

# On the Preservation of the Experience of Play in an MMORPG Environment: Livestreams and the Game Preservation Conundrum

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## INTRODUCTION

Player experience has long been an important part of the field of game scholarship (Andrew et al. 2015; Christoph et al. 2009; Johnson et al. 2018; Palomba 2018). Player interaction, or “the ability of the player to interact with a virtual environment,” (Caroux et al. 2015) is a particularly vital part of player experience (Arbeau et al. 2020), especially in online massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) such as World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment 2004), Elder Scrolls Online (ZeniMax Online Studios 2014), and Runescape (Jagex 2001) (Casañ-Pitarch 2021; Hemminger and Schott 2012; Martoncik and Loksa 2016), where the virtual environment consists of not just the overall environment, but also the other players. Current modes of game preservation, such as game emulation, do not preserve this key feature of player experience, though many have called for an expansion of current game preservation efforts (McDonough et al. 2010; Lowood et al. 2009; Newman and Simmons 2018; Glas et al. 2017). One potential solution to the issue of preserving the experience of online games is possibly the preservation of recorded live streams from gaming content creators on platforms such as YouTube and Twitch. These livestreamed play sessions often provide both player narration and also a direct recording of the player’s gameplay and interactions. To explore the validity of livestreams as a solution, I conducted semi-structured interviews with experts who work in the field of game preservation in both public and private institutions. This extended abstract will explore the initial challenges and agreements that emerged after interview analysis.

## METHODS

Experts were defined as those who had worked in the field of video games for over 10 years, and who had made significant business or academic contributions through publishing or working directly in an archive or institution. These experts were first found through direct contact with preservation institutions. Interviews were with multiple people within the Video Game History Foundation, the Museum of Art and Digital Entertainment, the Learning Games Initiative Research Archive at the University of Arizona, and the University of Michigan.

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## RESULTS

Through my coding and qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts, I determined three major challenges and three major agreements among all interviewees and their professional opinions on preserving gaming livestreams. The three major challenges are as follows:

1. Online space/capacity of current digital games archives - livestreams are usually over an hour long, and use high quality cameras. In order to digitally store these videos, institutions would need to maintain a large amount of server space, which can become costly.
2. Determining evaluation methods and regulations for selection of livestreams - game preservationists would need to come up with a new method to determine which livestreams would be suitable for their collections. This would mean direct contact with the livestream players in order to gain permission to store their livestreams, creating a method of evaluation for potential videos, and creating new internal regulations on the handling of livestream archiving procedure.
3. Gathering funding for games preservation - many preservation institutions are already underfunded, especially in the case of game preservation, having to make strong cases for grant funding and investors as to why games themselves are culturally significant and deserve to be preserved. The cost of preserving digital video footage would mean institutions would need more funding to continue their original work in addition to preserving livestream videos.

And the three agreements:

1. Key areas of games preservation are being ignored in favor of physical media preservation and digital game files - too often, a game is only thought of as the physical game or the digital file in itself, and nothing beyond that. In truth, game scholars have been stating for years (source) that we are losing culturally significant pieces of game history and creation due to a lack of interest, funding, and resources beyond the current narrow institutional scope. Without any pursuit of the preservation of game culture, we lack a holistic preservation of games themselves.
2. Livestreaming is now a major part of game culture, and oftentimes an important touchpoint for game consumers to interact with games outside of personal play - in the past ten years, gaming has evolved from being just a player experience to being a form of entertainment in and of itself. It introduces many viewers to games, their functionalities, and gaming culture. In 2022, acknowledging game culture without factoring in livestreaming is impossible.
3. And: no preservation institutions at this current time are capable of undertaking this kind of project due to the sheer amount of work they are currently doing in order to preserve what is already being offered to them - many game preservationists are working overtime just organizing and preserving what they already have on hand with the funding that is accessible to them. Many preservationists are also working double duty as librarians, professors, and game industry workers. The manpower alone would be a huge undertaking, one that only the largest institutions would be able to handle.

## CONCLUSION

While addressing these issues will be a significant challenge, I do believe that it is an important call to the game scholar world in general, one that will need to be addressed soon: We are rapidly losing information related to gaming culture and interaction when we focus preservation efforts on the preservation of the game alone. Preservationists must look beyond the archiving of the game itself and determine a way forward for a

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holistic game preservation plan that accounts for the culture and experiences of game players and fans.

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