Reddit began in 2005 as a news aggregate site and is now home to thousands of subcommunities known as subreddits, created by users to discuss a variety of topics. As of 2018, there were thousands of subreddits and 330 million users on the site (Pardes, 2018), making it an important hub for online discussions. In particular, Reddit has become popular with gaming-related communities, as it is a platform that allows fans to easily find like-minded communities and engage in asynchronous discussions about shared interests. Unlike the more ephemeral nature of in-game voice or text chat, Reddit discussions stay on the site unless deleted by the user. While new content is posted to the site every day, almost every conversation since the site launched also remains online and accessible, allowing for the longitudinal study of gaming and other fandom discussions.

The archival nature of Reddit has most recently been used by Ruberg et al. (2019) as a proxy archive allowing for examination of transient conversations on the game streaming site Twitch. In this article, we continue Ruberg et al.’s (2019) examination of Reddit as a location for larger gaming-related discourses, using the site as a means to learn about gaming-related community movement. Previous work on Reddit has sought to understand the interplay of a community’s size, its age, and the rate at which people come and go (Panek et al., 2018), but underexplored is the phenomenon of users leaving one subreddit for another when, given theories about fandom and consumption, they have reason to do so. Understanding user movement is important because if too many users leave at once, it destabilizes the community and in turn may destroy the social support network it provided (Fiesler & Dym, 2020). To address this issue, we turn to Reddit’s robust gaming-related communities, examining if fans leave one online community for another when a new game is released in a franchise.

For some time, fans have turned to the internet to find venues to interact with others interested in the same cultural objects (Baym, 1994; Fiesler & Dym, 2020). Like other social media spaces, subreddits serve as centers of community for fans of cultural products (Gunderman, 2020). Despite a history of research finding that fans create cultural meaning with the popular culture they consume (Fiesler et al., 2016; Jenkins, 1992), a contrasting conceptualization is that fans may be “ideal consumers [who] automatically buy the latest works” (Cavicchi, 1998, p. 62), and that fandom and consumerism are heavily intertwined (Hills, 2003; Stanfill, 2019). Fandom exists as a tension between consumption and creation, where both ends of the spectrum can be framed as
fans’ labor (Stanfill & Condis, 2014). According to the consumerist conceptualization of fandom, people who enjoy a particular game series are expected to buy new additions to the series, as is true with cultural products more generally (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). Here we investigate if this logic applies to sites of fandom-related communities, specifically Reddit’s gaming-related communities. As subreddits are often topic- and game-specific, with the more consumerist framings of fandom, it follows that there should be a migration from the old subreddit to the appropriate new subreddit when a new title in a game franchise is released.

To learn about community movement (or lack thereof) when a new game in a series is released, we analyzed data for several subreddits devoted to three popular, long-running game franchises. We investigated subreddits related to Bethesda’s The Elder Scrolls franchise before and after a new game was released in the series. We similarly analyzed data from subreddits devoted to Bethesda’s Fallout series, and finally, to compare against a game series produced by a different developer, we investigated subreddits devoted to the Civilization series. In total, our research utilizes data for over 10 million Reddit posts across these three game franchises and five individual game releases at five different points in time between 2011 and 2018.

Despite our primary hypothesis that community members would move from their current subreddit to the subreddit for a newer game in the same franchise upon its release, our analysis finds contrary results. People who were posting about a soon-to-be outdated game did not consistently move to the subreddit for the new release. Instead, our observations found evidence that established community ties are stronger than the lure of novelty and commercialism. Ultimately, we argue that community ties can be resilient even when there is pressure to move to a new community, providing further evidence of the deep social connections that are made through our digital leisure spaces.

**Background: Why Study Gaming Communities?**

There are large bodies of literature relating to both game studies and the study of community, highlighting the importance of understanding both to scholars and society. Research has shown that online community membership can be important for individuals’ well-being (Ellison et al., 2011; Rainie & Wellman, 2012; Rheingold, 1993), and both game playing (Brown, 2009) and communities (Gamble et al., 2014; Rainie & Wellman, 2012) are vital to humanity’s health. At times, however, online communities, including game-centered ones, do fall apart as people migrate from one space to another.

Loss of one’s community and its associated emotional and informational support is challenging (Fiesler & Dym, 2020; Pearce, 2009; Poor & Skoric, 2014). Given that much of our social lives are now mediated via online communities, we argue that it is important to know how members react when their community is under duress. We ask, when there is reason to believe that a community is approaching its end date, when and under what conditions do player populations relocate? This is of particular use for scholars interested in longitudinal studies of communities. This will also be of use to game scholars, as players are assumed to move from game to game over time, providing further details from where such populations can be recruited.

Communities that have formed via games do at times dissolve because of intra-group tension and unresolved arguments (Bergstrom, 2021; Chen, 2012), and community members may then leave the game. But gaming communities can survive multiple types of challenges, and they may move to a different online space to meet their needs and interests. As Taylor (2006) pointed out, “it is not uncommon for people to start and leave games with each other so that entire groups move” (p. 87) from one game to another. Poor and Skoric (2014) showed how one guild in EverQuest II fell apart in the game but some members of the guild maintained their connections in other games and on Facebook: their interests had changed to newer games, but they were still interested in their social ties, so they utilized platforms where those interests and social ties could be maintained.

Pearce (2009) has similar findings about people changing platforms to one that met their needs and interests, although in her case study, the original platform, the game Uru, was facing an imminent shutdown. Players were interested in maintaining the world they had in Uru and the social ties therein, yet they needed to move to another space, such as There.com, that could continue to meet those interests, and they did so. Consalvo and Begy (2015) studied the game Faunasphere, which like Uru was shut down by its developer, but in this case, the community largely dissipated rather than move en masse to a new game or platform.

Bruckman and Jensen (2002), writing about the decline and demise of an early online space, MediaMOO, found several reasons for the decline. One was that subgroups of users splintered off to other spaces when those other spaces were more focused on the interests of those users. This is relevant for our work here, as we expect users of an old game in a series to buy the new game in the series and then move to the discussion space that is focused on their interests: the new game.

Fiesler and Dym (2020) have similar findings for online fandom communities, reinforcing not only the reasons that people move and communities fall apart, but the importance of understanding why this occurs given the difficulties that face those left in a dwindling online community. People may move to a new community or platform for a variety of reasons, such as a newer site that offers better affordances, that their friends have moved, or, as we focus on here, that their interests have changed. Fiesler and Dym note “reasons for leaving a platform might also include joining a new community,” a hypothesis we investigate here. They find that “on a shared platform like Reddit, when new communities emerge they bring with them membership from prior communities,”
exactly the issue we are studying. Finally, Taylor (2006) stresses how online forums for games, such as we see in Reddit, do act as communities for their members.

Online gaming communities function similar to many online communities and provide many of the same types of support for their members. Members of gaming communities can provide both informational and emotional support for each other (Chen, 2012; Pearce, 2009), exactly like other online communities (Baym, 1999; Kraut & Resnick, 2011; Preece, 2000; Rainie & Wellman, 2012), and player bonds can lead to marriage (Poor, 2017) and funerals (Gibbs et al., 2012, 2013), much like with online communities more broadly (Rheingold, 1993). Gamers in gaming communities are playful with the game, creating and sharing memes, game mods, and comics about the game (Taylor, 2006), and are also playful within the game, undertaking playful communal activities that do not directly relate to gameplay itself, for instance, with raffles, horse races, and naked runs in The Elder Scrolls Online (ESO) (Poor, 2019). Despite these positive aspects, gaming communities can create and support harassment of those not seen as valid gamers (Gray, 2020; Nakamura, 2009; Taylor, 2006), and this also occurs in Reddit’s gaming communities (Jhaver et al., 2018), much like other online communities (Brock, 2020).

With this in mind, we use the relevant and interrelated literature on games and community to build toward three hypotheses and one research question generated from our understanding of this literature. The following sections are ordered by the centrality of the hypotheses to this research, starting with fan communities, then moving to nostalgia, use of multiple subreddits, and finally player typologies. As mentioned above, we take inspiration from Ruberg et al.’s (2019) use of Reddit as a more easily accessible archive of more ephemeral interactions. Here, we take what is known about gaming community migration drawing from deep, qualitative investigations and use it to inform a large-scale quantitative investigation of three Reddit communities. Our goal is to examine if a gaming fandom community shifts its congregation spaces over time.

**Games and Fan Communities**

Games are a form of leisure activity and can range from a casual hobby that occupies small moments of free time throughout the day (Chess, 2017) to a more serious pursuit. The gameplay of avid players may be more like fandom where the players’ interest in the game goes beyond merely playing it (Fiesler, 2007; Jenkins, 1992; Salter et al., 2019). Research on fans and consumption (Cavicchi, 1998; Hills, 2003; Sandvoss, 2005), as well as on cultural products more generally (Hesmondhalgh, 2007), suggests that fans of one game in a series should purchase the newest game in the series when it is released, and so should likely join an online community for that new game if they were already taking part in an online community for the series, leading to our first hypothesis:

\[
H1a. \text{Users of the subreddit for one game in a series become users of the subreddit for the newer game in the same series when it is released.}
\]

In this case, we use subreddit participation as a proxy for interest in a particular game, but we acknowledge that not all fans of a game are Reddit users. However, like Ruberg et al. (2019) who used Reddit conversations as texts to understand the more ephemeral interactions surrounding games played on Twitch, we view sustained Reddit posting as an approximation for continued interest (or lack thereof) in the games we investigate.

Research to date has shown that gameplay never happens in a vacuum, as people play more than one game at a time (Carter et al., 2014). Just as play habits change over time (Bergstrom, 2019; Brown, 2009; Chess, 2017), players can engage with dozens of games on multiple platforms and the communities of those games over the course of their play history (Lowood, 2006; Walsh & Apperly, 2008). We recognize that gaming fandoms can take many forms, including as fans of a particular game, a series, entire game companies, genres, and specific gaming platforms. As such, players should not be constrained to one game series or one game’s subreddit, but should try similar games and their subreddits. This led to a related hypothesis:

\[
H1b. \text{Users of the subreddit for one game become users of the subreddit for a newer, similar, game when it is released.}
\]

For this hypothesis, we are specifically (and somewhat narrowly) looking at users of the Skyrim subreddit upon the release of Fallout 4. Both games were produced by Bethesda, and are very similar in many ways—comments about Fallout 4 as “Skyrim with guns” can be found easily online, and the comparison was even the title of one college newspaper’s Fallout 4 review (Ferrell-Wyman, 2015).

**Nostalgia**

While market logic might assume that novelty or newness drives cultural consumption, other researchers have argued that nostalgia drives interest in particular games (Heineman, 2014; Natterer, 2014; Whalen & Taylor, 2008). Nostalgia is an often positive and social memory of the past (Sedikides et al., 2015), and with video games can lead to a positive psychological state and increased well-being (Wulf et al., 2018), but can be used for commercial purposes in games by game producers (Sloan, 2015). Nostalgia can also lead to a feeling of increased social connection on social media sites (Cox et al., 2015), potentially strengthening ties on sites such as Reddit. The release of a new game in a series may cause feelings of nostalgia in fans of older games in that series, feelings that can be addressed by discussing or playing the game. The potential for nostalgia leads to our next hypothesis:
H2. Subreddits for older games in a series see an increase in posts around the time a new game in the series is released.

Reddit and Distributed Communities

Reddit is a present-day embodiment of a message board system, evolved from earlier forms like Usenet and modem-based bulletin board systems. Online forums have been studied as communities for some time (Baym, 1994; Rheingold, 1993), and researchers consistently find that these primarily text-based forms of distributed communication can and do function like offline communities in terms of social support for their members (e.g., Agre & Schuler, 1997; Bruckman & Jensen, 2002; Ellison et al., 2007; Preece, 2000; Rainie & Wellman, 2012; Tausczik et al., 2014), as do online games (e.g., Chen, 2012; Ducheneaut et al., 2007; Poor & Skoric, 2014; Ramirez, 2018). Although we do not engage with the textual content or sentiment of Reddit users’ posts in this work, we feel we can assume there is some level of sociality and support in these subreddits given so much research in this area.

Reddit is not the only place online where fans discuss these games—over decades of changes in online platforms (Usenet, AOL, etc.), fans have moved multiple times to new discussion platforms to maintain ties to their communities (Fiesler & Dym, 2020; Fiesler et al., 2016). Baym’s (2007) observation that “people’s online activities are almost always distributed across multiple sites” is mirrored by game-specific research, such as findings by Puente and Tosca (2013), who noted that “the community of Skyrim players doesn’t reside in any one specific platform or virtual world, but is loosely articulated around the fora where discussion about the game occurs” (p. 3). Fiesler and Dym (2020) noted that “people are also often part of multiple communities across a single shared technology platform.” Such research suggests we should observe people using multiple subreddits, especially if the subreddits are related such as with a game series. These are, potentially, distributed communities. This stands in tension with observations that people who use Reddit mostly utilize only one subreddit (Buntain & Golbeck, 2014). In an effort to examine this tension, we put forward a final hypothesis:

H3. There are Reddit users who use more than one subreddit within a grouping of subreddits for one game series.

Player Typologies

The wide variety of player typologies (Bartle, 1996; Bateman et al., 2011; Hamari & Tuunanen, 2014), as well as work showing that some players prefer the sociality offered by MMOs compared to single-player games (Huh & Bowman, 2008; Kowert et al., 2014; Kowert & Oldmeadow, 2014), suggested our one research question:

RQ1. Is there a disjoint between fans of a single-player game and a multiplayer game in the same series?

The Games

The three long-running franchises under study here for their corresponding Reddit communities are The Elder Scrolls, Fallout, and Civilization. The Elder Scrolls is a fantasy game series by Bethesda, with six games dating back to 1994 (five single-player and one massively multiplayer). The Fallout series, also currently produced by Bethesda, is set in a nostalgic 1950s future nuclear wasteland. We focus on the six primary Fallout games beginning with the oldest released in 1997. Peripheral games such as Fallout Pinball or the mobile Fallout Shelter are not included. The six games of the Civilization series (known by its fans as Civ), dating back to 1991, allow the player to control an initially small civilization and attempt to grow it over time. Like with Fallout, we focus on core titles that are named Civilization with the series release number (specifically, the most recent three titles). Spinoff games, for example, Civilization Revolution, were not included in this study.

Limitations

The initial selection of The Elder Scrolls was motivated by earlier work studying that franchise (Poor, 2019). Although there are many subreddits for games that exist across Reddit, this research calls for a game franchise that, importantly, has associated subreddits for each game in the series. As Reddit communities are user-generated, there are no site-wide standards requiring that each game in a franchise has its own devoted subreddit—many do not, so the selection of the game franchises for this research is a purposeful sample (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Both The Elder Scrolls and Fallout are currently developed by Bethesda and are similar in several ways, including gameplay and the use of first-person view. As such, their fans on Reddit may be similar to each other. The Civ franchise is different in that the games focus on civilization building and are a bird’s eye view, and so Civ fans may be a different demographic compared to the other two franchises. Overall, the data come from English speakers who have the time and financial resources to play computer games—which previous research has shown is heavily skewed in terms of gender (Chess, 2017)—so the sample may have a larger percentage of men than women. We do not claim universal representativeness, but we hope to add to the literature concerning online communities during times of potential change.

Method

To study these hypotheses and the research question, we collected data for selected subreddits for a 1-year period around the release of a new game in each identified series, and chunked it into 1-month increments.

To see if users move to the subreddit for a new game (H1a and H1b), a focused 6-month period was examined, using
both posting patterns and also the correlation between number of posts to subreddits, per user, for 3 months before and 3 months after a game release. This approach measures the strength of the influence that posting in one subreddit has on posting in another, using correlations as simple regressions, so only users who posted to the initial subreddit were included in these correlations. These correlations also showed whether or not users of subreddits for the single-player games in The Elder Scrolls and Fallout franchises moved to the subreddits for the multiplayer games in those series (RQ1). After some discussion and testing, we used Pearson correlations because they measure correlation on the variable values, here the number of posts per user.

To study nostalgia (H2), frequencies of the number of posts to a subreddit over the year were observed (these were highly correlated with the number of users, so only the number of posts was used). Posts are a measurable form of activity, and since they are communication they are what forms community (Carey, 1989; Dewey, 1927; Gamble et al., 2014; Kendall, 2011).

To see if users posted to more than one subreddit (H3), correlations between subreddits were used. These differ slightly from the correlations in H1, which were “from” one subreddit to another; the correlations here in H3 include all users who posted to either correlated subreddit.

Data and Tools

For the 1-year period around Skyrim’s release in November 2011, we gathered data from the four appropriate Elder Scrolls subreddits active at that time (May 2011–May 2012), collecting data on 979,582 posts to those subreddits in that time period. The subreddits were communities devoted to the games Morrowind, Oblivion, Skyrim, and a then-new and lightly used general Elder Scrolls subreddit.

For the 1-year period around the release of ESO in April 2014, we gathered data from nine appropriate Elder Scrolls–related subreddits active at that time, which led to our collecting data on 1,296,146 posts. The subreddits were the previously mentioned four, along with one for ESO, Skyrim mods, Skyrim pictures (“Skyrim porn,” but meaning pictures as in “food porn”), general Elder Scrolls lore, and memes.

We collected data from seven appropriate Fallout subreddits for the 1-year period around the release of Fallout 4, in November 2015, with data for 3,857,427 posts. The subreddits were for Fallout 4, Fallout 3, and its follow-on Fallout: New Vegas (FONV), the “Classic” subreddit for the original two Fallouts, a general Fallout subreddit, one for mods, and one for lore.

We also collected data from eight Fallout-related subreddits around the time of its most recent release, the MMO-like Fallout 76 (FO76), in November 2018, leading to data on 3,688,773 posts. These eight subreddits were the previously mentioned seven plus the FO76 subreddit. Due to the then-recentness of FO76’s release at the time of the data collection in early 2019, only 10 months of data were collected. Ten months of data did not affect the correlation measures (which use 6 months of data) and did not adversely affect the 1-year frequency patterns.

Finally, we collected data for the release of Civilization VI in October 2016. A total of 613,768 posts were collected here, but only for the three most recent Civilization games and the general Civilization subreddit. We did not collect data from other Civ-related subreddits as some of the patterns were made clear by the Bethesda franchise games and their subreddits, and the Civ subreddits are not distinguishable from each other as clearly when compared to those for the Bethesda games. This is because there is one catchall Civ subreddit where Reddit users post anything related to Civ.

Deleted posts were not included in the analysis. Altogether, data on 10,435,696 posts were collected. Types of posts included both submissions (the term Reddit uses for top-level posts) and comments, which are replies to submissions. The source of posts was the Reddit archive made available by Jason Baumgartner at Pushshift.io, a current source for Reddit data for academic studies (Baumgartner et al., 2020), and was scraped with Python 3.6. Data were then cleaned and organized in Python (e.g., dropping deleted posts and converting epoch-format timestamps into monthly units before and after a game’s release), and finally analyzed and visualized in R 3.6, using RStudio 1.2 and the ggplot and ggcorrplot libraries. Co-occurrence frequencies for H1 were run using R’s count function.

Overall, Reddit became more popular with internet users across the 7 years in the data collection period (from Skyrim in November 2011 to Fallout 76 in November 2018). Correspondingly, there is generally an increase in posts across the full data collection period. Yet, some subreddits in some of the sample periods did not receive much traffic, such as the then-new general Elder Scrolls subreddit during the Skyrim sampling period, and both the Fallout 3 and Classic Fallout subreddits during both sampling periods for Fallout. These occasional small samples often caused problems for meaningful correlation calculations with much larger subreddits in the data.

Results

H1a, that people move from the subreddit for the older game in a series to the subreddit for the newer game, was not supported. Correlations between the number of posts per user to the subreddit for the old game during Time 1 (T1, the 3 months prior to the new release), and then for the new game during Time 2 (T2, the 3 months following its release), for users who were active on the subreddit for the older game during T1, are shown in Table 1. Only the results for one of the five transitions is above .20, which is still fairly small. In terms of the co-occurrences between subreddits, the result is similar in that most people do not move, although some do (see Table 2 for Skyrim to ESO).
For the Skyrim to ESO migration, the theorized movement (H1a) is very uncommon, and is only true of 206 out of 64,665 accounts (0.29%) in the accounts that posted to either subreddit at the time ESO was released. Potential nostalgia appears in these data, with people using the Skyrim subreddit after ESO’s release when they had not used it in the 3 months prior (11,696 accounts, or 16%). An unexpected finding was essentially movement backward, going against the commercialism hypothesis: people who posted only to the ESO subreddit before it came out, but then switched to Skyrim’s subreddit when ESO was released (188 accounts, or 0.26%). We expand on this observation in the “Discussion” section.

H1b, that people move from the old game to the new game in a different series (given considerations of the game type and time between releases), was not supported (Tables 1 and 3). The correlation between number of posts, per user, between the Skyrim and Fallout 4 subreddits is .10. When Fallout 4 was released, most Skyrim subreddit users stayed put. There are only 134 users out of the 205,444 (0.07%) that made this specific move (Table 3) out of users who posted to either subreddit at this time.

Nostalgia (H2) was present but not consistently, with a clear increase for some subreddits for the much older games in some instances, but not for all five of the launch periods we examined. The clearest cases were for The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind (released May 2002) upon the release of The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (November 2011), as shown in Figure 2, and for Civ IV (released October 2005) upon the release of Civ VI (October 2016). The Morrowind subreddit went from around 300 posts a month in the months prior to Skyrim’s release to around 1,000 posts a month after its release. Nostalgia is not clearly present in the Fallout data.

H3, that people use more than one subreddit and so take part in more than one online community, was supported, and can be seen in a quantitative manner through ggcorrplot’s hierarchical clustering function which revealed statistically based groupings of subreddits. Correlations in these groupings were low, the highest was .33, but some were in the .10 to .20 range. These quantitative groupings, upon inspection,
also make sense qualitatively, in that the subreddit clusters are thematically sensible (Figure 1). For instance, in the *Elder Scrolls* subreddits when *ESO* was released, there is a clear *Skyrim* block (the *Skyrim* subreddit, and both *Skyrim* mods and pictures subreddits) and a knowledge block (lore and memes subreddits).
Investigating RQ1, if there was a distinction between those in the single-player game subreddits and the multiplayer subreddits, revealed a mixed picture (Tables 1 and 2, Figure 1). The posting behavior of those who had posted to the subreddit for the single-player Fallout 4 when correlated with the posting on the multiplayer FO76 subreddit showed a correlation of .20 when FO76 came out, and more generally when all posting behavior is considered, there is some overlap in those posting on both the general Fallout subreddit and that for FO76. For the Elder Scrolls series, it is a different picture: the correlations between the eight Elder Scrolls–related subreddits and the subreddit for the massively multiplayer ESO are all but one essentially zero (Figure 1), while the correlation in number of posts between those who posted in the Skyrim subreddit and then posted in the ESO subreddit is only .04.

Discussion

That H1a and H1b were not supported—people were not moving from the subreddit for the old game to the subreddit for the new game in large numbers or in an obvious way—was at first a surprise, given the connections between fans and consumption (Cavicchi, 1998; Hills, 2003; Sandvoss, 2005). Upon further investigation, we realized this finding might be explained as such: anyone still using a subreddit for a years-old game had strong ties to that community, and so this result may be more about community ties than about commercialism. For instance, when Skyrim was released in late 2011, Oblivion (from March 2006) was approximately 5½ years old, and the correlation there is only .16. The lesson here is that when we study players, a robust community may be more important than the specific game franchise the community has been built around.

Overall, the correlations for the single-player to single-player game transitions are fairly low, ranging from .16 to .07. Most people either stick to their community or churn in or out, but switching is not very common in the data we collected. Fandom is neither straightforward nor is it a “one size fits all” subject position. Despite the literature used to formulate our first hypothesis that positions fandom as a consumptive subject position, here we recognize that fandom is not a lifetime commitment. Tastes, interests, and even the amount of leisure time available to devote to a particular loved series will shift and transform over time. This suggests the need for future work to query Reddit users directly, via survey or interviews asking participants about their sense of community belonging and why they do or do not change subreddits.

For the disparity in the findings for the two single-player to multiplayer transitions (RQ1), where there is a disjoint for

Figure 2. Post frequencies for Elder Scrolls subreddits at Skyrim’s release, November 2011. Log scale for y-axis.
the *Elder Scrolls* series (.04) but less so for *Fallout* (.20), there is a possible explanation worth further study. Although *FO76* is multiplayer, it is not multiplayer in the same way as many other multiplayer games where the focus is on player interaction. With a maximum of 24 players per game for *FO76* (Walker, 2018), yet with a huge game map (Petite, 2018), other players are not encountered all that often. Communication, which would form community (Carey, 1989; Gamble et al., 2014; Kendall, 2011), cannot occur easily or consistently in-game, but requires another space such as Reddit. As such, perhaps *FO76* is seen more like a single-player game, and it is certainly not like an MMO in the way that *ESO* and many other MMOs are. Categorization is neither straightforward nor apolitical (Bowker & Star, 2000), and game typologies may at times be overly simplistic and may hinder analysis. Whether or not the lack of movement from the single-player release to the newer MMO or multiplayer release in the same franchise represents different player types (around in-game sociality) or, given our focus on Reddit, the strength of long-standing subreddit communities, is not clear from these data but could be disentangled through interviews. Another possibility is that there are *Skyrim* players who used Reddit, but then moved to *ESO* and left Reddit, since *ESO* is an MMO and discussions can and do take place in-game.

As seen here, and contrary to the market logic of cultural products (Hesmondhalgh, 2007), consistent and sizable transitions to a new game’s community from the previous game’s community in a franchise are not present in the data we collected. The largest correlation between any two of these communities is .20—which is not very large although is a borderline defensible correlation in the social sciences—but most of the correlations in this specific analysis are much smaller. Such findings call into question the power of commercialism to compel influence where and when fandom-related discussions occur. Instead, what may be more influential to an individual are the psychological attachments to a subreddit or to the other members of a community (Tausczik et al., 2014). The allure of a new game is not a straightforward nor apolitical phenomenon (Cavicchi, 1998; Hills, 2003; Sandvoss, 2005) influencing community migration patterns. Ultimately, the rejection of the commercialism hypothesis allows for a better understanding of fandom in a way that aligns with theories about general nostalgia and, specifically, game-related nostalgia (Natterer, 2014; Wulf et al., 2018). Some fans of a franchise, upon being reminded of it via advertising and reviews for a new release, return to that franchise, which then organically releases follow-ups and continues to be popular due to the market logic of commercialism and “retrogaming,” which is playing and collecting old video games and consoles (Wulf et al., 2018, pp. 60–61).

In some cases, for instance, with the *Morrowind* subreddit, this nostalgic increase is not temporary but is long-lasting. When *Skyrim* was released in November 2011, activity on the *Morrowind* subreddit increased from around 300 posts per month to around 1,000 posts per month, surpassing the number of posts on the *Oblivion* subreddit (Figure 2). Two and a half years later, when *ESO* was released in April 2014, the number of posts on the *Morrowind* subreddit had increased, and it was approximately 3,000 for three of the months in the 1-year period around the *ESO* release. *Morrowind*, released in 2002, was over a decade old at this point. That *Bethesda* supports modding of its games on the PC is probably part of the explanation here, and *Morrowind* is playable on the Xbox One via the backward compatibility program despite its age—originally released for the first-generation Xbox in 2002, it is still playable two console generations and 18 years later on the Xbox One. If *Morrowind* were not popular, *Bethesda* would not have made it backward compatible, but on the contrary, this popularity might also be driven because it is still playable so many years later. Finally, the lands of *Morrowind* are present in *ESO*, possibly creating nostalgia in older players and new interest in others.

These findings in support for nostalgia also challenge the initial hypothesis for the strength of commercialism within fandom (Cavicchi, 1998; Hills, 2003; Sandvoss, 2005) influencing community migration patterns. Ultimately, the rejection of the commercialism hypothesis allows for a better understanding of fandom in a way that aligns with theories about general nostalgia and, specifically, game-related nostalgia (Natterer, 2014; Wulf et al., 2018). Some fans of a franchise, upon being reminded of it via advertising and reviews for a new release, return to that franchise via a more older and technologically outdated release and discuss doing so on Reddit. Some fans may engage in a form of “game tourism,” partaking in activity on a subreddit for a new game before returning to the comfort of the community for an older game. This is the reverse of the commercialism hypothesis: instead of old to new, people are moving new to old. Tie strength is again a factor here, as nostalgia revives these dormant ties. Nostalgia appears to be an important issue for fandom, and fans can be involved with older games for years, such as with work put into modding, or even wholesale updating of an older game, such as with...
fan-based efforts to re-create * Morrowind* using *Oblivion*’s or *Skyrim*’s game engines (Meer, 2018). Games on personal computers are better positioned to take advantage of nostalgia compared to games on consoles and smart phones, as it is often difficult or impossible to run older games on newer consoles and phones, although console makers have recognized this market as we have mentioned above.

That some people use multiple subreddits, H3, makes sense in context. Some of the subreddits that statistically correlated with each other, that is, had overlap in their users, are clearly related in terms of their topics. One example is the overlap of three Skyrim-related subreddits when *ESO* was released: one for *Skyrim*, *Skyrim* mods, and *Skyrim* pictures. The cross-subreddit use within each series clustered in a sensible manner, questioning if a single subreddit is an appropriate object of analysis or instead if the correlations show that the subreddits are greater communities. Possibly, the *Skyrim* subreddit is used by several overlapping subcommunities, depending on the nomenclature you want to use to describe and distinguish groups. Other times, the overlap is not as straightforward but can still be made sense of: in the *FO76* data, both the lore and mods subreddits correlate a small amount with the general *Fallout* subreddit, but not each other.

**Conclusion**

For scholars, this research complicates games and their associated fandoms in a manner that ultimately allows us to better understand their existence beyond merely consumptive leisure practices. In our data, we consistently observe churn, but we also see people staying with and returning to the communities for older games, overturning our earlier assumptions about the strength of novelty and commercialism, but supporting theories about the strength of community, nostalgia, and even game tourism. Taken together, these findings serve as a reminder while as researchers we often focus our attention to players of one particular game, or, perhaps problematically, one site where we feel we will find research subjects related to one game (Bergstrom, 2017), in reality, the players that we study are participating in multiple gaming communities at any one time.

There were several examples of multiple game-related subcommunities within the subreddits of the franchises, subcommunities which overlapped with each other in the more general topic subreddits. Although the general, overarching subreddits could be considered one cohesive community within each franchise, our work suggests that at times such community centers may be a cohesive set of related subcommunities, and this has implications for future research.

Online or not, communities change over time, facing both internal and external stresses. In this study, we see that fans are not necessarily willing to abandon a game community where they may have strong ties when a new community for a new game beckons, even when the new game is a logical progression from the older one. Older gaming communities were able to survive—and in some cases revitalize—when players were given reason to decamp to a newer, similar gaming community, and members either stayed or left, and then returned when the novelty of the newer game wore off. Within these gaming communities, community consistently beat commercialism, and nostalgia was at times more important than the new. These findings give new understanding to our knowledge of fans, commercialism, and nostalgia within a community framework, hopefully allowing researchers and practitioners to have a better understanding of how online communities can survive in the face of change.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**ORCID iD**

Nathaniel Poor https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5248-883

**Supplemental Material**

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

**References**

Agre, P., & Schuler, D. (Eds.). (1997). Reinventing technology, rediscovering community: Critical explorations of computing as social practice. Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Bateman, C., Lowenhaupt, R., & Nacke, L. (2011, September 14–17). *Player typology in theory and practice* [Conference session]. Proceedings of the Digital Games Research Association 2011 Conference, Hilversum, The Netherlands.

Baumgartner, J., Zanettou, S., Keegan, B., Squire, M., & Blackburn, J. (2020). The Pushshift Reddit dataset. In *Proceedings of the Fourteenth International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media (ICWSM2020)* (pp. 830–839). https://aaai.org/ojs/index.php/ICWSM/article/view/7347/7201

Baym, N. (1994). From practice to culture on Usenet. *The Sociological Review, 42*(Suppl. 1), 29–52. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1994.tb03408.x

Baym, N. (1999). *Tune in, log on: Soaps, fandom, and online community*. SAGE.

Baym, N. (2007, August). The new shape of online community: The example of Swedish independent music fandom. *First Monday, 12*(8). https://firstmonday.org/article/view/1978/1853

Bergstrom, K. (2017). An unwelcome intrusion? Player responses to survey research recruitment on the World of Warcraft forums. *Loading, 10*(16), 15–31. https://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/view/168

Bergstrom, K. (2019). Moving beyond churn: Barriers and constraints to playing a social network game. *Games and Culture, 14*(2), 170–189.
Bergstrom, K. (2021). Anti-social social gaming: Community conflict in a Facebook game. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 38(1), 61–74.

Bowker, G., & Star, S. L. (2000). *Sorting things out: Classification and its consequences*. MIT Press.

Brock, A. (2020). *Distributed blackness: African American cybecultures*. New York University Press.

Brown, S. (2009). *Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul*. Avery.

Bruckman, A., & Jensen, C. (2002). The mystery of the death of MediaMOO: Seven years of evolution of an online community. In K. A. Renninger & W. Shumar (Eds.), *Building virtual communities: Learning and change in cyberspace* (pp. 21–33). Cambridge University Press. https://www.cc.gatech.edu/fac/Amy.Bruckman/papers/chapters/2001052485.pdf

Buntain, C., & Golbeck, J. (2014, April). *Identifying social roles in Reddit using network structure*. [Conference session]. *WWW* ’14 Companion, Seoul, Korea. https://doi.org/10.1145/2567948.2579231

Carey, J. W. (1989). *Communication as culture: Essays on media and society*. Routledge.

Carter, M., Nansen, B., & Gibbs, M. (2014). Screen ecologies, multi-gaming and designing for different registers of engagement. In *CHI PLAY 2014—Proceedings of the 2014 annual symposium on computer-human interaction in play* (pp. 37–46). Association for Computing Machinery. https://doi.org/10.1145/2658537.2658686

Cavicchi, D. (1998). *Tramps like us: Music and meaning among Springsteen fans*. Oxford University Press.

Chen, M. (2012). *Leet noobs: The life and death of an expert player*. Peter Lang.

Chess, S. (2017). *Ready player two: Women gamers and designed identity*. University of Minnesota Press.

Consalvo, M., & Begy, J. (2015). *Players and their pets: Gaming communities from beta to sunset*. University of Minnesota Press. https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.192088

Cox, C. R., Kersten, M., Routledge, C., Brown, E. M., & Van Enkevort, E. A. (2015). When past meets present: The relationship between website-induced nostalgia and well-being. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 45(5), 282–299. https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12295

Dewey, J. (1927). *The public and its problems*. Swallow Press.

Ducheneaut, N., Yee, N., Nickell, E., & Moore, R. J. (2007, April). The life and death of online gaming communities: A look at guilds in World of Warcraft. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI 2007 Annual Conference* (pp. 839–848). Association for Computing Machinery. http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1240750

Ellison, N. B., Steinfeld, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook “friends”: Social capital and college students’ use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1143–1168. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00367.x/full

Ellison, N. B., Steinfeld, C., & Lampe, C. (2011). Connection strategies: Social capital implications of Facebook-enabled communication practices. *New Media & Society*, 13(6), 873–892. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810385389

Ferrell-Wyman, S. (2015, November 16). Fallout 4 review: Like Skyrim with guns. *The Tacoma Ledger*. http://thetacomaledger.com/2015/11/16/fallout-4-review-like-skyrim-with-guns/

Fields, S. (2015, October 22). Every Fallout game is on sale this weekend on steam. *Game Rant*. https://gamerant.com/fallout-series-steam-sale/

Fiesler, C. (2007). Everything I need to know I learned from Fandom: How existing social norms can help shape the next generation of user-generated content. *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Technology Law*, 10, 729–762.

Fiesler, C., & Dym, B. (2020, May). *Moving across lands: Online platform migration in fandom communities* [Conference session]. Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction. https://doi.org/10.1145/3392847

Fiesler, C., Morrison, S., & Bruckman, A. S. (2016, May). An archive of their own: A case study of feminist HCI and values in design. In *Proceedings of the 20 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems—CHI ’16* (pp. 2574–2585). https://doi.org/10.1145/2588036.2588409

Gamble, C., Gowlett, J., & Dunbar, R. (2014). *Thinking big: How the evolution of social life shaped the human mind*. Thames & Hudson.

Gibbs, M., Carter, M., & Mori, J. (2013). Vile Rat: Spontaneous shrines in EVE online. In *Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on EVE Online* (pp. 12–15). http://www.fdg2013.org/program/workshops/papers/EVE2013-Gibbs—VileRat.pdf

Gibbs, M., Mori, J., Arnold, M., & Kohn, T. (2012, September). Tombstones, uncanny monuments and epic quests: Memorials in World of Warcraft. *Game Studies*, 12(1). http://gamestudies.org/1201/articles/gibbs_martin

Granovetter, M. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360–1380.

Gray, K. L. (2020). *Intersectional tech: Black users in digital gaming*. LSU Press.

Gunderman, H. C. (2020). View of fan geographies and engagement between geopolitics of Brexit, Donald Trump, and Doctor Who on social media. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 32. https://journal transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/1675/2413

Hamari, J., & Tuunanen, J. (2014). Player types: A meta-synthesis. *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association*, 1(2), 29–53.

Heinemann, D. S. (2014). Public memory and gamer identity: Retrogaming as nostalgia. *Journal of Games Criticism*, 1(1), 1–24. http://gamestcriticism.org/articles/heinemann-1-1/

Hesmondhalgh, D. (2007). *The cultural industries* (4th ed.). SAGE. Hills, M. (2003). *Fan cultures*. Taylor & Francis.

Huh, S., & Bowman, N. D. (2008). Perception and addiction of online games as a function of personality traits. *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories Methods and Applications*, 7(3), 1–24. http://gamescriticism.org/articles/heineman-1-1/

Hudson. (2003). *The life and death of online gaming communities: A look at_ guilds in World of Warcraft*. Peter Lang.

Jhaver, S., Chan, L., & Bruckman, A. (2018, February). The view from the other side: The border between controversial speech and harassment on Kotaku in action. *First Monday*, 23(2). https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/8232/6644

Kendall, L. (2011). *Community and the internet*. In M. Consalvo & C. Ess (Eds.), *The handbook of internet studies* (pp. 309–325). Wiley-Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444314861.ch14

Kowert, R., Domahidi, E., & Quandt, T. (2014). The relationship between online video game involvement and gaming-related friendships among emotionally sensitive individuals. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 17(7), 447–453. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2013.0656

Kowert, R., & Oldmeadow, J. A. (2014). Playing for social comfort: Online video game play as a social accommodator for the
insecurely attached. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 53, 556–566. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.05.004
Kraut, R. E., & Resnick, P. (2011). *Building successful online communities*. MIT Press.

Leadbetter, R. (2017, December 9). Xbox one backwards compatibility: How does it actually work? *Eurogamer*. https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/digitalfoundry-2017-xbox-one-x-backcompat-how-does-itactually-work
Lowood, H. (2006). A brief biography of computer games. In P. Vorderer & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Playing video games: Motives, responses, and consequences* (pp. 25–41). Lawrence Erlbaum. https://doi.org/10.3232/9780203873700
Meer, A. (2018, July 19). Bethesda’s Todd Howard isn’t keen to remaster Morrowind. *Rock Paper Shotgun*. https://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2018/07/19/morrowind-remaster/
Nakamura, L. (2009). Don’t hate the player, hate the game: The racialization of labor in World of Warcraft. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 26(2), 128–144. https://doi. org/10.1080/15295030902862052
Natterer, K. (2014). How and why to measure personal and historical nostalgic responses through entertainment media. *International Journal on Media Management*, 16(3–4), 161–180. https://doi.org/10.1080/14241277.2014.989567
Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 42(5), 533–544. https://doi.org/10.1007/S10488-013-0528-Y
Panek, E., Hollenbach, C., Yang, J., & Rhodes, T. (2018). The effects of group size and time on the formation of online communities: Evidence from Reddit. *Social Media + Society*, 4(4), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118815908
Pardes, A. (2018, April 2). The inside story of Reddit’s redesign. *Wired*. https://www.wired.com/story/reddit-redesign/
Pearce, C. (2009). *Communities of play*. MIT Press.

Petite, S. (2018, June 11). “Fallout 76” is an online-only “soft-core” survival game arriving this November. *Digital Trends*. https://www.digitaltrends.com/gaming/fallout-76-unveiled-e3-2018/
Poor, N. (2017). Death of a guild, birth of a child: Multi-boxing and self-imposed exile to the prison server in EQ2. Esoteric Gaming. http://esotericgaming.com/2017/12/18/death-guild-birth-child-multi-boxing-self-imposed-exile-prison-server-eq2/
Poor, N. (2019, August 26–30). *Building and sustaining large, long-term online communities: Family business and gamifying the game* [Conference session]. Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games, San Luis Obispo, CA, United States. https://doi.org/10.1145/3337722.3337760
Poor, N., & Skoric, M. M. (2014). Death of a guild, birth of a network: Online community ties within and beyond code. *Games and Culture*, 9(3), 182–202. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412014537401
Preece, J. (2000). *Online communities: Designing usability, supporting sociability*. Wiley.
Puente, H., & Tosca, S. (2013, August 26–29). The social dimension of collective storytelling in Skyrim [Conference session]. Proceedings of the 2013 DiGRA International Conference, Atlanta, GA, United States.
Rainie, L., & Wellman, B. (2012). *Networked: The new social operating system*. MIT Press.
Ramirez, F. A. (2018). From good associates to true friends: An exploration of friendship practices in massively multiplayer online games. In K. Lakkara, G. Sukthankar, & R. Wigand (Eds.), *Social interactions in virtual worlds: An interdisciplinary perspective* (pp. 62–79). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316422823.004

Rheingold, H. (1993). *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier*. Addison-Wesley.
Ruberg, B., Cullen, A. L. L., & Brewster, K. (2019). Nothing but a “titty streamer”: Legitimacy, labor, and the debate over women’s breasts in video game live streaming. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 36(5), 466–481. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2019.1658886
Salter, A., Stanfill, M., & Sullivan, A. (2019, August 26–30). But does Pikachu love you? Reproductive labor in casual and hardcore games [Conference session]. Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games, San Luis Obispo, CA, United States.
Sandvoss, C. (2005). *Fans: The mirror of consumption*. Polity Press.
Sedikides, C., Wildschut, T., Routledge, C., Arndt, J., Hepper, E. G., & Zhou, X. (2015). To nostalgize: Mixing memory with affect and desire. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 51, 189–273. https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.asep.2014.10.001
Sloan, R. J. S. (2015). Videogames as remediated memories: Commodified nostalgia and hyperreality in Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon and Gone Home. *Games and Culture*, 10(6), 525–550. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412014565641

Stanfill, M. (2019). *Exploiting fandom: How the media industry seeks to manipulate fans*. University of Iowa Press.

Stanfill, M., & Condis, M. (2014). *Fandom and/as labor*. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 13. https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2014.0593
Tausczik, Y., Dabbish, L., & Kraut, R. (2014, February). Building loyalty to online communities through bond and identity-based attachment to sub-groups [Conference session]. Proceedings of the ACM 2014 Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work—CSCW ’14, Baltimore, MD, United States.
Taylor, T. L. (2006). *Play between worlds: Exploring online game culture*. MIT Press.

Walker, A. (2018, June 13). Fallout 76 supports 24 players in each game. *Kotaku*. https://www.kotaku.com.au/2018/06/fallout-76-supports-24-players-in-each-game/
Walsh, C., & Appert, T. (2008, July 25–27). Researching digital game players: Gameplay and gaming capital [Conference session]. Proceedings of the 2008 IADIS International Conference Gaming, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
Whalen, Z., & Taylor, L. N. (Eds.). (2008). *Playing the past: History and nostalgia in video games*. Vanderbilt University Press.
Wulf, T., Bowman, N. D., Rieger, D., Velez, J. A., & Breuer, J. (2018). Video games as time machines: Video game nostalgia and the success of retro gaming. *Media and Communication*, 6(2), 60–68. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v6i2.1317

**Author Biographies**

**Kelly Bergstrom** (PhD, York University) is an assistant professor in the School of Communications at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Her research examines drop out and disengagement from digital cultures, with a focus on digital games. **Nathaniel Poor** (PhD, University of Michigan) is a computational social scientist at the Underwood Institute who researches issues involving online communities, often gaming communities, with a socio-technical appreciation for design, technology, culture, and history.