Fame And Celebrity Within A Virtual World

A Case Study Of World Of Warcraft

Name: Lucy Armelin
Supervisor: Kristina Widestedt
Student Number: 880728-T145
Date of Submission: 24th May, 2012
Department: Media and Communication Studies, Stockholm University
Abstract

Despite the vast amount of research conducted by media academics over the past decade, little is known about the concept of internet celebrity, or e-celebrity, within an online-gaming environment. The overall impression that emerges from literature in this field is that e-celebrity has been studied in popular, user-based or social networking websites. However, this paper aims to contribute to the field by further exploring the role, concept and practices of e-celebrity within a virtual world: the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game World of Warcraft. By exploring Marwick’s concept of micro-celebrity and by studying players via qualitative means using virtual ethnographic participant observation supported by interviews, the data collected in this paper aims to add nuance to our understanding of the changing concept of celebrity on a virtual level.

Tags: World of Warcraft, virtual world, MMORPG, celebrity
## Table of Figures

- Figure 1. Image of the loading screen, animated with characters from *World of Warcraft*. 8
- Figure 2. A character idling in the Trade District on a mount. 26
- Figure 3. A screenshot of the amount of "played time" that a character has acquired. 29
- Figure 4. Image of the character "Bloodline" in the guild "Lords of Ironhearts". 30
- Figure 5. The menu showing a player's achievement points. 31
- Figure 6. An example of a *WoW* video uploaded to *YouTube*. 34
1. Introduction

1.1. Why should celebrity be studied?

“Are we a celebrity obsessed culture?”. While writing this paper the question appeared to answer itself when the sudden death of Whitney Houston flashed across the television news screen. The death sparked the press into a frenzy and it was only a matter of days before the explicit leaked photos of Houston’s body emerged. Whitney Houston was the classic celebrity, who seemingly led a glamorous Hollywood lifestyle. However, celebrity stars like Houston are not the only kind of celebrity these days, thanks to the emergence of the Internet and new media. A paradigmatic shift is taking place, questioning just who and what celebrities are. Prior to the Internet, celebrity was based on the distance and separation of the star to their audience, through traditional medias such as the press, film and television. Nowadays, many ordinary people have found fame by connecting to an audience on a personal level through social and user-generated content platforms, such as YouTube and MySpace. When these ordinary individuals are projected into a ‘world in which every citizen can broadcast to every other citizen’ (Rheingold, 1994:14), is it any wonder that the opportunity for celebrity is becoming more and more widespread? Especially, according to Sherry Turkle, when there is the possibility of inventing ourselves again and again by moving freely between an infinite number of possible identities? (Turkle, 1995:9-26). Young people today not only imitate celebrity, but expect it thanks to the process of celebrification, by which ‘celebrities have become more central to our culture than ever before, which has affected virtually every area of popular culture’ (Marwick, 2010:218). Whether or not critics agree that we are a celebrity obsessed culture, there can be no doubt that celebrity is apparent in everyday life and features highly in certain aspects of society. Celebrity is an important feature to study in academia, not only for the social and political implications it carries, but also for the ever changing dimensions and characteristics that are visible when fame occurs.

1.2. Why does online-gaming matter?

The second important aspect of this paper concerns the Internet and the online-gaming community. ‘[Internet] spaces are important as a part of everyday life, not apart from it’ (Miller and Slater, 2007:7). The online-gaming community is built upon millions and millions of people who enjoy playing video games online, normally in cooperation with real-
life friends or simply against other players from around the world. The games range from the classic 2D platforms, such as *Super Mario*, to Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) and strategy games, such as *Starcraft 2* (SC2), *Diablo III* (D3) and *Lord of the Rings Online* (LOTR). When Kelly 2's book, *Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games*, was first published in 2004 he said that by the end of the decade it was estimated that there would be 100 million MMORPG players in the world (Kelly 2, 2004:14). A figure, in my opinion, may have well been reached or even possibly exceeded by now since at one point in time *World of Warcraft* (WoW) had 12 million subscribers alone (BBC News Technology, 2011). With other critics such as Mark Meadows insisting that games like WoW 'will continue to grow, evolve, and generate more value because...they carry strong metaphors...', it is no wonder that a possible 100 million people play online-games (Meadows, 2008:25).

Despite being labelled as 'online-games', much of the games' influence does not just stay online. The online-gaming sector, or e-sport industry as it is known, has seen immense growth the past decade, with millions of dollars being spent on gaming conventions and tournaments around the world. The biggest and most popular conventions and tournaments take place in Korea and America, and usually feature top-end players or celebrity gamer guests competing for prize money. In 2011 the *League of Legends* Season Two prize pool featured a record setting $5 million (Ryze, 2011). According to Kelly 2, MMORPG audiences now rival those of television audiences (Kelly 2, 2004:14). At one time in South Korea the television audiences plummeted, with people favoring 'game life'. To compensate, television channels have created shows in which they broadcast players actually playing online-games against each other in live contests (ibid., 2004:16). Now in Korea, regular live streaming of these e-sports events on television has proven extremely successful and other countries are beginning to follow suit. Over the past decade Sweden has seen an increased popularity surrounding these tournaments, hosting its own yearly conventions such as *Dreamhack*. The gaming industry in Sweden is currently experiencing a huge boom, ‘in the past four years, the Swedish gaming industry has doubled its turnover, reported financial newspaper *E24*. In 2010 the industry's turnover reached 1.2 billion kronor ($178 million)’ (*The Local*, 2012). With this industry rapidly becoming one of the most popular and biggest online sporting events, it is important that we report and log the changes, implications and influences that this has on culture and society for future reference.
1.3. Overall intentions of the paper

The intention of this paper is to specifically examine Internet celebrity within a virtual online(gaming environment. Firstly it is interesting that through social media, any ordinary person can become famous or a celebrity within their own smaller social circles. The Internet has broken down the original gate-keeping barriers which sheltered, to some degree, the celebrity from the public and vice versa. This change implies that the whole celebrity practice has evolved dramatically since the emergence of the Internet. Secondly, it is interesting to study the effects of celebrity in a virtual world because presently there has been much research looking at the practices of celebrity involving popular websites such as Twitter and MySpace. However, my argument is that on websites such as these, the stars are themselves; they sign up to the website using their real names or pseudonyms. Nonetheless, they appear as real human beings on the websites, where pictures link names to faces, human faces to stories and experiences. In a virtual world on a computer game this is not the case. The player is represented by a characterized avatar accompanied by a made-up (usually fantasy) name. Unless the player themselves chooses to expose their identity via an outside platform (such as Facebook), they remain completely anonymous. So how do these anonymous players receive their celebrity status? Is it solely through the virtual avatar representation or does it depend on the player’s character and behavior? This paper aims to explore the player's actions that contribute to forming their identity as a micro-celebrity, however, is not going to look at the characteristics of the player behind the avatar. It is not concerned about who the human being is behind the character, unlike other studies. It is solely focused on the characteristics that can be seen exerted by the avatar in the game.

Much of the past academia has been focused on celebrity practices concerning social networking and user-generated websites, drawing from case studies of real-life people who have become famous thanks to the Internet. For example, Chris Crocker posted a YouTube video of him telling people to “Leave Britney Alone” in the face of her breakdown; hundreds of books on Amazon can be bought if one would like to know how to self-brand and sell yourself in the Internet age. Likewise, a lot of academic work has covered World of Warcraft, concerning the people who play the game, their lifestyles, thoughts and feelings. There have been studies on the player’s characteristics and outside influences on what type of characters the player chooses to use, concentrating on linking personality and character types to relevant
aspects in-game. Nonetheless, little literature can be found specifically about the practices of celebrity in a virtual gaming environment. However, by combining the literature from gaming subcultures, and the concepts from celebrity studies, new possible revelations can come to light to be studied.

My interest in this study lies with the fact that I have been an avid gamer nearly all my life - from the age of six when I first received a SEGA Master System console I have always enjoyed playing games as both a form of relaxation, escapism and as a way of socially interacting with others. For the past six years I have solely been playing World of Warcraft, which is an online PC game, as opposed to consoles which were mainly offline. During the past six years while playing World of Warcraft I have had to cope with the impact of unwanted attention, and in some respects notoriety, just for my gender. Being a woman in what started out to be thought of as a mainly male dominated community set me apart regardless of whether I wanted to stand out or not. I consider my gender to play another factor in my interest in this study. Again while growing up I was very much exposed to female magazines which promoted celebrity lifestyle and culture, whether it was to sell the latest fashions, perfumes or films. Celebrity was everywhere it seemed. Ordinary people, my friends, began to use these social networking websites and quickly it became a popularity competition to see who could acquire the most friends. My friends became famous in their own small social circles all thanks to the opportunities social networking platforms brought about. A combination of all these factors has contributing to igniting my passion of celebrity in an online-gaming environment.

The knowledge that I hope to add to the field will have both scientific and social implications. I hope to contribute to a unique niche aspect of society that not everyone is privy to, but will hopefully be explored and revealed more clearly in this paper.
2. Background of World of Warcraft

Figure 1. Image of the loading screen, animated with characters from World of Warcraft.

2.1 History of World of Warcraft

*World of Warcraft* is one of the most popular and successful MMORPGs to date, owned and developed by *Blizzard Entertainment*. As of September 2011 there were 10.3 million subscribers to the game and it holds the Guinness World Record for the most popular MMORPG by number of subscribers (BBC News Technology, 2011). *WoW* was first released on November 23rd, 2004 and currently has three expansions (*Burning Crusade, Wrath of The Lich King, Cataclysm*), with the fourth soon to be implemented, called *Mists of Pandaria* (*Blizzard Online*).

So what exactly is an MMORPG? Kelly 2's definition of MMORPGs is that they are 'living, self-contained, global, three-dimensional virtual worlds, each one the size of a real-world country filled with forests, prairies, oceans, beaches, mountains, towns, and thousands of
simultaneous players' (Kelly 2, 2004:13). *World of Warcraft* is a whole fantastical virtual world, filled with millions of players across the globe.

### 2.2 Getting started in *World of Warcraft*

*World of Warcraft* takes place in the virtual world of *Azeroth* (see appendix for a full list of *WoW* terms and phrases used throughout this section). *Azeroth* is currently made up of three different continents (*Azeroth*, *Outlands* and *Northrend*), which players can explore freely using a fictional character, otherwise known as an avatar, an 'interactive social representation of a user' (Meadows, 2008:13). Players may control the looks, behavior, activities, speech and actions of their character on the most specific and micro-levels (ibid., 2008:15).

According to Meadows, *WoW* has 'complex' avatars that require a high 'technical skill' from the player, which can be reflected in the subscription figures. There are 10 million subscribers to *World of Warcraft* compared to 290 million subscribers for other types of games with simple avatars (ibid., 2008:15). The complexities of the characters can be seen on the starting screen, with the option to choose from twelve different races: Goblins, Elves, Orcs, Humans, Worgen, Draenai, Tauren, Undead and various others. Consequently depending on the player's choice of race from the above list, they are faced with two subsequent options: they are then either allocated to the "Horde" faction or the "Alliance" faction. These two factions (or tribes) have a history deep in lore of clashing, meaning that both sides are meant to battle each other. Additionally, the players can then select their class. The class of the player determines what role they would like to play in the game, such as a healer, a tank or a damage dealer.

Once the process of avatar selection is complete the player can then enter the world of *Azeroth* and begin to level up by questing and entering dungeons (Player Versus Environment, PVE) or battling against other players (Player Versus Player, PVP). The player can either explore *Azeroth* solo, or join a guild to help them along the way. A guild is a collection or a group of players with specific aims and goals who all help each other to accomplish tasks within the game. Once in a guild and after defeating enemies or monsters, your guild can be ranked within the *WoW* community on special websites, with details of the kill and what position you came throughout Europe in killing the enemy. The more prestigious the kill, the higher rank you have in Europe. Guilds with high ranks are quite
successful and always have a high number of player applying to be in their guild, due to the status and fame that can come with the guild tag. Players are not ranked individually as such like guilds, however there are certain measurements that can give you a good indication of the reputation of a character. Gear score is one of them. A gear score is a system of points based on the weapon and armour you wear. The more difficult an enemy is, the better piece of gear it drops, the higher the amount of points associated with that piece of gear. Therefore, people with high gear scores generally have a higher status within the WoW community because other players recognize how hard it is to acquire those pieces of gear. Low gear scores means that the player has not really completed any of the game content within WoW and can seem to be new to the game or very inexperienced. The second measurement scale of a character is achievement points. Achievement points are very much like the system of gear score. You get achievement points for completing certain events or tasks in the game - the more points you have the more you have completed in the game, connoting experienced and a large amount of time and effort put into the character.

2.2.1 Composition of the world

Not all 10.3 million players are together in one giant world at once. Instead, the game is broken up into many identical versions of Azeroth (their technical term being called servers), placing a cap on the amount of players that can be on each server. Like T.L. Taylor notes, 'players do not play in one world but are scattered amongst duplicate versions of the game that reside on separate servers' (Taylor, 2006:3). This implementation intends to prevent overcrowding and to improve game-play performance. Each server on WoW is identical in terms of the virtual environment the player plays in, and can hold up to 2000 people. However within WoW there are a few designated special servers which have different properties and qualities. For example there are specialist French, Russian, German, Spanish and English servers where the native languages are spoken throughout the game as the primary form of communication. On top of that the servers have been split into Role Playing-Player Versus Player (RP-PVP), Role Playing-Player Versus Environment (RP-PVE), Player Versus Player (PVP) and Player Versus Environment (PVE). The 'RP' prefix simply informs the player that there is an element of role-playing on their server and avatars can be "in character". PVP means that players can battle against each other or be attacked themselves. PVE is a server where PVP does not take place, meaning that a player cannot
simply be attacked by another player, they are free to play safely without the worry of being attacked. While creating their character, the player can choose specifically what server they want to be on depending on the above criteria (ie. language, PVP). The servers are all identical in terms of the content within them, apart from the mentioned variables. Whenever creating a new character, the player always have the choice of picking what server they want to play on. Once a character is made on that specific server then the player has to continue playing on that server, they cannot just change servers every time they log on to play WoW. However, there is a limit to the amount of characters that one can have per server - the cap being ten. Nonetheless, there is nothing stopping the player from creating a character on every different server (with there being hundreds of different servers).

2.2.2 Players

WoW players come from all over the world and are not confined to one specific server, regardless of their originating country or culture. However there is a noticeable gathering of players from particular geographical areas depending on, as mentioned above, the primary set language of the server. Moreover, some guilds have a language requirement in order for players to join, so for example a Finnish guild would only recruit Finnish players. Like nationality, age and gender are also completely random. Players range from twelve years old and up (the minimum age limit in the Blizzard License Agreement is twelve). One of the oldest players that I have personally come across while playing the game has been fifty-five! I also know of families who enjoy playing together as a way of bonding, despite sometimes being two generations apart. As for gender, the amount of women who play World of Warcraft is speculated to be a high figure, however due to gender discrimination and unwanted attention from other players, not as many female players tend to readily reveal their gender identity. There are normally quite a few openly female players on every realm, though there are no solid figures to support this. Interestingly Aleks Krotoski in a 2005 white paper, commissioned by the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association (ELSPA), found that 'women make up 39% of all active gamers in the United States, while in Korea they go well beyond 50% of the market' (Krotoski, 2005 cited in Taylor, 2006:93).
3. Research Aims and Questions

3.1 Research aims

The intent of this study is to explore the concept of micro-celebrity within a virtual world, drawing on the different theories from both celebrity studies and internet culture. The aim is twofold: Firstly, it aims to examine how Marwick’s theory of micro-celebrity (see literature review for more details) can be practiced in a virtual world and to identify, if any, examples of key features in WoW that contribute to micro-celebrity, along with reasons and motives that players have for practicing micro-celebrity. Secondly, it aims to discuss to what extent the three theoretical frameworks (structuration, continual observation and typology) can usefully be applied to World of Warcraft.

3.2 Research questions

1. What are the motives and opinions of players in WoW who can be seen practicing micro-celebrity in relation to Marwick’s theory?
2. What factors contribute to producing a micro-celebrity within World of Warcraft?
3. What are the disadvantage and advantages of micro-celebrity in World of Warcraft?

4. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In this section of the paper I will be looking at and discussing some of the general literature in the area of celebrity and online communities. Following this overall introduction to the literature I will be specifically looking at the concept of micro-celebrity, since that will be the main focus and aim of this paper. Lastly, I will also briefly examine some of the theoretical frameworks that may be applicable to World of Warcraft.

4.1 Celebrity, the Self and the Internet

The effects of the Internet on social relations are obviously complex’, Yochai Benkler writes, his research suggesting that clearly ‘the Internet has some fairly well-defined effects on human community and intimate social relations’ (Benkler, 2006:357). According to Benkler, due to the Internet and new media, we have room for more 'looser' and more 'fluid' social relations and it is exactly these new, fluid relations that are changing the way we perceive
celebrity. Like Benkler, David Marshall also notices the change in ‘the symbiotic relationship between media and celebrity’, explaining that the relationship has been ‘ruptured somewhat’ in the last decade through the development of new media (Marshall, 2006:634). The different flows of information that have developed due to the Internet do not resemble the broadcast model of communication anymore. Instead the Internet ‘permits movement of information in both directions and in many of its forms can be defined as many-to-many form of communication, in contrast to broadcast technologies’ one-to-many’ (ibid., 2006:637). This change in the structure of communication is important because it suggests why there are more and more Internet celebrities appearing daily; the fluid social relations provide a more exciting dynamic of exchange between people, satisfying the audiences’ need for fast, up-to-date information while at the same time allowing the celebrity direct and quick access to their fans. Previously, the celebrities would have their PR department send out information to the relevant press outlets, generating a steady but slow flow of data to feed the fans. Nowadays the information is released almost instantly via multiple Internet platforms for whomever the audience may be, and is not constricted by time frames, gatekeepers or specific fans.

The fluid social relations caused by new media has opened the door to personal expression in the public sphere on the Internet, with the new driving force in the economy being the 'image', not information, as Sternberg notes (Sternberg cited in Marshall, 2006:418). According to Marshall there has ‘been an explosion in practices of presenting one’s self online in the most public way’ (Marshall, 2006:638). With this shift in personal expression from the private to the public, new media can ‘generate public privacy into a new form of narcissism’ (ibid., 2006:640). The phenomenon of celebrity is very much linked with the renaissance and what has been called modernity, in the sense that it depends on an ‘audience that understands and celebrates the malleability of identity and primacy of the individual’ (ibid., 2006:19). David Boorstin suggests that celebrities ‘are nothing but ourselves seen in a magnifying mirror…[they] populate our horizon with men and women we already know…celebrity is made by simple familiarity, induced and re-enforced by public means’, which partly explains the fascination and attraction surrounding them (Boorstin cited in Marshall, 2006:81). On the other hand, being too familiar to the public such as having ‘ordinary clothing, forgettable faces...indistinct personalities’ command little market interest (Sternberg cited in Marshall, 2006:426).
This celebrity discourse in contemporary culture allows us to explore the articulation of identity, individuality, values, and norms, whether seen in the real world or online (Marshall, 2006:6). With Boorstin noting that 'celebrities are made by people’ (Boorstin cited in Marshall, 2006:88), celebrity now 'becomes the lens through which we understand a variety of issues, disciplines, and concerns’ (Marshall, 2006:3). However, despite the shift to the online environment, the ways of branding oneself as a public identity ‘into a commodity that is brokered and exchanged’ stays the same (ibid., 2006:6). The only difference is that historically, celebrities have never handled their own image, rather a large amount of staff would do it for them. Nowadays ‘in electronic games, the shift is that the individual is the agent, the actor, the avatar’, and therefore the individual has to manage and negotiate identity while still trying to sell themselves as a commodity (ibid., 2006:640).

4.2 Online communities

Early online community academics, like Edward Castranova, have always stated that synthetic worlds have a huge impact because they are not 'radically different' from our world and ordinary life (Castranova, 2005:78), but instead bearing 'as much weight as the real world' (ibid., 2005:146). Harold Rheingold, who was thought to be one of the earliest writers about the gaming communities of MUDs (Multi User Dungeons), states that you can 'do just about everything people do in real life' in a virtual world. When he first published his book on virtual communities in 1993, he said that they 'are likely to change our experience of the real world as individuals and communities’ (Rheingold, 1993:3-4). Furthermore, Rheingold implies that knowledge of how people function in small virtual communities 'give you tolls for comparison when we zoom out to the larger metropolitan areas of cyberspace' (ibid., 1993:16).

Traditionally the definition of a community involves 'solitary groups of densely knit neighbors located in a common geographical space' (Wellman and Gulia, 1999 cited in Marwick, 2010:32). This traditional definition is problematic while discussing a virtual community, due to the emphasis it puts on 'a common geographical space' and due to the fact that a community connotes something in common; a shared bond, whereas here it is described as a 'solitary group'. According to Alice Marwick (2010), the term community is now moot because it is so contested, which is why she refers to the term as a “scene” in her
works. Though I do not quite fully agree that the term is moot, I do agree that it is contested. Nonetheless, Marwick's own term "scene" is also not compatible to use here. In his book, Rheingold defines a virtual community as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace' (Rheingold, 2000:xx). For me, Rheingold's definition of a virtual community is not suited for this particular study either, which is why I will be stating my own definition of what a virtual community is. For the purpose of this study, a virtual community is a group or body of people who share an interest in common, and who are able to communicate, interact and exchange information over the Internet. In my definition I purposely do not mention anything about the relationships between the persons in an online community because it varies greatly from community to community.

In general, Internet celebrity relies on social media platforms in order to gain fame and notoriety through the online community, and the active participants of these virtual networked communities play a key role in promoting the self. Taylor insists that this communication in online games, such as WoW, is a key feature of how 'social life is supported'. In WoW, in addition to public communication methods, such as the global 'General' chat channel, players are also able to send private messages to one another' (Taylor, 2006:39). Marshall also supports Taylor's claim that communication plays a key role in the ‘para-intimacy of individuals' which depends on 'sophisticated communication networks that connect the people to the “thronged”' (Marshall, 2006:19). Moreover, this communication makes a group of people 'significant and interesting enough that disconnected people follow their exploits and lives’ (ibid., 2006:19).

4.3 Micro-celebrity

According to Marwick, the present fragmentation of mass culture has had a few profound effects. Firstly it has created certain subculture 'heroes' who are familiar to 'far fewer people' (Marwick, 2010:13). Secondly, the same process of fragmentation, combined with celebritification, has 'transformed celebrity into a set of practices' and 'self-presentation techniques' which are spread 'across social graphs as they are learned from other individuals' (Marwick and Boyd, 2011 cited in Marwick, 2010:5). Because these practices can be learned and are spreading rapidly, they are becoming 'more available to the average person' in a
culture where 'publicity tactics are increasingly demanded in all professions' (Marwick, 2010:294). The accessibility of social media on the Internet has allowed these practices and techniques to transform celebrity from something 'a person is to something a person does', hence the term 'the practice of micro-celebrity' (ibid., 2010:13). Nonetheless, despite being a learned practice, micro-celebrity is deemed 'a more authentic and interactive version' of traditional celebrity because the micro-celebrity 'intrinsically involves direct interaction' with fans using social media (Senft, 2008 cited in Marwick, 2010:18). The micro-celebrity exhumes closeness and accountability because the direct interaction with the fans is a crucial part of maintaining fame and notoriety (Marwick, 2010:231). However, despite a suggested increase in authenticity with the fans, the number of fans that a micro-celebrity acquires is irrelevant, micro-celebrity is 'independent from the number of followers an individual has' (ibid., 2010:232), hence the celebrity being on a micro scale in a small community. Below is Marwick's definition of what she calls a micro-celebrity:

'Micro-celebrity is an emerging online practice that involves creating a persona, sharing personal information about oneself with others, performing intimate connections to create the illusion of friendship or closeness, acknowledging an audience and viewing them as fans, and using strategic reveal of information to increase or maintain this audience' (ibid., 2010:13)

4.3.1 Achieved and ascribed micro-celebrity

There are two types of micro-celebrity according to Marwick, achieved and ascribed. Achieved micro-celebrity involves a deliberate and conscious effort or set of choices that a person makes in order to maximize their 'visibility, status, and popularity' (Marwick, 2010:14). This can involve becoming an online model, writing a successful blog or hosting a video show. Ascribed micro-celebrities on the other hand are 'assigned celebrity positions through the production of celebrity media about them' (ibid., 2010:14). For example, being featured in paparazzi photos or in gossip blogs. In the case of a small community, ascribed micro-celebrity is quite commonly experienced with ascribed micro-celebrities occasionally shunning the spotlight or using micro-celebrity practices to 'manage their audience once they reach a certain level of online fame' (ibid., 2010:249). The people who actively seek achieved micro-celebrity often 'create a persona', and 'share personal information' to perform 'intimate connections', thus giving the illusion of friendship or closeness (ibid., 2010:250). Once an
audience is acknowledged by the micro-celebrity they are then constructed as fans and the use of strategic reveal of information is then induced in order to 'increase or maintain the audience' (ibid., 2010:250).

4.4 Definition of a celebrity for the purpose of this study

This study will use Marwick's definition of micro-celebrity. However, the term 'celebrity' should be more clearly defined. I will now look at the term "celebrity" and its various definitions. The word celebrity and the connotations that are attached are changing thanks to the Internet. However, it is not just recently that the term celebrity can be contested. According Alfredo Panzini (1963:202), stardom is the phenomenon by which an individual attracts unconditional admiration or interest from many other people; Richard Dyer describes stars as a ‘complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs’ (Dyer cited in Marshall, 2006:153); and Leo Lowenthal notes that contemporary heroes are the product of 'consumption and organized leisure time' (1961:121). Despite the varying definitions of celebrity, Graeme Turner has collected and outlined three primary scholarly definitions of the term: 'celebrity as a way that people are represented and talked about'; 'a process by which a person is turned into a commodity'; and 'an aspect of culture which is constantly being re-inscribed and re-formulated' (Turner, 2004:9). By using a combination of all three of Turner's primary definitions, this study can cover and examine a wide range of player's actions in-game, under the broad term of 'celebrity'.

4.5 Theoretical frameworks that can be explored in World of Warcraft

4.5.1 Structuration

Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration (1984:25) is the way that social systems are produced and reproduced through social interaction. Micro level activity, or human agency, and macro level forces, such as social structure continuously feed into each other. This means that it is impossible to just study the micro or macro level. However, the social structure of traditions, institutions, moral codes and established ways of doing things can be changed at micro level when people ignore, replace or reproduce them differently (Gauntlett, 2008:102). In this study it would be interesting to see if celebrity is achieved through this micro level of change against the whole of the social structure, or if celebrity is achieved through following
already existing social structures and practices in the game. How much do the structure of the game itself, the culture and the practices that have emerged from the game contribute to the creation of the micro-celebrity, or is it just down to the player themselves?

4.5.2 Typology

In small communities such as World of Warcraft, gossip helps to transform micro-celebrities into character tropes and the narratives provide an 'evaluative framework for behavior' (Marwick, 2010:219). However, an earlier study conducted by Richard Bartle found that there were different categories for the motivation of gamers. Originally Bartle (2003:130) had found four categories: the Explorers, the Socializers, The Achievers and the Controllers. After further research, Bartle concluded that there were eight different player types, linked by the 'implicit and explicit'. It is the Achievers and the Socializers that I am most interested in because this is where I think the concept of micro-celebrity in a virtual world would be most influenced by existing player typology. The Achievers are described as:

'People who come to build. They are happiest with challenges that involve the gradual accumulation of things worthy of social respect. They want the world that allows all kinds of capital accumulation and reputation-building. They want the ability to increase the power of their avatar, to build new structures, to hoard wealth, and to change the world itself (Bartle, Players Who Suit MUDs).

The Socializers are described as:

'...interested in people, and what they have to say. Inter-player relationships are important: empathising with people, sympathising, joking, entertaining, listening; even merely observing...The only ultimately fulfilling thing is not how to rise levels or kill hapless drips; it's getting to know people, to understand them, and to form beautiful, lasting relationships' (Bartle, Players Who Suit MUDs).

While conducting my study I will be able to examine to what extent the micro-celebrities can be classed as Socializers and Achievers. Marshall states that the texts that surround a celebrity are the ‘source material for determining what is exhibited and what is repressed by individual celebrity’ (Marshall, 2006:3). What I intend to find out is to what extent this typology of the player influences the exhibition of the micro-celebrity and if it has any influence on the way micro-celebrity is practiced.
4.5.3 Continual Observation

The ‘continual observation’ theory was put forward by Francesco Alberoni in 1962. Despite the theory being put forth over fifty years ago I believe that it is still useful today, with relevance in contemporary celebrity online culture. As Alberoni points out, the continual observation theory states that all members of social groups are ‘subject to continual observation’, with members of the group evaluating celebrity behavior in regards to:

1. See if the person’s character can be considered deviant
2. Compare performance with expectations
3. Verify culturally established predictions and expectations
4. Assess the influence of their behavior on the community
5. Satisfy their own conscious or unconscious desires or impulses
6. Receive advantages from having interactive relations with the person

Alberoni goes forth to note that with the last point, in a small community, individuals can hold more power, therefore a greater observability may be taken and that people who have very limited institutional power can arouse ‘a considerable and sometimes even a maximum degree of interest’ (Alberoni, 1962:45). This study will look at whether micro-celebrities are evaluated according to Alberoni’s criteria through the ‘direct or indirect consequences of their activities’ by the WoW player community (Alberoni, 1962:45).

5. Method and Material

5.1 Methods

The method that was used within this study was virtual ethnography in the form of participant observation, combined with interviews. I hoped that the gathered data from the observations would be supported by the information that comes to light in the interviews, therefore strengthening my hypotheses. On the other hand, in the case that the interviews did not positively correlate to the observations, it would have be interesting to investigate why.
Both the participant observation and the interviews took place on the *Stormreaver-EU* (PVP) server, by players who currently reside there. My own *World of Warcraft* character was used to undertake the observations, which has access to all aspects of *WoW* life and the *WoW* community. Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) software was used to conduct the interviews in the form of *Skype*.

The micro-celebrities that were chosen to participate in the interviews were based on my observations taken in *WoW* and also through repetition and frequency of their names in common chat between players within the world. The names that were then coming up in constant conversation, or recommended by other players, were followed up by myself and then contact was made to request an interview.

5.2 Sample size and population

According to the *Blizzard* loading screen when you log into the game, *Stormreaver* is classified as a "medium" population realm. This means that although there is no way for certain to know how many players occupy the server for sure (unless *Blizzard* chooses to release those figures directly), it is safe to assume that there will be enough players to partake in my observation. As for an actual sample size, it was not necessary for me to select a rigid number of players to observe, since I was be looking for general trends and patterns: I will continue observing for a set amount of time, rather than a particular sample size.

I chose to interview people who frequently came up in conversation or were recommended by others, a technique called snowball sampling (Patton, 2002:237). I conducted semi-structured interviews, meaning I had a standard set of questions but usually let each interview take its course and develop in case any new data came to light. In the end four people were questioned about their experiences, ideas and thoughts about their micro-celebrity character in *WoW*, all of which were conducted via *Skype*. 
5.3 Timeframe

This study took place over two weeks, from the 31st of March until the 14th of April, logging on every day at random times, for an hour at a time, then again in the evenings, this time for block periods of 1-3 hours. The two weeks were chosen specifically because the Easter breaks fall in the middle of them, meaning that more players had the possibility to log on and play, due to time off from work or school, making the server slightly busier than usual. I also decided to log on in the evenings because that is when most of the players are online, since by 6pm most players have again finished work or school and have time to play.

The interviews were arranged privately between myself and the participants and then carried out whenever it suited them best. I did not allocate a time limit to the interviews because I wanted to push the participant for the maximum amount of information.

5.4 Researcher awareness

During a virtual participant observation there are many ethical and scientific practical issues to regard. I will now explore some of the issues that occurred and how I presented solutions to them. One important aspect of this study that needs to be mentioned is that I was not a 'tourist researcher'. As Meadows states, tourist researchers have 'little to give, so they get little in return. Most virtual worlds function like this, and most unfavorable reviews neglect this social factor'. Furthermore, 'in order to enter any society, one must have a role. You must know something about the rituals and archetypes. You must have something to do there. It is best if you have something to contribute...' (Meadows, 2008:48). After six years inside the game I consider myself to be very much a part of the community, giving back much to the game as it gives me, which can be considered as a major strength. My role is of an active participant, unlike other new members to the community, I already understand to some extent what is expected of me and therefore can utilize and yield better results than the average researcher unused to his surroundings. Another critic, Taylor, seems to agree with Meadows about the importance of the researcher being aware of his or her landscape, '[I do] not want to suggest a researcher can make inherently good or bad choices in terms of thinking about how representation and game structure will affect their experience and data, I do think
understanding how avatars and play choices are inextricably tied to the research process is important' (Taylor, 2006:15).

Another issue that was apparent while conducting my research was the issue of “known-ness”. While using my character there are always people knowing who I am, through gossip and stories in the community, and therefore behaving differently towards me. However, I argue that without my character and its reputation of being an active participant of the WoW community, I would have likely not have received as many people willing to be open enough to talk to me in the interviews. Due to the fact that there are a lot of scams and gold-sellers in WoW, players on the whole are very wary of talking to an unknown level 1 player. Again, I consider using my character here as an added strength in the paper.

Consent is a huge part of the ethical debate while conducting research. My observations were carried out in WoW in a virtual public space - in other words all the information that was collected was publicly available and identities remained anonymous for extra precautions. Therefore I do not think that consent was needed in this respect. Taylor states that 'as MMOGs become key spaces of social life...they may at times serve as a form of public space' (Taylor, 2006:160). However, any information that I gathered through private means (such as whispers, etc.), the participant was informed of my intentions and purpose, and permission was asked if the information could be used in this study. Likewise with the interviews, the players were informed and aware of the intentions of the study and permission was granted to use the data and their identities were changed upon request.

During the interviews what I had not realized was that players would be sometimes uncomfortable talking, instead requesting the interviews to be carried out via typing, meaning that the majority of my interviews were still carried out via Skype, but by text only. One could argue that by not always conducting face to face interviews or voice interviews, the researcher loses out on important body language ques. However, I contest this argument for this particular study because each of the players interviewed are very used to the VOIP services and typing since they are a very important tool used to enhance the gaming experience. All interviewees in the end were comfortable with their requested interviewing technique. One reason for the lack of voice interviews was that the players were not native English speakers, so they felt nervous about answering and making mistakes. However I do
defend my interviews for two reasons, firstly because WoW is made up of people from all around the world it would have been impossible to get face to face interviews. Secondly by allowing the interviewees to type the answers they seemed to take longer to think about what they were saying, increasing their effort to give an answer they believed in.

I did encounter some small issues between “insiderness” and objectivity. As Raymond Madden says, ‘the ethnographic manor of being with people is to find a way to get close, but no so close one can’t step back again...One acculturates and socializes to the point of being comfortable with representing the ethnographic context, but one doesn't give over totally to the cultural and social immersion' (Madden, 2010:79). At times taking a step back was complicated because of my own position within the game, thanks to my participation in the community. I had access to people with high social status in the game – was that a reflection of my own social status? However I maintain that I did step back to conduct this study successfully, by ensuring small steps were followed, such as not interviewing close friends. I did, in the process of carrying out my research, become friendly with the players afterward. Few even shared personal information and anecdotes with me that I have excluded from the results due to irrelevance or to protect my interviewee.

6. Results and Analysis

In this chapter I will present my results from the study, which firstly looks at the motives and opinions of micro-celebrities, and secondly identifies key features that contribute to micro-celebrity within WoW. Lastly, the advantages and disadvantages of micro-celebrity will discussed. The four micro-celebrities that were interviewed were Brahla, Mdg, Zewie and Aegar.

6.1 The micro-celebrity and the self

When asked during the interviews if the micro-celebrities thought of themselves as celebrities, three of the four participants denied acknowledging their higher ranking status in the WoW community. Mdg states that he is 'not a celebrity like Hydra or that sort of PVP hero, but in Stormreaver scale I think I'm kind of well-known'. Like Mdg, Aegar also states that 'I'm mainly known to people I've only met or other raiders just looking for advice or
some random mages who have checked me out on YouTube, but ask the average guy on WoW and they wouldn't know me even on Stormreaver. It is interesting here that both players use the phrase "well-known", suggesting that they register differences between the two terms of "celebrity" and "well known". The term "celebrity" in this case could be deemed problematic to WoW players who are only aware of the traditional sense of the word celebrity, without realizing that there are other forms, such as micro-celebrity with different connotations attached. For example, in his statement Mdg compares his own status with that of the worldwide famous WoW player, Hydra, who competes in tournaments which are broadcast on the internet to a large audience, instead of comparing himself more closely to his own server. Likewise, Zowie says that he is 'well known by people that's played the game for long and knows a bit about the game/server...but famous I'm not'. These self comparisons of the interviewees to more worldly players reflect the more traditional definition of celebrity that has been ingrained into popular culture over the years. Nonetheless, by acknowledging that they are known to some other players on the server, they accept that they do provide some kind service or role in the Stormreaver community.

The only person who was actually aware of his fame or notoriety was Brahla, stating that 'up to a certain extent, it surprises me how many people I have never heard of have an opinion about me and know my name'. Marwick suggests that motivation for becoming a micro-celebrity can be monetary and for advancing their career. In terms of monetary gain, Brahla is not exempt from receiving items or gold from followers or admirers. Additionally, his game playing is also somewhat advanced to a certain degree because his fame allows him to group with players of a higher standard than your average player, resulting in experiencing more benefits from the game and acquiring more status. Therefore, to Brahla, 'creating a public presence is therefore a necessity in order to secure and maintain a job', in other words, securing and maintaining his game activity and status (Marwick, 2010:282). Hand in hand, game activity helps to fuel the celebrity status, as Castronova states, because 'status inequality is hard to avoid in human systems in general, but in MMORPGs it is glorified' (2005:113). It was found that in general status was one of the main reasons to motivate people to 'participate in online interactions' and Brahla is no exception to this (Boyd, 2007; Lampel and Bhalla 2007; Marwick, 2010:151).
The most interesting result that came to light here was to find out that not many of the players who fitted the criteria of micro-celebrity actually viewed themselves as micro-celebrities, with the above exception of Brahla. Nearly all of the participants involved in my study seemed to be ascribed micro-celebrities, rather than achieved (the reasons for this ascribed micro-celebrity will be discussed further in the paper). The only person who consciously worked towards achieved micro-celebrity seemed to be Brahla. A plausible explanation for the lack of recognition of the players on their own status within the game is the problematic traditional sense of the word celebrity. When prompted about the exact definition of the term "celebrity", there was a distinct variation of answers from the interviewees. Mdg explained that he thought 'celebrities must get hundreds of fan posts daily, but well-known people get dozens of questions and fan posts to mailbox/whisperbox daily'. This reasoning suggests that WoW as a platform has no connotations of celebrity for him. His statement highlights that both celebrities and well-known people both receive fan posts, but the emphasis seems to be on '...to mailbox/whisperbox', inferring that the online-gaming mode of communication is a barrier to becoming a celebrity. On the other hand, Aegar sees celebrity as someone who is 'generally well known, whereas fame is something you get for accomplishing something, or at least attempting to...which of course would have to be well known anyway'. Again his description emphasizes that WoW as a platform is a barrier for accomplishing something. He acknowledged that players in game do occasionally from time to time accomplish minor feats, but it is not enough to become a celebrity.

While both Mdg and Aegar are not completely positive in their views of players who are well-known, Zewie's response reflects differently upon the situation, 'I'd say a well known person is...someone that's doing good and people know about in a positive way...a celebrity doesn't really have to be that way...'. Brahla was able to comment on both the negative and positive connotations of "celebrity", 'I guess that being well-known is a direct result of having an extraordinary personality that people seem to notice, negatively or positively, though being famous really implies that the majority of people find your personality appealing in a positive sense. You can also be well-known in a notorious way, but 'fame' is really not a concept that fits any negative situation'.

25
When questioning the interviewees about who they deemed famous there seemed to be a consensus of some players they knew by name. Brahla was a player who seemed to be known to many players on the Alliance side, particularly for his trolling and constant use of the chat channels available in-game, 'he used to spam trade chat like it was his Facebook wall. I don't think many on the Horde side know him. But on Alliance side I could consider him as famous' (Mdg). Though Brahla to many players hasn't accomplished so much, his constant use of communication channels make him noticed in the game. With this method of putting himself in the limelight, Brahla attracts negative criticism. 'Spamming trade making an ass out of yourself doesn't mean anyone knows you, those who read trade chat on alliance side will recognize the name but that's it' (Aegar). In a lot of cases Brahla is what players often call an "attention whore", a deliberate phrase for someone who actively seeks attention and popularity - in this study it would be considered as an attempt to exercised attention seeking practices to achieve micro-celebrity. Despite the negative criticism, Brahla is recognized as a 'nice person' according to Mdg when he 'spoke with him and role-played with him in Stormwind...[but] most of those attention whores are bit cocky and they're like those Big Brother style celebrities who just can't live without being noticed by other people'. Castranova states that 'by recognizing that the activities of a few ordinary people, no matter
how odd or interesting those activities might be, do not necessarily deserve all that much attention' (Castranova, 2005:77). This is what the majority of Brahla's critics seem to agree on - that Brahla has not accomplished anything great and therefore does not deserve to receive attention. Though I do not necessarily disagree with Castranova's statement, it appears to be contradicted by the rise of micro-celebrities like Brahla within the game. Their activities are odd and interesting and some players have determined that they should receive attention for it, which in turn supports Marwick’s theory that the micro-celebrity is not concerned about the number of fans.

Kavapallo is another player's name that is generally tossed around the server repeatedly, being somewhat of a legend in the WoW community. Firstly he is well known on both the Horde and Alliance side, which is a more rare occurrence for players to be known cross-factions, due to the blocked channel of communication between the two sides. Also no one is quite sure if Karvapallo still plays his main character of which made him a micro-celebrity in the first place. It could be that he is still playing, but on a different avatar that people are unaware of, or he could not be playing the game at all. Both this and the fact that he is a long term, old player (Zewie mentions that Karvapallo has been playing since the first WoW expansion) contributes to the myth and legend surrounding him. As Zewie says, 'they [legendary players] don't do anything specific, it's just that their actions are heard of or spoken of by other people around them to outsiders that builds this reputation or gives this...what to call it, aura? around them'. Aegar also mentions a player called Scorpion, who was also well known both for the rare "Scarab Lord" achievement and for selling his account (a taboo subject that is generally frowned upon in the community). Previously in WoW there have been very few achievements where only one person on each server could receive the "Scarab Lord" achievement being one. The awe of having achievements like this on a character adds to the myth and legend surrounding players, fuelling gossip and chat. Many players like both Aegar and Zewie admit that they 'don't know what they do or much about them [legendary players] to be honest, I've played a bit with them and that's about it, they can play but what they did to become so well known I have no idea'.

Other players that have got mentions in the game are well-known PVEers, who happen to be in high ranked guilds on the server. Aegar states clearly that 'nowadays I think the most famous people would be the EL guys [Exploding Labrats] who transferred to Horde recently, such as Leviculus'. These players are noticed because 'they are people that has been around
that knows what they are doing’ and are admired for building their reputation (Zewie). What appeared clear in the interviews is that while not all the players like each other, there is a high degree of respect for the accomplishments, high status and effort put into the game by players such as these. ‘Beyond systems of reputation to get into a guild, members also work to build and maintain their status once accepted. People become known for their skills as raid leaders, accomplished class players, group organizers, and general knowledge of the game world’ (Taylor, 2006:44). As Zewie explains, Threat, the leader of Exploding Labrats, is ‘18-19...and he's leading a top 30ish guild’ which in Zewie's opinion, has 'gotta count for something...or that Astarta [leader of Dark Ritual] has been able to run a guild for 6-7 years to raid every tier’.

Lastly, players were mentioned who were only well-known to each of the interviewees, implying that the interviewees interests affected the social circles that they mix in. ‘Being known primarily for their well-knownness, celebrities intensify their celebrity images simply by becoming widely known for relations amongst themselves’ (Boorstin: Marshall, 2006:83). According to Brahla, he remembers Kush because Kush was ‘a real virtuoso with language and could always sustain his gentleman kind of attitude whilst repressing any assault on his person. He always managed to keep his dignity through a fine choice of words...he distinguished himself with written words and I admire that’. Brahla in a way is similar to Kush, using the public chat channels and language to make himself more visible to other players. Mdg remembers Thastor, a PVPer because Thastor is seen to make ‘those fancy PvP videos [of]...5 minute weekly clips intending to be famous’, whereas Aegar recalled Uns, who was a ‘very famous ganker [a ganker is a person who kills another repeatedly] a few years ago’. While each interviewee remembered a different player, all for various different reasons, it is because of their particular interests in the game. Aegar would never have come across Uns if he spent all his time socializing in the city, likewise Mdg would not have come across Thastor if he were not slightly interested in PVP. These results seem to support the existence of micro-celebrity in small communities.
6.3 Key features contributing to micro-celebrity

6.3.1 Time spent in-game

In this study it is apparent that the time spent in game plays a crucial factor in determining whether a person becomes a micro-celebrity or not. All the players I interviewed admitted that they spent 'a lot' of time in the game (Zowie), putting in as much as '5-16' hours a day, admittedly with it always being nearer the 16 hours than the 5 hours (Md). Like any celebrity, visibility is key; the more hours spent online in WoW, the more the player can be seen.

At this point I have to question whether the micro-celebrities just become a celebrity from being a fixture of the world due to their time spent in-game? Would other players be comforted by a regular player's presence in the game? For six and a half years Md has played WoW, meaning that he has had the time input to be considerably recognized by others, 'even the old-school guys might remember me'. Zowie also notes that he has not done anything special in the game, only that he 'plays a lot and they’ve [other players] seen me around for a long time so they know I’ve been around for a while'.

6.3.2 Guilds

Guilds are an important aspect of WoW life, without a guild it is nearly impossible to explore all the abilities that the game has to offer a player. One needs to group up with like-minded players in order to be able to complete challenges. The guild aspect also plays a major factor in the reputation, popularity and monetary gain of a character, of which all contribute to micro-celebrity. The longer a player stays in a renown guild, the more reputation they acquire. Taylor notes that 'reputation plays a significant role in a gamer's success because at a
basic level reputation determines both being able to secure groups over the long term, as well as being admitted into a guild' (Taylor, 2006:43).

Nearly all the interviewees are conscious of their guild and its reputation. According to Mdg, being an ‘officer in the realm's highest ranked guild helps out’, while trying to find an explanation or reason for his popularity. The officer rank in the guild showcases his high status within not only the guild, but the realm, and to some extent Europe since his guild has managed to often secure good positions in the progress tables of all of Europe. Likewise, Zowie is aware of what a guild tag symbolizes to other players, ‘I guess the guild tag says something about it as well’. Without a guild, a player's status within the game is considerably lowered amongst the other players, with the view of being a "no one", or a Zowie puts it, 'if you've been around for a while and you're in a respectable guild, guess it's not the same as being a random if you know what I mean'. A "random" is the term used for an unguilded player, that often has negative connotations because of the lack of trust from other players and normally a lack of experience in the game. Being in a top guild means that there is always more attention surrounding the players in that specific guild. According to Mdg 'the guild most definitely helps being well-known, since people in EL are always wearing the newest shiny heroic gears and people like to gather around and watch and throw questions to

Figure 4. Image of the character "Bloodline" in the guild "Lords of Ironhearts".
good geared people because I think they think good gear means good player’. Moreover, it 
can be argued that Mdg attracts even more attention because he is a part of a guild where the 
policy is to take Finnish only players. This air of exclusivity surrounding the guild adds 
mystery and a certain barrier to many of the players on the server who do not happen to be 
Finnish. Zowie on the other hand is part of an English speaking guild, where the doorway is 
more open to the average player, since Stormreaver is an English speaking server in the first 
place. In some sense Mdg appears to be part of a different closed group to Zowie.

6.3.3 Achievements, items and gear

In recent years changes to WoW have been made to make the game more entertaining and fun 
for players who are interested in completing tasks and collecting items. One of the changes 
was the implementation of a system called "achievement points". Achievement points are a 
collection of numerical points which are attached to a character, connoting how much time 
and effort they have put into their avatar. The higher the achievement points, the more the 
player has achieved in the game. Achievement points range from varying difficulties to 
acquire, with some being able to obtain singularly, while others need to be obtained with a 
large group of 25 or more people.

![Figure 5. The menu showing a player's achievement points.](image)
While carrying out my observations I found that players with a higher number of achievement points seemed to gain more attention from other players around them. The players who had a high number of achievement points were often found to be in reputable guilds and who played for a number of years, or a large quantity of time. The reason for this is that the average player can only get so many achievement points solo. Like previously mentioned, to gain a considerable amount more of points, a coordinated team effort of 25 players is needed, which takes a lot of time and skill to complete. Brahla notes the sense of pride he has from acquiring so many achievement points, 'the fact that I intentionally brag with achievements and accomplishments in this game constantly, very consciously, which I and some other people enjoy really much but other people can't seem to appreciate'. His comment also reveals that some players do tend to have negative views towards players with a high amount of achievement points, possibly out of jealousy?

Like achievement points, certain gear and items can be obtained throughout the game which has visual appeal or use to boost the appearance or performance of the characters. Weapons, armor, pets and mounts are just a few of the items which add to character appeal. As Castranova notes, if a player accumulates a lot of money or gold, 'the developers will make sure you have the opportunity to let others know' (Castranova, 2005:113). The most rare items are only obtainable through either using a group of 25 players, which again requires skill and coordination, or through hours of tedious ‘grinding’. Grinding is the process in which a player constantly kills specific monsters or creatures for the chance that a rare item will drop. Often items can have a 1%, 0.1%, 0.01% chance to drop, meaning that the grind for an items is a long and slow process, where many players get bored and give up. It is for this reason that players with rare items are often revered amongst other players, because of their determination and stamina.

6.3.4 Trolls

'I wouldn't say he is well-known...Brahla is just a troll' Zowie

Trolls are a phenomenon that can be seen in WoW. The aim of a troll is to provoke players in order to gain an emotional reaction from them. This can be done a number of ways, though the most visible ways in WoW are through two public chat channels which everyone has access to, called 'General' and 'Trade'. Mostly from my observations, trolls tend to spam the
channels with useless, irrelevant information or external links, sometimes with references to 
*WoW* and in-game content, but often with internet subculture jokes. Some *WoW* players, like 
Mdg, who are in a reputable guild and appear to have a high status within the server do not 
want to troll since they risk losing their reputation and status which has taken a number of 
years to build, 'not insulting people is a big bonus for not getting abandoned by the fans'. 
However, others like Brahla are aware of trolling and often take part:

'My friends and I are conscious of the trolling-level, aware of the fact that there is no real value in anything in 
this game, but others often fall for the joke. I guess it is sometimes an experiment, to see how people respond to 
my simplistic, raw thoughts. I also find it fascinating that people seem to lack the social capacity to understand 
that I am merely roleplaying'.

By taking part in this highly visible trolling, Brahla could be trying to elevate his social 
status, despite explaining that it is just a joke to him. Trolling can be seen as a way to practice 
and achieve micro-celebrity in the small community, however, there are downfalls to 
partaking in this type of practice. 'Those who pursue attention and visibility for its own sake 
are liable to find their personas and activities policed and judged by others' (Marwick, 
2010:248). Brahla is accustomed to being judged by other players in the community 
continuously when speaking in Trade or General. 'Karvapallo and Brahla are *THE* trolls. 
they can troll the forums to be "known" but that doesn't make them famous really ' (Aegar). 
While carrying out observations there was quite a big backlash to Brahla, resulting in him 
getting a temporary ban from the game for disturbing the peace, showing just how much he 
provokes other players while trying to receive attention. This tactic does work occasionally 
because even more people gossip and talk about him after he is banned.

6.3.5 External platforms

Many micro-celebrities use a wide range of Internet platforms in order to achieve fame. It is 
a crucial part of the process of self promotion. What this study touched upon was whether 
*WoW* players could achieve celebrity solely through playing on the server, or whether they 
had to rely on outside platforms to promote the self. Despite the fact that few interviewees 
actively made content to go on other platforms, other platforms were inextricably linked to 
*WoW*. It was revealed in the interviews that both Mdg and Aegar make videos of their
characters, while Zewie does not upload videos to YouTube, rather he uses a live streaming service to directly feed his friends with progress of his game-play. All three players insist that they had only made the recordings and videos for friends and guild members to view, not for the general public, ‘[I] haven't really broadcast myself around' (Mdg) and 'not always stuff I release publicly for all to see' (Aegar). However, the choice of platform, in Mdg's case, YouTube, is a platform open to the general public and therefore has the possibility to be seen by other members of the WoW community. According to Aegar, he is aware that external platforms are a welcome way to draw attention to yourself in the world of e-sports, however he thinks that by just playing WoW alone, one will not become famous.

One reason why Brahma does not particularly promote his image on external platforms is because it requires alot of effort, 'reaching fame on forums would really require a lot of attention and it would certainly pose a challenge to manage to acquire a lot of it there, as initially you will find more scepticism from more people and barely any recognition...I've never relied on anything else than social contacts in the game to reach this status of being well-know'.

Figure 6. An example of a WoW video uploaded to YouTube.
6.3.6 Miscellaneous

During the interview process some interesting comments came into focus from the players. Apart from the above listed main features that contribute to becoming a micro-celebrity, a few comments were surprising. The first was by Brahla, who revealed that his idols played a huge part in his hunger for fame. As a young, impressionable 11 year old, Brahla stated that he had 'always looked up to people who were good at the game'. Now his guild (according to him) is 'best on this side of the server, a place where I've been for 7 years soon' in terms of progress. Brahla wanted to become a micro-celebrity in order to fulfil a 'secret childhood dream'.

Being an all-round player, or gifted at the game, is another reason players gain fame. Mdg is a player that has 'done many things in WoW' and stands out for completing all the game's content, which includes PvP, raiding, achievements, collections, both in group play and solo. Zewie appears to be another player that is well-known because of playing a certain role in the game – that of a guildleader. Not all players become or once have been guild leaders in WoW. Guild leading requires coordination, skills and effort to maintain leadership over 25 players plus. 'I think people notice me from the effort I've done in the past guild I've been in...'. Being an "all round player" appears to demand respect from other players in the game due to the amount of skills and coordination you have to have to be able to manage successfully.

6.4 Advantages and disadvantages of micro-celebrity

Like traditional celebrity, micro-celebrity has both advantages and disadvantages. This section of the paper examines both these sides of micro-celebrity, experienced by the players. Firstly the advantages in the game of being a micro-celebrity is the social status and bonuses that encompass it, such as receiving free items or gold. If you are particularly good at a certain aspect of the game, in Mdg’s case PvP, you are also granted access to the best arena teams to join. These arena teams are made up of elite groups of players who aim to achieve a high rating and exclusive rewards from the ratings. This is considered a bonus because otherwise if a player wants to form an arena team they have to spend their time looking for suitable members to partner up with. This way, they bypass the usual time requirement. Like arena teams, players can also be granted access to the top guilds which, according to Zewie,
can boost the player's confidence. In-game actions are not the only ones taking place either. Another advantage of being a micro-celebrity is the attention that one can get. Brahla in particular highlights this certain advantage, 'when I am in an attentionhorny mood, I can just speak in any public channel and people start spamming both there and in whispers'. He explains that the attention he receives is interesting to see how people respond to me and my way of expressing myself. The internet is a safe place to do so, if I manage to remain anonymous' (however, the attention can also be a disadvantage, as will be discussed below). In real life the micro-celebrities can expand their circle of friends because it is not uncommon for player to secure long lasting friendships or relationships with other well-known players.

With any attention, the person in the spotlight may receive negative feedback or criticism from the public. Brahla again notes this and admits he finds a lot of 'opposition against my presence'. To cope with this negative feedback he firmly relies 'entirely on the people I have invested my time in, as others are likely to be very prejudiced'. Mdg has also experienced negative feedback from people who he deems "haters". 'Sometimes some haters are telling me to fuck off or get a life or go to work etc, but always haters will be hating...but I don't get upset by insults, I would've quitted this game dozens of times if I did get upset'. Haters are not just particularly negative members of the public, they can be trolls too. Aegar notes that famous players have to deal with trolls on a daily basis, 'when you become well-known on the internet a lot of people on the internet will give you negative attention which you need a thick skin for'. Less harmful effects of micro-celebrity in a virtual environment like this is the continuous amount of players who want information from the micro-celebrity. The micro-celebrity is often held as a pinnacle of knowledge, whether it is true or not. Zewie sees this continuous stream of questioning as "spam". He says that 'in the long run, you just get spammed from a lot of people asking you things they are too lazy to look up themselves, for example "what poisons should I use on my main hand" to rotation questions to other silly stuff'. Trivial chatter such as this example is not meant to offend the micro-celebrity, however it does become bothersome as my research suggests.
7. Discussion of Theoretical Frameworks

7.1 Structuration

I will now discuss how Giddens' structuration theory, by which the social system is produced through social interactions, is seen in World of Warcraft. The way the game was designed and played in previous years had a major effect on the emergence of micro-celebrities in the Wow community. The game was structured in such a way that made communication in this small community simple and effective, through the chat channels and a limited space in which the players interacted. Nowadays Wow has changed in terms of growth (expansions), and with that growth players have left the game. These long term players have quit the game due to Blizzard's changes, which in effect made it easier for 'casual play' within World of Warcraft. Previously, to be able to kill end-content bosses or to get into a good guild you had to have been playing Wow for a huge amount of time, experiencing the game and knowing how to play your character well. This would then allow you to be acknowledged and worthy of a trial period in a guild, in order to experience the bosses. According to Zewie, everything now 'looks the same' within the game, therefore tiring very quickly. He also points out that Blizzard have seemingly lowered the skill level so any player can experience what at one point quite elite and special. Subsequently, this is losing its appeal for players like Zewie and trivializing the game so 'it's not really a big deal anymore'. Brahla mentioned that the game did play a 'bigger role' for him 'a few years back' and mentions that people complain that accomplishing things in the game has become easier the past few years, especially in this current expansion. Another point that Zewie notes is that game is being more and more centered around the format of a 'single player game where you don't need to be in a group or a guild to do stuff', especially with the introduction of cross-realm collaborations. The cross-realm collaborations were introduced to try and combat the problem of the unbalanced player pools across servers, with the implementation of them allowing an expanded community where players who would never have met or talked now have the option to work together in order to achieve goals. With the introduction of new aspects leaning towards a 'single player' game, instead of highlighting the aspect of community, Blizzard have now caused a defragmented community where there is a clear line between casual players and non-casual players.
In the more recent years, as players have migrated servers and factions, micro-celebrity could merely be an indication of the lack of players that can be of any competition to the alpha player (a player with a strong reputation and cemented status within the community, along with the best items and gears in the game). Brahla acknowledges that his fame is 'subject to the social circumstances' that he finds himself in and muses that the 'requirements for distinction have dropped dramatically both naturally over the years through game-mechanics as well as socially'. It seems like there has been recent changes at macro level, resulting in a gradual change of micro level practices, causing a change in micro-celebrity in *WoW* through a lack of social options available to players. It is not down to the game structure anymore that players are finding themselves to stand out in the crowd, instead it is due to the micro actions they perform within the game on a daily basis.

7.2 Typology

From my observations the most famous micro-celebrities on the server appeared to fit Bartle's 'Achiever' category. According to the interviews, players like Mdg, Zwie and Aegar played *WoW* to complete the challenges the game had to offer, including building up the power of their avatars through items and gear, and to change the outcome of a PVE fight. All of the interviewees admitted to gradually acquiring items in the game that were particularly challenging to achieve. Although this information correlates with Bartle's Achiever criteria, in his definition he states that this accumulation of things is '...worthy of social respect'. Though true, the items are worthy of social respect, from the results chapter one of the most surprising things that was found was the micro-celebrities did not consciously aim to accumulate the items just in order to gain social respect. The social respect happened to be a by-product of playing the game in the style that the micro-celebrities enjoyed. Therefore it seems like if a player is predisposed to being an Achiever, then micro-celebrity is more likely to occur, whether it is achieved or ascribed.

While examining *WoW* players for fitting Bartle's 'Socializers' criteria, there were certainly players who were interested in other people, with emphasis on their in-game relationships or who particularly enjoyed to role-play. However, these players that I would categorize as Socializers were not apparent micro-celebrities. This is because by '...merely observing', the players miss out on opportunities the game has to offer that can only be experienced by
partaking in action. By missing out on this in-game action the Socializers do not have as many chances to broaden their social circles and more importantly, gaining items or wealth which leads to a high ranking social status in the community. However, there are a few very rare exceptions to this rule. On designated RP-PVP or RP-PVE servers, the main RP prefix indicates the special interest of role-playing. Role-playing can be a pronounced feature of a fantasy game like World of Warcraft, due to the mythical and magical aspects of the game. Role-players flock to these designated areas specifically for the chance to socialize and act, and can become micro-celebrities due to their skills and determination to role-play. In cases like these, the micro-celebrity would be classed as a Socializer, unfortunately however in my research I was unable to interview anyone who appeared to be a micro-celebrity that would have been classed as a Socializer.

7.3 Alberoni's theory

Alberoni’s continuous observation theory proved still useful in WoW's contemporary community to see how the community reacted to micro-celebrities around them. The players used the steps to policed the micro-celebrity, assessing whether or not they were a threat or an asset to the community. When a micro-celebrity went too far in the pursuit of attention, for example like Brahla, they were 'condemned and lose status accordingly' (Marwick, 2010:295). In World of Warcraft micro-celebrities seemed to hold more power, like Alberoni's suggested, and therefore they attracted a greater level of observability. At times, through the direct or indirect consequences of the micro-celebrities actions, the players in the community have been seen to followed steps in Alberoni's continual observation theory in order to assess the micro-celebrity.

An overall assessment of the micro-celebrity was needed in order to see if that micro-celebrity was deviant or not. In the majority of cases, the micro-celebrity was considered to be non-deviant, and instead an asset, providing a useful resource as a bank of knowledge for questions, like was the case for Aegar and Mdg. However, some micro-celebrities like Brahla were deemed to be deviant and the community often reacted with negative criticism whenever Brahla would be seen to be practicing his micro-celebrity. As mentioned earlier, this even resulted in a temporary ban of his avatar from the game.
From the results it was found that generally micro-celebrities have been playing the game for an extended amount of time. This extended period of time connotes a larger understanding of the game mechanics and specialty in thoroughly understanding your avatar and the way it functions. If the micro-celebrity would want to get into a guild then their performance will be scrutinized and assessed on the most rigorous level, due to their perceived experience in the game. To pass the guild's trial would then depend on whether the micro-celebrity lived up to their predicted performance expectations by the other members of the guild.

The micro-celebrity in WoW was often been seen as a tool by the community to further their own conscious or unconscious desires or impulses. By being grouped with a micro-celebrity, other players' visibility is often boosted and it is possible to see a rise in their own status. Another advantage of being friends with a micro-celebrity in the game is the special privileges, such as not having to spend time forming a raid. Instead raids that the micro-celebrity normally takes part in are often pre-formed and arranged, meaning that there is a better chance of success thanks to an increase in both skill and coordination. Furthermore, acquiring items, gear and achievement points can be acquired at an easier rate when grouped with micro-celebrities since often they either do not need items, leaving them to be allocated to other players, or they are equipped with the knowledge of how to get the items, making the task a lot easier.

8. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of micro-celebrity within a virtual world, drawing on theories from both celebrity studies and internet culture. As discussed throughout the paper, Marwick’s theory of microcelebrity was successfully seen to be present in an online-gaming virtual world and the player's motives were successfully assessed and examined. The paper identified some key features of a micro-celebrity who has a high status in a small community: 'visibility, wealth, entrepreneurship, conformity to a certain image and recognition' (Marwick, 2010:285). I was also able to identify and name key categories within WoW that contributed to the rise of a micro-celebrity player (Guilds, Time Played, External Platforms etc.).
A key point of the paper was to confirm that the social status of a player is most important in a small community because the personal attention, as Rheingold noted, 'is like a currency...everyone is on stage who wants to be, everyone is the audience, and everyone is a critic' (Rheingold, 1993:182). Since status is omnipresent and a 'major motivator' for online player activity (Lampel and Bhalla, 2007 cited in Marwick, 2010:5), having a certain amount of status allowed the player to develop their characters in the game through acquiring a good guild, gold and achievements. One of the most interesting things that came to light through this study is that not many of the people who fit into the micro-celebrity criteria acknowledged themselves as being micro-celebrities. This implies that the genre is different to that of social networking websites, where players are more aware of themselves and their status within their community. From what was said in the interviews, the micro-celebrities main aims were normally just to 'have fun' and promote their guilds for 'recruitment purposes' (Aegar). Their main aims were not to 'broadcast...personal achievements in the game' (Aegar) and to be 'attention whores' (Mdg).

Despite the theoretical frameworks being created for use of the traditional celebrity studies, they are shown to be present to some degree and with some relevance in modern day online games like World of Warcraft. Though they did not always fit in perfectly with an online virtual environment their main points were visible and could be adapted to micro-celebrity. Structuration was the most problematic framework in this case, where as Alberoni and Bartle's theories were more easily applicable. I think the theory of structuration could be better explored in a case study like this if the next step of this research would to be to focus on post modern identity theory, regarding cyberspace and identity management. It is interesting that micro-celebrities are possibly fragments of an identity, an online identity, which can also be extremely different to a real-life identity.

Some issues that I as a researcher had to be aware of were discussed under the methodology section of this study, however I will now make note of some of the key limitations in this paper that arose while writing. Although studies on gaming culture and World of Warcraft are popular and extensive, dealing with micro-celebrity is still a relatively new concept that has not been explored thoroughly or extensively yet. Some of the theoretical framework, like Bartle and Alberoni, are drawn from traditional celebrity studies and although are relevant to certain extents, do not always apply perfectly to the new phenomenon of Internet micro-
celebrity. In my opinion there is a distinct lack of literature on micro-celebrity in relation to online-gaming, which is reflected in my bibliography. However, I do not feel like this negatively impacted my paper, as I am happy with the information I was able to acquire. Another limitation is that the interviewees that took part in the study were all male. I would have also liked to interview female micro-celebrities and I did actively seek them out to try and gain a more balanced gender perspective of micro-celebrity. Unfortunately they were either hard to find or unable to take part in the study. Again although this could be considered a limitation, I think that micro-celebrity practices would not vary too greatly, despite players being a different gender, due to the fact that the communication in the game would follow similar patterns and generally micro-celebrities in WoW are known for their avatar's achievements, items and gear, not the player's gender. Lastly pre-known knowledge of the community benefitted me greatly and without it this paper may not have been able to be written successfully. However, while writing this paper it was hard to try and explain all the technical details of the game to readers with no prior knowledge. Throughout the paper I have tried to explain key terms as I have gone along, though for a more thorough explanation and to benefit the readers, I have provided a glossary in the appendix of some of the most common and confusing terms in hopes of clearly explaining gaming terms. Finally, the micro-celebrities who were used in the interviews on the whole denied their celebrity status. I have to point out that there is a possibility of social desirability bias occurring in the interviews, by denying their status in the community. However, the interviewees would have more to gain in the game by admitting their social status and embracing it, rather than shunning away from the spotlight. This is one of the reasons why I feel that the interviewees were being truthful in their responses because they do not gain anything from denying that they are seen as celebrities.

This paper contributes to the field of ludology through adding understanding of micro-celebrity in a virtual online gaming environment, exploring the factors which allow the process of celebritification to take place within said environment. It also aimed to open up and explore a part of a social subculture that is rarely seen by anyone outside of the gaming community, in order to encourage more people to think critically of Internet spaces and the effects that contemporary culture has on virtual spaces. Further work in the area can be developed by examining how gender plays a role in the production of micro-celebrity
between gamers, or by studying other online games to see if there is any main underlying thematic features of celebrity in a virtual environment that can be applied cross-game.
9. References


Panzini, Alfredo. (1963) Modern Dictionary of Words which are not Found in Ordinary Dictionaries. Milano: Hoepli


8. Appendix

During the interviews the same procedure and structure was carried out. Firstly the participants were given a brief introduction to the projects, my aims and investigation to make sure they were fully informed about the material I would use within the paper. I then clearly asked them if they would allow their consent and character names to be used for reference. The following were the interview questions that I specifically asked:

1. What do you think of when you hear the word “celebrity”? What are the connotations to the word "celebrity"?
2. How do you define the words “fame” and “celebrity”?
3. Is there a difference for you between a "celebrity" and someone who is "well-known"?
4. Do you consider yourself to be famous? Why do you consider this?
5. What do you do or what do you think makes you stand out as being famous?
6. Why do you do it? Do you do it on purpose?
7. And what have you accomplished through it?
8. What are the advantages of being famous?
9. What are the disadvantages?
10. Do you think that by simply playing the game is enough to get you famous, or do you need external help, such as other platforms to operate on?
11. What external platforms do you use?
12. Can you name some people that are well-known or famous?
13. What are your opinions of them? Why do you consider them to be famous?
14. What reasons do you think they do it for? Do they become famous purposely?

Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement Points</th>
<th>A collection of points in the game which signifies status of a character. The more points a character has, the more time and effort a player has put into their character.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>One of the two factions in the game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arena</td>
<td>An event that lets players fight against each other's characters. Requires some skill to compete in and to be able to get ranked in a good position. A good position in the arena can result in extra items and gear for the players, as well as social status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avatar</td>
<td>The visual representation of the player within World of Warcraft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azeroth</td>
<td>The name of the world in which World of Warcraft takes place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>The same as an avatar (see definition of avatar).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>The class of a character determines what role the character plays within the game. The classes have three main roles: to either deal damage to enemies, to heal friendly players, or to tank monsters which means that you prevent other players from being hit by enemies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dungeon</td>
<td>An area in the game which players enter to fight specific monsters or enemies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganker</td>
<td>A player who repeatedly kills another player, without letting the dead player escape or heal to full health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gear</td>
<td>Items and armour that is useful to the character, that is acquired throughout the game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>The currency used in World of Warcraft to buy gear and items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grinding/Farming</td>
<td>The repetitive process of killing enemies or monsters over and over again until they drop a specific item that the player needs or wants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups</td>
<td>A group of players (up to 5) who work together to complete a task or dungeon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guild</td>
<td>A group of players (no limit to the number) who all work together on a regular basis and socialize with each other while playing the game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Game</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guild Leader</strong></td>
<td>The leader of a guild.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Horde</strong></td>
<td>The second faction, who opposes the Alliance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MMORPG</strong></td>
<td>Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Played Time</strong></td>
<td>The amount of time a player has spent in <em>World of Warcraft</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PVP</strong></td>
<td>Player Versus Player. Players fight other real life humans, not against the computer generated people within the game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PVE</strong></td>
<td>Player Versus Environment. Players fight against computer generated enemies, not other real life human beings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td>Determines what your character looks like and what skills it can have. There are 12 different races: Worgen, Dranei, Dwarf, Human, Goblin, Orc, Undead, Gnome, Night Elf, Tauren, Troll, Blood Elf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Raid</strong></td>
<td>A larger group, consisting of up to 25 people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Random</strong></td>
<td>A player who is guildless or has an unknown reputation or low status in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Server</strong></td>
<td>A duplicated world of Azeroth, for the purpose of solving overcrowding issues or languages issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stormreaver</strong></td>
<td>The name of the specific server that the study was carried out on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trade Channel</strong></td>
<td>A channel of communication between the players who are in the city district. Ideal for advertising or selling items and gear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trolls</strong></td>
<td>Players who provoke other players in order to receive a response from them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whisperbox</strong></td>
<td>The main form of communication, where you can see any messages that were sent to you on your screen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>