



NATIONAL RESEARCH  
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# «REAL» NATURE OF MASSIVE ONLINE GAMES VIRTUAL REALITY: WORLD OF WARCRAFT EXPERIENCE

Game Studies Research

Moscow, 2020

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## RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTION

- Modern researchers pay little attention to the fact that videogames they study differ from classical virtual space a lot (like a social network), because, as we think, it combines certain elements from common reality with what we would call “digital specifics”.
- *Which features of digital culture in massive online games may be the indicators that these games have political and social practices or identities taken from the real world?*

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## RESEARCH FIELD – DIGITAL CULTURE

- “Digital culture” research was built out of the analysis of networked societies (Castells 2010), the geography of digital worlds (Aarseth 2008) and cultural notations on virtual reality (Shaw 2010).
- Researchers were most interested in questions of identity formation (Rettberg 2008), replication of phenomena from the real world (Langer 2008) or communication in World of Warcraft (Manninen 2003).
- The most discussed idea in recent studies is related to the perception of WoW as a purely cultural and not political or social phenomenon (Nardi 2010).

## RESEARCH FIELD – PRACTICES AND IDENTITIES

- Practices in virtual space (just as in social sciences) represent themselves as repeated complexity of actions that consist of physical and mental behavior and background knowledge in the form of emotions and motivations (Reckwitz 2002).
- Particularly in WoW, it was shown that players can form their in-game identity through communication and in-game practices (Tronstad 2008).
- Identity is the result of the sense-making process by which people selectively organize their experiences into a coherent relation to the identification spaces (Gilpin 2011 + own modification)

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## METHODOLOGY

- The methodology of *virtual ethnography* we used was proposed by Christine Hine and applied to MMOG worlds in the book of Bonnie Nardi, Tom Boellstorff, Cella Pearce and T.L. Taylor «Ethnography and Virtual Worlds» (Boellstorff et al., 2012)
- Perception of social interactions between players as the basis for the local community that can be explored through classical ethnographical methods, but with some changes occurred from the specific nature of the virtual world, such as «identity division problem» or «texting interview preference» (Sveningsson 2004).

# METHODS

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- **Structural Narrative Analysis**

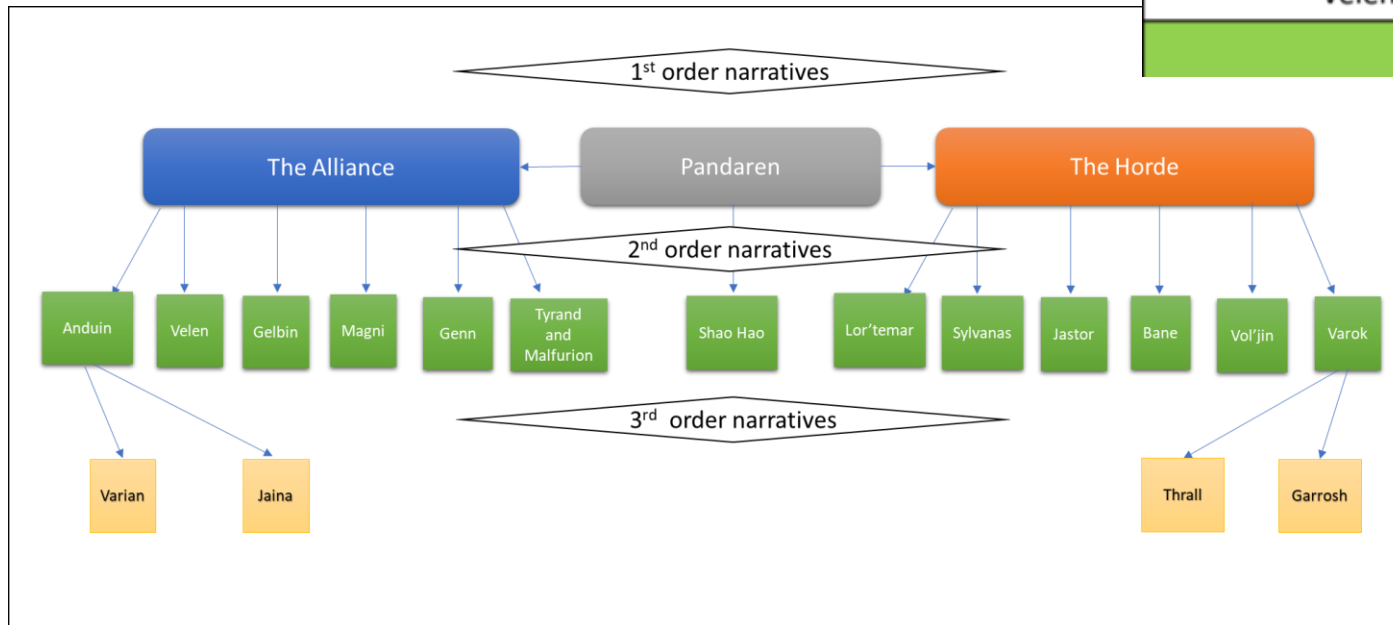
Building the structure of identification spaces out of in-game narratives tied to political and social concepts. (To discover **identities**)

- **Interviews + Qualitative Content Analysis**

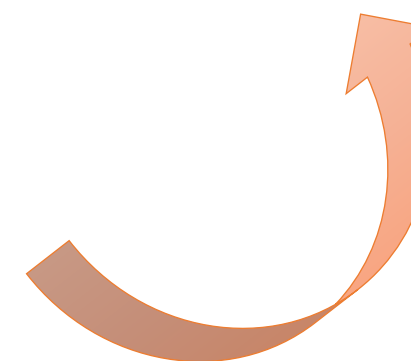
Interviews based on deductively pre-made comparisons between in-game practices and real-world practices + QCA for these interviews to discover the presence of such comparisons in relation people have to in-game practices. (To discover **practices**)

# SNA RESULTS

The Alliance	The Horde
Anduin ( <b>just war</b> )	Sylvanas ( <b>just war</b> )
Genn ( <b>nationalism</b> )	Thrall ( <b>democratic leader</b> )
Jaina ( <b>racism</b> )	Garrosh ( <b>nationalism</b> )
Velen ( <b>immigrants</b> )	Vol'jin ( <b>liberation war</b> )
<b>Pandaren (isolationism)</b>	



**Identification spaces related to the political and social concepts**



**Empirical model of narratives hierarchy in World of Warcraft**

# QCA RESULTS

**Raid groups are like project teams**



**Guilds are like political practices**



**Authoritarian practices are present in guilds and raids**



**New members recruiting in guilds are similar to the ones in political party**



**Practices of fractions conflict are based on ideological cleavages**

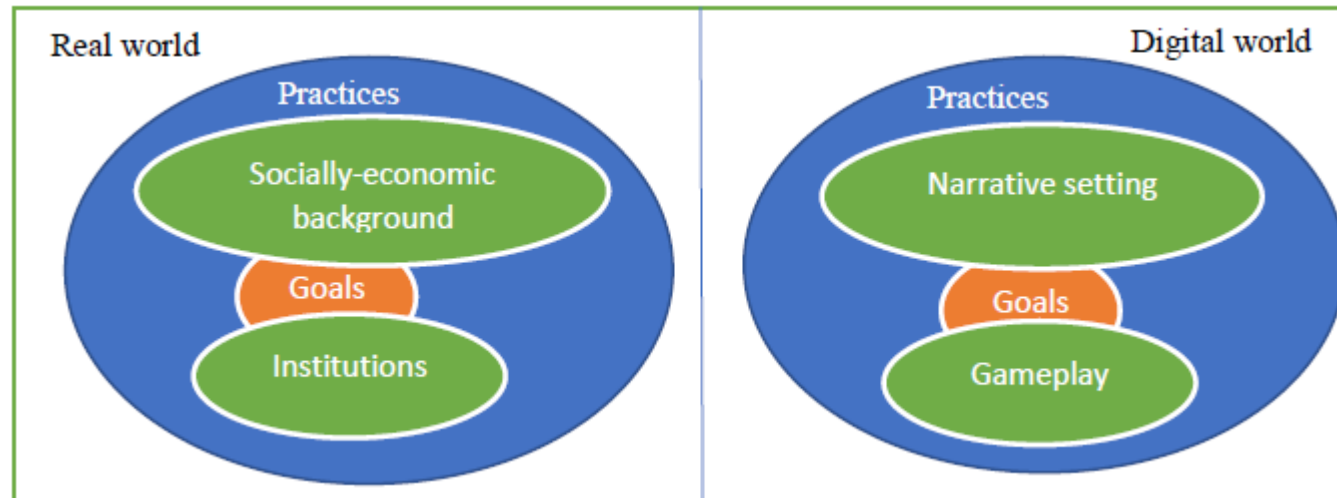




# KEY CRITICAL FINDINGS

Practices are “taken” from the real world and put in the different recreation conditions. “Real” recreation conditions are social, economic and political environments. In the virtual world, it is replaced by **setting**.

In-game narratives are given with the less observable information about motivations and context for the established ideas. Thus, **the way the narrative is given** plays an extremely important role in the representation of identity aspect.



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## APPLICABILITY AND FURTHER RESEARCH

- SNA analysis is rarely used for virtual narratives. It may be the guideline to further research that will try to outline complex identification spaces in other videogames.
- Our findings will be useful for considering contemporary virtual spaces as far more important places for cultural development. And thus, it may help people to treat these spaces responsibly.



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