perception, and how it affects his commentary. **Dimension 2: Co-Authorship as Fan** shows that Wooden Potatoes comments on his playthroughs as a fan in order to engage with the greater community of players. **Dimension 3: Co-Authorship as YouTuber** shows how the affordances of YouTube allow Wooden Potatoes to take on a particular style of presentation and how he must balance between his interests as a fan and his financial interests as a YouTuber.



DIMENSION 1: CO-AUTHORSHIP AS GAMER

THE SCHEMA: THE PLAYER'S MENTAL NARRATIVE

According to psychologists, a schema “refers to how the mind acquires, represents, and transforms knowledge (Salen and Zimmerman 2-3). Due to Wooden Potatoes having traits from both immersionist and audience style, Wooden Potatoes was able to develop a schema as he interacted with the narrative elements provided by the game. When Wooden Potatoes experienced the playthrough, he formulated a schema or an “inner narrative model” (Lindley 21-23) and related it as if the events had actually taken place (Zariko 152-153; Shinkle 2) as he experienced the narrative provided by *Guild Wars 2*.

Here, the narrative established by the game serves as a guide to the player. It introduces them into the world around them and gives it meaning and dimension. Thus, the main storyline brings players into the world that they are experiencing. As a game with a hypernarrative, players are given choices when interacting with the story. With these choices and experiences, players develop their own narrative schema with the story provided by the game as a guide.

This study has shown that co-authorship takes place during a playthrough as Wooden Potatoes engaged with the game's narrative and the in-game world. Thus, the narrative and the narrative structure of the game served as a guide to his mental schema and cultivated his player narrative.



FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE SCHEMA

The findings in the study showed both in-game elements and external elements released by the official publishers can affect the schema.

The study showed that the following elements that affect a schema:

- In-game narrative, content, and gameplay experiences
- Officially published content by the game developer company
 - Includes books, films, trailers, and games that are considered canon and are connected narratively to the game.
- Dissonance.
 - Prevents players from being fully immersed in game.
 - Occurs when games switch between game mode and story mode and players experience conflicting narrative and experiences (Lee). With regard to the third cause of dissonance, which was switching between perspectives (Lee), the study was not able to confirm this finding as *Guild Wars 2* did not have that issue.

These were elements that were included in his player narrative and affected his playthrough experience.

HOW IN-GAME CONTENT AFFECTS THE SCHEMA

The article *4-Layers, A Narrative Design Approach* states that, the “narrative goal” provides the player a purpose in the game (Grip). Players desire to have an understanding



of the world around them and have a purpose and motivation going forward. In the case of *Guild Wars 2*, the narrative serves as a guide for the mental schema with players co-authoring their experience along with the game's narrative.

In the second chapter of the expansion, the despot Joko's representatives known as the Mordant Crescent offer protection to the free city of Amnoon which is a neutral territory in Elona. As the player is a hero and known dragon slayer, the councilors of Amnoon requests for the player's advice if they should ally with Joko, remain a neutral territory, or fight against Joko and Balthazar along-side the Sunspears ("Blazing a Trail"). The example below shows, what runs through the mind of a player when faced with hypernarrative choices.

Wooden Potatoes: "The first thing that really struck me was we get to open up and have this decision as to what we do with the fate of the Amnoon Oasis. Do we try and have... drag the Sunspears into this? They may be a weak force and the people of Kormir but maybe you know they're the best people to turn to. Do we try and keep the place in neutral? Do we sell them out to Joko's armies who have power but are obviously just trying to manipulate Amnoon to fall under their control despite having been neutral for all these years? I sold them out to Joko! I love this!" (*Holy Crap I Finished The Story | Path of Fire Lore, Reactions & Initial Thoughts [HEAVY SPOILERS]* 00:04:03-00:04:35)

As seen in the example above, Wooden Potatoes reflected on the choices that were available to him. His reflection and the choice he made are part of the process of co-



authoring the player narrative and is part of the natural affordance provided by the hypernarrative design of the game. Even though he followed a predetermined path, the mental process that formed from analyzing these decisions, the actions he made, and the final choice were part of the co-authorship process.

“Looking at games as experiential systems means looking at them as participation, as observation, as a mental state, as bodily sensation, as emotion, as something lived” (Salen and Zimmerman 4).

Another example of how the in-game lore affected Wooden Potatoes’ schema was through interactions with NPCs, characters, and activities. As seen in the example below, Wooden Potatoes talks about his experience in the Vehtendi Academy. In this area, players can interact with NPCs through a dialogue panel. They are given choices in which they can try to educate the children about the real history of Tyria or reinforce the status quo. As players interact with these NPCs, players are rewarded with information regarding the belief system of the NPCs in the academy. Here, the mental schema tends to adapt to the interactions with the environment and the in-game characters. As seen in the quote, he discusses his experience as if these children were real.

Wooden Potatoes: “The hearts are all so involved in Vabbi and I've noticed that the hearts take longer to complete too... Which means that I'm spending longer figuring out all the different stuff that's available. Like, do I throw a ball at this kid? Do I try and teach this kids the real history of the world? And often there's obviously a combat thing you can do. That claypool style event that I love so



much where you have to strike someone between his blocks reappears at the academy. Spent a huge amount of time here” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 7 | 100% Map Exploration, Zomorros & Palawa Kills Zhaitan* 00:07:58-00:08:02, 00:08:04-00:08:24).



(Figure 26: Vehtendi Academy dialogue)

By interacting with the NPCs, experiencing gameplay, and activities, players would be able to develop an understanding regarding the history, culture, and lore of the area. Interestingly, through this method, Wooden Potatoes showed a sign of significant attachment towards the NPCs of the area and even brought up the idea that he was having difficulty making choices for the activities. This indicates that the co-authorship when interacting with choices in-game and players receive feedback on those choices. The co-



authorship process also continues as the player experiences and reflects on more of the game. This can be seen when Wooden Potatoes was simply reading through the memoirs as he reacted towards the scenario as if it were real.

Wooden Potatoes: “So I really like Volume 7 by the way, I think it could be really easy to forget and it can be hard to put yourself in the shoes of a society that is so reliant on the physical nature of information keeping. Like losing an entire library having all those books and tomes and things burned! That really is wiping out the past. If that stuff is irreplaceable because so few members of the population are literate because so much vital important information consolidated to specific areas. When you live in these worlds you can really imagine a despot like Palawa being able to control information like that actually being incredibly easy. And the further we move into the information age and you know we live lives of luxury with the internet and so forth. I think we can stray further and further from remembering just how ridiculous something like that is and how capable Palawa would have been to twisted the culture and the people of Vabbi to what we see in two hundred and fifty years in the future” (*Guild Wars 2 - The Lore Behind Acquiring the Griffon Mount | Secret Mount and Extra Story Steps 00:34:55-00:35:51*).



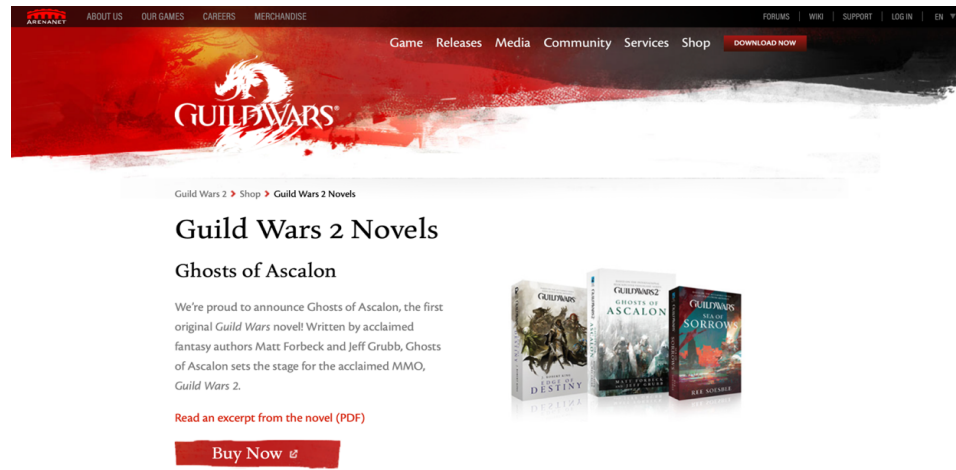
(Figure 27: Palawa Joko)

In short, narrative serves as a guide in the co-authorship of the player experience. The co-authorship process occurs as players reflect, experience gameplay, and make choices in the playthrough.

OFFICIALLY PUBLISHED CONTENT AFFECTS THE SCHEMA

Whether that be in the form of books, trailers, developer discussions, data mined content, or a previously published game, external factors that are deemed as canon by the developers affected the mental schema. The term canon in this context means content that is officially acknowledged by the developers as part of the narrative.

The study showed that the novels released by the ArenaNet affected Wooden Potatoes' schema and his expectations during his playthrough experience. The *Guild Wars 2* novels are canon and can be bought directly from ArenaNet.



(Figure 28: Guild Wars 2 Novels)

As a reader of these books, Wooden Potatoes expected the narrative and design of the game to allude to the material that they published in the literature. The example below shows that official content affects the player's schema.

Wooden Potatoes: “Uhm and this is where we get to, you guys will remember, always in *Guild Wars 2*... If you pressed ‘M’ and you looked to the map you see that giant brand scar where we always thought Kralkatorrik had been hanging out. So, this is where you get to head here. I have to say that the Brand here... Uhm I don't think impressed me as much as I was hoping it would have. Like I would have hoped that this would be like really high level really dense meta events and dangerous Branded stuff going on because this is like where Kralkatorrik came to us. This is where the second novel ended! I was really hoping for more... And as impressed as I've been with the Brand in the expansion it didn't quite go far



enough I think here” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 2 | Riding A BUNNY, Dwarvern Mines & Tomb of Primeval Kings* 00:43:48-00:44:21).

Not all games, novels, and movie franchises are aligned narratively or design wise; however, the *Guild Wars 2* novels were officially declared as canon. This is what created that expectation in Wooden Potatoes mind regarding the design and assets within the game. He expected continuity from the game and from the novel which is why he discussed it in the playthrough.

Another incident where this occurred was when Wooden Potatoes saw a *Guild Wars 2* trailer. Although trailers simply serve as advertisement for the game, Wooden Potatoes integrated it in his player schema and thus his expectations were formed regarding how the expansion would treat mounts.

Wooden Potatoes: “One of the trailers showed Kasmee riding around on a mount and Canach and Rytlock on a different mount and I was wondering whether we have moments where we get to see them bonding with their animals... That hasn't happened! And in fact, that idea that the mounts would be quite well integrated into the story hasn't happened in the abundance I was expecting. That's not a huge knock on the expansion it's just not what I thought was going to happen”(*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 2 | Riding A BUNNY, Dwarvern Mines & Tomb of Primeval Kings* 00:19:08 -00:19:28).

The examples above simply indicate that items affiliated with the brand or franchise, especially items that are considered as cannon, will be taken into consideration



by the player. These can result in disappointment these structures created by the schema are unfulfilled in the game.

Usually, external factors are not considered by researchers due to the many variables available. However, this study has shown otherwise in the case of officially published materials. All these external elements that were discussed in the playthrough's commentary suggest that the player seeks continuity in the narrative and playthrough experience. In the final example pertaining to external factors related to the game, it shows the player seeking continuity as he looks for a reference from the first *Guild Wars* game in *Path of Fire*.

Wooden Potatoes: “So you go on this quest of this Forgotten to destroy the Staff of the Mists. You throw it in an abyssal pit where apparently can be never never be recovered and from here it will be broken. It was one of my favorite things to show off to people in my *Guild Wars* 1 let to play series and I've always wanted to see what the fate of that area was what was going on there. So, you can return in *Guild Wars 2* to this location I have not been able to find the exact point that we destroyed the Staff of the Mists and I have not been able to find anywhere any reference to the Staff of the Mist at all. Maybe there is one in the map and I just haven't seen it yet but I was looking for so long to find it and unless it's in a very obscure place I don't think the devs have acknowledged it; which is rare for *Path of Fire* because *Path of Fire* has acknowledged basically everything I would want them to have except this and so I'm not actually disappointed that they haven't



referenced it right now because I kind of... I just think it's more of a curious thing that they haven't referenced it. We'll see" (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 5 | Palawa Joko's Harem, The Forgotten Lair & Mouth of Torment!* 00:20:31-00:21:24).

These three examples that are related to the *Path of Fire* expansion show that players seek continuity. Their mental schema appears to be challenged when they encounter information that is contrary or lacking from the structure their schema has created. In relationship to dissonance, external factors that are considered somewhat related to the main narrative, world, or story of the game are expected to have a form of continuity. If not, dissonance occurs as player experiences and narratives come in conflict with the mental schema. I have not included this under dissonance because the examples shown are related to external factors. Lee was primarily referring to internal factors of the game when he discussed dissonance and scholars usually dismiss external factors as they tend to be unrelated or unpredictable. However, this context shows that external factors are taken into account by the player schema and affect the narrative.

DISSONANCE

Lee proposed that there are three types of dissonance that players experienced. These were switching between game mode and story mode, players experience conflicting narrative and experiences, and players switching between perspectives in game. The study affirmed that switching between game mode and story mode as well as player



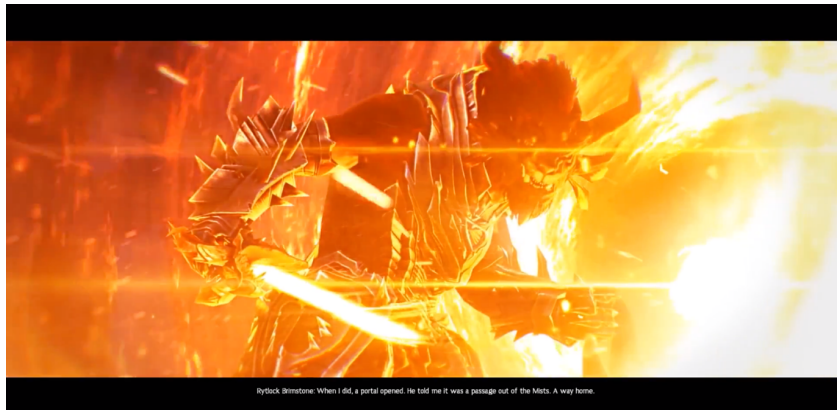
experiencing conflicting narrative and experiences resulted in dissonance. However, the study was not able to affirm regarding players switching between perspectives in-game as Wooden Potatoes rarely discussed this. In fact, the only mention of switching perspectives was when Wooden Potatoes wanted to play and explore a different character's perspective in the playthrough. Instead of utilizing switching perspectives, the game used a simple cutscene reminiscent of a flashback to communicate the story.

It is interesting to note that Wooden Potatoes thought that it would have been a fun experience in game.

Wooden Potatoes: "So here we also get Rytlock. I'm gonna have to rush quickly through this, otherwise I will just be talking for hours. Then we also get the revelation of what Rytlock did in the Mists. Now this was actually a very basic story they did in the end wasn't it? But unexpectedly even as basic as this was I enjoyed this. I remember before the expansion came out I was wondering you know they could add a lot of length by letting us play as Rytlock while he was there in this kind of cave format that they did in Living World season 2. As much as I would have loved that I also enjoyed the way they did use a cutscene here and they... I dunno there's something kind of mythical and magical and kind of backstory wise that they've done where it's like yeah Rytlock just found a man that was chained up and he released him. So Rytlock is responsible for Balthazar having returned to Tyria and that story isn't... you know... not potentially some massive revelation on its own but I think it was handled well and I liked to have



seen at least what he was doing” (*Holy Crap I Finished The Story | Path of Fire Lore, Reactions & Initial Thoughts [HEAVY SPOILERS] 00:10:15-00:11:02*).



(Figure 29: Rytlock escaping the Mists)

In the following quote, Wooden Potatoes discusses the issue of dissonance in regard to switching between game mode and story mode. This is in regard to a data mined scene that was cut from the final game. Wooden Potatoes explains that having the cutscene instead of the way it was executed in the final cut would have ruined his immersion thus affirming Lee’s theory regarding the issue between switching from game to story mode.

Wooden Potatoes: “Funnily enough Shaman has talked to me about the fact there was a cutscene that he's managed to data mine from this section of the story which more explicitly showed in cutscene form Vlast being attacked by Balthazar. And I've got to say I prefer the way that they've done it here. The cutscene didn't look that good. The cutscene would have broken the pacing of this. Opting to do this



just (as) a part of the experience was excellent and I remember having an interview with a dev where they talked about this and you know figuring out where that line is or do you do in a cutscene or not? It was absolutely the right call not to do this in cutscene” (*Holy Crap I Finished The Story | Path of Fire Lore, Reactions & Initial Thoughts [HEAVY SPOILERS] 00:09:25-00:09:57*).

Lee also stated that conflicting narrative and player experiences result in dissonance. This was the case with external factors, as discussed earlier, and in-game content as players seek continuity. Continuity with game narrative is important in crafting expectations in the player’s mind. Failure to meet that can cause problems with immersion thus causing dissonance. In the example below, the bone wall was a strong fortification for the forces of Joko. The Open World, flavor text, and even the narrative history of the area directed the players to think that it was a great stronghold. However, the player character and his allies simply walk through the entrance of the place without any trouble. Although, Wooden Potatoes speculates that it might have been because they lacked time to put an instance in the area, it was a portion of the game that did not align with the world building that was developed. Thus, causing dissonance.

Wooden Potatoes: Now I am a bit disappointed in the core story today. Uhm, the core story I experienced on day four took place throughout the Desolation map which I have now visited and it didn't really have much going on in terms of like actual instances so there's a lot you do and you speak to a lot of NPCs and is very Open Worldy but it feels like it did drop off. It feels to me like what the core story



really needed was a proper instance right here at the bone wall. I wanted an instance involving like scaling it or breaking through it or whatever but just to... You know really dive into how we managed to get south of the wall beyond these exiles and that really doesn't exist. That's just a portal and we walk through and despite all of the world building and map story and stuff you get everywhere. I was talking about this being the serious fortification that people shouldn't be able to travel through! We just kind of meander our way through and I don't know... Was that a cut instance that maybe they wanted to do? That's the first little disappointment I've really had with the story" (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 4 | Exploring the Desolation (!), Riding a JACKAL & The Riverlands* 00:18:31-00:19:26).



(Figure 30: The Bone Wall map view)

To conclude, these findings affirm the two reasons proposed by Lee as to why players have difficulty experiencing immersion. However, further research is needed to confirm the third. Lee's paper also suggested moving away from cutscenes; however, the finding in this study suggests that cutscenes are still an effective method when used in the appropriate context and situation. The immersion of the player was not broken and the



cutscene was appropriate given the context of the narrative. This observation in the study is in relation to how the player schema is molded and formed when interacting with gameplay, design, and narrative. Therefore, in a playthrough's commentary, players relate these factors in light of their mental schema and how their schema is violated by this dissonance that occurs as they interact with the game.

FLEXIBILITY OF THE SCHEMA

As *Wooden Potatoes* dealt with topics that revolved around narrative and immersion, the study showed how a player's schema adapts or gets challenged by experiences.

First, a player's schema gets violated when the game has no reason to create logical leaps. The schema does not adjust if the game or the player has no reason to connect narrative or game experiences. The example below shows how *Wooden Potatoes* schema failed to adjust to a logical leap. During the playthrough, *Wooden Potatoes* saw an NPC character whose dialogue did not match the area or context it was placed in. Thus, his response:

Wooden Potatoes: "The one thing that disappointed me a bit is quite clearly I think all of these NPCs dialog was made in a can and their actual locations around the expansion doesn't seem to have any respect to what they say." (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 2 | Riding A BUNNY, Dwarvern Mines & Tomb of Primeval Kings* 00:41:34-00:41:46).



In the dialogue above, Wooden Potatoes saw an NPC that was placed in the Shiverpeak mountains but instead of talking about the current context it was in, the NPC would provide dialogue about the Domain of Istan; which was not even accessible in the expansion at the time he played (“Domain of Istan”). This is something that broke his immersion and resulted in the comment stated above. If the NPC had dialogue relevant to the content of *Path of Fire* and the environment, it would have provided Wooden Potatoes with a better player experience and would have solidified the narrative schema. Instead, the data shows that Wooden Potatoes player narrative was challenged by it. If there is no reason for the narrative to make logical leaps, the player will not feel the need to adjust to the game’s gap in logic and would feel that their schema is violated by the game.

When the narrative guides a player towards certain expectations and results, it results in a player’s schema being fixed. Once the narrative schema is fixed and the gameplay experience is in line with this narrative schema, this results in player satisfaction and immersion. In the story, when Wooden Potatoes also failed to trigger dialogue and he ended up wandering in the Domain of the Lost.

Wooden Potatoes: “The instance itself was a brilliant instance! I got a little bit lost to be honest. I didn't trigger some dialogue and ended up wandering around aimlessly for ages” (*Holy Crap I Finished The Story | Path of Fire Lore, Reactions & Initial Thoughts [HEAVY SPOILERS]* 00:24:02-00:24:08).

In this portion of the game’s narrative, the player’s user interface, map, and other visuals that are usually part of the normal gameplay are hidden. This is because the player



dies in the narrative which is why despite not triggering the dialogue it contributed to his immersion. As there was no reason why this experience was not logical and it helped solidify his narrative schema. The study showed that elements in the player experience that were all logical and were in their proper place caused the player's narrative to solidify and contributed to an immersive experience.

The effect of the in-game narrative and assets on the player's mental narrative is quite significant. Classic storytelling elements such as Chekhov's gun and red herring came up several times as Wooden Potatoes talked about the map, the landscape, and the story. This was quite prominent in Kormir's library instance where Wooden Potatoes kept talking as if someone was there before his player character. This also occurred when he was looking at the passageway from Elona to Tyria. These in-game narrative elements caused Wooden Potatoes to reflect and adjust his player narrative to address these elements.

Wooden Potatoes: "Did you guys notice that weird message with the... the cipher that you can sort of play around with a bit once you've gone into the hidden room? It's like suggesting someone's been here like the Whisper... I think it's got something to do with the Order of Shadows but the next instance when we go to Kesho the hidden city. There's like another suggestion someone's been there that they'd sabotage the door so that it wouldn't open. We have to actually break it! What's going on here?! And then some of the dialogue from the Order of Whisperers is suggestive of something... It's really curious. I've got to dig into it



more but this is really caught my attention. What is going on here guys?!” (*Holy Crap I Finished The Story | Path of Fire Lore, Reactions & Initial Thoughts [HEAVY SPOILERS]* 00:17:40-00:18:12).

It is interesting to note that despite being fond of the lore and the world, Wooden Potatoes notes that he does not fully appreciate the Open World set up. There are two meanings when Wooden Potatoes refers to the Open World. In the Open World, players interact with events, NPCs, items, and other elements of the game in order to get a holistic view of the history and the lore of the area. The player then pieces together the story through the clues and fragmented narrative that is scattered throughout the game. However, Wooden Potatoes is referring to the main story narrative in the Open World. In other words, the main narrative plays out in the Open World and players can interact with NPCs and characters just as if they were in an ordinary Open World set up. This type of Open World narrative, which is part of the main story, allows players to feel more immersed in the area and environment because there are no loading screens or instances. However, this does not prevent players who are also in the Open World from blocking NPC characters saying dialogue or doing particular actions.

Wooden Potatoes: “Uh and looking at the achievements and the way that it works it feels like the Desolation got a bit gypped for story... It feels like there wasn't a good instance entering it. It feels like there weren't enough things to do with like instanced story and I know that we should appreciate Open World story as much as we do instanced story and certainly I do. But I think there's a quality to having



some real time in an instance hanging around these places and getting to slow down” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 4 | Exploring the Desolation(!), Riding a JACKAL & The Riverlands 00:19:56-00:20:20*).

Why Wooden Potatoes prefers instanced story was not mentioned in the videos but it is possible that because he is used to the instanced set up, it would take time for him to get adjusted to Open World mode of storytelling which *Guild Wars 2* is transitioning towards. The preference of Wooden Potatoes indicates a need for narrative stability rather than flexibility. It is also possible that this statement provided by Wooden Potatoes stems from how the game established narrative structures; starting off with the instanced system. It is now that the game is transitioning towards an Open World style which is significantly different from the form that the player is used to.

As seen above, logical leaps, player context, play experience, and narrative affects the schema. Players can justify why logical leaps are acceptable in the case that their personal context allows for such breaks in immersion or experience to happen. However, the schema can greatly contribute to player immersion. If guided correctly, a player’s schema can be a powerful asset for game developers in creating immersive experiences.

To conclude, as a gamer, Wooden Potatoes uses his player narrative as a basis to comment on his playthroughs. This is because the perception that he has about the game is based on the structure and narrative provided by his mental schema.



DIMENSION 2: CO-AUTHORSHIP AS FAN

As a fan, often Wooden Potatoes adds his own analysis to the game. He would talk about how he feels regarding certain things and sometimes over analyses the smallest details and hints. He takes part of online discussions by providing his speculations and assumptions. Wooden Potatoes tends to speculate or “muse” about something extensively despite the lack of evidence supporting his observations or thoughts (“Speculate”). He also tends to theorize and come up with an analysis based on his observation that he saw or noticed (“Definition of ‘Theory’ - English Dictionary”). He focuses on sharing experiences, theorizing, and talks extensively about the game within the *Guild Wars 2* community.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

Fans such as Wooden Potatoes and members of the community read and interpret data in the game. They create theory and they also pick up on hints that can be shared with the community as discussed by Jenkins in his book:

“As Levy explains, ‘the members of a thinking community search, inscribe, connect, consult, explore. . . . Not only does the cosmopedia make available to the collective intellect all of the pertinent knowledge available to it at a given moment, but it also serves as a site of collective discussion, negotiation, and development. . . . Unanswered questions will create tension within cosmopedic space, indicating regions where invention and innovation are required.’ Online fan communities...



[are]... expansive self-organizing groups focused around the collective production, debate, and circulation of meanings, interpretations, and fantasies in response to various artifacts of contemporary popular culture” (Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* 137).

The study shows that Wooden Potatoes does two things as a fan:

1. He provides his findings, opinion, thoughts, theories, and speculations regarding the game and its narrative.
2. He addresses, engages, and answers community concerns.

This is how he comments on his playthroughs as a fan.

In the quote below, Wooden Potatoes discusses a small reference in the game that referred to data mined information. Here Wooden Potatoes takes the data mined information, engages with this idea providing his findings to the community, and gives his thoughts, opinions, and speculations regarding that tiny bit of data.

Wooden Potatoes: “But there's a reference in *Guild Wars 2* in the Desolation to some lore that only was previously data mined from *Guild Wars 1*. So, this happened a lot in *Nightfall* and a little bit beyond as well. People started data mining the first game and they realized there was like interesting lore describing places that we've never really known was canon and had never been officially drawn as canon because it was never officially front-facing in the game given to us. It was only data mined and the devs never gave us any exact definition of



whether it was or wasn't canon. And in *Guild Wars 2*, what's happened now is they're referencing that information. So, what was previously only data mined has now just become canon in *Guild Wars 2*. And for the examples I've talked about here there... These are fairly minor inconsequential things but it does have some broader implications then. Because the idea of a god predating Abaddon... A dead spider god, a titanic spider known as Arachnia this is some really fun lore. Arachnia the previous spider god but it was only ever data mined from *GW1* and now *Guild Wars 2* has canonized some of that stuff. So, does that mean that Arachnia could now be canon?" (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 5 | Palawa Joko's Harem, The Forgotten Lair & Mouth of Torment!* 00:28:10-00:29:25).

Wooden Potatoes actively engaged community concerns and issues as he went through the game, discussed his player experience, and received player feedback.

In the main story, players were to defeat one of the 6 gods of the humans. However, members of the *Guild Wars 2* community did not want to fight Balthazar in a one-on-one fight since him look weak. Thus, Wooden Potatoes provided a solution for the community suggesting that it is because of Aurene and the sword of Rytlock, Sohothin that they were able to defeat Balthazar. Here we see Wooden Potatoes providing his theory for members of the community in order to address their concerns regarding the narrative of the game.

Wooden Potatoes: "So in kind of a joule, I've seen some people online saying oh this wasn't good because you know I don't want to 1v1 if it makes Balthazar look



weak... I wanted this in a raid. And yes, I and you know that bit... It being in a raid would have been a much more profound experience. But they cannot do that. This is not that kind of MMO. They won't do that. They shouldn't do that. We're gonna get a 1v1 experience of taking out a god in the story. We're gonna become a god slayer and all I think what the devs could have done again... It relates to Sohothin... I think that showing that it was Sohothin's power that really managed to key into the defeat of Balthazar. I think that would have been really good and they didn't do that so I think that's a bit of a shame. But what a cinematic end!"

(Holy Crap I Finished The Story | Path of Fire Lore, Reactions & Initial Thoughts [HEAVY SPOILERS] 00:33:44-00:34:14, 00:35:17-00:35:28).

As Wooden Potatoes is concerned with community issues, he tries to answer them based on his own knowledge about the game. Here, as the community was concerned regarding meta events, Wooden Potatoes addressed their concerns directly and clarified them using his expertise and understanding of the game. In the example below, Wooden Potatoes addresses the community regarding their misconception regarding the term meta, what meta means and what it has evolved into.

Wooden Potatoes: “Now, yesterday, we talked about a few things that spurred quite a lot of discussion. First on the merits of rushing through [the game] and why people did it. All kinds of opinions on that ranging from max efficiency from play time to not wanting to be spoiled on the story but most of the discussion came on the merits of running big meta events in expansions. And it's funny because I've



read a lot online, oh, there's a big split in whether people like metas or not. There really is that genuinely is a lot going around and it's not necessarily negative mean-spirited cruel discussion it's just genuine chat about whether the expansion would be better or worse having a lot of metas. And so, someone has astutely noted how the term meta has kind of shifted its meaning a lot in Guild Wars 2 right now. And we have to be clear about what we mean when we say this right. A meta event, okay, is literally just a selection of dynamic events chained together and narratively bound to one another and you get a bit of UI in the top right-hand corner that tells you how they progress. That's technically what a meta event is and in those terms *Path of Fire* has loads of them. I showed off a really good one in the Elon Riverlands at Augury Rock on just yesterday's video. But now since *Heart of Thorns* it's kind of shifted its meaning to two other things really... That is that a meta event is something that is a major thing that has to have a big boss at the end and unites an entire map of players to come together and fight it. And as to a slightly lesser extent as well, I think when people say *Path of Fire* has no metas what they actually mean is there's no farm potential behind the meta events. Like, why do people really like Auric Basin in Tahrir? Well, yes, it's incredibly well built and it's beautiful and seeing four massive packets of players zerging from the North, West, South, and East as you finally break the four Octovines is very thrilling and running around getting all the chests and stuff. And it's all, you know, got good voice acting and the music rises and crescendos and does all these wonderful things. Yes, it's a well-built



meta event but why do people play it really? Why do they do it so much over two years? Well, because it was attached to a farm” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 4 | Exploring the Desolation (!), Riding a JACKAL & The Riverlands* 00:00:40-00:02:37).

In the example provided above, Wooden Potatoes addresses community concerns regarding metas, clarifies what metas mean, and helped defend the expansion from misconceptions and confusion from the community. As previously observed, Wooden Potatoes is concerned about the game and the health of the *Guild Wars 2* community. This is why he voiced out these concerns and helped clarify issues that were being talked about regarding the expansion.

To conclude, as a member of the *Guild Wars 2* fandom, Wooden Potatoes discusses his thoughts, theories, speculations, opinion, and findings with the greater *Guild Wars 2* community. He engages with the community and tries to answer their concerns by using his expertise or by providing a theory that is based on his knowledge of the game. By engaging with the *Guild Wars 2* community, he is able to share his ideas and address community issues through his knowledge and personal experience of the game. This is how he comments on his playthroughs as a fan.

DIMENSION 3: CO-AUTHORSHIP AS YOUTUBER

The study has shown that Wooden Potatoes comments on his playthroughs as a YouTuber. This dimension occurs due to the affordances provided by YouTube’s



architectural structure. The structures set in place by YouTube are based on subscribers and this affects the earnings of YouTube partners (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 335, 337-340; Postigo, “Playing for Work” 213; Andrejevic 421). This is because subscribers affect the ranking of these videos and their popularity (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 339).

Since Wooden Potatoes is a small to medium sized channel, he does not earn much as a large YouTuber would from YouTube’s advertising system (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 339) which is why he is dependent on patrons from the subscriber system and ArenaNet’s partnership program’s financial incentives. Therefore, Wooden Potatoes must manage between his subscribers, YouTube’s systems, and ArenaNet’s perception of his channel. This is why co-authorship as YouTuber became the final dimension; as his commentary was affected by YouTube’s architectural structure, the taste of his subscribers, and his corporate affiliations.

PRESENTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

As a YouTuber, it is necessary for Wooden Potatoes to engage the audience. Engaging viewers is an observation that many researchers have seen in their own studies (Zariko 15; Johnson and Woodcock, “Fighting Games and Go” 17; Anderson) especially since it is how channels are ranked and how these YouTubers earn money (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 338-342). As subscribers are a valuable currency



in YouTube (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 339), Wooden Potatoes builds his channel by engaging his audience.

Wooden Potatoes employs the following strategies in order to cultivate his audience:

- Directly engages his audience
- Provides context to his videos
- Uses in-game terms
- Uses first, second, and third person in order to relay experiences
- Features content that adds value to the player experience
- Places the focus on the game by using only his voice and game clips
- Plays roles as a teacher, mentor, and experienced fan in order to establish credibility

By utilizing these strategies, it shapes how his videos are structured and affects his commentary.

Wooden Potatoes engages his audience by directly addressing them, creating conversation with them, greeting them, and makes guesses on what they are currently doing. He talks to the audience as if they are on the journey with him and he encourages them to engage with his video. He also provides the context on how these videos were created in order for the viewer to understand what is going on.



Wooden Potatoes: “Last night the *Path of Fire* expansion released and I hungrily devoured it. I wanted to give you guys a bit of an update on what my experiences have been in there. For those of you who maybe haven't been able to play the expansion yourself or have got a bit of down time maybe you're on a shift at work or something and you want to see how what you did compares to how what I did and whether maybe you had missed anything that was fun so my perspective going into this expansion as you all know has been to take it easy, has been to take it slow. I have not been rushing to go really really deep into the desert” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 1 | Unlocking Weaver, Raptors, Adventure & Brand NO SPOILZ* 00:00:07-00:00:36).

The natural instinct of Wooden Potatoes as a fan gives him a desire to discuss, share, and break down every bit of information in the game. However, as a YouTuber, Wooden Potatoes needs to consider the length of the video he uploads for subscribers. In the samples below, the affordances of YouTube can be seen affecting the structure of the video and the commentary that is presented. This is because as a YouTuber he must consider what his subscribers want to watch.

Wooden Potatoes: “I wish I could show you guys all 9... 8... 9 hours that I played and especially the first six from the first map to give you every single second. I had a constant perpetual feeling within me although I've got to record this. I've got to share this so I've got to share this and of course that would be impractical to do but it I think that's a sign that there's a lot of fun to be had just



from traveling around here” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 1 | Unlocking Weaver, Raptors, Adventure & Brand NO SPOILZ* 00:18:46-00:19:07).

This is why the discussion length of his video ranges from 20-40 minutes with majority of the videos ranging around 30 minutes per average. He also mentions in the videos that he has to keep himself under control or else he would be talking for hours. In the example below, he tries to stop himself from talking because he would continue to break down and elaborate the scene.

Wooden Potatoes: “I will try not to interject too much which sucks because there's so much I want to talk about” (*Guild Wars 2 - The Lore Behind Acquiring the Griffon Mount | Secret Mount and Extra Story Steps* 00:28:14-00:28:19).

Wooden Potatoes also provides the context of play in order to keep viewers up to speed regarding what was happening in the video. This aligns with the study of May as she observed that players provide the context for videos (99-101). Wooden Potatoes also provides background information in order for viewers to understand why he responded in a particular manner why he made certain choices in the game. He also provided details on what he chose to focus on such as gameplay highlights as well as the process on how he chose events in the video. In the example below, he provides context on what he did during the day and how he felt regarding the playthrough.

Wooden Potatoes: “So, day two. I spent more time playing *Path of Fire* than day one. I spent about ten hours this time. And what is so exciting to me about all of this is those ten hours were spent entirely on the second map which I had already



played a little bit of from yesterday - if you guys watch that video, you might remember - and the story associated with that map and that we access from that map. So, in total I think I'm approaching about halfway complete with Act 2 of the story and I got an immense amount of playtime out of the game before I even got there. It's so thrilling for me to know that I've spent so long already in it and I'm only just now at the beginning of day three; beginning the third map and there's five of them to go through right"(Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 2 | Riding A BUNNY, Dwarven Mines & Tomb of Primeval Kings 00:02:36-00:3:16).

The example above shows Wooden Potatoes' mental state as he entered the second map and experienced the story. These details are important, not only to the study but also to the viewer. This is because previous research shows that viewers seek to live vicariously through these playthroughs (Glas 83-84). These events also provide context to the perception and response of the player regarding the game. This information helps the audience get a grasp of Wooden Potatoes' mindset during play.

Wooden Potatoes would warn his viewers if there were any spoiler related contents in his video since he released these videos during the first week *Path of Fire's* launch. This is because viewers might become upset if the video they watch spoils the story and play experience for them. As a YouTuber it is necessary for him to build a viewing audience as this helps create income for his channel and purpose for him as a YouTuber. Thus, at the start of the video he tells his viewers that he will not ruin their playthrough experience as seen in the quote below.



Wooden Potatoes: “What I'm gonna be talking about today guys I just mentioned a little bit is not gonna be specific story spoilers, so don't worry about that. None of these recaps that I do will ruin that stuff for any of you” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 1 | Unlocking Weaver, Raptors, Adventure & Brand NO SPOILZ* 00:01:51-00:02:00).

He also provides the audience with a warning for his video when he talked about the story related content.

Wooden Potatoes: “Uhh yeah.... Massive spoilers people! You have been warned. In a couple of seconds, I'm gonna spoil everything about *PoF*. So, turn the video off if you are still trying to hide your head under the sand” (*Holy Crap I Finished The Story | Path of Fire Lore, Reactions & Initial Thoughts [HEAVY SPOILERS]* 00:00:00-00:00:10).

Wooden Potatoes also talks about events and areas that will potentially add value to the viewer's player experience. He does this in order to build his viewing audience and give viewers a reason to watch his channel. In the example below, Wooden Potatoes talks about a unique event that viewers may have missed during their playthroughs.

Wooden Potatoes: “It's one of the least spoilery places that I can talk about that it's done it and you get to wander around and interact with these people. It's so weird! It put a smile on my face in the weirdest way! To see that the devs were tackling the subject material and they make it funny too! Like there's a harpy! A harpy in his harem! There's an ogre!



Ogre: “Kralkatorrik Branded my village. Without the strength to survive, I turned to Joko.

Wooden Potatoes: “And even best of all there is a Choya! There's legitimately a Choya and when you walk over to try and talk to her this happens.

NPC: “Leave her be she's shy and rarely speaks.

Wooden Potatoes: “An NPC warns you that she's gonna be quiet. You'll see sometimes like a servant will go to interact with them and the upper levels of this area you can see that they've been painting paintings of Joko just over and over again and doing these little sculptures of him. What a weird and beautiful and interesting place! Oh, my goodness! I wish that Guild Wars 2 had been doing stuff like this for a long time ago! And definitely a well worth event! Go in for it, guys, if you haven't done that just yet. It gets better though, this is still not the best... Though in terms of the event that's probably the best event and an interesting place to go” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 5 | Palawa Joko's Harem, The Forgotten Lair & Mouth of Torment!* 00:17:01-00:18:28).



(Figure 31: Choya in harem)

Wooden Potatoes also tries to talk about things intelligently because he presents himself as a guide, a mentor, and a teacher. As he plays this role, he tries to make sure that his opinion is based on facts before he makes a statement. This aligns with what was observed in the studies of Johnson and Woodcock (“Fighting games and Go” 17). Thus, as seen in the discussion below, Wooden Potatoes states that he and has an understanding regarding the topic he is discussing.

Wooden Potatoes: “I wanted to have that absolute raw perfect understanding of the worst-case scenario for how long it takes to get experienced to train masteries. So that I could talk intelligently about it. There was no point in *Heart of Thorns* me boosting a ton and then saying oh it's too easy because I wouldn't have had a realistic understanding. So I did that in *Heart of Thorns*” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of*



De La Salle University

Fire Gameplay - Day 1 | Unlocking Weaver, Raptors, Adventure & Brand NO SPOILZ 00:12:06-00:12:27).

As a YouTube gamer, Wooden Potatoes uses specific terminology in his videos. This use of language can be viewed as a tactic to attract *Guild Wars 2* subscribers to his channel.

Wooden Potatoes: “My refusal to turn off glass even though I know it's silly for me to keep running glass. I know I would be really really struggling if I was doing this on the on my own just trying to learn the Weaver and playing with basically no trait there so I need to change up my mindset a bit for all the advice I tell people I say yeah run Marauders stats you know. Round your builds out and stuff. For all that advice that I constantly give people I haven't listened to it myself and I am struggling on Weaver in a lot of places with the desert mobs and stuff” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 1 | Unlocking Weaver, Raptors, Adventure & Brand NO SPOILZ 00:17:47-00:18:11).*

Interestingly, Wooden Potatoes uses first, second, and third person when discussing his playthroughs. This is because he is not only sharing his experience but he knows that he is sharing something that the viewers of his channel also might have gone through. This is why he uses “I”, “we”, “you”, and “us” a lot during his discussions. In the example below, Wooden Potatoes describes how it feels to go through the area by using you in order to help the viewer feel more engaged as it is an experience that players can all go through. This presentation style can be seen as a tactical effort to engage viewers



and make them feel “engaged” with regards to his commentary (Glas 83-84). By using first, second, and third person, Wooden Potatoes acknowledges the player experience of the audience as he comments on his playthrough.

Wooden Potatoes: “There's also the Vehtendi Academy and we'd had a little bit about education institutions in the Desolation when that place at Rin was mentioned. Well we get to a very interesting place where people are being educated and brainwashed about Palawa Joko’s influence on the world. And just the straight-up lies essentially of Joko didn't lose Turai Ossa. Joko beat Turai Ossa and these kids these adolescents are being taught that as fact and there's all this art being done depicting things that never occurred. Amazingly even stuff like Joko defeated Mordremoth instead of us, The Commander, is being taught to these people. Joko defeated Zhaitan! And there's an event where you can wander around with a member of the Pact. I guess Priory where they're studying what these people have learnt and the undead are trying to kick you out” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 7 | 100% Map Exploration, Zomorros & Palawa Kills Zhaitan 00:05:37-00:06:15*).



(Figure 32: Mural of Palawa Joko defeating Zhaitan)

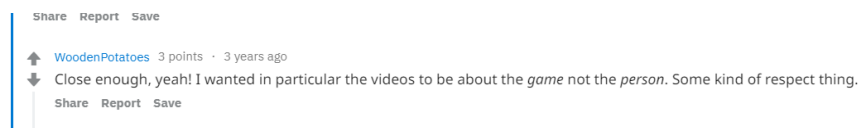
Using this kind of terminology and method of speaking make Wooden Potatoes “credible for audiences to accept and follow” (Pietruszka 55) as he acknowledges their player experience and knows their terminology.

In YouTube, each channel has a unique niche and content and the way different content creators entertain their fans “vary from one vlogger to another” (Pietruszka 68). In Wooden Potatoes case, his choice not to show his face in order to focus on the game, using his voice as a medium to keep the attention of the audience, greeting the viewers and talking to them as if they were there with him, and limiting his own desire to talk and show certain clips for the sake of the viewers make up his channel entertainment strategy.

As part of his performance, to keep the attention of the audience on the game and to satisfy his niche market, Wooden Potatoes chooses not to show his face and only uses



his voice in his video. This is to help keep the focus of the audience on the game and what it had to offer instead of putting the focus on Wooden Potatoes' physical performance or body language during the playthrough. According to Wooden Potatoes, showing his face would deviate the focus from the game to him as a celebrity as discussed in a reddit forum (*r/WoodenPotatoes - 'Serious' Question about the 'No-Face' Thing*). This is a personal choice Wooden Potatoes makes with regards to the presentation of his videos in YouTube.



(Figure 33: About the Game not the Person)

As a tactical effort to engage viewers (Glas 83-84), Wooden Potatoes commentaries are like a radio show. His voice drastically changes whenever he needs to shift the mood or tone. The joy in his voice is clear as he talks about humorous topics and even adjusts the way he says things in order to connect the viewers with the experience. His voice tightens and becomes more high pitched when he is happy. He becomes louder and he pauses when he wants to make emphasis on something. He also slows down when he is discussing serious matters and he effectively makes use of pauses. The videos themselves are Wooden Potatoes talking non-stop with a few select moments of him keeping silent in order to show case NPC dialogue or to show a scene from the game.



BUILDING AN AUDIENCE AND BALANCING PERCEPTIONS OF PATRONS

YouTube allows content creators to become financially independent yet the system provided by the architecture of the website makes content creators subject to the tastes of their subscribers, corporate partners, and affiliates (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 335, 337-340; Postigo, “Playing for Work” 213; Andrejevic 421). As a YouTuber, Wooden Potatoes must cultivate patrons. In this case, his patrons are the members of the *Guild Wars 2* community and the developers of ArenaNet since he is an ArenaNet partner. The study shows that Wooden Potatoes must cultivate an audience, ensure that his channel is advertiser friendly, and play his role as an ArenaNet partner by promoting the game.

Because he focuses on a particular game type, he does not get as many views as Markiplier or PewDiePie does and does not earn as much as a large YouTuber. The statement below was mentioned at the end of the video series. He encouraged viewers to support him and his channel considering all the work and time that he has put into the videos.

Wooden Potatoes: “The other thing I guess I'd say at the end of this first week with all this stuff we've done if you have been enjoying remember that myself and many of the other *Guild Wars 2* content creators. The scene is comparatively small too a lot of big games out there. We don't necessarily get very many views compared to other games. Advertisement revenue is not as high as you'd expect



and if you have been enjoying them I do run a Patreon campaign which I live my life by so anyone who goes there and contributes in any way you are incredible. You helped me to make videos this much in weeks like this. So if you'd like it please do consider it. I hate begging online. Hopefully people don't consider this as such but yes. So thanks very much for watching guys. It's been a good one I think and I'll have more coming up very very shortly thanks!" (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 7 | 100% Map Exploration, Zomorros & Palawa Kills Zhaitan 00:21:54-00:22:39*).

However, as a person cultivating patrons, conflict occurs between the interests of *Guild Wars 2* community who comment, critique, and interject their opinions in discussion while the ArenaNet developers are concerned with the public image of their game, community, and increasing the player count. Thus, players such as Wooden Potatoes must balance between the interests of his two patrons and their perception of him and his channel.

The findings of this study are similar to the findings of Sari Piittinen on her study on YouTubers dealing with morally questionable decisions (14). When making morally questionable choices in the game, Wooden makes them humorous or simply justifies the depth of the choice. Sometimes he just makes a curt comment and laughs about it. He makes situations relatable to the audience using humor, his tone of voice, and the voice speed. He also shows his personal stands and values regarding in-game situations and provides his opinion on the morals that the game chose. An example of this was when he



first entered a map and a member of the Order of Shadows talks to him about the brain washed Vabbians.

Wooden Potatoes: “So when you first enter Vabbi there's this brilliant NPC who says... “If we're ever gonna enact change in Vabbi it's gonna be a slow subtle social change that's gonna take many years.” And this was like such a big thing to immediately see. The Commander's response is a bit dickish really. Like he literally just hears, yeah, these people's friends and family are the undead and we're like “Oh well, we'll deal with that.” It's very much we're forcing our perspective of the world on them. Maybe a little bit too much so but uhh.. you know.. they deal with this straight away” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 6 | Exploring Vabbi, Completing the Story [No Spoilers]* 00:13:46-00:13:50, 00:14:15-00:14:39).

On the other hand, when faced with criticism, Wooden Potatoes sometimes directly addresses the critique or skirts around it if he feels that it is not valid or important. Here, Wooden Potatoes owned up to the comment but also added that it was because of his own enjoyment that caused him to behave in such a manner.

Wooden Potatoes: “I was described as fondling ArenaNet's balls yesterday because I'm having so much fun in the expansion and sharing it with you all online! We're gonna do more of that today” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 3 | [Open World Spoilers] Augury Rock, Community Update, & Skimmer!* 00:00:09-00:00:22).



In another instance, Wooden Potatoes was criticized regarding his pronunciation on the Necropolis, he told the viewers that he did not care and continued to proceed with the rest of the video discussion.

Wooden Potatoes: “Some of the more interesting places actually like the Necropolis... People criticizing the way I was saying that in a previous video by the way. Guess what! I don't care! You're Wooden Potatoes and we get pronunciation weird sometimes! So yeah moving forward into the map...” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 7 | 100% Map Exploration, Zomorros & Palawa Kills Zhaitan 00:01:09-00:01:23*).

It is a known fact that game companies reach out to YouTubers in order to promote their content through their channel. However, this directly affects the co-authorship process because of the conflict of interest between different dimensions. The study shows how the dimension of co-authorship as a YouTuber and the dimension of co-authorship as a fan interact and try to balance or conflict each other in the playthrough video. Being a YouTube partner of ArenaNet partner comes with certain responsibilities. In the sections below, there are certain behaviors that Wooden Potatoes exhibits that are different from that of a YouTuber that is independent of a company.

Generally speaking, Wooden Potatoes' YouTube channels serves as a source of advertisement for the game. As an ArenaNet partner, he generally provides positive statements on the game and came to a point where people were describing him as “fondling ArenaNet's balls” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 3 | [Open World Spoilers]*



Augury Rock, Community Update, & Skimmer! 00:00:09-00:00:22) but he said he was simply was enjoying the game. The quote below shows him advertising the latest expansion by comparing the difference between *Path of Fire* and *Heart of Thorns*. Here he is providing reasons why people should pick up the new expansion especially if they felt that *Heart of Thorns* felt lacking for players.

Wooden Potatoes: “I'd be pretty much done for that traditional exploration and one of *Heart of Thorn*'s biggest criticism from casual players was that it didn't offer enough. I think that when I look then immediately it's evident *Path of Fire* kind of resolved this because now for *PoF* I'm not mostly done” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 3 | [Open World Spoilers] Augury Rock, Community Update, & Skimmer!* 00:02:17-00:02:31).

Because of his corporate affiliations, Wooden Potatoes carefully notes the difference between criticisms and observations.

Wooden Potatoes: “I gained them that quickly and so this isn't necessarily criticism as much as it is just an observation_of what my experience has been” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 1 | Unlocking Weaver, Raptors, Adventure & Brand NO SPOILZ* 00:13:43-00:13:49).

In the example above, Wooden Potatoes was quick to point out that what he was talking about was an observation he made rather than a criticism. This might have possibly been due to preventing backlash from the community or the developers who might have taken it the wrong way.



Whenever he is disappointed in certain aspects of the game, he cushions things and makes a point to note observations when he points things out. However, he still makes a point to note these observations and explain them even if these are just his own opinions. Yet, as you can see in the example below he is providing a buffer for his comment.

Wooden Potatoes: “So, um there is another component that we meet Joko. The only time we meet Joko is here when we find out he's been chained up by Balthazar. This I also found really fun. Now, Joko himself the way he sounds, the way he looks, I don't know... He disappointed me. I don't know... What is it? What's wrong with me?” (*Holy Crap I Finished The Story | Path of Fire Lore, Reactions & Initial Thoughts [HEAVY SPOILERS] 00:26:16-00:26:30*).



(Figure 34: Palawa Joko chained)

Here Wooden Potatoes tries to voice out his concerns as a fan of the game but because of the affordances of YouTube and his corporate affiliations he provides a



cushion for these statements. Here we see how the dimensions interact and co-author the video and commentary. As a fan, he wants the game to improve and thus he provides his opinion but as a YouTuber, he must maintain good standing with his audience and his corporate affiliations which is why he must provide a buffer to his statements.

To conclude, the commentary of Wooden Potatoes is affected by the affordances provided by YouTube and his corporate affiliations. Thus, his commentary must balance between different audiences with differing interests and tastes.



ANALYSIS

The results in the study help answer the research questions below:

RQ1: HOW DOES WOODEN POTATOES IN HIS PLAYTHROUGHS RELATE GAMEPLAY, DESIGN AND NARRATIVE?

A GAMER'S VALUES DETERMINE A GAMER'S DISCUSSIONS

The way Wooden Potatoes relates gameplay, design, and narrative are strongly connected to his player type. In the case of this study, Wooden Potatoes videos were generally in line with his traits as an explorer, audience style, achiever, and immersionist. Therefore, his player values and the things he highlighted regarding gameplay, design, and narrative were related to his player type.

As an achiever, Wooden Potatoes was concerned with incentive and payoff and discussed it throughout the game.

Wooden Potatoes: "I spent so long here doing these achievements! Took ages to find the hidden room in the water as well. You get all that extra lore and so here's the most fascinating thing about the library to me" (*Holy Crap I Finished The Story | Path of Fire Lore, Reactions & Initial Thoughts [HEAVY SPOILERS]* 00:17:30-00:17:40).

As an explorer, he was concerned with gameplay, balance, narrative, and exploration. In the example below, he talks about exploration and gameplay taking up a lot of his playtime.



Wooden Potatoes: "...This huge crack in the land that you fall into this deep ass Dwarven mine. And there's this whole narrative about what's going on there. So, you find a runestone now the idea of this place is, and this was a massive amount of my play time okay, a huge amount on this map, and there are runestones hidden around right. So, when you grab one of these runestones, first you find one on the table that the Priory give to you. (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 2 | Riding A BUNNY, Dwarven Mines & Tomb of Primeval Kings* 00:35:47-00:36:08).

As an audience style player, Wooden Potatoes was concerned with the tone of the narrative, the morals and values of the in-game world, lore, and the thematic design of the game and narrative.

Wooden Potatoes: "...where we find out who this body is okay. So, with the final dialogue we can go to the body and they'll say you've done a great deal for... to preserve the Sunspears. Thank you there is hope in Elona. And we can say well what now and the body says the rebuilding has only just begun but I sense you have even larger struggles ahead. Do not worry the Griffons will aid you wherever and whenever you call. And we say we still have questions and they say well you've earned some answers, speak your questions. And we could say what is your name and the body says, I am Tahlkora, daughter of Prince Mehtu the wise, guardian of the Great Library of Chokhin and last Spearmarshal of the order of the Sunspears. So, this is Tahlkora!... So, we can ask her how did she end up here?



How did Tahlkora become this?!..." (*Guild Wars 2 - The Lore Behind Acquiring the Griffon Mount | Secret Mount and Extra Story Steps* 00:22:26-00:23:03; 23:58-24:00).

Finally, as an immersionist, he concerned himself with agency, organic learning, and immersion. In the example below, Wooden Potatoes discusses the game provided him with an organic learning experience while immersing him with the Choya villagers.

Wooden Potatoes: "What is so beautiful about this is how hilarious it is, in that you can't actually communicate with vendor these Choya, right. The game is comfortable with really playing with like a scout NPC so you get this instead, right and I love it! The time that game is comfortable to do this and play with these things in kind of a wry way is where it really starts coming into its own. It's where a game finds its soul! I found this so fun! There's another NPC as well that you can talk to and get some similar dialog and the contrivance of the heart is that you don't know what to do and that's something all *Guild Wars 2* players have experienced at some point. You go to a heart there's nothing to kill in the area. You just want to be brain dead and kill stuff we all know that we've all got to that point at some moment in our play time. And it's like well what do they want me to press F on? What do I do? I need to actually think for a second and the fun thing about this Choya heart is they deliberately obscure that from you in a fun way so it took me a bit... but you... I kind of started head-butting coconut trees with the new mounts and putting them in baskets and it turns out that the Choya don't like



harpies so you can kill a lot of them” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 2 | Riding A BUNNY, Dwarvern Mines & Tomb of Primeval Kings* 00:22:56-00:24:09).

Based on the information provided by the study, player type provides a deeper understanding on how YouTube gamers discuss gameplay, design, and narrative. This aligns with the work of Glas (83-84) and Lindley (1-2) who use the taxonomy system to better understand gamers and their desires.

This study contributes to the literature as the findings provided by the research show that player type is not only applicable to how gamers are categorized but to how these individuals comment on their playthroughs. The things that players highlight during their discussions can be strongly linked to the values of their player taxonomy. Even if player type tends to be fluid and encompass one another, this study strongly suggests that there are certain player taxonomy traits that remain dominant throughout the discussions in the playthrough. Instead of only one player type being dominant as observed for the player taxonomy (Lindley 2), the study showed that each player category contributed to the commentary. There is also a tendency for more than one player category to dominate the discussion. This directly affects the co-authorship process as player type affects the commentary and the things highlighted throughout the discussions based on the individual’s player values. This study showed that player taxonomy is not only useful for categorizing players but is also useful in understanding how they discuss gameplay, design, and narrative in relation to how these values upheld by their player type.



FAN ACTING AS DEVELOPER

The findings have shown that Wooden Potatoes- in his playthroughs -relates gameplay, design, and narrative as if he were a developer of the game. These aligns with the previous research by Jenkins (*Convergence Culture* 160-162), Hopp et al. (469-472), and O'Connor et al. (470), and Daneva (57-67) that discuss the involvement of players in the development of the MMORPG.

Because Wooden Potatoes has a sense of ownership over the game, bringing certain experiences to the attention of the attention of his audience and possibly the developers might result positive and beneficial change for the game and the community which is why Wooden Potatoes takes on the role of a developer. In the quote below, Wooden Potatoes discusses the issue of balance and payoff in regard to an experience he had in the Open World. He indicates that there is something wrong with the experience that he encountered during the playthrough.

Wooden Potatoes: “There is another feature of the Brand which is this fairly interesting jumping puzzle sign area but it's a Skimmer JP where we kind of have to glide our way around and up and every now and then you'll be knocked off and you do these little combat scenarios. A lot of fun and interesting exploration however it ends with this anomaly that I swear to God had like 8 million health. It was ridiculously tanky and it took a long time to grind through like 10-15 minutes solid of a pretty tricky game type of gameplay - that may again be because I'm feeling fairly weak on Weaver but it took three of us! There was a random spud. Stood



there... Which was awesome to see when we got there and we sort of grinded this boss down for ages until eventually he died. When he died did we get a big reward? No! We got a champ bag and it instantly respawned so I'm guessing there's something broken about this" (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 7 | 100% Map Exploration, Zomorros & Palawa Kills Zhaitan 00:13:48-00:14:39*).

As a fan, playing the role of a developer, he keeps track of the developer's work and the changes that were made to the game.

Wooden Potatoes: "I think that it's all incredibly well built. I think that it's all really well handled. I think a lot of the little issues that have been plaguing this game like not knowing whether you can talk to random NPC in the area because they don't probably give you the right mouse cursors, like dialogue overlapping, like not giving certain things enough space to tell their stories... I think all of those things have really been ironed out and I've so much enjoyed what I've played so far of Act 1" (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 1 | Unlocking Weaver, Raptors, Adventure & Brand NO SPOILZ 00:05:12-00:05:35*).

He would also express his concern about how the developers treated elements of the game considering the behavior of the playerbase. In the example below, Wooden Potatoes talks areas of the game that the developers created that might be missed by players due to the way that they are designed.

Wooden Potatoes: "My main fear is that all those beautiful extra areas most people won't end up going to because there's no good enough reason to check



them out; but with the new achievement UI thing, hopefully more people are invested in that side of the game and we will see that they get as much exploration as they deserve” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 1 | Unlocking Weaver, Raptors, Adventure & Brand NO SPOILZ* 00:03:56-00:04:12).

To conclude, Wooden Potatoes takes on the role of a developer because the sense of ownership he has regarding the health of the game and its community. This aligns with the study of Jenkins in his book *Convergence Culture* where he observed fans contributing for the betterment of the game (160-162). This also aligns with the study of Johnson and Woodcock (“Fighting games and Go” 17) in which they observed that players take on roles.

In this study, participatory culture can be seen in a positive light and strengthens the established research (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 160-162) by showing how fans want to help the game and its community. This study adds to the literature by showing a fan taking on the role of a developer, discussing how the game should be improved in a YouTube video. By taking on the role of a developer, Wooden Potatoes relates gameplay, design, and narrative during his discussions and uses his expertise as a fan to discuss and engage with these elements. The study contributes to the literature by showing how Wooden Potatoes provides feedback and suggestions and presents his discussions in YouTube.



RQ2: HOW DOES WOODEN POTATOES COMMENT ON HIS PLAYTHROUGHS?

Wooden Potatoes comments on his playthrough as a gamer, fan, and YouTuber. As a gamer, Wooden Potatoes talks about his playthrough as if it were his lived experience and in relation to his player narrative. This finding was in line with the papers of Zariko (152-153), Shinkle (3), Lindley (21-23) Simons (2), Lee, Aarseth (Myers 76), and Myers (76, 82). The study also shows that the mental schema was an important aspect in formulating his perception of the game and this heavily affected his playthrough commentary. As a fan, he engaged with the larger community and helped address their concerns regarding the game. He would theorize, speculate, and share his thoughts and opinions which was part of his commentary. This aligned with studies done by Jenkins (*Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* 139; “Interactive Audiences? The ‘Collective Intelligence’ of Media Fans” 1-5, 12; *Convergence Culture* 160-162) and May (94) regarding fans and their behavior. As a YouTuber, Wooden Potatoes would engage his audience and balance between the perceptions of corporate affiliates and the interests of subscribers. The example below shows the three dimensions interacting in order to craft the commentary he has. It shows his player narrative, his theories and speculations as a fan, and also how he engages with his viewers and develops patrons for his channel.

Wooden Potatoes: “Did you guys notice that weird message with the... the cipher that you can sort of play around with a bit once you've gone into the hidden



room? It's like suggesting someone's been here like the Whisper... I think it's got something to do with the Order of Shadows but the next instance when we go to Kesho the hidden city. There's like another suggestion someone's been there that they'd sabotage the door so that it wouldn't open. We have to actually break it! What's going on here?! And then some of the dialogue from the Order of Whisperers is suggestive of something... It's really curious. I've got to dig into it more but this is really caught my attention. What is going on here guys?! But yeah so that's the library that's the Mist instance. My goodness you'll hear me gushing more about that in future videos I'm sure” (*Holy Crap I Finished The Story | Path of Fire Lore, Reactions & Initial Thoughts [HEAVY SPOILERS]* 00:17:40-00:18:18).

The affordances of YouTube that were discussed by Hector Postigo directly affected the commentary and presentation style of Wooden Potatoes (“Converting Play into YouTube Money” 334-342; “Playing for Work” 213-214). This is primarily due to the systems in place that makes the YouTuber dependent on subscribers, the YouTube advertising, and corporate partnerships (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 334-342). While presentation techniques seen in the study were line with the research of Pietruszka (55) Piittinen (14), Glas (83-84) and Johnson and Woodcock (17).

As a YouTuber, Wooden Potatoes tried to strike a balance between his audience members composed of the ArenaNet development team and the *Guild Wars 2* community. He was careful with the way he used language to describe his stand regarding criticism



and morals that were presented by the game. Wooden Potatoes brought up concerns and critiques in a constructive, sometimes passive, and self-introspective manner. With this he gives the developers the benefit of the doubt with regard to certain blind spots they might have missed without degrading the game. This also allows Wooden Potatoes to discuss parts of the game in which he had a negative experience or disagreed with the implementation provided by the developers. Thus, Wooden Potatoes provides a critique of the balance, gameplay, and pay off of while still bringing his concerns to the table.

Wooden Potatoes: “There is another feature of the Brand which is this fairly interesting jumping puzzle sign area but it's a Skimmer JP where we kind of have to glide our way around and up and every now and then you'll be knocked off and you do these little combat scenarios. A lot of fun and interesting exploration however it ends with this anomaly that I swear to God had like 8 million health. It was ridiculously tanky and it took a long time to grind through like 10-15 minutes solid of a pretty tricky game type of gameplay - that may again be because I'm feeling fairly weak on Weaver but it took three of us! There was a random spud. Stood there... Which was awesome to see when we got there and we sort of grinded this boss down for ages until eventually he died. When he died did we get a big reward? No! We got a champ bag and it instantly respawned so I'm guessing there's something broken about this” (*Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 7 | 100% Map Exploration, Zomorros & Palawa Kills Zhaitan 00:13:48-00:14:39*).



The study adds to the literature of game studies, fan studies, and new media studies by showing how these three dimensions affect each other and are affected by each other.

These dimensions interact because of the affordances of YouTube as a platform because individuals can upload their content online (Postigo, “Converting Play into YouTube Money” 340). Thus, these dimensions interact and influence each other through the co-authorship of the playthrough video. The study shows how the player and these dimensions co-author the playthrough video and it is not solely dependent on the game or its context.

Dimensions co-author the playthrough on two levels: The first level of co-authorship occurs between the dimension and the game while the second level is inter-dimensional co-authorship.

In the **first level** these dimensions can be seen co-authoring the game in the following manner:

Dimension 1: Co-Authorship as Gamer

As the player engages with the game, the player uses the game’s narrative as a guide for the mental schema. As seen in the study, Wooden Potatoes did not just depend on in-game elements but also included external elements as part of his schema. This was seen in his commentary as he reflected on the game, explicitly stated the things that disappointed him, and how he had a certain expectation for the game and its experiences. His schema also adjusted based on his personal context of play which is why he found certain facets of the game unacceptable or acceptable. In this dimension, player type and



player values were discussed. The in-game elements that Wooden Potatoes discussed and highlighted were based on a combination of his player values as an individual, his playthrough experience, and his mental schema. Even if MMORPGs try to cater to a wide variety of player types (Daneva 58), the discussion revolved around Wooden Potatoes player values as an individual. This is because the study showed that his player type affected the player values he highlighted during the playthrough. Through this, the study also adds to the literature of game studies by showing how the mental schema requires continuity, how dissonance affects the mental schema and the player's perception, and the flexibility of the schema.

Dimension 2: Co-Authorship as Fan

In this dimension, fans co-author their commentary and provide theories, speculations, and opinions based on what they experience in-game. These theories, speculation, and musings from Wooden Potatoes are based on his knowledge, expertise, and experience. By taking on the role of a developer, fans such as Wooden Potatoes provide aspects in the game that can be enhanced and improved. He provides solutions and suggestions that are not available in the game and can better cater to the community. Thus, their commentary can provide needs within the game that have to be addressed. This is how co-authorship occurs as a fan.

Dimension 3: Co-Authorship as YouTuber

The affordances provided by YouTube (Postigo, "Converting Play into YouTube Money" 335-340) allow content creators such as Wooden Potatoes to showcase their



experiences, commentary, and in-game footage. Because of YouTube's structure (Postigo, "Converting Play into YouTube Money" 335), content creators can present their content and tailor fit it to meet the demands of their audience. Through this dimension of co-authorship, it also shows how these dimensions interact and provides an avenue for inter-dimensional co-authorship to occur.

The **second level** of co-authorship occurs when these different dimensions affect and influence each other. As a gamer, player values and player type affect the discussion and suggestions, theories, and speculations made by the fan. Being a YouTuber affects the discussions of a fan who wants to flesh out information in the game but must restrain himself for the interest of viewers. The affordance of the YouTube commenting system (Postigo, "Converting Play into YouTube Money" 340) and the corporate affiliations of a YouTuber affects player values and highlights. This proceeds to affect the discussion of the fan playing the role of a developer. The fan playing the role of a developer affects the dimension of a YouTuber, as the fan is interested in making the community and game better, thus, makes his critiques public and so on.

This is how the dimensions of co-authorship occur in a YouTube playthrough video. This study shows that, although the game is engaged by the player in all dimensions, what is featured, highlighted, and discussed comes from the content creator as an individual. This is because a playthrough video includes factors that go beyond the scope of the game such as the mental schema of the player, the interests, knowledge, and engagement of the player as a fan, and the structural affordances provided by YouTube.



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CONCLUSION

Playthrough is a site of both production and consumption as the player is not only playing a designed game but takes on the role of a gamer, fan, and a YouTuber.

Gamers are co-authors of a game's narrative. Their mental schema or player narrative is guided by the structure provided by the game and is influenced by factors such as a player type, items they read or see from official sources, and the elements of the game itself to create their own story.

As fans, these gamers act as developers for the sake of the game's betterment by providing suggestions to improve the game's gameplay, narrative, and in-game world. Their expertise allows them to analyze the progress of the narrative, changes that were made in the game, and its need for improvement. They also engage with the larger community by sharing theory, speculation, and possible solutions to in-game problems.

In this particular instance, YouTube gamers who are affiliated with companies must strike a balance between sharing their interests, cultivating their audience, and manage the interest and perception of patrons. They must play the roles assigned to them by catering to their niche market and thus manage how people view them.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

This study provides a theoretical structure that shows how the dimensions of being a gamer, fan, and YouTuber co-author an online playthrough. As this study was done with a qualitative method of thematic analysis with a single YouTuber, there is still a need to test the theory provided by the study through other qualitative and quantitative methods. In addition, since the subject of study was a dedicated player of an MMORPG that had hypernarrative affordances, it would be interesting to see how co-authorship occurs with other forms of playthrough and games. Wooden Potatoes, as an MMORPG player, provided suggestions regarding the improvement of the game by taking on the role as a developer. Future studies can explore if this behavior is still applicable to fans that are non-MMORPG players. Another aspect of this study that can be tested in future research is the effects of subscriber comments and how much corporate affiliations affects the co-authorship and creation of the YouTube video. Future studies can also explore how these dimensions affects subscriber and community growth for games.

Furthermore, future studies can explore the legal implications of these dimensions of co-authorship and how they affect the ownership and rights of playthrough videos.

As *Path of Fire* was based on the first *Guild Wars* game, Wooden Potatoes encountered a lot of nostalgic experiences and showed a variety of interesting traits when exposed to nostalgic stimuli. However, this goes beyond my scope of research. As a topic for future research, *Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire* can provide rich insights regarding how



players are affected by nostalgic stimuli and how this contributes or hinders the player's immersive experience.

Another topic for future research is how players adapt, perceive, and transition towards different storytelling structures. This is due to Wooden Potatoes' comment regarding his preference towards instanced storytelling versus Open World storytelling. Future studies can also expand on the causes for dissonance and the causes for immersion. Future studies can also explore the use of player narrative in immersion by triggering immersion through narrative based game designs.

Topics regarding the schema can also be explored in regard to how designers can effectively direct the schema towards agency and immersion without causing dissonance. Exploration of the mental schema can also be explored in future studies in the context of a game that does not have narrative structures.

Future studies may also want to trace how the commentaries of YouTube gamers affect or influence changes in the game.



PRODUCTION COMPONENT OF THE STUDY

I created a documentary for the production component of the study by utilizing elements from expository forms of documentary. By utilizing the expository form of documentary, I can provide a background of the phenomenon, information on the game, and help introduce the findings of the study to the viewer. The target audience for this documentary range from the ages of 18 -28 years of age.

I utilized in-game footage from the *Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire* expansion along with clips from Wooden Potatoes videos, images from the game, text, images, and supporting evidence that will help bring to light the findings of the study.

The documentary itself contains the findings of the research as well as the recommendations and practical applications that developers can take.

The start of the documentary provides a quick introduction to the Let's Play and playthrough phenomenon. The documentary then introduces the papers of Lee, Simons, Myers in reference to Aarseth, Lindley, Jenkins, and Zariko. It also introduces *Guild Wars 2* as a game and basic information regarding *Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire*. Then it introduces Wooden Potatoes and his YouTube channel. The middle part of the documentary contains the dimensions of player experience in detail starting from co-authorship as gamer, then co-authorship as fan, and finally the co-authorship as YouTuber. Then, the end portion of the documentary summarizes what the study contributes.



With regards to the rights for the in-game footage, according to their terms of use, *Guild Wars 2* allows the use of their content for non-commercial purposes as stated in the image below (“Guild Wars 2 Content Terms of Use – GuildWars2.Com”).

I'm interested in using *Guild Wars* or *Guild Wars 2* art on a website, application, in a project, or on a *Guild Wars*, *Guild Wars 2* or ArenaNet fansite. What is your policy regarding copyrights and trademarks? May I use ArenaNet, *Guild Wars 2* and/or *Guild Wars* content, such as images, text, sounds, or video?

Yes, you may use our content-that is images, text, video and audio files-within the following parameters:

- The content must be used in a non-commercial context for private, personal use only (i.e. not for use by a company)
- You must include all copyright and other notices associated with the content
- You acknowledge and agree that no title nor any other form of ownership to the content has been or will be transferred to you from ArenaNet nor from anyone else
- You agree that you will not alter, disassemble, decompile, reverse-engineer or in any other way modify the content
- You agree that you will not present the content as officially sanctioned or professionally associated with ArenaNet
- You agree that ArenaNet has the right to require removal of our content at any time, for any reason

(Figure 35: Guild Wars 2 Terms of Use)

As for Wooden Potatoes’ videos, he has allowed me to use them with the rightful credit due his work.



De La Salle University



lonewolfjc11 · 21 hours ago · Shared privately

Dear Wooden Potatoes, I am Jasper Go a Masteral student at De La Salle University. I am currently taking my thesis this term and I believe that your videos on Path of Fire would really help my case. As my course is communication majoring in applied media studies, aside from having a paper to write, I have to produce a documentary. I would greatly appreciate it if you could allow me to use some of your videos in order to strengthen my case. I will make sure that I credit your videos the due credit during the presentation. My brothers and I are huge fans of your videos and we watch them in the morning every time you make a release. Here's hoping for your kind consideration. Thank you very much! Sincerely, Jasper

Reply



WoodenPotatoes · 20 hours ago

Absolutely, go for it! And good luck!

Reply



lonewolfjc11 · 4 seconds ago

Thank you so much! Appreciate it!
God bless and have a nice day!

Reply

(Figure 36: Asking permission from Wooden Potatoes)



GLOSSARY CHART

Achievements	“Achievements are a system in the game to help gauge what a player has accomplished in the game. They are awarded for completing various tasks spanning all game types; PvE, PvP, and WvW. Completing an achievement may reward the player with achievement points, a mastery point, an item, or a title. Players also get achievement rewards for obtaining enough achievement points for the tier” (“Achievement”).
Achievers	“Driven by in-game goals, usually consisting of some form of points gathering (eg. experience points, levels, or money)” (Lindley 2).
Ascension	“A state of communion with the Old Gods. Among other benefits, those who succeed in attaining it are able to travel through the Mists, and with the right help can unlock hidden reserves of power” (“Ascension”).
Agency	The ability to choose and make your own decisions that would impact the narrative, the in-game world, gameplay, or play experience.
Asura	A race of short somewhat gremlin like creatures. They are “alchemagical inventors” and are incredibly intelligent (“Asura”).



Audience style	Moves for reading in-game narrative material, such as opening and reading virtual books presenting game scenario and fictional game world history material, and moves for conversational interaction with NPCs, all of which are common within RPGs” (Lindley 13).
Aurene	A dragon scion that bonds with the player in the main narrative (“Aurene”).
Awakened	“Undead” NPCs that “serve Palawa Joko” (“Awakened”).
Balthazar	One of the 6 gods worshiped by the human race. He is the main antagonist in the expansion (“Balthazar”).
Brand	Also known as the “Dragonbrand” an area in Path of Fire that Kralkatorrik has corrupted (“Dragonbrand”).
Branded	Refers to the “corrupted minions” of “Kralkatorrik” (“Branded”).
Buff	Refers to “increasing the power of an element” in the game either permanently or temporarily during a balance patch. May also refer to a “temporary” effect that “enhances a player” (“Etymology of ‘Buff’ and ‘Nerf’ as Used in Video-Game Slang”).
Build	Generally refers to the stats of the player’s armor and its respective combinations (“Build”).
Canon	It is something that is created by the official writers, producers or developers and is considered as an official part of the story or



	narrative (Romano).
Champ bag	An abbreviation for champion loot bag, a reward item in the game containing randomly generated loot (“Champion Loot Bag”).
Character Creation	Affects the race, class, and choices for your character’s personal background and dialogue in <i>Guild Wars 2</i> (“Character Creation”).
Charr	A race of cat like creatures that have a military society (“Charr”).
Chekhov’s Gun	Refers to the principle established by the writer Chekhov that everything in the narrative must be utilized in the story (“Chekhov's Gun: What It Is and How To Use It”)
Choya	A race of sentient cacti like creatures that serve as both enemies and allies in the game (“Choya”).
Dev	Abbreviation for developer. Devs is the abbreviation for its plural form.
Dissonance	Conflict in the player's mental schema (Lee).
Dynamic Event	This refers to events that occur in the in-game world of <i>Guild Wars 2</i> with or without the player’s participation. These events are connected to one another both in gameplay and narrative and “were designed to replace traditional MMORPG quests”(“Dynamic Event”). Player participation or lack thereof affects the final outcome of these events results in a “change” in the areas around



	the event (“Dynamic Event”).
Easter Eggs	References or features within the game that were purposefully hidden for players to find (“Easter Egg (media)”).
Ele	The shortcut term used for the elemental class in <i>Guild Wars 2</i> (“Abbreviations”).
Elementalist	A light armor “scholar” class in <i>Guild Wars 2</i> (“Elementalist”).
Elite Specializations	Gives player classes access to new weapons, skills, and traits previously unavailable in their base class (“Specializations”).
Endgame	Refers to in-game challenges and activities that are accessible to the player once they complete the main game and reach “maximum level” (“ <i>Endgame</i> ”).
Explorers	“Driven to find out as much as [he could] about the virtual world, including mapping its geography and understanding the game mechanics” (Lindley 2).
Exploration	To explore the in-game world.
F	The “F” key is the default key binding setting that allows players to interact with objects in the game world.
Fan	An individual who has both “an intense emotional investment in media text” and “who engages with the larger fandom” or community (“When Fandom Goes Mainstream”).



Farm	An area with events that provides players with a significant amount of loot, items, or enemies which can be replayed for more rewards (“What is Farming?”).
Farming	When a player repeatedly “grinds” an event in order to gain significant amount of “experience, points, ...in-game currency,” or items (“What is Farming?”).
FB	An abbreviation for the Firebrand (“Abbreviations”).
Firebrand	“An elite specialization of the guardian” (“Firebrand”).
Forged	Enemy NPCs that serve “Balthazar, the god of War and Fire” (“Forged”).
Gamer	Gamer in this context means a player of the game and will be used interchangeably throughout the paper.
Gameplay	The game mechanics, simulations,in-gameactivities, how characters move or interact with the in-game world.
Gems	An in-game currency in Guild Wars 2 usually requiring real money to acquire (“Gem”).
Glass	An abbreviation for the word “glass cannon” (whatsaname) which is a build type with strong damage but “low defense, life, durability, etc” (whatsaname).



Griffon	The hidden mount in <i>Guild Wars 2</i> (<i>Guild Wars 2 - The Lore Behind Acquiring the Griffon Mount Secret Mount and Extra Story Steps</i>).
Guardian	A heavy armor “soldier” class in <i>Guild Wars 2</i> (“Guardian”).
Guild Wars	This is the title of the first game (“Become a Legend”). However, this term can also be used to refer to <i>Guild Wars 2</i> ; thus, the player base calls it <i>Guild Wars 1</i> to differentiate it from <i>Guild Wars 2</i> .
Guild Wars 2	The “sequel to” <i>Guild Wars</i> (“Guild Wars 2”).
GW1	Abbreviation for <i>Guild Wars 1</i> ; the first <i>Guild Wars</i> game (“Abbreviations”).
GW2	Abbreviation for <i>Guild Wars 2</i> , the sequel to the first game (“Abbreviations”).
Heart	Abbreviation for Renown Heart (“Renown Heart.”).
Hero Points	Used to upgrade player “traits” and “skills” (“Hero Points”).
HoT	Abbreviations for the <i>Guild Wars 2: Heart of Thorns</i> expansion (“Abbreviations”).
Immersion	Generally refers to an immersive experience.
Immersionist	Refers to individuals who seek to “support a player experience”, have “developed a persona”, and spend a significant time in the game (Lindley 13).



In-game world	Specifically refers to the visual design elements in the game. This is to prevent it from being confused with game design that may relate to gameplay and game mechanics as well. This includes elements such as the user interface, the terrain, the character designs, anything in relation to graphics, art, 3d models, textures, rendering, and anything related to the visual design elements of the game world.
Incentive	Refers to what motivates players or makes them interested within in the game.
JP	Abbreviation of jumping puzzles (“Abbreviations”).
Junundu Wurm	Creatures from the first <i>Guild Wars</i> game and in <i>Path of Fire</i> that look like giant centipede worms (“Junundu Wurm”).
Lore Book	In-game books that players can read for “lore and information” (“Lore Book”).
Main narrative	Refers to the main story of the game and activities linked to it.
Map Completion	“The act of visiting all points of interest, vistas, waypoints and completing all renown hearts and hero challenges within a given zone” (“Map Completion”).
Mastery	Used to upgrade skills. Attained in a variety of ways such as



points	finishing the story, communing, or complete a set of tasks (“Mastery”).
Meta Event	Has two meanings in Guild Wars 2: It is “a series of dynamic events that tells the story of an explorable zone”(“Meta event”). A major set dynamic events with “a big boss at the end and unites an entire map of players to come together and fight it” and is usually associated with a farm (Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire - Day 4 Exploring the Desolation (!), Riding a JACKAL & The Riverlands 00:00:40- 00:02:37).
Mob	An abbreviation for enemy NPCs (“Mob (gaming)”)
Mod	The term itself is the abbreviation for modify. In games this specifically means to edit the game’s code and create customized content that works with or is a derivative version of the main game (“Mod”).
Morals and Values	What people perceive as right or wrong.
Mounts	Mounts are traveling systems that have been introduced in the <i>Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire</i> expansion. There are currently six mounts available for players to use (<i>Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire</i> –



	<i>Expansion Feature – Mounts</i>).
Narrative	Refers to both the game’s narrative and the narrative experience that a player experiences within the in-game world; as narratologists believe that a player’s lived experience can also be considered as a narrative (Lee; Simons 2-3).
Nerf	To weaken an element in a game (“Etymology of ‘Buff’ and ‘Nerf’ as Used in Video-Game Slang”).
Necro	An abbreviation for the Necromancer class of <i>Guild Wars 2</i> (“Abbreviations”).
Norn	“This race of towering hunters experienced a great defeat when the Ice Dragon drove them from their glacial homeland” (“Norn”).
NPC	Abbreviation for non-player characters.
Open world	Refers to the in-game world of <i>Guild Wars 2</i> where players can roam freely (“Open World”).
Order of the Sunspears	A former elite military force that protected Elona (“Order of the Sunspears”).
Orders [of Tyria]	Refers to the Order of Whisperers, the Priory, or the Vigil who are different factions that a player can choose in the core narrative of <i>Guild Wars 2</i> . This affects the narrative that the player will experience in game (“Order”).



Organic Learning	Learning from primarily through experience and by interacting with the elements of the in-game world.
Player type	Refers to the player taxonomy scheme by Bartle and Lindley.
Payoff	Payoff is when a player receives a result of an outcome, experience, or process. The result or payoff can be in the form of a narrative, a reward, or an experience. The result of the payoff may either be greatly desirable or undesirable depending on the process, experience, or difficulty the player experienced. Payoff may not necessarily be connected to the motivation of the player but rather the experience attached to the end result.
PoF	An abbreviation for the <i>Path of Fire</i> expansion (“Abbreviations”).
PUG	An abbreviation for “pick up group; a group of randomly matched players” (“Abbreviations”).
PvE	An abbreviation for Player versus Environment game mode. This game mode focuses on the main narrative and fighting against “AI-controlled enemies” (“Abbreviations”).
PvP	An abbreviation for the Player versus Player game mode. This game mode focuses on “pitting players against other players” (“Abbreviations”).
Random Spud	Wooden Potatoes is referring here to a member of his guild (Guild



	Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 7 100% Map Exploration, Zomorros & Palawa Kills Zhaitan 00:13:48-00:14:39).
Raptor	A dinosaur looking mount similar to that of a Velociraptor. Players can use this mount to travel vertically across the desert (<i>Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire – Expansion Feature – Mounts</i>).
Red Herring	A plot device used to distract the players from the main narrative (“Red Herring”).
Renown Heart	A series of activities and goals within an area that are narratively connected and presided over by an NPC. Renown hearts provide experience points, narrative information, and are necessary for the completion of the map (“Renown Heart”).
Rytlock Brimstone	The charr Tribune of the Blood legion who plays a significant part in the narrative due to his ownership of Sohothin and his experience in the Mists (“Rytlock Brimstone”).
Schema	“Refers to how the mind acquires, represents, and transforms knowledge (Salen and Zimmerman 2-3).
Skimmer	A manta ray-like creature that players can use to travel over bodies of water and quicksand (<i>Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire – Expansion Feature – Mounts</i>).
Sohothin	A legendary blade used by Rytlock Brimstone (“Sohothin”).



Spearmarshal	Refers to the “leader of the Order of the Sunspears” (“Spearmarshal”).
Specialization	Known within the game as “specs” (“Abbreviations”) or “trait lines... is a profession mechanic which allows players to customize their characters to concentrate on different aspects of their build through various traits” (“Specialization”).
Springer	A bunny-like creature that players can use to climb over high areas and mountains that are not accessible by foot. (<i>Guild Wars 2: Path of Fire – Expansion Feature – Mounts</i>).
Sylvari	A race of plant-like creatures that closely resemble humans (<i>Sylvari</i>).
Tahlkora	She is the last Spearmarshal, a follower of the goddess Kormir, whose soul was trapped in her corpse by Palawa Joko (“Remains of the Last Spearmarshal”).
Tempest	“An elite specialization of the elementalist” class (“Tempest”).
The Commander	Also known in game as “the Pact Commander, or... Commander, is the player’s character” (“Pact Commander”).
Thematic design	Thematic design occurs when elements of the game are connected to one another. For example, the environment design appears a certain way due to the narrative. Or the game mechanics play out a



	certain way in order to align with the culture of the people in the game or so on.
Theme	Generally refers to an overarching message that connects seemingly separate elements namely the in-game world, the narrative, and the gameplay together in the framework. This creates a unified universe for the player to experience throughout their playthrough sessions.
Tone	Refers to the mood of the narrative.
Trait	“An in-game mechanic” that “passively” affects a player’s build, “skills”, “attributes”, and “actions” (“Trait”).
Tyria	“Tyria, sometimes called Central Tyria, is a continent in the world of the same name” (“Tyria”). While the term core Tyria can refer to the main game without its expansions.
UI	Abbreviation for user interface.
Veteran	An experienced player of <i>Guild Wars</i> , typically referring to a player who has played both <i>Guild Wars 1</i> and <i>2</i> .
Vlast	The scion of Glint that sacrifices itself to save the player character (“Vlast”).
VoD	A term that Wooden Potatoes used in his video which is an abbreviation for video discussions (See <i>Guild Wars 2 Path of Fire Gameplay - Day 6 Exploring Vabbi, Completing the Story [No</i>



	<i>Spoilers] 00:08:54-00:09:09).</i>
WvW	An abbreviation for the World versus World game mode (“Abbreviations”).
Zerg	Refers to a incredibly large amount of players (“Abbreviations”).



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