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The Narrative of Dream SMP:

A group of people living an adventure in a video game?

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I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

V Českých Budějovicích dne

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Lucie Votavová

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis aims to analyse the structure and development of the narrative within the Dream SMP, a Minecraft role-play server that became popular during the COVID-19 pandemic. The story unfolds over livestreaming platforms, engaging a live audience, where improvisation, creative collaboration between Dream SMP members, and spontaneous moments shape the narrative core. The boundary between real-life and in-game worlds is frequently blurred, making the narrative even more complex. In this thesis, I use a combination of structural analysis and Conversation Analysis to outline the interaction of narrative video gaming and its impact on shaping the social experience of modern society.

Keywords: narrative; creativity; collaboration; role-play; Conversation Analysis; computer game; live audience; Minecraft

Anotace

Cílem této bakalářské práce je zanalyzovat strukturu a vývoj vyprávění v rámci Dream SMP, Minecraft serveru, který se stal velice populárním během pandemie COVID-19. Hráči na tomto serveru zaujímají postavy, které poté ovládají ve virtuálním světě. Příběh je sdílen s živým publikem prostřednictvím streamovacích platforem, kde improvizace, tvůrčí spolupráce mezi členy Dream SMP a spontánní okamžiky utvářejí jádro vyprávění. Hranice mezi reálným a herním světem jsou často překračovány, což přidává tomuto stylu vyprávění na komplexnosti. V této práci využívám kombinaci strukturální analýzy a konverzační analýzy k nastínění interakce online videoher a jejich vlivu na přetváření sociálního života moderní společnosti.

Klíčová slova: vyprávění; kreativita, spolupráce, hraní rolí, konverzační analýza, počítačová hra; živé publikum; Minecraft

Table of Contents

Introduction

> *"Gentlemen, this is the final room. The Final Control Room" declares Eret, ushering his L'Manberg comrades into a dimly lit space. Upon guiding his character to open a chest labelled with his name, Wilbur mutters, utterly perplexed, "There's nothing in the chests…"*
>
> *Suddenly, the room is invaded by another group of players. Sounds of combat and shattering potions accompany their arrival. The fight is brief, crowning the Dream SMP members as the victors. Wilbur and his allies are left empty-handed, struggling to comprehend the recent betrayal.*
>
> *"Down with the revolution, boys!" Eret's deep voice drowns out the angry shouts, saluting his camera, "It was never meant to be!"*
> *(Eret, 2020).*

The date of 2 August 2020 remains engraved in the memories of Dream SMP fans as a pivotal moment in the server's narrative, presenting an unexpected turn of events. This date also marks one of the starting points of the long saga of what would be later known as a game-changing phenomenon in the world of storytelling and content creation. Dream SMP, a Minecraft role-play server, goes beyond the traditional gameplay by incorporating a complex narrative. It gained traction during the COVID-19 pandemic when many of its consumers were confined to their homes. The members of Dream SMP took this as an opportunity to explore a new type of narrative gameplay, using the global confinement to their advantage. What Dream SMP entails is described in detail in section 1.3, The Origins of Dream SMP.

The interest in gaming is not a recent trend, with global statistics indicating the participation of 3.24 billion players worldwide in online computer games as of 2021 (Clement, 2022). Over the next two years, this number only climbed to a total of 3.8 billion players worldwide, which is approximately 41% of the world's population (Dimitrievski, 2023). Narrative, the concrete realisation of a story, plays a very dominant role in online group video games. While roughly 80% of players may not complete or abandon standard video game playthroughs in the process, for video games that are built on narrative, that number is equivalent to their market success rate (Ronan, 2018).

Role-playing games (RPGs) have been thoroughly studied and recognized by numerous scholars, designers, and fans, gaining popularity thanks to the cultural impact and size of their gaming audience (*Role-playing game studies: Transmedia Foundations*, 2018). However, the possibility of creating a narrative through the Minecraft environment remains a relatively unexplored topic.

Why has narrative become, as in Aristotle's time, an essential rhetorical strategy for group interaction in the online video game environment, and what does narrative in online video games look like? This bachelor's thesis addresses this question through a case study focusing on the narrative within the Minecraft universe. Instead of examining the storyline of the game itself, the study rather explores the dynamics of narrative, which was seamlessly integrated into the gameplay by the members of Dream SMP. In this context, the computer-generated environment serves as an online platform, providing a setting where participants create an unscripted narrative and communicate in real time with a live audience through livestreaming platforms. This creates a shared discourse between the server members and their audience.

For a better understanding of the topic, Chapter One provides background information on Minecraft, role-play gaming, and the Dream SMP server, while Chapter Two deals with fundamental narrative characteristics in the context of Dream SMP. It points out its unique combination of improvisational storytelling, collaborative content creation, and direct engagement with its audience. The inspiration for this research is rooted in my personal project, DSMP Transcriptions, where I transcribed most of the Dream SMP broadcasts throughout the year 2021 to provide an accessible medium for fan-based analyses of the narrative and character developments. Chapter Three explores my journey in detail, covering the methodology chosen for this research, the process of data collection, and their preparation for subsequent analysis in the context of this study.

The main point of this thesis resides in Chapter Four, where I delve into an extensive analysis of livestreams through Conversation Analysis and narratology principles, applied to audiovisual recordings. The aim is to provide insight into the narrative interaction of online gaming and attempt to outline its role in transforming the social experience of modern society. The key findings from the analysis undertaken are summarised in the final chapter of this study.

1. Minecraft, a Timeless Videogame

The rise of Minecraft belongs to one of the most surprising sensations in the gaming industry. While the average lifespan of games usually circles two years, Minecraft defies this convention (Woodward, 2023). Despite its old age, the platform continues to attract a diverse audience of new and existing players with its straightforward gameplay and user-friendly creative features. This chapter explores the structure of the Minecraft platform, the reason behind the selection of this platform for storytelling purposes by the members of Dream SMP (explained in detail in Section 1.3), its differences from the original Minecraft gameplay, and its similarities with role-play gaming.

1.1. What is Minecraft?

According to Matthew Woodward's article on Minecraft statistics (2023), the game was created by Markus Persson in Stockholm, Sweden, with its first release, called Java Edition, on 17 May 2009. The full release of the game to the public dates to 18 November 2011, two and a half years later. This delay helped developers significantly improve its function before players took control of the official version. However, this was not the end of the evolution of the game. Minecraft has continued to improve over the years, becoming more accessible with the reach of mobile devices with its pocket edition in 2017 (Woodward, 2023). While other games remained the same with only slight fixes, Minecraft has continued to evolve with every newly released version, introducing new features to the gameplay to keep the game entertaining. This made the process of creating content through the game significantly easier. As the official Minecraft.net website introduces:

> *Minecraft is a game made up of blocks, creatures, and community. Blocks can be used to reshape the world or build fantastic creations. Creatures can be battled or befriended, depending on your playstyle. Experience epic adventures solo or with friends, there's no wrong way to play.*

The gameplay adapts to the player's chosen path, shaping itself accordingly, rather than the player adapting to the gameplay. Minecraft is a great example of a 'sandbox' game. This type of game design provides the player with an almost unrestricted degree of creativity to interact with the in-game world; 'Give someone a sandbox and they will build castles' (Breslin, 2009). There is no incorrect approach, allowing nearly limitless possibilities within the open game world with the resources given.

Apart from the creative activities, what makes Minecraft more remarkable is its aesthetic sensibility and its mechanics (Duncan. 2011). The graphics of the game have not changed much since its release, keeping its simplistic 'blocky' style, as shown in Figure 2 in section 1.2. That allusion to LEGO makes it easy to create anything the player desires, from pixel art to massive builds and remarkable remakes of in-real-life places. This creative freedom of gameplay aligns seamlessly with the narrative development of Dream SMP, merging the simplistic style of the game with the level of fantasy of both the players and the audience. This provides the creators with an ideal live stage to tell their story without physically gathering in one location.

1.2. The Basics of Minecraft Gameplay

The game offers the flexibility of being experienced individually or in a multiplayer environment, within privately or publicly owned servers. There are three main game modes, which can either restrict or enable the player to explore their creative self: Survival mode, Creative mode, and Hardcore mode. The names already suggest the purpose of each one. Creative mode provides the player with many advantages, such as accessing the full menu of materials and items (Figure 1) or disabling in-game gravity, subsequently giving the player the ability to fly around the open world. This game mode is largely used for building purposes. With the world as your canvas, the only restrictions become your imagination and pixelated world.

Figure 1: In-game menu of items and materials in Creative mode (screenshot from the gameplay).

Although in both Survival and Hardcore modes you can build as well, the addition of survival makes this task more difficult. Instead of selecting the materials from a menu, players are required to locate and gather resources within the in-game environment and systematically upgrade their tools and items to progress to their next steps. Once you begin a new game in Minecraft, you start in a specific spot within the world you have generated, referred to as the world spawn point. This location also serves as a respawn point where you reappear when your health points, displayed as red hearts at the bottom of your screen (Figure 2), are completely reduced (Anderca, 2023). Your health points decrease due to game factors, such as the in-game gravity or encounters with hostile mobs[1] within the open world. The gameplay is then further enhanced by the number of hunger bars, equalling character stamina, requiring the players to constantly monitor and refill both bars if they are low.
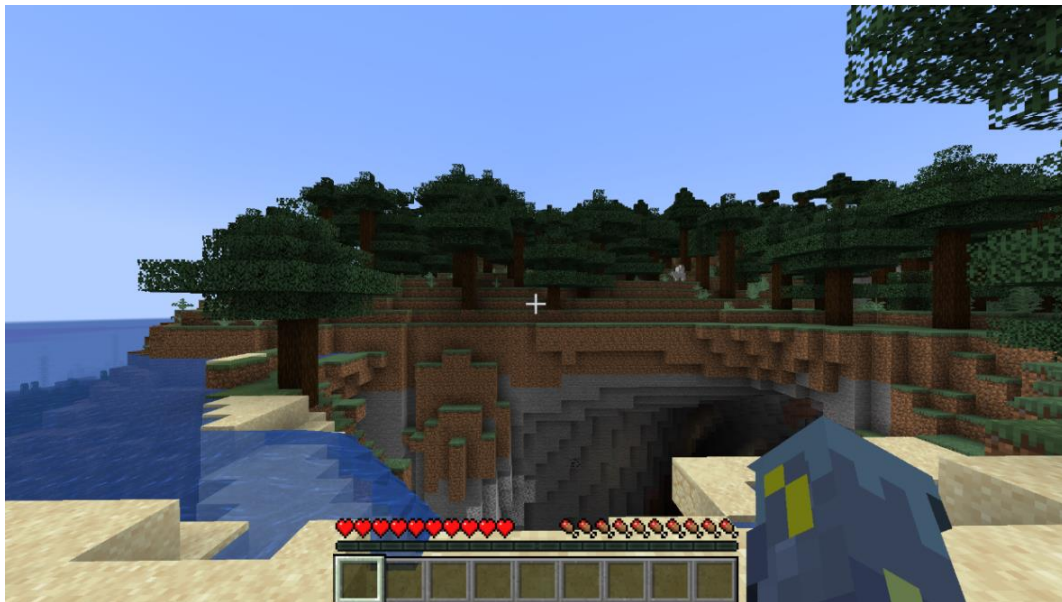
Figure 2: An initial first-person view after in-game world creation in Survival mode (screenshot from the gameplay).

The main difference between Survival and Hardcore modes lies in their difficulty levels. While dying in Hardcore mode results in the end of the game, dying in Survival typically leads to a loss of progress. In the latter case, the players respawn at their previously set spawn point and resume gameplay. Additionally, hunger decreases at a slower rate, and the in-game environment does less damage to the players than in Hardcore mode.

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[1] Minecraft incorporates AI-driven in-game entities with varying reactions to players. Peaceful creatures can be tamed and serve as a source of food or companionship. On the other hand, the primary role of hostile creatures is to challenge the player and deal a significant damage, potentially leading to the player's respawn if they fail to overcome these fights (Landin, 2023).

During the gameplay, players can accomplish various achievements broadening the game's purpose. Players can reach the ultimate ending of the game by defeating the final boss[2], the Ender Dragon, situated in her dimension known as the End. This conclusion requires a systematic upgrading of items and tools that players can craft and acquire throughout their game. Even though Dream SMP operated in Survival mode, it was forbidden for players to embark on this mission of freeing the End to not disrupt the pace of the server (DreamSMP Wiki, n.d.).

The invited members used a computer-generated world as their stage with some narrative interfering with the game mechanics such as the permanence of in-game death. Back in 2020, a fan under the username 'usedforwholesomeness' made a post on Reddit, theorising about the rule of three lives for each character, where they could die and respawn up to three times before becoming ghosts. This proposition was subsequently integrated into the official storyline by Wilbur, a member and writer of Dream SMP, merging the essential features of Survival and Hardcore mode.

1.3. The Origins of Dream SMP

With the initial outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020, gaming quickly became one of the most popular activities. Many people turned to their devices to simply pass the time during long periods of being locked down at home. According to a survey in June 2020 undertaken by J. Clement, in which she focused on the growth of time spent gaming during COVID-19 worldwide, around 39% of responders globally observed that their time spent playing video games increased during the pandemic (2021b).

Multiplayer games proved to be especially popular since precautions had been taken to limit physical contact between people, and gaming did not require any face-to-face contact. As a result, many gamers felt happier and less isolated since gaming helped them maintain their social needs and entertainment (Clement, 2021a). This increase in players had a significant impact on Minecraft as well, where the number of active players grew by over 14 million, reaching 126 million players worldwide in the period from 2020 to 2021 (Woodward, 2023). This time frame aligns with the duration of Dream SMP's popularity on streaming platforms, such as Twitch and YouTube.

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[2] Boss is a hostile AI-driven entity, an aggressive mob, that presents a significant challenge to players. They typically have higher health, deal more damage, and attack the player constantly. By killing these foes, player can either acquire valuable rare items or alter the Minecraft world in some way (Minecraft Wiki, n.d.)

Launched in 2011, Twitch is now one of the leading platforms for the gaming community. With its focus on live interaction, it allows streamers to chat with their audience and build online communities while streaming entertaining content in real time. Although YouTube (launched in 2005) is mainly known for its pre-recorded videos, it also offers live streaming features just like Twitch, giving content creators more flexibility (Mahbub, 2024).

The beginning of Dream SMP can be traced back to May 2020 when Minecraft content creators, Dream and GeorgeNotFound, decided to create a private Minecraft server for their friends (Asarch, 2021; D'Anastasio 2021), streaming its content on their dedicated Twitch accounts. Originally known as Dream Team SMP (later abbreviated to simply DSMP, where SMP stands for 'survival multiplayer'), this server was initially invite-only with a handful of content creators. Its trajectory gradually changed from a casual survival game to a narratively rich environment with every new member added, as stated by Fundy, a DSMP member, in an interview for Business Insider (Asarch, 2021).

The server has an established canon, like a Marvel Cinematic Universe, allowing the viewers to trace multiple storylines across different streaming channels with the liberty of choosing which point of view they would like to follow. Combined with the absence of saved videos, since Twitch does not allow to archive past broadcasts longer than two months (Twitch Support, n.d.), a mentality of "once in a lifetime" opportunity was created. This mindset emphasised the importance of viewers attending each stream to fully engage in the unfolding story and share their viewing experience with others, helping the server gain even more popularity by breaking records in viewership.

During one of the chapter finales a member of the DSMP, TommyInnit, peaked at 650,000 live viewers on his Twitch livestream, making it the third-highest all-time concurrent viewer stream on Twitch as of January 2021 (Rod Breslau, 2021). As Wilbur, a member of DSMP, stated: "I think the Dream SMP is popular thanks to the brilliant creators and funny improv[3] moments. I think we'll be seeing the emergence of a huge wave of role-play-centric gaming communities" (Asarch, 2021). Although Dream SMP is not the first role-play server, both EarthSMP and SMPLive were around long before the server came into existence, none had been as successful as Dream SMP.

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[3] Improv, short for *improvisation*, is a form of performance, such as comedy or acting, where the content is spontaneously created during the execution rather than relying on pre-written and rehearsed words or music (Cambridge Dictionary).

1.4. Role-play Gaming and the Dream SMP

Role-playing in an online environment is hardly a new phenomenon. Beginning with Dungeons & Dragons in the 1970s as the pioneer of role-playing games (RPGs), role-playing quickly transformed into this modern genre of entertainment for people all around the world (Deterding & Zagal, 2018). With a focus on addressing the needs of players, RPGs have branched out into several types. Tabletop role-play games (TTRPGs), such as Dungeons & Dragons, acquire face-to-face interaction between the referee, Dungeon Master, and a limited number of players situated around a table. These players control fictional characters, as the narration and played actions are verbally described, restricted only by the player's imagination and the values on the dice. The success of players' actions depends on the rules of the game and the dice rolls. This often leads to the narrative progression being influenced by luck and the play of chance. No one can control what the dice roll.

Live-action role-play (LARP) responds to the problem of limited players by moving the world beyond the realm of imaginary adventures. Players fully embody their characters and create a 'real' game by playing in a physical environment (Livingstone, 1982). Unlike TTRPGs, visual effects and acting play a pivotal role in LARP. Players cosplay[4] their characters in a pre-prepared realistic space where their actions are guided by their physical abilities; "you can do what you can do" (Zagal & Deterding, 2018). Instead of narrating the events, the situations are in real-time responded to and acted out, transforming the narrative into a performance between the players.

Although LARP does minimise the issue of a limited number of players, it still does not solve the time-consuming preparations that are necessary before each session. During the 1980s, computer role-playing games (CRPGs) addressed this challenge. In this mode, the computer functions as the referee, creating environments and giving the player options within the game mechanics and rules. These actions cannot be alternated unless the player directly modifies the game's programming themselves (Zagal & Deterding, 2018). The narrative is typically integrated into the gameplay and contains predefined sets of actions from which the player can choose based on their decisions, restricting the player's creative freedom to tell their own story.

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[4] According to Lamerichs, the term 'cosplay' is a blend of the words *costume* and *play* (2015). This practise involves individuals adopting specific elements of the appearance or mannerism of characters from comics, video games, films, or similar sources, effectively bringing them to life (Crawford & Hancock, 2019).

Dream SMP is not based on just one branch of RPGs; instead, it represents a unique combination of all forms of RPGs within the Minecraft platform. Players create and develop unique characters with distinct personalities, backgrounds, and abilities. They have the freedom to shape their character's arcs, relationships, and motivations over time as the story develops. Players work in collaboration to explore and create the fictional universe, where they make choices and take actions, influencing the game world even further. Apart from just simply playing, the three genres of RPGs (tabletop, live-action, computer-based RPGs) all involve elements of performance, as players embody their characters and interact with each other and the audience.

The COVID-19 pandemic and no-contact policy maximised its use, resulting in an unusual live stage, where individual content creators controlled their chosen characters within a pre-prepared environment, limited only by game mechanics and the ability to use them to their advantage. Narrative freedom remains unrestricted by nothing but creativity and collaboration of its members and audience.

2. Narrative Characteristics of Dream SMP

After exploring the relationship between Dream SMP and Minecraft as its platform, the focus now shifts to understanding the concept of narrative and its primary characteristics. Subsequently, each point is compared to the narrative structure of DSMP.

2.1. What is a Narrative?

The Oxford English Dictionary traces its origins to the late Latin word 'narrare', meaning 'to tell', which comes from the late Latin adjective 'gnarus', which means 'knowing'. The French translated 'narrare' as 'naratif', from which late Middle English borrowed it and assimilated its spelling to its current form 'narrative'. Within the context of meaning, the Oxford English Dictionary defines narrative as "a spoken or written account of connected events; a story". These etymological and semantic developments emphasise the dual form of narrative, oral or written, which contains knowledge spread through storytelling.

Every narrative consists of a teller, a tale, and an addressee (Toolan, 2001). As established previously, the narrative core is partially constructed from its content, yet the story itself cannot exist independently. A narrative requires an agent to communicate its existence and a recipient to receive it. Much like discourse, stories are made to be consumed by a specific audience, a principle that also applies to the narrative of Dream SMP. Each participating content creator, who streams their perspective, assumes the role of a collaborative narrator of the story. At the same time, the audience, who sit in front of their screens, contributes to the narrative as the addressees.

Considering the emphasis on content creation among the DSMP members, these three fundamental elements (teller, tale, addressee) create the core existence of such a narrative. Without a teller, there would be no one to tell the story, and without a tale, there would be simply no tale to tell. The presence of an addressee broadens, as it not only includes the audience but also some DSMP members, who may be left unaware of certain planned narrative developments. Additionally, The DSMP narrative was designed to be shared with an audience, a concept which was not hard to reach as each of the players already cultivated a community of their own. Thanks to the server's popularity, reaching a wide audience became much more feasible with every successful broadcast. Through this opportunity, a large number of addressees was created, and simultaneously the reason to tell a story came into existence as well.

Figure 3: Fanart of the DSMP members by Honted [@Honted_ on Twitter], digital painting. 2022

2.2. Collaborative Narrative

Narratives must have a teller, and the teller, no matter how backgrounded or 'invisible', is always important (Toolan, 2001). Where every member creates the story of their character, Dream SMP has this way over 30 tellers. Although certain members, such as Dream or Jschlatt, stray from livestreaming their perspective, each character adds a new viewpoint with their participation. The main difference between a static story of a book and a collaborative role-play is the formation of a shared discourse (Kim, 2003). While in a book we usually have only one author, the authorship in a role-play grows with every new participant. The environment and mechanics of the game, the problem-solving of the players, and mutual interaction shape the final product which we then call a story.

The narrative of Dream SMP is very dependent on its addressees to the point where the so-called 'chatters' become part of the story as well. Streaming platforms have a built-in feature of live chats, where watchers can comment and interact with the streamer and each other during the broadcast; hence the terminology of a chatter. Some DSMP members chose to include their chats in the narrative in ways that fit their characters, and the degree of integration varies (Dream Team Wiki, n.d.). For instance, Ranboo, playing a character with Enderman[5] traits, portrays his Chat as particles that float around and communicate with his character when he's alone. However, a notable character to whom Chat plays an indispensable role is Technoblade, an anarchist whose purpose is to fight against a tyrannical and oppressive government. His Chat, personified as voices in his head, often fills with repetitive messages that influence his character, as he explicitly states during one of his storytelling streams:

> *I think, the reason it's so hard for me to be non-violent, it's because I hear voices, Phil. I hear countless voices in my head. All the time. And the voices are crazy, Phil. Sometimes they're angry, sometimes they're sad, sometimes they mock me. But the thing about the voices, Phil. The one thing I hear from them the most. The voices demand blood, Phil. They demand blood (Technoblade, 2021, 32:26).*

This approach further deepens the struggles of Technoblade's character, feeding into his fictional blood thirst and desire for violence. Thanks to his exceptional gaming skills and knowledge in player versus player (PVP) combat, he earned titles such as 'Blood God'. This recognition is often expressed both in gameplay and chats through recurring

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[5] Enderman is an AI-driven entity, characterized by its black, lanky appearance, with neutral behaviour unless a direct eye contact is made. These creatures emit purple particles, providing a visual interpretation of their ability to teleport around the Minecraft world (Stone, 2017).

messages like 'Blood for the Blood God' and 'Technoblade never dies', especially during intense combat moments.

As established, narrative collaboration goes beyond DSMP members by including a major portion of fan contributions. Fan theories are frequently confirmed or even incorporated into the storyline, given the immediate feedback available from fans on various social media platforms after every new livestream. Furthermore, elements from fanart designs (Figure 3), such as Philza's character with damaged wings from an explosion or Dream's character wearing a significant smiley mask, have been integrated. They draw inspiration from the simplistic Minecraft textures that the members of the Dream SMP assigned to their characters. This broadens audience engagement, cultivating a deeper connection between viewers and the Dream SMP narrative.

2.3. Narrative Preparation

Before a narrative can come into existence, the basis of its creation must be discussed, such as pace and emphasis (Toolan, 2001), especially with as many contributors as DSMP has. Since everything is broadcasted on streaming platforms, the pace and timeframe mostly follow the real-time of watchers. Once something is said it usually cannot be retconned[6] unless discussed otherwise.

Despite the largely improvised nature of DSMP, the plot is partially scripted. In an interview with Business Insider, Wilbur, a member and writer of the SMP, revealed that he wrote up a series of plot hooks and points that were tied together; however, during the actual livestreams, they would improv dialogue and comedic elements to let the plot organically unfold. Similarly, Dream, one of the creators of Dream SMP, stated in an interview for The Eboys Podcast (2021) that they roughly outlined various potential outcomes based on the possible directions the narrative would take, keeping the suspense of the storytelling and spontaneous trajectory. This included private discussions between participating members regarding the livestreams they would collaborate on. Even during improvisation, certain points or themes are intended to be referenced or addressed. This practice prevents the occurrence of serious misunderstandings during the scenes and ensures that the content is entertaining.

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[6] 'Retcon', derived from *retroactive continuity*, is a literary device involving the alteration of the form or content of a previously established narrative (Merriam-Webster.com, n.d.). In the context of Dream SMP, it eliminates past details, such as accidental character deaths or in-game family relations, to avoid disruptions to the main plotline's trajectory.

2.4. A Degree of Pre-fabrication

Narratives frequently seem to have bits that appear familiar, either due to our direct exposure or due to the belief that we have encountered them previously (Toolan, 2001). Everything is inspired by something; ideas do not come from nothing. This phenomenon was exhibited during one of Wilbur's streams on 5 January 2022, where he revealed that his writing process was inspired by television and film, namely the musical "Hamilton"[7] (2015). This source of inspiration played a pivotal role in shaping the very first conflict between L'Manberg and Dream SMP on the server; L'Manberg represented a revolutionary un-American faction that sought to separate itself from Dream SMP and its control over the server.

The Hamilton storyline of the Broadway musical is also frequently referenced or even directly quoted during the broadcasts, such as moments of betrayal in "the room where it happened" dubbed "The Final Control Room", or a bow-and-arrow duel between Dream's and TommyInnit's (further also referred to as Tommy) characters since guns in DSMP universe did not exist. This duel is a direct reference to the gun duels in the Hamilton storyline, where characters often resolve their dispute through such means.

2.5. The Importance of Trajectory

The narrative is strongly focused on its development and ending; from the very first moment, each story moves towards its conclusion. The recipients are waiting to see how it ends. Stories have a shape, they begin somewhere and end somewhere, and there should be a logical continuity between situations. Aristotle instituted this phenomenon in his Poetics:

> *A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./1920).*

This definition of a unified plot is quite straightforward, and it works when considering the whole storyline as well as individual broadcasts. Each livestream follows a clear

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[7] Hamilton, a stage musical composed by Lin-Manuel Miranda, made its debut on 17 February 2015 (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2024). The production covers the life of American Founding Father Alexander Hamilton and his family, presenting their involvement in the American Revolution and the political history of early United States. A filmed version of the Broadway production was released in 2020 on Disney+.

structure of beginning, middle, and end, where each part logically connects to the previous one. This aligns with the concept of unity of actions, as indicated by Aristotle in the next chapters of his Poetics, where the function of the teller is not to report what has happened but what may happen based on the probable or necessary sequence (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./1920, p. 35).

Thanks to advancements in technology, anyone now has the potential to become an author, as shown in the dynamic of DSMP. In this context, multiple authors and readers engage in a frenzy of communication, creating a real-time narrative that often surprises not only the audience but the DSMP members as well. Consequently, the middle segments of the narrative are often unpredictable, and their endings tend to be rather anarchic. As Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, a 19th-century Prussian field marshal, once famously stated, "No plan survives first contact with the enemy" (quoteresearch, 2021). While planning is crucial for anticipating potential diversions, the ability to adapt to unforeseen circumstances is equally essential.

The plot therefore develops organically and arises from the incidents themselves. However, the audience still expects to reach a full circle of the storyline. One needs to tie together the loose ends. Since the storytelling of Dream SMP is produced by several writers and its nature is predominantly episodic, a phenomenon which Aristotle shuns, the trajectory may become disrupted. Aristotle emphasises that if a probable or necessary sequence does not lead the plot, the episodes can "stretch the plot beyond its capacity and are often forced to break the natural continuity" (ca. 350 B.C.E./1920, p. 39).

In this overarching blueprint, each new episode introduces a new problem that must be solved before the final ending can be reached. However, this structure also works in the creators' favour, as it lures the audience to eagerly anticipate the next episode in hopes of reaching the final resolution. This ensures that viewers come back for more.

2.6. The Beginning, the Middle, and the End

When Dream first started the SMP, it was initially exclusively categorised as a survival server meant for playful conflicts and entertainment. It was only after Wilbur had joined that the story started to have a deliberate and structured plot (The Eboys Podcast, 2021, 7:23). Despite the idea that plot development began several months after the server was established, the birth of its narrative trajectory can be traced back to the initial creation of the SMP. This early period of role-play is often referenced during interpersonal

conflicts and the reasoning behind character actions, fulfilling Aristotle's definition of a probable or necessary sequence, as conflicts arise naturally from previous situations.

As of September 2022, the server plotline had developed more than 20 distinct eras, which overlapped and intertwined, as shown in Figure 4 after this section, featuring a cast of more than 30 reoccurring characters (Dream Team Wiki, n.d.). Each member weaved their perspective within the main story and created a series of plot hooks and storylines for the audience to follow. Despite the narrative complexity, a few reoccurring themes can be pointed out, including issues of betrayal and alliances, political power struggles, war crimes, and character development with a focus on self-discovery and moral alignment.

As Wilbur, one of the writers of the Dream SMP storyline, emphasised during a stream with his fellow SMP member Philza (Philza VODS, 2022a), writing drama involves introducing conflicts that change characters, and a key aspect of the Dream SMP storyline is their moral ambiguity. There is no absolute distinction between good and bad, reflecting the intricate complexity of the real world. Ironically, the ongoing challenge on the server has always been its tendency to divide into opposing sides and factions, often leading to interpersonal conflicts. However, this aspect notably heightened the engagement of the storyline, creating a scenario where the audience could cheer on different sides and speculate about the eventual victor.

Due to its growing popularity, the storyline exceeded its original one-year duration, continuing for another year. However, as COVID-19 restrictions began to ease, arranging collective streaming sessions for new storylines became increasingly harder to do. According to Dream, many individuals, including himself, experienced a loss of motivation or became too busy to participate in the scheduled streams. The tragic passing of Technoblade[8], a prominent member, also contributed to the gradual ending of the storyline (Gutelle, 2023; RunAlong, 2023). The server reached its dramatic conclusion with a widespread detonation on 13 November 2022, two and half years later since the creation of the server. The importance of this event is examined in detail in section 4.2.3.

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[8] On 30th June 2022, a video titled "so long nerds" was uploaded on Technoblade's YouTube channel, where his father shared a message written by Technoblade eight hours before his passing. This announced the end of Technoblade's prolonged battle with cancer. He passed away at the age of 23.

Figure 4: Dream SMP plot timeline as of August 2021 (Dream Team Wiki).

23

3. Data and Methodology

This chapter examines the analytical focus and methodological approach of the research, detailing the process of data collection through my personal project, DSMP Transcriptions, and the subsequent selection of events, summarizing their importance in the overarching narrative. Lastly, the chapter describes the chosen methodological approach for analysing the narrative structure of Dream SMP (3.3).

3.1. Data collection via DSMP Transcriptions

As an active member of the Dream SMP community, I developed an interest in analysing the narrative back in 2020. Using the knowledge of linguistics and data collection from my early studies, I began to transcribe the broadcasts into coherent units. The goal was to create a more accessible medium for fan-based analyses and to archive the unfolding story. The process involved careful and repeated listening to audiovisual recordings of past broadcasts, effectively transcribing them into written form. As my journey progressed, I welcomed assistance from fellow fans, and we formed a collaborative team under the simple name of DSMP Transcriptions. What began as a small hobby evolved into a meaningful fan project that lasted over ten months, gained traction of 38,000 followers on X (Twitter) and resulted in over 150 transcripts in total. These transcripts were shared via Google Docs with links on a dedicated Twitter account (@dsmptranscripts) and website (dsmptranscripts.carrd.co).

The transcripts ranged in length from 2,000 to 50,000 words, depending on whether they covered a single interaction or entire broadcasts, which were on average two hours long. One of the biggest projects I have done with my helpers involved transcribing a prison escape of Dream's character from the server prison on 28 November 2021. This transcript included various perspectives from ten livestreams in total by Awesamdude, Technoblade, BoomerNA, Punz, Sapnap, Nihachu, Michaelmcchill, TommyInnit, Hannahxxrose, and Eryn. Due to its extensive content, the transcript had to be split into two parts: 'The Prison Break' and 'The Aftermath of the Prison Break'. The entire process of transcribing lasted over two months and resulted in over 83.600 words with every point of view included.

The primary focus of the transcripts was on the elements of the story, often leaving out parts in which any content creator broke character or engaged in regular gameplay with no focus on contributing to the narrative. The process of transcribing involved discussing the exclusion of parts within the transcription team, followed by initial

transcription, proofreading from a different person than the transcriber, and subsequent editing to fit the established format for all transcripts on the account. The format was inspired by movie scripts and Gail Jefferson's transcription system (2004), with her system serving as the guiding principle. However, to facilitate plot development analysis, only a limited number of transcription symbols were retained, including square brackets ([]) for overlapping speech, asterisks (*) to mark body language such as laughter and intonation, and descriptions of scene changes with associated timestamps, as shown in the following Figure 5.

```
{1:03:27} [After scouting out L'Manberg, Tommy and Techno make their way
back to the nether portal. Panic settles in the pit of Tommy's stomach
as a man in full netherite armor blocks their way. Tommy holds up his
shield, throwing a few potions below their feet, as Techno points his
crossbow at their new company.]

TOMMY:      *high-pitched* Hi, Dream.

DREAM:      Hello!

TECHNO:     So… Hm… [Hm, how's it going?]

DREAM:      [How's it- How is it going?]

TECHNO:     [Doing pretty well. Doing pretty well.]

DREAM:      [If I remember correctly.] If I remember correctly… You are
            not supposed to be here, Tommy.

TECHNO:     *whispers* Tommy, don't be scared. He doesn't have no house.
            He don't got no home, Tommy. Don't be scared.
```

Figure 5: Showcase of the transcript format from 27 December 2020 (dsmptranscripts, 2020).

Given the extensive nature of the transcripts, the focus of the original format was on simplicity and clarity. Since regular fans were not familiar with the detailed academic format used in Conversation Analysis, the transcripts aimed to be legible and cohesive rather than detailed as one would if the system of Gail Jefferson (2004) was followed.

3.2. Selection of Material

I decided to take advantage of my enormous dataset from DSMP Transcriptions along with the full audiovisual recordings of actual broadcasts available on YouTube. Systematically reviewing each transcript side-by-side with its YouTube recording, I focused on identifying intriguing phenomena within the context of narrative structure.

After the summer of 2021, as the audience and fanbase grew, livestreams became progressively more planned, including recorded cutscenes and pre-rehearsed segments, due to the expectation pressure and players' desire to experiment with cinematography. Considering this change of style and the limited length of my thesis, I selected transcripts

and livestreams from the first half of the narrative (from July 2020 to January 2021), featuring significant events that would best showcase their largely improvisational and collaborative nature.

I am approaching the next section as a cinematic experience, full of action, lots of characters, and climatic events that drive the narrative forward. These elements set the scene and give context for the subsequent discourse analysis, which serves as the key outcome of my thesis. The focus is on real-life conversations, avoiding scripted or preplanned narratives (the primary focus of Conversation Analysis as I explain in section 3.3). These streams often captured interpersonal conflicts and battles, aligning with the central theme of the Dream SMP narrative. Such situations had a large and frequent impact on character development or future events. In the following subsections, I provide summaries of these events and explain why I find these segments representative.

3.2.1. L'Manberg vs. Dream SMP War

This two-week conflict lasted from 24 July to 2 August 2020 and was centred on L'Manberg's first fight for independence. L'Manberg, inspired by Hamilton's storyline (2020), was a non-American faction led by WilburSoot, which aimed to secede from Dream SMP in hopes of becoming an independent country on the server. Although it was hardly the first conflict on the server, this event marked the beginning of a cohesive story with established characters.

A crucial stream for my analysis occurred on 2 August 2020, during the final battle. The conflict started with mutual provocations, escalating into an actual battle between the two sides. The pivotal plot twist came with Eret's betrayal (also introduced in the Introduction of this thesis), leading to the ambush of L'Manberg members, where each lost one of their lives. The subsequent bow duel between Dream and TommyInnit, followed by their spontaneous negotiation where Tommy offered Dream his music discs[9], Cat and Mellohi, L'Manberg gained its technical independence. Despite the apparent resolution of the conflict, the hostility remained, especially between Dream and Tommy, when Tommy swore to get his music discs back.

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[9] Music discs are a set of sixteen Minecraft items that can be played in jukeboxes to change the in-game music within the immediate area. They can be found in specific structures that are randomly scattered around the open world. These simple items became narratively important as Tommy's most valuable material possessions, specifically the Cat and Mellohi ones.

3.2.2. The L'Manbergian Election

Following their independence, Wilbur decided to officially run for president through a democratic vote starting on 3 September 2020. This period consisted of campaign activities, including a presidential debate, concluding with the L'Manburg 2020 Voting Ballot via Google Forms. The audience, consisting of live viewers and members of the DSMP online communities across various social media platforms, got to choose between four running parties: POG2020 (Wilbur, TommyInnit), Schlatt2020 (JSchlatt), SWAG2020 (Quackity, GeorgeNotFound), and Coconut2020 (Fundy, Nihachu).

After counting approximately 220,000 legitimate votes, the results were announced on 22 September 2020. POG2020 appeared to be the winner with 45% of the popular vote. However, due to SWAG2020 and Schlatt2020 forming a coalition, their votes were combined, giving them 46% of the popular vote, securing their victory by 1%.

After an initial shock, as a such result was not expected to happen, JShlatt was inaugurated as the new president of L'Manberg. He delivered three speeches in which he banished Wilbur and Tommy from the land, renamed L'Manberg to Manberg, and removed the walls surrounding the new country. This event demonstrates the importance of large audience participation for voting to take place and to have an actual impact on the narrative change. Its results can take the narrative in a completely opposite direction, to which the main participants must adapt.

3.2.3. The Manberg Festival

On 16 October 2020, Tubbo and the rest of Manberg's council hosted a festival to celebrate the new country and its democracy. Wilbur and Tommy, banished to live in a ravine named Pogtopia, observed the festival from a distance. The mental state of Wilbur's character visibly declined, yearning for revenge, and wanting to blow up the country to smithereens. Despite the initial celebrations, the festival took a drastic turn after JSchlatt's and Tubbo's speeches. JSchlatt exposed Tubbo as a traitor for secretly endorsing Pogtopia, leading to Tubbo's execution by Technoblade, a recently invited member who was secretly helping Pogtopia as well. The festival quickly turned into a fight for survival, causing doubt in JSchlatt's leadership, further dividing the server into more sides.

3.2.4. The Manberg vs. Pogtopia War

Another war dramatically concluded a two-month-long arc known as the Manberg Rebellion. During this period, several members engaged in individual livestreams, exploring their characters' developments, and wading into the waters of power play dynamics and personal struggles. On 16 November 2020, the conflict finished with a battle on Manberg grounds, with the threat of a traitor drastically changing the course of events. After Jschlatt's sudden death from a heart attack, Manberg citizens chose Tubbo as their new president.

However, the event did not end there. Wilbur decided to detonate stacks of TNT he had previously laid under Manberg, reaching with this act the "finale of his symphony" (a callback to the Hamilton musical), and sacrificing the rest of his lives in the process. This act kicked off another battle, with Technoblade and Dream destroying more of the land. The War ended with Tubbo in charge, planning to rebuild L'Manberg with his new cabinet, aiming for a better future for the server.

3.2.5. Tommy's Exile and Technoblade's Execution

After the war the journey of self-discovery continued, laying down foundations for more personal arcs from members such as Jack Manifold, BadBoyHalo, CaptainPuffy, or Nihachu. Following the disaster of the last war, Technoblade was declared an enemy of New L'Manberg and temporarily retired from his anarchist ways. Due to interpersonal conflict and threats to the citizens and existing government, two significant events marked this period. The first one was Tommy's exile. This verdict was reached through a negotiation between Dream and Tubbo and the New L'Manberg cabinet in concern of Tommy endangering the lives of his fellow citizens.

The second one was Technoblade's attempted execution when he was hunted down by the Butcher Army for his past violent acts against the nation and brought back to the mainland to face the consequences. This group consisted of Quackity, Tubbo, Fundy, and Ranboo. However, their attempt at seeking justice essentially failed as Technoblade managed to escape before he could lose one of his lives. Both situations significantly influenced future events and character development as they heightened hostility and distrust between the characters.

3.2.6. Doomsday

Due to growing mistrust and struggles for power, Dream and Technoblade started a war against the rest of the server, aiming to finish Wilbur's goal of destroying L'Manberg once and for all. The server, instead of coming together and preparing for the upcoming battle, continued to argue in recollection of past events and conflicts. Despite Tommy's efforts to organize a defence, the outcome had been already decided. Dream, Technoblade, and Phil, all skilled fighters with resources for mass destruction, ensured the battle was short-lived. Betrayal from the inside, as some members chose not to fight for the lost country anymore, ensured that the TNT raining from the sky left nothing but a huge crater behind. L'Manberg reached its final symphony on 6 January 2021.

3.2.7. The Disc Confrontation

What some consider as the end of season one of the Dream SMP saga, the final Disc Confrontation unfolded on 20 January 2021. As Tommy promised and showcased throughout the narrative, he was determined to reclaim the discs he traded for L'Manberg's independence. The opportunity presented itself when Dream invited him and Tubbo to a secluded location. After bidding goodbye to the rest of the server, Tommy and Tubbo embark on a journey that ends with a hectic confrontation with Dream. Using Tommy's deep connection to Tubbo, Dream disarmed them both and led them to a Vault, showcasing places for everyone's prized possessions, including Tommy's music discs. In this bizarre confrontation centred around Dream's manipulation of emotional attachments to regain control over the server, Tommy faced a choice between retrieving his discs or saving Tubbo's life.

In the last moments, the rest of the server intervened, standing united in support of Tubbo and Tommy against Dream. As Dream had lost two of his lives, he promptly revealed the existence of a book, which could bring people back to life. This revelation led to his somewhat merciful imprisonment in Pandora's Vault, the server's prison.

In this seemingly peaceful resolution, the narrative branched out into individual arcs, where collaboration with several members became less achievable. It did provide considerable space for the remaining members to further develop their personal narratives, however, these narratives are not the focus of this study.

3.3. Methodological Approach

The research centres around a single case study of the Dream SMP narrative, outlining the overall structure of narrative emergence in an online gaming environment, and emphasising elements that are considered representative of this type of storytelling approach. The following chapter examines the general structure of significant Dream SMP livestreams, further investigating how players navigate and understand its narrative emergence. Narratology principles, including structural analysis, have been selected as one of the methodological approaches.

While the narrative is partially scripted, any plan can change due to unforeseen circumstances during the broadcasts and their development is organic and unpredictable. The study is therefore complemented by the incorporation of Conversation Analysis (CA) methods, focusing on natural conversation, with emphasis on speech patterns, overlaps, pauses, intonation, and other phenomena. The ongoing monitoring of the conversation becomes crucial, as any turn of talk can lead to a change in the narrative framework (examined in the Data Analysis).

Conversation Analysis is a qualitative research method created in the 1960s by three academics: Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson. Transcriptions become its essential component as they produce a written form of natural conversation, simplifying the analytical process. CA presents insight into how people use language in everyday communication and how they collaboratively construct meaning through their interaction, subsequently allowing us to freeze a moment of conversation and examine "*how* it worked, *what* worked, and what *did not*" (Stokoe, 2018).

Since the original transcripts from DSMP Transcriptions excluded some casual moments between players, specific sections for the analyses were rewritten in the Jefferson style (see Appendix A), with the guidance of YouTube broadcast recordings. This process involved converting the selected parts into audio formats and transcribing them using Audacity and Microsoft Word, ensuring all necessary symbols such as pauses, overlapping speech, and intonations were accurately marked. Audacity was chosen for its ability to measure pauses during speech down to milliseconds, making the transcribing and analytical process easier. These selected segments are presented and analysed in Chapter Four in the context of narrative emergence.

4. Data Analysis

Now that the theoretical aspects have been covered and the general structure of Dream SMP outlined, the next step is to explore its narrative. The aim is to examine the shape of the storyline through audiovisual and transcript data, analyse the relationship between real-life events and gameplay dynamics, and explain how these distinct elements intertwine to define the narrative core of Dream SMP.

4.1. The Framework of Livestreams

Similar to how TV series have episodes and books have chapters, the narrative of DSMP is structured into individual livestreams, with each event serving as one episode in the whole story. During each livestream everything is captured in chronological order, emphasizing the spontaneous creation of the narrative as it unfolds. This approach of showing each action and decision made by the streamers contributes to the immersive experience of viewers, making them feel as if they were witnessing the events along with the characters. This time perception is examined in more detail in section 4.2.2.

When it comes to the structure of plots, Freytag's Pyramid (1890s) is commonly applied in narrative analyses and plot designs, consisting of exposition, conflict, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. This diagram is typically used in fiction writings to establish a coherent story, focusing on how each section follows and influences the next one. However, this framework works best with narrative analyses of central scenes and reflecting points, where the story graduates and falls. Considering the mainly conversational and improvisational nature of the DSMP, the focus of my analysis is instead on how the overall narrative is created during the broadcasts. The narrative development depends on the immediate circumstances and interactions between players and viewers, with some narrative plot points possibly scripted beforehand (see section 2.3). However, the outcome is never guaranteed and therefore unpredictable.

Each livestream follows the traditional narrative framework of a beginning, middle, and end, as outlined by Aristotle. While the beginning is represented by the Introduction to the stream and the end by its Ending, I categorized the middle into additional segments that capture the narrative progression. I provide a detailed analysis for each of the segments in the following subchapters. Apart from the Introduction and Ending, these segments happen *several* times during each stream, and their combination and sequences create the final narrative core. My focus was on the content and the objective of each scenario, which I categorized accordingly into *8 separate segments*:

1. *__Introduction__*: (fixed position) The player starts their stream by greeting their live viewers and providing context for the upcoming session to set the scene.

2. *__In-character Gameplay__*: The player remains in character while they also focus on simple gameplay, such as gathering resources or building structures. Pushing the narrative forward is not the main objective here.

3. *__Conversation Segments__*: Players focus strictly on dialogue, engaging in direct conversations that may reveal secrets or unforeseen circumstances. These conversations are crucial to the narrative development.

4. *__Negotiations__*: Parties engage in direct discussions which are aimed at negotiating desired outcomes and mutually beneficial resolutions, trying to resolve a conflict.

5. *__Internal Monologues__*: These segments offer insight into the character's inner thoughts when their struggles are shared with the viewers aloud.

6. *__Combat (PVP):__* Focused on strategy and skill, players engage in physical fights with each other, typically to defeat their opponent.

7. *__Travelling__*: In this segment, players change locations and traverse the server. The narrative direction may be influenced by their observation during the journey.

8. *__Ending__*: (fixed position) The streamer steps out of character and concludes the episode by saying goodbye to their audience and doing their outro routine.

Streams became much more structured and pre-planned as the narrative developed further. This difference can be seen in the following time chart (Figure 6), which compares the first and final streams in my selected material. Internal Monologues were not included in the infographics, as they represent the most flexible segments within the narrative structure. These moments are often brief, and they frequently overlap with other segments. Nevertheless, they carry an important aspect of character expression, as detailed further in section 4.1.4.

Since the final stream only features two perspectives from Tubbo and Tommy, I chose Tommy's point of view to demonstrate the layout and possible sequence of my narrative segments in both events. Through chronological examination of the recordings and their transcripts, I identified the start and transition points of each segment (I explain these transition points in Figure 7). By measuring their durations and assigning precise timestamps to each transition, I organised the livestreams into a visually accessible infographic (Figure 6), providing a clearer understanding of the broadcast layout by marking the beginning and end of each segment.
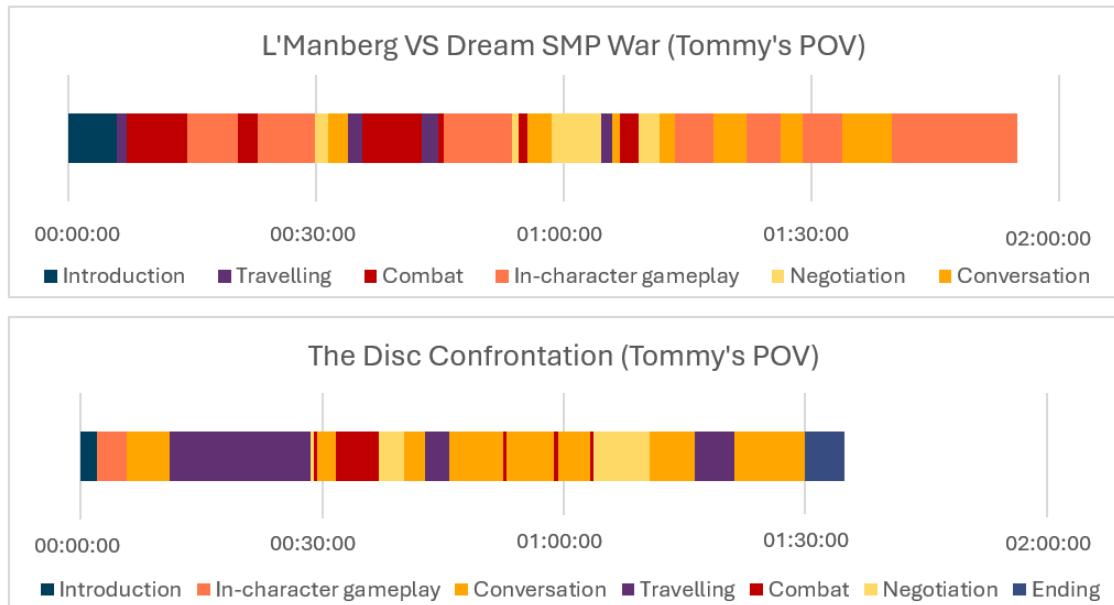
Figure 6: Segment sequences chart for the initial and final stream from TommyInnit's perspective.

I provide detailed analyses of each segment alongside their transition points in the following subsections (sections 4.1.1–4.1.8). The influence of pre-planning can be seen by simply looking at the segment distribution and the overall duration of each broadcast. The Disc Confrontation is notably shorter. However, while Combat segments here occupy less space, Travelling segments are extended to fulfil the narrative need of reaching specific server locations. Additionally, In-character Gameplay gives way to Conversation segments, indicating a more narratively focused approach as Conversation segments tend to be more narratively driven (showcased in section 4.1.3).

In contrast, in the L'Manberg VS Dream SMP War broadcast, transitions between segments appear more rapid. Narratively heavy segments centre around the one-hour mark, while the end of the broadcast shifts between casual gameplay and occasional conversation only. This illustrates the player's transition towards more casual interaction between players, as In-character gameplay often does just that (discussed further in section 4.1.2). Notably, the War infographic does not include the Ending segment of the stream, as it was not included in the official recording on Tommy's YouTube channel. That is mainly due to Tommy's focus shifting to typical Minecraft gameplay activities rather than trying to deliberately drive the narrative forward.

The order of segments is logical, arising from the consequences and circumstances of surrounding segments, with a focus on the immediate context of the players. While some segments naturally arose from new conversations, others required smoother and more direct transitions where players were still engaged in said conversations. Such

transitions were directed by explicit *framing phrases,* with which players signalled their intention to change the narrative framework. I present a table with their examples and guidelines on their positions and actions (Figure 7). By examining the overall structure of player-player and player-audience interactions, I identified recurring patterns within each segment. Distinct framing phrase had an impact on the direction of the narrative, setting a clear boundary between topics. Each of these framing phrases is exemplified in the following subsections, where I analyse them in their narrative context and showcase their function as framing phrases of their respective segments (4.1.1–4.1.8).

Segments	Examples of phrases	Additional guidelines and actions
Introduction segments	"Hi chat" "Welcome" "Here's what happened…"	Fixed position at the beginning of the stream, where players acknowledge their audience while providing context for the upcoming session.
In-character Gameplay	"I need…" "Do you have…?" (references to real life and casual gameplay)	Indicates a shift to casual gameplay. Moments where the streamer directly acknowledges the audience and the outside world.
Conversation segments	*Hello–Hello adjacency pair* "What are you doing?" "What's going on?"	Starts with a greeting between players when they join a new narrative-focused conversation. Players do not break character until the conversation is over.
Internal Monologues	"I think…" "Chat…" (directly questioning own choices and decisions)	Players privately address their thoughts to their audience. They begin with muting and end with unmuting their mic while in conversation with other players.
Negotiation segments	"Speak to them!" "Let's have a conversation." A: "I'm expecting […]" B: "Can we go into call?"	Typically occurs as new conversations between players, presenting expected outcomes as the players try to reach at least some mutual understanding.
Combat segments (PVP)	"They are shooting!" "Don't give him time to think!" "I choose blood!"	Initiated by a direct attack on a player. Typically ends with at least one player losing their life during combat.
Travelling segments	"Let's go…" "Follow me."	When a player embarks on a journey to reach an entirely different location on the server.
Ending segments	"Alright…" "I'm gonna end my stream…" "I hope y'all enjoyed the stream…"	Fixed position at the end of the stream. The player begins to say goodbye to the chat and concludes the broadcast.

Figure 7: Guidelines for transitions and framing phrases between individual segments.

34

In the context of segment distribution, the contrast in narrative focus is even more evident (Figure 8). This infographic was created by measuring the duration of each segment category and then calculating their percentage of the total stream length, showcasing which segment had the longest duration during livestreams as the narrative progressed. While Negotiations occupy relatively the same amount of time, the duration of Travelling segments stretched as characters required narratively specific locations. The biggest change can be observed between In-character gameplay and Conversation segments, as they have essentially swapped their positions in terms of percentage.
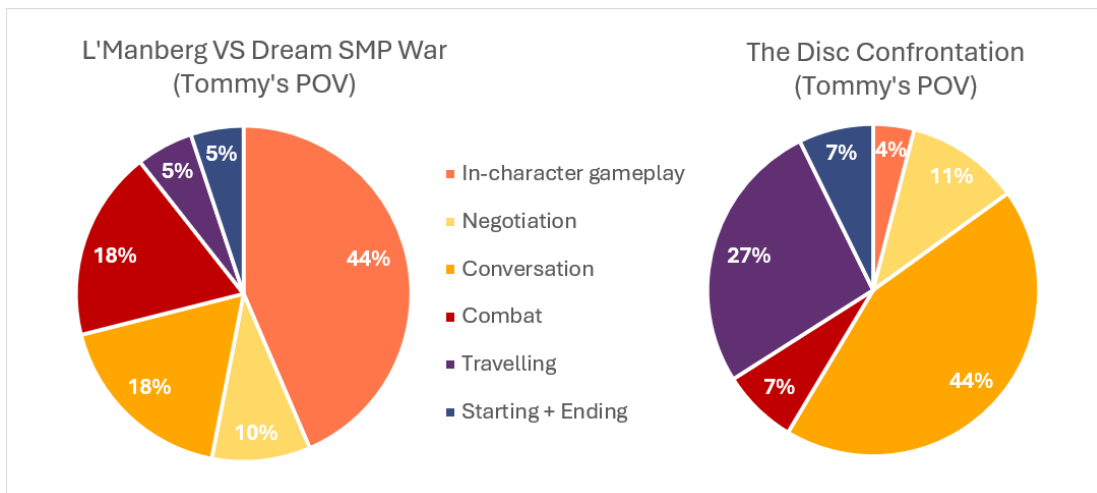
Figure 8: Segment distribution chart of the initial and final stream from TommyInnit's perspective.

With the primary goal of entertaining the audience, players rarely remain silent for long periods. They often interact with the chat or provide commentary on in-game events to fill the silence and maintain engagement. This way conversation becomes an important feature of each segment. Moment-to-moment contingency, where the next dialogue turn depends on the one just before (Sawyer, 2002), can lead to unpredictable outcomes, forcing the members to collaborate in the narrative's creation. In the following subsections, I highlight the distinct boundaries and framing phrases of each segment. Additionally, I explore the characteristics of each segment and the challenges they present in connection to the narrative progression. The natural, improvised, and somewhat chaotic nature of Dream SMP conversations is showcased in my Data Samples.

4.1.1. The Introduction: Hello, Stream!

The Introduction functions generally as an out-of-character (OOC) segment in which the streamer starts the stream, interacts with viewers, and ensures everything is running smoothly. With its fixed position, it marks the beginning of the stream from the moment it starts, and its length mostly varies between two and six minutes (Figure 6).

Data Sample 1: Tommy's Introduction before the L'Manberg vs Dream SMP War

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	TOMMY:	<u>WEL</u>COME EVERYONE >welcome welcome welcome<.
02		(1.0)
03	TOMMY:	.hhh >if you weren't here for the end of yesterday here's what ↓happened<

The Introduction typically begins with *greetings*, in which the streamer directly acknowledges and welcomes viewers and the live chat to the livestream. Greetings are typical for every start of a conversation, serving as a direct acknowledgement of other participants during the exchange. Followed by a quick recapitulation of previous situations (line 3), this ensures that all audience members have the full context for the upcoming session, even if they have not seen the previous broadcasts. The streamer can also transition into greetings *after* they have provided the summary, giving the context right away before any interaction with chat can ensue. This summary might also include hints at future narrative intentions, as shown in the following Data Sample.

Data Sample 2: Tommy's Introduction before the Disc Confrontation

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	TOMMY:	to<u>night</u> is the: uh— the finale. (0.9) >what does that mean<= =well—
02		(2.1)
03	TOMMY:	ou::n on ↓<u>Saturday</u> (0.4) on the ↓<u>sixteenth</u> (0.8) Dream left a note at my house saying on <u>Wednesday</u> (.) you and Tubbo ↓<u>alone</u> come and visit me. (0.6) <u>alone</u>.
04		(4.2)
05	TOMMY:	to<u>day</u> is that ↓Wednesday (0.8) and he said if you <u>don't</u> arri:ve the discs will be burned. (1.9) so we can only: hhh (0.5) ↓y'know (0.8) L'Manberg's dead. (1.5) everything was ↓gone= =but ↑<u>this</u>—
06	TOMMY:	(2.1) this is our last thing we've got. (1.2) this is a:<u>ll</u> we can cling onto. (1.9) hhhh
07		(4.6)
08	TOMMY:	hhh >but we're gonna get those discs back.< (0.8) or <u>die</u> trying.
09		(1.4)
10	TOMMY:	.hhh <u>BOYS</u>— (1.3) WELCOME BACK TO THE STREAM

Tommy introduces the stream as a chapter finale, which he follows immediately with an elaboration on its importance. With emphasis on dates and keywords (line 3), he gives the audience members a throughout *summary* of past events and outlines potential consequences if he does not follow Dream's instructions (line 5). This sets the scene for the upcoming session, avoiding any potential confusion from audience members. The focus here is on theatricality, utilizing dramatic pauses to seep more suspense into the recapitulation (lines 2, 4, and 6). By using plural personal and possessive pronouns in line 6, Tommy cultivates a deeper connection with the audience, subtly suggesting that the audience might have the same personal values as his character does. Finally, he turns his full attention to the chat, welcoming them to the stream with direct greetings (line 10).

The duration and format of the Introduction segment varies based on factors such as the player's individual style and personal routines, the number of technical issues during the session, and scheduled events, as shown in the following Data Samples.

Data Sample 3: Technoblade's greetings to the chat

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	TECHNO:	↓sta:rtin' the ↑strea::m (0.8) alright.
02		(1.0)
03	TECHNO:	a:lright let me just—let me just <u>check</u> something on my phone ↓here <u>one</u> ↓second one ↓second—
04	TECHNO:	I might have <go:ne ↑li:ve> (1.3) to the <wro:ng livestream?> (1.0) so I'm <u>hoping</u> you guys didn't all just get like a <u>phone</u> notification for the wro:ng stream. that would be <u>very</u> awkward.

Initially, Technoblade started his stream with his catchphrase "starting the stream" (line 1), which served here as a subtle *greeting* to his audience. However, his beginning was abruptly interrupted by technical difficulties as he rushed to ensure that his stream was running smoothly (line 3). The word *alright* here plays a transition role between these lines (lines 1–3). While resolving the issue, he continued to explain the problem and his actions, providing context to his audience (line 4), avoiding the creation of silence, where his audience would lose interest and possibly leave the stream.

Data Sample 4: Techno hints at what should be expected from the session.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	TECHNO:	I didn't need to see my stream and dashboard for this stream ↓anyways= ='cause we're just gonna ↑<u>chill</u> (0.4) we're just gonna <u>chill</u>=
02	TECHNO:	=look at our <u>to do</u> list for ↓today alright?= =we're gonna check up on our <u>bee</u> farm?

Eventually, deciding to abandon the issue entirely (line 1), he instead focused on guiding the attention of his audience to more engaging content (line 2). While his Introduction did not include a summary of past events, Technoblade hinted at his plans for the session by sharing his to-do list with his chat (line 2), keeping his audience in a narrative context. The *equal signs* between talk also mark the rapid speed at which he moves from one point to another (latching), completely avoiding any silences that could ensue, compensating for his previous lack of immediate interaction with his audience.

This Introduction segment unfolded on 16 December 2020, where Technoblade's character was supposed to face the Butcher Army[10], and became the *longest* Introduction segment observed. The Butcher Army began their journey from the mainland, leading to a lengthy Travelling segment as they traversed the server to reach Technoblade's location. Instead of passively waiting for their arrival after he welcomed everyone to his stream, Technoblade had to engage and entertain his viewers for over 15 minutes, ensuring that they would not lose interest and leave the stream.

Data Sample 5: Technoblade stalls for time.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	TECHNO:	\<let's just look outsi:de> (1.4) appreciate the nice weather guys isn't this ↑fan<u>tas</u>tic (0.7) #isn't this# ↑↑fantastic everyone (0.6) o::h this is ↓incredible (0.4) this is ↓incredible=
02	TECHNO:	=am I \<sta:lling for ↑ti:me> (.) right now because I—I did s—I—I— (0.6) didn't realize how long things would ↑take= =<u>a:bsolutely</u> not chat. a:bs— I would—I would <u>never</u> make a mistake like ↓<u>that</u> (.hhh) and have to awkwardly stand in my house (.) \<sta:lling for ti:me>

As shown in the data sample, Technoblade underestimated the distance between his location on the server and the mainland (line 2), miscalculating the time required for the other party to arrive. Had he known the precise duration of their journey, he could have started his stream a bit later, avoiding the obvious delay in the narrative progress.

This analysis underlines the authenticity of narrative improvisation and its difficulty in having everything captured as it happens, requiring the players to address issues on the spot. The challenge here arises from deciding how to fill the unexpected

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[10] This group consisted of four other DSMP members, Quackity, Tubbo, Fundy, and Ranboo, who intended to bring Technoblade to justice for his previous war crimes against L'Manberg. As outlined in section 3.3.4, Technoblade, characterized as an anarchist, had a history of detonating and destroying the L'Manberg lands and going against its government, becoming the enemy of the state with his actions.

time gap before the narrative can continue. As the data sample shows, Technoblade handled this situation with his natural sarcasm (<u>stressed</u> words in line 2), filling the gap with his continuous talk, and not allowing a prolonged silence to dominate the broadcast. Instead, he chose to humorously acknowledge the circumstances as they were, while interacting with the chat and viewers (line 1). Here we can also observe a subtle transition into In-character Gameplay as Technoblade explores his immediate surroundings (line 1).

The Introduction segment continues until the next stimulus, phrase, conversation, or action causes a shift within the narrative framework. Which segment follows the Introduction is therefore determined by the player's immediate in-game environment. If there is no direct impulse for transition to happen, players typically embody their character and simply start playing the game, entering In-character Gameplay.

4.1.2. In-character Gameplay

In-character (IC) Gameplay primarily serves as a *bridge* between moments that are largely driven by the narrative (Figure 6). They fill the gap that would otherwise occur between segments that do not naturally relate to each other. During these segments, the player typically engages with the in-game environment, embodying the personality of their character, without focusing on moving the narrative forward. Instead, they perform typical in-game tasks such as gathering resources, crafting items, or building structures. These segments were also often omitted from the original DSMP Transcripts, as they had no direct impact on the narrative progression. Nevertheless, they are an essential part of the analysed framework as they portray the real-time authenticity of the narrative.

Data Sample 6: In-character gameplay with gathering resources.

```
 #   Speaker  Utterance
01   WILBUR:  >you have the Declaration of Independence yeah?<
02            (0.4)
03   TOMMY:   yeah yeah. >have [you got an Ender Chest?< have—
04   WILBUR:                   [I NEED A NEW BOOK. I need
                      leather? and I need ↑leather and I need paper and
                      I need ink and I need feathers. (0.3) [I want—
05   TOMMY:                                           [>have you
                      got an Ender Chest< over there?
06            (0.8)
07   WILBUR:  no. no we don't have an Ender Chest [over here
08   TUBBO:                                       [yeah we do.
09            (0.3)
10   WILBUR:  OH we do [we do.
11   FUNDY:           [we do we do
12   TOMMY:   I can—I can >craft us one if you want.<
```

In this exchange, players engage in casual conversation which is relevant to their immediate surroundings. Taking place shortly after L'Manberg gained its independence, the dialogue centres on crafting and gathering resources for a new book (lines 1 and 4). There is no direct focus on pushing the narrative forward as players simply inform each other about their resources and items. Rapid speech and occasional overlap are therefore very common as players talk at the same time (lines 3–5), with Tubbo and Fundy repairing Wilbur's utterance with their own insight about their surroundings (lines 7–11).

The boundaries of In-character Gameplay are then defined by the start and end points of other segments, which prompt the switch to happen. In-character Gameplay functions as a somewhat *default mode* of the livestream, where the focus point turns back to simple gameplay as players transition to another segment and narrative point. The following flowchart illustrates how I further distinguished if the conversation belonged to In-character Gameplay or other segments, based on the players' actions in-game.
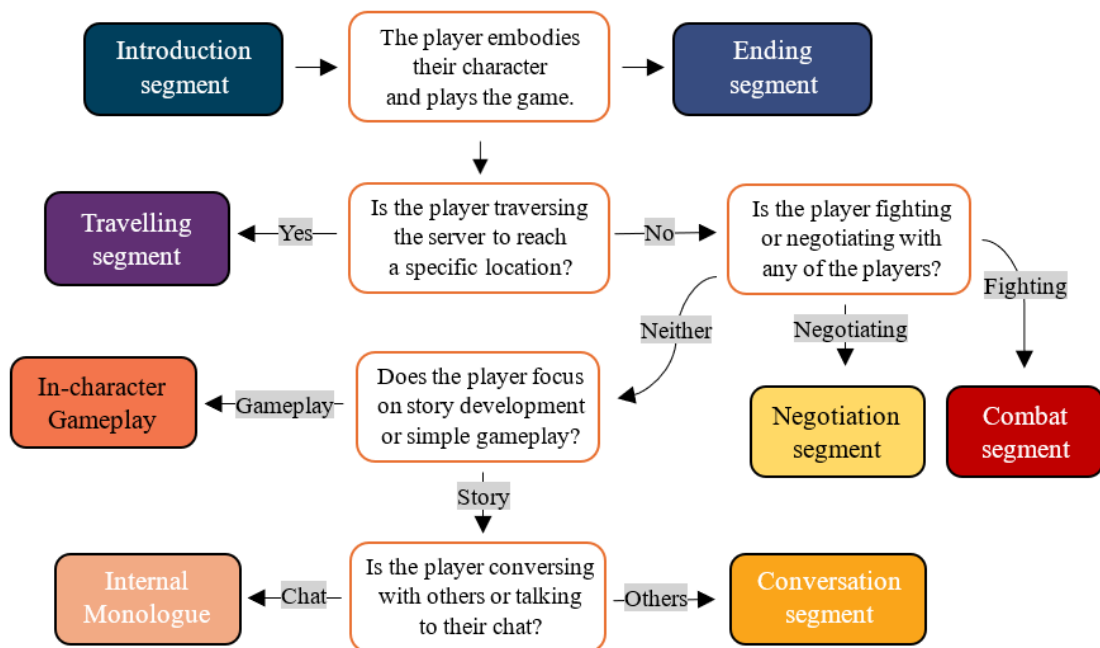
Figure 9: Flowchart detailing the conversation distinction process.

Further defining In-Character gameplay, players not only react to their in-game environment but also to the *real world*. Switches between In-character (IC) and Out-of-character (OOC) Gameplay were observed here the most, without any specific order. Streamers might directly interact with their audience or reference a real-world situation for the sake of entertainment or putting things in context, alternating between reactions to the real environment and the in-game one, as showcased in the following Data Sample.

Data Sample 7: Tommy and Tubbo's In-character Gameplay with real-life references.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	TOMMY:	((checking his in-game inventory))
		I have had the <u>longest</u> day of <u>a:</u>ll ↓<u>ti:</u>me I'm
		still— (.) [Tubbo da—dare I— dare] I do it I=
02	TUBBO:	[heh HEH HEH heh heh]
03	TOMMY:	=<u>still</u> after this stream im<u>mediately</u> have to
		<get a video ↓out>= =today has been the <u>longest</u>
		[day ever for me]
04	TUBBO:	[<o:h my <u>god</u>>]
05	TOMMY:	I have been—=
06	TUBBO:	=it's just gonna— <u>never</u> ↑ending <u>never</u> [<u>ENDING</u>—
07	TOMMY:	[>never
		ending day never [end—<
08	TUBBO:	[#NEVER ENDING DAY# (.) a day—
		(.) <u>so</u> long— (.) the—the <u>sun</u> does not <u>set</u>— (.hhh)
		<u>Je:sus Christ</u>—
09		(0.9)
10	TOMMY:	Tubbo the sun might <u>not</u> set for us ↓tonight man?
11		(1.1) ((Tubbo looks at the in-game dark sky))
12	TUBBO:	it's actually already currently ↓<u>nighttime</u> (0.3)
		the sun is <u>gone</u>. (.) PFFT HEH HEH
13	TOMMY:	HEH HEH HEH HEH

    This conversation happens a few minutes after Tommy's Introduction in the Disc Confrontation (Data Sample 2). Tommy and Tubbo are already engaged in gameplay, gathering resources before they must head out towards Dream's location. There are a few real-life references throughout the dialogue (lines 1 and 3), with playful reactions from both players as they banter and bounce off each other's energy (lines 6–8). Despite Tommy's attempt to try and guide the conversation towards its narrative purpose (line 10), Tubbo interrupts it with a humorous remark about the in-game night sky (line 12). While it does reference Tommy's previous note about the sun, this remark steers the conversation back into In-character Gameplay, where both players break into laughter.

    The frequency of IC Gameplay depends on the level of pre-planning for the stream and the streamer's preference for either casual gaming or narrative immersion during individual livestreams (Figure 8). Their gaming style and chat interaction create a unique viewing perspective for each member. Those who like chaos and a more playful approach tend to have a higher frequency of in-character gameplay. On the contrary, in streams where the player prefers narrative progression over causal gameplay, In-character Gameplay occurs less frequently, giving more space to Conversation-focused segments as they push the narrative forward the most (Figure 8).

4.1.3. Conversation-focused Segments

While In-character Gameplay does include conversation, the primary focus remains on the gameplay itself, as established in the previous section. In contrast, Conversation segments are solely dedicated to character interaction, with individuals *halting other activities for the purpose of talk only.* Characters often share knowledge of past events the rest of the participants of the conversation might not be aware of. These segments are integral parts of the DSMP narrative as they feature important speeches and revelations that shape the trajectory of the story.

They typically occupy a quarter to half of an individual livestream (Figure 8), highlighting the central role of character interaction in the DSMP narrative. A single participant cannot control the outcomes of these conversations, rather they emerge from the collective actions and contributions of everyone involved. Conversation segments often begin with either a *direct question* that prompts other players to pause or respond, or by players simply *greeting* each other. For a conversation to take place, someone must start it in the first place. These initial exchanges differ based on the participants of the conversation, their familiarity with each other, and the urgency of their delivery.

Data Sample 8: Tubbo talks to Wilbur and Tommy before the Manberg Festival.

```
 #   Speaker   Utterance
01   TUBBO:    [hey guys.]
02   WILBUR:   [↑hey: Tubbo?] hh hey [Tubbo.
03   TOMMY:                          [hey: ↑Tubbo:
04             (0.4)
05   TUBBO:    hey= =what's going on—what's going on ↑guys
06             (0.9)
07   WILBUR:   Tubbo you know the— (1.0) >Tubbo I'm having
                second thoughts.<
08             (0.9)
09   TUBBO:    you're having second [thoughts about what?
10   WILBUR:                        [when are you doing your
                speech—when are you doing your speech ↓Tubbo
11             (0.5)
12   TUBBO:    u:::h (0.3) probably in about like— twenty
                minutes or ↓so (.) why?=
13   WILBUR:   =twenty minutes twenty minutes that—is that
                enough time? do we think—okay. (0.5) TUBBO I need
                you to— (.hhh)
14             (3.8)
15   WILBUR:   >Tubbo is he a good leader?< (1.0) [just say it—]
14   TUBBO:                                       [Schlatt?]
```

This Sample illustrates a typical opening sequence of conversation where players acknowledge each other by *greetings* (lines 1–3). While Tubbo takes the first step in the dialogue (line 5), trying to gain more knowledge on the nature of their situation, Wilbur immediately dominates the conversation by voicing his struggles and questions, marking his hesitation as the main problem (line 7). The frequent overlap of utterances underlines the improvisational and spontaneous nature of the scene. As the conversation progresses, it becomes evident that this dialogue is narratively focused, with Wilbur expressing his worries and using dramatic pauses (in lines 7, 14, and 15) to play into the theatricality of his frantic thought process. This transition guides the dialogue towards its narrative purpose, as characters exchange crucial knowledge for the story's progression (line 15).

Instead of relying on the in-game chat feature only, Dream SMP members use Discord voice chats[11] for player communication. Voice chats provide a more convenient and expressive form of interaction through direct calls, which are unrestricted by the limitations of text-based discourse. Within the private Discord server, DSMP members have access to up to 10 voice channels that players can connect to when they encounter each other in-game. This allows players to engage in direct real-time conversation regardless of their proximity and visibility within the game world.

Data Sample 9: Phil joins Wilbur's voice chat to have a conversation.

```
 #   Speaker    Utterance
 01  WILBUR:    the-the THING THAT I WORKED TOWA:RDS (0.7)
                DOESN'T exist anymore. (.) it's over.
 02             (1.3)
 03  PHIL:      what 're you doin'.
 04             (1.9)
 05  WILBUR:    °Phil?°
 06  PHIL:      #what 're you doin'.#
 07             (1.6)
 08  WILBUR:    Phil where are you?
 09             (2.3)
 10  PHIL:      #I'm joining the server right now.#
```

Conversation segments may begin directly, without any greetings whatsoever, when prompt action is narratively required to *talk* someone out of causing in-game harm. In this scenario, Phil joined Wilbur's private call to reason with him, despite not being anywhere close to Wilbur's immediate location on the server (lines 8–10).

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[11] Discord, a widely popular communication platform within the gaming community, offers various features including both text and voice channels, allowing its users to create communities through public or private servers. It has estimated over 560 million registered users by 2023 (Ceci, 2023).

Dramatic pauses here once again heighten suspense, while Phil's authoritative tone, marked by his falling intonation (lines 3, 6, and 10), underlines his attempt to resolve the escalated situation. It is important to remember, especially in Conversation segments, that a character's knowledge is limited exclusively by how much their player has been told or experienced during the gameplay. DSMP members tend to avoid "metagaming", where characters gain knowledge beyond the storyline itself, for example by mentioning events they should not be narratively aware of. This gives purpose to Conversation segments, where players can gain "new" knowledge through narrative dialogue with other players.

4.1.4. Internal Monologues: Insight into personal thoughts

Internal Monologues are among the most flexible segments in DSMP streams, occurring randomly with some streamers not featuring them at all. This is mainly due to the lack of a streaming point of view, a topic explored in detail in section 5.1. While in books, the character's thoughts are commonly written in text, or in movies where voiceovers may be used for the same reason, DSMP integrates internal monologues as explicitly and directly narrated by the players in real-time. The difference between internal and external monologue is then in the level of discretion.

Typically, Internal Monologues are delivered during dialogue with other players. While the player might be a part of said conversation, they are *not* an active participant at that moment. Players mute their mic to avoid interrupting or involving others in their character's mental processes, as shown in the Data Sample below (written in *italics*).

Data Sample 10: Tubbo's Internal Monologue about Exile

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	TOMMY:	this is the only item on this [server that means anything to you now (.) <and it's in>=]
02	TUBBO:	((mutes his mic)) *[this is not going to plan <u>chat</u> (0.3) this is not going to ↑pla:n]*
03	TOMMY:	=<<u>my</u>: possession> (0.5) <u>I</u>: have it.
04		(0.6)
05	TUBBO:	*this is— (0.7) this isn't ↓good (1.1) we're gonna have to [<u>exile</u> ↑Tommy]*
06	TOMMY:	[so ↓Dream—]
07		(0.6)
08	TUBBO:	*it's gonna end this <u>way</u> (0.3) Dream has (0.5) got [<u>so</u>:: <u>many</u> things up his sleeves]*
09	TOMMY:	[I think from now on you've got—] (0.4) you are' in any [position here] to be in charge of us.
10	TUBBO:	*[this is gonna be—]* *he's really acting like the villain.* ((unmutes))

This scene unfolds during a Negotiation between the New L'Manberg cabinet and Dream, where they discuss whether Tommy should be exiled for his behaviour. Tubbo sees Tommy's banishment as the only solution, as he struggles with potentially angering Dream otherwise (lines 5, 8, and 10). This serves as an example of Tubbo's Internal Monologue, who is muted during this part of the conversation, sharing his thoughts with his audience alone. Even though Tubbo is not actively engaging with the chat's messages, his viewers are directly addressed ('chat' in line 2), serving as silent addressees and listeners in the unfolding one-sided conversation. This practice provides viewers with an insight into the character's thoughts, a unique perspective which is unreachable from other livestream viewpoints.

Data Sample 11: Wilbur's Internal Monologue about his TNT plan.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	SCHLATT:	did you plant any lettuce before this? [((incoherent))
02	WILBUR:	*[chat do I ↑wanna— chat do ~I wanna~ (.) do [I wanna do ↑it]*
03	QUACKITY:	[I'm not seeing enough] fli:es.
04	WILBUR:	*I'm having [second thoughts [about the TNT*
05	TUBBO:	[wait wait wait— [we have— we have—
06	QUACKITY:	[there's not enough flies Tubbo.
07	SCHLATT:	did'u plant any?
08	TUBBO:	yeah yeah yeah [we've] got some lettuce=
09	SCHLATT:	[okay]
10	TUBBO:	=l—look you've got the garden all the way over there man? [((incoherent))
11	WILBUR:	*[chat I'm having second thoughts about the TNT= =do I wanna kill these ↑people= =seeing that they are my friends?*

In this scenario, Wilbur begins his Internal Monologue while he observes Schlatt, Quackity, and Tubbo in-game. By having his mic muted and by addressing his viewers ('chat' line 2), he signals an overlap of In-character Gameplay and Internal Monologue. He goes on, expressing doubt about his original plan of sending L'Manberg into smithereens (line 4), grappling with the moral implications of his actions and their impact on the other players he considers friends still (line 11). This demonstrates how Internal Monologues provide players with a secluded space to explore their characters' thoughts, adding depth to their portrayal and potentially discovering new aspects of their personalities, as they contemplate their next move.

Internal Monologues are therefore strictly narratively focused, as players remain in character as they narrate their characters' thoughts aloud. The boundaries of these segments are further defined by players muting and unmuting their mic while they are engaged in conversation with others.

4.1.5. Travelling: The absence of narrative teleportation

Another challenge, which is easily resolved in traditional narrative mediums, is the issue of travelling long distances. While in books or movies Travelling segments can be summarized or skipped, characters in the Minecraft environment must physically navigate the virtual world, consuming a significant amount of time by simply changing their locations. They often delay the next narrative point by several minutes, as presented in Data Sample 5, where Technoblade had to stall the story's progression until other members arrived at his location. Similarly, during the Disc Confrontation, Tubbo and Tommy embark on a long journey to meet Dream at a specific location. Their Travelling segment lasted a whole 17 minutes (Figure 6), and both streamers had to entertain their audience throughout the journey. This doubled the 8-minute-long travel segment of the Butcher Army, crowning the Disc Confrontation stream with the longest narrative journey within the whole storyline.

Considering the natural flow of conversation, Travelling segments are very similar to In-character Gameplay. However, their boundaries are defined by a clear beginning and end of the journey. Unlike In-character Gameplay, which functions as simply playing the game in character, Travelling segments have a direct link to a specific destination the player must reach before the next point of the storyline can unfold. Such a segment can be initiated not only by characters physically moving to begin their journey but also by explicitly prompting other players to do the same.

Data Sample 12: Dream initiates a Travelling segment.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	DREAM:	↑well (0.3) ↑u::m (0.5) here I'll take you—I'll take you to the <u>real</u> discs.
02		(1.5)
03	TOMMY:	↑wheh?
04	TUBBO:	<u>why</u>.
05		(1.3)
06	DREAM:	follow me.
07		(2.8) ((Dream starts walking away))
08	DREAM:	alright?
09		(2.0) ((Tubbo and Tommy follow Dream))
10	TOMMY:	°Tubbo?°(0.4) °<u>stay</u> <u>close</u>.°

Dream indicates the start of the Travelling segment with his utterances *I'll take you…* (line 1) and *Follow me* (line 6), taking the initiative by urging Tommy and Tubbo to accompany him. He provides them with more context on their destination, and with emphasis on the adjective *real,* he entices them with the idea that the music discs Tommy and Tubbo had encountered before were not as real as they hoped (line 1). By using *alright* (line 8) with a rising intonation, Dream prompts the duo again to follow along. While Tubbo's one-word question with falling intonation signals distrust in Dream (line 4), Tommy's lines reveal the presence of fear in his quiet tone (line 10). All of these actions set the scene for the upcoming Travelling segment, fostering suspense and anticipation.

Similar framing phrases have been observed in the L'Manberg VS Dream SMP War livestream, where characters verbally prompted others to change locations.

Data Sample 13: Eret and Tommy initiate a Travelling segment.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	ERET:	>let's make our way <u>back</u> to [↓L'Manberg<]
02	TOMMY:	[alright] let's HEAD ↓AROUND let's—let's head [around the <u>other</u> way.]
03	WILBUR:	[yeah okay okay ↓okay]
04		(1.2) ((Everyone starts heading back))
05	TOMMY:	okay FOLLOW ME ↓Will

Eret's use of *Let's…* (line 1) to initiate the Travelling segment functions more as a suggestion of the next course of action for the group. Tommy accepts Eret's suggestion with *alright* and by repeating *Let's* (line 2) he adds a suggestion of his own, confirming the start of a Travelling segment. In contrast, Tommy's *Follow me* in line 5 is a direct command for Wilbur to follow him specifically, directing their joined route himself.

Data Sample 14: Dream initiates a Travelling segment with the help of Wilbur.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	WILBUR:	you <u>don't</u> have the <u>power</u> or the <u>capacity</u> to blow up L'Manberg.
02	DREAM:	↑okay (0.3) let's go to ↓it let's go <u>right</u> ↓now
03		(1.0) ((Dream starts walking back to L'Manberg))
04	WILBUR:	what—what [have you <u>done</u>.
05	DREAM:	[let's go ↓<u>together</u>

In this sample, Wilbur indirectly triggers the beginning of the Travelling segment by expressing doubt about Dream's arsenal. As their conversation unfolds near L'Manberg, Dream decides to prove Wilbur wrong, prompting them both to start heading back to the L'Manberg walls. By using *Let's go* and *Let's go together* phrases (lines 2 and 5), he initiates their Travelling segment.

Conversation during a Travelling segment is very similar to In-character gameplay, with the difference that players are moving to a specific location. They start with the beginning of their journey and end by transitioning to another segment the moment the characters arrive at their desired location. Instances of narrative progression have been observed here as well, where streamers might engage with their surroundings as they pass by familiar buildings and locations, initiating conversations about past events or memories surrounding those places. As Travelling segments can get quite long, players must find ways to fill the silence, leading to opportunities for communicating and the introduction of topics that may not arise during more narratively heavy dialogue. Such cases include sharing sentiments or reminiscing over past experiences.

Data Sample 15: Example of conversation during a Travelling segment.

#	Speaker	Utterance
06	TUBBO:	SAY THE WORD <u>GRASS</u> SAY GRASS
07	TOMMY:	grass.
08		(0.9)
09	TUBBO:	#gr:ass:#
10	TOMMY:	YOU ARE [<u>STU</u>— okay no no no we have so much to—]
11	TUBBO:	[that's what <u>you</u> sound ↓like <u>that</u>'s what] you sound like. (0.4) that's what <u>you</u> sound like #GR:ASS:# (.) #GR:ASS:# (0.7) [that's you.]
12	TOMMY:	[that's just—] ↓y'know (0.6) we've had a really [good time.]
13	TUBBO:	[↓yeah (.)] YEAH
14		(1.5)
15	TOMMY:	>I know I've haven't always been the ↓best but< (0.7) <u>thank</u> <u>you</u> for sticking [<u>with</u> me.
16	TUBBO:	[you've been ↑<u>alright</u>
17		(1.4)
18	TOMMY:	<u>thank</u> you (0.5) ↑man (0.4) for—for <u>everything</u>.
19		(1.5)
20	TUBBO:	it's ↑<u>alright</u>
21		(5.0)
22	TOMMY:	(.hhh) hhh I'm quite nervous.
23		(0.9)
24	TUBBO:	are we <u>there</u> yet? ((snickers)) like <u>come</u> <u>on</u> man?

During Tommy and Tubbo's journey in the Disc Confrontation, the conversation shifts from comical to sentimental as they continue to traverse the server. Their proximity and possible impending doom make them restless, expressing compassion and fondness for each other (lines 12–20). Tommy's admission of nervousness (line 22), effectively paints the gravity of the situation, guiding the audience to feel similar emotions, while Tubbo's comment in line 24, highlights the lengthy duration of their journey.

4.1.6. Negotiations: Where choice matters the most.

Since Dream SMP gradually splits into opposing sides throughout the narrative, themes of fictional political hierarchy and power dynamics are present, leading to Negotiations becoming a recurring feature. My decision to make Negotiations their own segment, even though they are an integral part of Conversations, originated from their distinct impact on the narrative and their primary focus on resolving conflicts between characters. They cultivate the practice of decision-making skills and the ability to present and advocate for yourself and your beliefs. They often follow previous Conversations or Combat segments, which typically serve as an introduction to the context of the problem (Figure 7). Such transition is evident in the following Data Sample.

Data Sample 16: Tommy tries to initiate a Negotiation segment.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	WILBUR:	they're not the best [shot I would say.
02	TOMMY:	[stand back— if they shoot ↑Wilbur we know (.) if we can negotiate. (0.3) [speak to them Wilbur] SPEAK to ↓them=
03	TUBBO:	[THEY JUST ↑SHOT ME]
04	TOMMY:	=°yeah but it's fine even—° SPEAK TO THEM

As the L'Manberg comrades were under attack, Tommy directly prompted a negotiation (*speak to them* in lines 2 and 4), trying to initiate a collaborative discussion to resolve the unfolding conflict. As we know, negotiations typically feature two or more participants with different perspectives on a presented problem, which they are trying to resolve as peacefully as possible through *communication*. As negotiations often happen to resolve a conflict, they frequently happen in the context of Combat segments (as lines 1 and 3 highlight) and their boundaries are influenced by these segments the most as well (see section 4.1.7).

This is also where the boundary between a character and its content creator needs to be addressed. While some aspects of the character may align with the streamer's personality, it is essential to remember that they are portraying a character influenced by the in-game world and events, especially during narratively heavy segments. This allows for a certain alteration of identity to take place, enabling players to explore their character's morality as they make decisions aligning with their character's persona. A relatively consequence-free environment is created, where the player's decisions have no real impact on the real world, however, they can still experience the agency of their choices and actions in the fictional world.

Data Sample 17: Negotiation about L'Manberg independence

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	WILBUR:	we don't wish for ↓<u>blood</u>shed (0.2) we don't wish for— (0.3) for— wa:r (.) we don't wish to— show our <u>power</u> >in any way we just want ↓freedom< (.) we just want- (0.5) emancipation independence (0.2) okay Dream? (.hhh) (1.0) [what we want—
02	DREAM:	[okay would— would you like to know what <u>I</u>: ↓want
03		(0.4)
04	WILBUR:	what do you want Dream. hhh
05		(0.5)
06	DREAM:	I want white fla:gs (0.6) up. (0.5) inside. your land (0.2) <u>your</u> land.
07		(1.5)
08	WILBUR:	and it can be our ↓land
09		(2.0)
10	DREAM:	no: I want white flags up— of <u>surrender</u> (.) declaring that you are— it is <u>not</u> (0.2) an independent land and >that it <u>is</u>< a part of the Dream Team SMP↓

One of the first narrative Negotiations unfolded on 20 August 2020. While Wilbur aimed to secede from DSMP by establishing L'Manberg as an independent land (lines 1 and 8), Dream advocated for the server to remain unified (line 10), still using the original name of the server. Even though Dream's (line 2) and Wilbur's utterances (line 4) begin as typical questions would, both of their intonations fall at the end of their utterances. This Negotiation includes an obvious power play and fights for control as both leaders make statements rather than ask open-ended questions. Wilbur's sigh in line 4 further emphasizes his annoyance. As illustrated in the sample, the two parties only exchanged their desired outcomes, unable to reach an agreement as neither was willing to surrender.

Data Sample 18: Tommy requests a Negotiation with Dream in private.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	DREAM:	↓Tommy (2.0) I'm expecting (.) <u>Mellohi</u>: (0.7) to be given to ↓me (2.6) ↑a::nd (1.1) as soon as it ↑<u>is</u> (1.4) we will cea::se (0.5) ↑fire (1.1) and we will <u>revoke</u>— (0.4)
02	TOMMY:	NO Dream? no<u>no</u> (0.2) lis— (0.6) >can we go in a call< for <u>one</u> ↓second (0.3) just a <u>milli</u>second.
03		(1.1)
04	DREAM:	[okay]
05	TOMMY:	[just] between us. (.) this is <u>our</u> war.
06		(2.4) ((Dream and Tommy joins a private call))
07	TOMMY:	↑Dream I know what you want from ↓me hhhh

While Dream continues to voice the conditions of surrender (line 1), Tommy initiates another Negotiation segment by requesting to speak in private (line 2). By emphasizing this should be just between Dream and him (*our war* in line 5), he enforces that no one else joins their private chat. By setting the scene and signalling he knows what is at stake (*I know what you want from me* in line 7), Tommy eventually offers Dream *both* of his discs (Cat and Mellohi) in exchange for L'Manberg's independence. This marks it as a successful negotiation that unknowingly places great value on personal attachments in the future storyline.

Many decisions in the DSMP storyline are influenced by characters' attachments to their most prized possessions and hierarchical positions on the server, questioning their protection at the expense of causing harm to others. This dynamic was evident during the Disc Confrontation on 20 January 2021, when Tommy attempted to reclaim his music discs, which he traded for L'Manberg's independence. However, the negotiation did not unfold as Tommy and Tubbo had planned.

Data Sample 19: Tommy's choice

```
 #    Speaker    Utterance
 01   DREAM:     I— I feel like I've [I've given you way::=        ]
 02   TOMMY:                         [>d'u have any pearls Tubbo?<]
 03   DREAM:     =too much ti[me] okay?
 04   TUBBO:                 [no]
 05   TOMMY:     neither [do I we] we couldn't—
 06   DREAM:             [listen—]
 07              (0.6)
 08   DREAM:     make your decision. (0.5) Tubbo die:s? (1.2) >or
                 you give me the discs.<
 09              (1.3)
 10   DREAM:     ten. (1.7) nine. (1.8) eigh'.
 11   TOMMY:     >Tubbo what do I ↑do<
```

Although line 2 suggests that there could be a Combat segment following this dialogue, it is ultimately dispersed by Dream, who demands their attention with the word *listen* (line 6) and subsequently presents two possible outcomes of their encounter (line 8). When choices affect the direction of the narrative and the life of other characters, tension and pressure can arise by giving a time limit to the character's decisions (line 10).

An interesting point to highlight is that even though Dream attempts to enforce a 10-second countdown, maintaining such limitations as a human being and not a machine can become challenging. Without any actual timer, he unknowingly offers Tommy nearly 20 seconds as he continues to count down in roughly 2-second intervals instead (line 10).

This is no fault on Dream's part, as counting authentic intervals without a physical timer *is* difficult. This circumstance gives Tommy even more time to make his decision. However, as no one focuses on the authenticity of Dream's counting, it does not ease the tension in any way. Such difference in time perception is therefore only evident through close analysis of the speech in post-production.

Tommy's rapid speech and rising intonation on *do* betray his inner turmoil over the choice (line 11). This concept follows the principle of the real world where our own choices have actual consequences and where we often must instantly decide what to do next without the ability to pause time and think everything over. The constant urgency requires immediate action from the characters, forcing the players to act fast under pressure, having both an entertaining and teaching impact on the player.

As a result, some decisions may be rushed in the heat of the moment, a significant aspect of character choices within the DSMP context. Additionally, this presented dilemma forces Tommy to compare the value of human life with the value of material possessions (line 8). It showcases how personal attachment can influence our decisions, making us easier to manipulate and control. However, it also highlights the strength such attachments can give us, emphasizing the importance of human connections over material possessions. Despite the initial hesitation (line 11), Tommy ultimately chooses Tubbo, presenting his choice of human friendships over possessions.
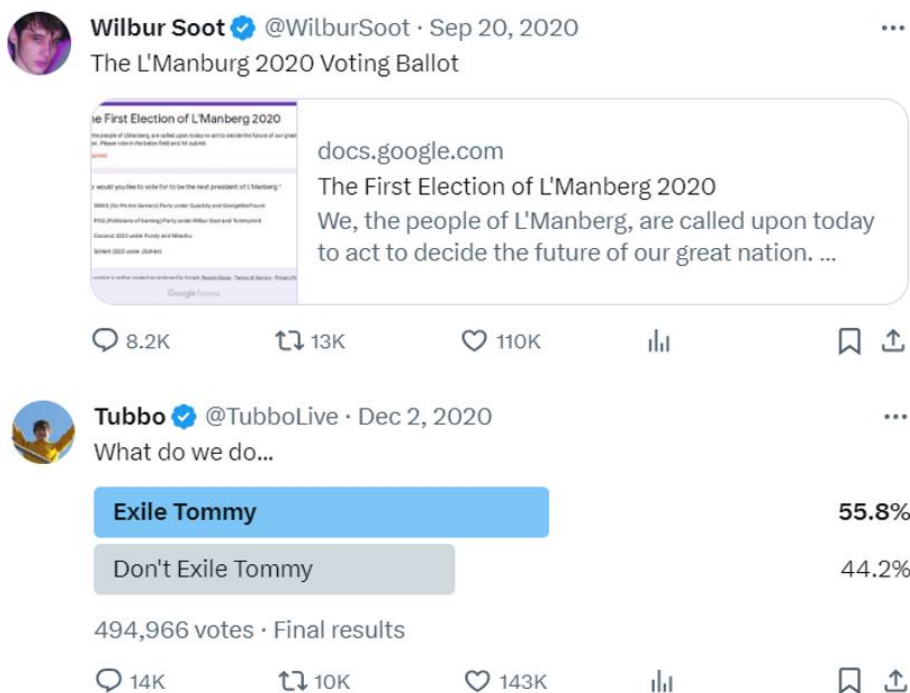

Figure 10: Screenshot of Twitter posts with voting polls released to the public (Twitter, 2020).

As discussed in section 2.3, various potential outcomes were scripted depending on what choice would end up as the final one. This is also where the involvement of the audience and its choice has an impact on the narrative trajectory. Viewers were given two opportunities to influence the course of the DSMP storyline: the 2020 Presidential Election and Tubbo's decision on Tommy's exile. Towards the end of 2020, two Twitter polls were released to the public, allowing the audience to make a choice.

Involving the audience in narrative decisions is what helps streamers to tailor the experience to viewers' preferences and interests. As both depicted polls concern the democratic decisions of L'Manberg citizens, this inclusion also gives the audience a sense of fictional citizenship in the DSMP universe. Although the audience does not have its own characters that could physically traverse the DSMP lands, their active participation contributes to narrative creation through various forms of backchannel talk, such as live reactions to events or the creation of fan works that deepen the world-building of Dream SMP. The narrative of Dream SMP would be therefore incomplete without the active participation of its viewers, as they are an integral part of the narrative core.

4.1.7. Combat: A showcase of skill or a narrative device?

Combat is a reoccurring design of multi-player video games, especially when it comes to political or territorial conflicts between players. It not only showcases players' gaming skills but also their knowledge of game mechanics in player versus player (PVP) combat. In the context of DSMP, this refers to moments where characters physically fight each other rather than computer-controlled entities. With the advantage of having approximately 38 players on the server, combat becomes much more entertaining and dynamic with so many characters involved in a fight.

These massive conflicts typically produce the most broadcasts, allowing viewers to switch between various perspectives of players. The most widely streamed event was the Manberg vs. Pogtopia War, which attracted an audience of approximately 850,000 viewers across 16 various DSMP livestreams at the same time. The three major wars on the server (L'Manberg vs. Dream SMP, Manberg vs. Pogtopia, and Doomsday, see section 3.3) were all influenced by players' skills, decisions, and strategies. For example, during Eret's betrayal (section 3.3.1), the outcome of the battle between L'Manberg and Dream SMP was determined by a moment of surprise and a good strategy, such as trapping players in an enclosed space to prevent their escape. Keeping your plans secret also ensures that the rest of the players have genuine reactions to unforeseen events.

This raises the question: Is combat simply a showcase of skill and entertainment, or can it also function as a narrative device? Combat is one of the segments which players have the *least* control over. While the process of Conversations, Negotiations, or Travelling segments can be pre-planned, the outcome of combat is purely spontaneous and unpredictable. Players have only so many seconds to decide on their next step, essentially relying on their skill and luck. However, these clashes not only result in political and territorial wars but also function as conflict resolutions, often escalating from heated moments between characters, serving their narrative purpose as well.

When examining the sequence of Combat within DSMP, PVP typically unfolds within the context of Negotiations (Figure 6). Although conversation can occasionally diffuse some of the tension, conflicts often come to physical confrontations despite the initial attempts at diplomacy.

Data Sample 20: Technoblade initiates a Combat segment.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	QUACKITY:	>it's either gonna be the <u>easy</u> ↑way= =it's gonna be the <u>hard</u> way.< (0.2)
02	TUBBO:	[yea:h I'm gonna <u>chop</u> off your <u>ankles</u>.]
03	QUACKITY:	[we're gonna bring you <u>back</u> to L'Manberg] (0.2) you're gonna <u>fucking</u> come <u>with</u> us.
04		(0.6)
05	QUACKITY:	>there's no <u>other</u> way <u>around</u> ↓it< <u>okay</u>?
06		(0.4)
07	TECHNO:	if there's no other ↓wa:y
08		(1.0) ((Technoblade holds his axe))
09	TECHNO:	#if there's no <u>other</u> way#
10		(1.0)
11	TECHNO:	#I CHOOSE <u>BLO::OD</u># ((Technoblade attacks))

Taken from the Butcher Army encounter and Technoblade's Execution broadcast, this conversation initially takes place during a Negotiation segment. Despite Quackity voicing the options and presenting Technoblade with two choices (either *this* or *that* in line 1), there seems to be only one possible outcome: taking a journey back to L'Manberg together (line 3). What begins as Negotiation quickly becomes blackmail (*there's no other way* in line 5), with Tubbo's remark emphasizing its graphic connotations of violence (*chopping off ankles* in line 2). The tension only graduates as the situation evolves further. Faced with hostility and with no other solution, Technoblade initiates a Combat segment (lines 7–11), resorting to physical harm, as Quackity and Tubbo had implied they would do the same (lines 1–2). Failed negotiations then turn into violent Combat segments, with players engaging in direct combat rather than using words and power plays.

Violence typically becomes the primary means of communication as characters refuse to listen to each other. A similar situation occurs during the Disc Confrontation (see 3.3.7), where Tommy and Tubbo reach Dream's location to face him.

Data Sample 21: Tommy initiates a Combat segment.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	TOMMY:	have you got the discs <u>on</u> <u>you</u> Dream?
02		(2.0)
03	DREAM:	<I ↑may: or I may ↓no:t>=
04	TOMMY:	=do you have them <u>on</u> <u>you</u> right now?
05		(1.1)
06	DREAM:	I ↑mi:ght
07		(0.7)
08	TOMMY:	Tubbo? ((Tommy nods at Tubbo))
09		(1.4)
10	DREAM:	↑he:y: [let's have a— let's have a— let's have a ↓conversation (.) LET'S HAVE A <u>CONVERSATION</u>—]
11	TOMMY:	[DON'T GIVE HIM TIME TO THINK TUBBO DON'T GIVE HIM TIME TO THINK (.h) DON'T GIVE HIM TIME TO THINK—] ((Tommy attacks Dream))

Their initial Conversation segment presents two outcomes: a peaceful Negotiation or a violent Combat. While Dream initiates his utterance with *Let's have a conversation…* (line 10)*,* suggesting a collaborative resolution of the problem, Tommy rather leans towards a direct attack (line 11). His decision is influenced by his deep attachment to his music discs and the slim chance of reclaiming them from Dream if he defeats him immediately (lines 1 and 4). Dream's ambiguous responses and taunting regarding the location of said discs, as his intonation on *might/may* rises (lines 3 and 6), with the dramatic addition of pauses (lines 2 and 5) and Tommy's urgency (*don't give him time to think* in line 11), prompts the attack. This shift marks the transition from conversation to Combat segment.

Combat segments primarily involve confronting enemies, supporting allies, and pushing the narrative forward through spontaneous actions. Improvised conversations are typically even more impactful as they are produced in the heat of the moment, with characters going against their morals and betraying others in the process, as showcased in the following Data Sample 22. These segments also reinforce the topic of the three-life mortality of DSMP characters, raising the tension of combat as it comes to characters' last lives, making each combat they encounter potentially their last one. The choice of starting a Combat segment is still deliberate, often arising from the circumstances of the situation, however, their progress and conclusion are very archaic and unpredictable.

Data Sample 22: Tubbo loses his second in-game life.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	TECHNO:	Tubbo I'm sorry. (0.4) I'll make it as— as <u>painless</u> as (0.2) [<u>colourful</u>=
02	TUBBO:	[~Technoblade~
03	TECHNO:	=as possible [Tubbo.
04	TUBBO:	[~WHAT THE HELL~?
05		(0.6) ((JSchlatt laughs in the background))
06	TECHNO:	Tubbo I'm [<u>sorry</u>
07	TUBBO:	((glances at Wilbur)) [~Wilbur~ (0.4) wha— [I—
08	TECHNO:	[Tubbo I'm— I'm being subjected [to—
09	SCHLATT:	[<u>DO</u> IT
10	TECHNO:	to some <u>mild</u> amounts of ~peer [↑pressure Tubbo~
11	SCHLATT:	[<u>DO</u> <u>IT</u> TECHNOBLADE
12	TECHNO:	A:::GH ((Technoblade kills Tubbo with a firework, accidentally killing Schlatt and Quackity, too))
13	SCHLATT:	WHAT THE HELL
14	TOMMY:	TUBBO <u>NO::</u> ((Tommy runs to attack Technoblade))

This situation occurs during the events of the Manberg festival (section 3.3.3), where JSchlatt tasked Technoblade with Tubbo's execution. What makes this combat different is Technoblade's deliberate character choice to proceed with the execution despite his combat abilities, with which he could have defeated the rest of the players pressuring him into action (lines 9–12). This emphasizes the narrative core of the DSMP universe, where actions are sometimes taken to drive the storyline forward rather than streamers utilizing what they are truly capable of. Nonetheless, Technoblade's action still initiates a Combat segment, as Schlatt and Quackity become caught in the explosion (line 12), and everything breaks into chaos (lines 13–14).

The boundaries of such segments were then further defined by players engaging in physical fights, typically initiated by one player directly attacking another. They often concluded either with a character fleeing the scene to escape the immediate danger or with a character losing one of their in-game lives. There were instances where characters accidentally lost their lives in the same fashion as Schlatt and Quackity, such as taking too much fall damage or not avoiding an explosion. However, some of these moments were viewed as bloopers and promptly retconned, especially when characters were fostering their last in-game lives. Such trivial deaths would disrupt the storyline trajectory too much and players would not be able to participate in the storyline as much anymore. Essentially, decisions about these incidents were made in private discussions between players, a topic discussed in more detail in section 4.2.3.

4.1.8. Ending: Goodbye, Stream!

Just like the Introduction, the Ending has a fixed position at the end of the stream (Figure 6), when the player finds a suitable point in the storyline to seamlessly wrap up their broadcast. These moments often happen after important Conversation segments or during In-character gameplay (Figure 6), when the player is not progressing the storyline in any way and is already close to breaking character. Framing phrases are here once again direct and explicit, clearly stating what is the next course of action for everyone involved.

Data Sample 23: Tommy says goodbye to his viewers.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	TOMMY:	<u>alright</u> I'm gonna do my outro= =are you gonna keep ↑streaming
02		(0.9)
03	TUBBO:	u:::h yeah? 'will for a little bit?
04		(0.4)
06	TOMMY:	okayhm. (.) see you in a minute man.
07	TUBBO:	SEE YOU ↑<u>later</u> man
08		(1.0) ((Tommy mutes his mic))
09	TOMMY:	↑<u>CHAT</u> (1.5) <u>THANK</u> YOU ALL FOR ↓WA:TCHING

Apart from using the discourse marker *alright* to signal a shift in conversation, Tommy also explicitly announces his intention to end his stream (*I'm gonna do my outro* in line 1). This serves not only as a hint for Tommy's viewers but also for Tubbo, who is on the stream with him. After they exchange goodbyes (lines 6–7), Tommy mutes his mic and turns his attention to his viewers (*chat* in line 9), to bid them goodbye and express his gratitude for watching the stream. This pattern is followed in other Endings as well.

Data Sample 24: Technoblade initiates his Ending segment.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	TECHNO:	[↓alright well I'm actually—]
02	RANBOO:	[I <u>really</u> do like what you've] done with ↓this ((referring to Technoblade's cabin))
03	TECHNO:	>I'm actually pretty hungry so I'm gonna< #<u>ABRUPTLY</u> end my stre:am= =everybody subscri:be#

This illustrates a transition from In-character gameplay to the Ending segment. While Ranboo tries to bring up a new conversation topic (line 2), Technoblade uses the discourse marker *alright* once again to signal a change in the direction of the broadcast (line 1). Despite being interrupted during his initial announcements (line 1), he continues to swiftly end the stream. The words *actually* and *pretty* serve here to emphasize the shift of plans and the importance of rushing the stream ending (line 3).

Data Sample 25: Wilbur initiates his Ending segment.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	WILBUR:	<u>you</u> ↑guy:s (.) you guys have your ↓fun (0.3) you guys have your fun. (1.4) alright? (0.4) I'll be back.
02		(3.2) ((Wilbur leaves the voice call))
03	WILBUR:	.hhh ((claps once)) (0.3) °again this is all acting.° heh HEH HEH heh heh (0.8) .HH <u>none</u> of this is real. (0.6) that's just another ↑pa:rt (.) in the ↓story
04		(0.6)
05	WILBUR:	I hope y'all enjoyed the ↓stream (.) I hope you've had a good ↓ti:me (0.6) I hope y'a::ll enjoyed what ↑happened (.hhh) u::h
06		(0.8)
07	WILBUR:	next ↑ti:me (0.6) I'm gonna get that button room ↓ready (.) and we are gonna <u>detonate</u> that motherfucka= =we're gonna <u>blow</u> it to <u>kingdom</u> <u>come</u> dude. (.hhh) we're gonna <u>absolutely</u> destroy it.

Wilbur follows the pattern of saying goodbye to the rest of the players (line 1) before shifting his attention to his live audience. Apart from simply interacting with his viewers, he takes a moment to remind them of the fictional nature of their livestreams (line 3), which can help with lessening any negative feedback regarding in-game betrayals for the sake of story progression. After expressing his gratitude for their engagement and viewership (line 5), he also provides teasers for his upcoming stream, emphasising the impending level of destruction by stressing keywords in his speech (line 7).

This approach serves to maintain viewer engagement in future streams, fostering emancipation and excitement for the conclusion of Wilbur's storyline. Additionally, engaging with the audience allows streamers to receive immediate feedback on how the presented story was received, which opens the possibility of editing future storylines and aligning them with the expectations of the audience.

4.2. The Balance Between the Virtual and the Real World

To fully cover the narrative dynamics of the Dream SMP, it is important to consider the intricate relationship between the real and the virtual universe. How closely are these two worlds intertwined in shaping the narrative core of the Dream SMP? How does it differ from conventional storytelling mediums like books and movies?

4.2.1. Perspective, the Eye of the Beholder

Apart from individual narrative segments, the beauty of the Dream SMP lies in its ability to be experienced from multiple perspectives. This is further emphasized by Minecraft's first-person point of view, which makes the viewers see the in-game world through the eyes of DSMP characters (streamers). This not only allows viewers to hear the character's Internal Monologues but also gives them a chance to witness and experience the same events directly through their characters.

Out of the 38 players involved, only three do not share their perspective with the audience. This is either due to a desire to remain secretive with their character's inner thoughts (such as Dream and JSchlatt) or because the players are not content creators but rather friends of the streamers, like Callahan, whose primary focus is keeping the server working and online. While not having a perspective is an option, the biggest difference is whether players use a face camera during their narrative livestreams or not.
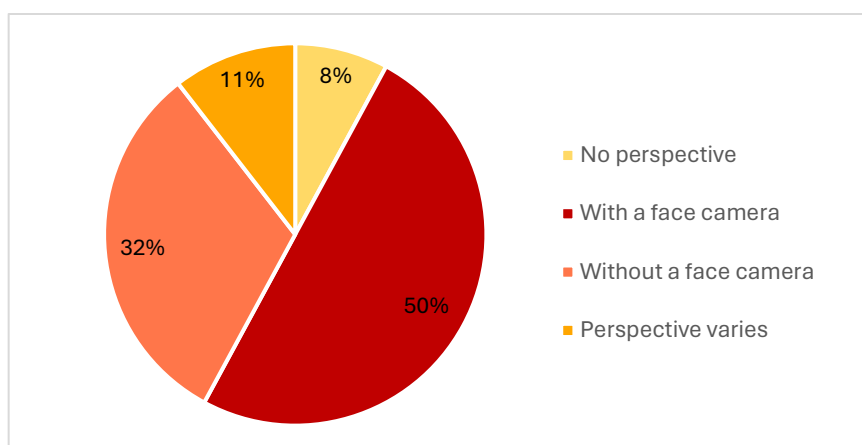
Figure 11: Percentage of DSMP members streaming their perspective with the addition of a face camera.

While roughly half of the members, representing the majority, enrich their streams with a face camera, around one-third of DSMP players rather stay solely with the game's point of view, leaving their facial expressions open to interpretation. The use of a camera serves to convey the real-life body language of streamers, providing an additional layer to in-character expression. Some members may even engage in cosplay, embodying the character they control not only in the game but also in real life. Streamer's perspectives may also vary, often choosing to not use a camera during intense narrative moments to avoid having their uncontrolled facial expressions captured. Instead, they rather let their voice and in-game movement translate their inner mood and emotions.

Data Sample 26: The Eye of the Beholder

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	TOMMY:	°you're a <u>monster</u> ↓Dream°= =this isn't <u>fair</u>. [this isn't—
02	DREAM:	[I mean— (.) ↑e:vil (.) i:s (0.6) ↓y'know (0.3) in the <u>eye</u> of the be<u>hold</u>er. (0.8) [right?
03	TOMMY:	[that— (.) I <u>don't</u>— [really understand] what that means.
04	DREAM:	[I mean it's not—]
05		(0.8)
06	DREAM:	ouh it just means that— (0.2) y'know <u>you</u>'re ↓evil (0.3) to ↓<u>me</u>

As the narrator changes depending on which streamer is being watched, the narrative itself has a completely different angle as well. A character seen as a hero from one perspective can be seen as a villain from another. In the DSMP universe, characters are not strictly good or bad, but rather their moral alignment shifts with their actions and relationships. Viewers choose the type of narration they prefer based on their personal tastes. This choice is often influenced by the streamer they regularly watch, and they tend to stick with that perspective during narrative events. Stream-hopping or watching multiple perspectives is also an option, allowing the audience to gain a broader narrative knowledge compared to if they were following just one perspective.

This sets DSMP apart from traditional narratives of books and movies, where our knowledge is typically limited by how much the author or director reveals. While this goes for the DSMP narrative as well, there is additional access to a much wider range of perspectives, where the level of viewer's knowledge is ultimately influenced by how many perspectives they decide to watch.

4.2.2. Time Perception

In his work "Narrative, a Critical Linguistic Introduction" (2001), Toolan examines traditional narratives in books in terms of "story time" and "text time", where the pacing of events does not follow the pace of the reader's reading time (p. 42). Authors manipulate time to adjust the pace of events, stretching them or reducing them based on how important they are to the overall story. Sometimes a whole chapter is dedicated to an entire day or month, while the addressee reads it in a matter of minutes.

This relationship between "story time" and "text time" broadens in visual storytelling forms like movies, TV series, or theatre performances, where aesthetics are as crucial as the narrative text itself. Directors can play with stretching the time into slow-

motion sequences or quickening it with time lapses. Nevertheless, even in these mediums, the focus remains on pivotal moments, omitting less important details which could cause the addressees to lose interest or stretch the sequence beyond what is necessary.

In the context of Dream SMP, the narrative unfolds in real-time, matching the experience of the viewer's time perception with the characters' sense of time, down to specific dates and minutes. This synchronization of time perception occurs in several events, specifically during a scene where Wilbur and Tommy discuss the best time to release the Voting Ballot for the 2020 presidential election (Figure 10).

Data Sample 27: Wilbur and Tommy decide on time.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	WILBUR:	wait is ↑it o:h it's ten PM I need to drop I need to drop the poll [I need to drop the poll ↓in]
02	TOMMY:	[no no no don't drop it yet] >no no no< delay it de<u>lay</u> it.
03	WILBUR:	okay we're [we're gonna drop we'll=
04	TOMMY:	[we <u>can't</u> drop it ↑man]
05	WILBUR:	=drop it at <u>eleven</u> PM (.) I'll drop the poll at eleven PM.
06	TOMMY:	why don't we- ten thirty ten thirty, we got twenty-three minutes yeah?
07	WILBUR:	okay fine fine fine yep.

This brief interaction unfolds quickly under the pressure of real-time, pushing the characters into immediate action (line 1), just as Dream's time limit pushed Tommy to choose during a Negotiation segment (Data Sample 19). Tommy quickly resolves the problem by suggesting simply postponing the release of the Voting Ballot by a few minutes (line 6), dispersing the real-time pressure, and giving everyone more time to finish the activities, which they had not done yet.

The inclusion of real-time details provides the audience with precise guidance on when they can begin their public voting and not miss it (lines 5–6). This emphasizes the interactive nature of the DSMP narrative and increases audience engagement. An interesting detail to highlight is also the shift in subject pronouns used by Wilbur in lines 3 and 5, where he switches from '*we'll* drop it' to '*I'll* drop it'. This alteration underlines the fact that Wilbur is the only one who can release the poll, given he created it. Possibly the shift from the inclusive 'we' to centring 'I' can also signal his assertion of power and taking agency within the fictional political hierarchy as the self-appointed leader of the L'Manberg faction.

References to real-time dates happen several times throughout the narrative, especially during events which involve multiple players. For example, during a political confrontation, where New L'Manberg is blamed for the wreckage of a significant server building, the Community House, tensions escalate to the point where Dream decides to join forces with Technoblade and Philza and schedule the destruction of the entire country. Dream announces the precise date and time of the detonation during his speech.

Data Sample 28: Dream announces Doomsday.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	DREAM:	L'Manberg (0.6) is (0.3) being ↓<u>destroyed</u> okay?= =Tomo[<u>rrow</u> at <u>three</u> PM
02	TOMMY:	[no no it [<u>no</u>—
03	FUNDY:	[no no [>no no no no—<
04	DREAM:	[say your <u>goodbyes</u>=
05	TOMMY:	=NO IT'S [<u>NOT</u>.
06	DREAM:	[I'm giving you ↑<u>time</u>
07	TUBBO:	[NO NO NO NO= [=NO NO NO
08	DREAM:	[SAY YOUR <u>GOODBYES</u>
09	FUNDY:	[NO NO NO [NO NO
10	TOMMY:	[NO <u>NO</u> [<u>STOP</u>–
11	DREAM:	[<u>TOMORROW</u> (.) it is being <u>destroyed</u>.

In this case, Dream references the real-life date and time rather than the in-game cycle of the sun setting and rising again (lines 1 and 11). By postponing the event to the next day, he effectively teases what will happen in the upcoming episode (next stream), creating anticipation for either unexpected salvation or impending doom. This delay not only prevents the event from being too lengthy but also gives every member an extra day to prepare for the upcoming battle, allowing them to gather resources and discuss new strategies for their survival.

In the context of Conversation Analysis, this segment features significant overlap in dialogue, illustrating the chaotic nature of conversations within the narrative. Dream's initial opening (line 1) marked by noticeable pauses between words, hints at the inevitable change in tempo, where Dream quickly latches the precise date to try and avoid the upcoming protests. The tempo of the conversation shifts rapidly as the players are presented with unsatisfying conclusions.

The real-time passage is notably exploited in later lore, particularly during the summer and autumn of 2021, when the challenge of scheduling collaborative livestreams significantly increased. Due to the DSMP members' personal lives, storyline streaming became less frequent, causing the duration of a few events in the narrative to stretch. This dynamic led to some amusing interactions, as illustrated in the following example.

During the prison arc following the Disc Confrontation, Technoblade's character finds himself trapped in the same cell as Dream.

Data Sample 29: Phil and Technoblade talk about time perception.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	TECHNO:	I GAVE YOU THAT BOOK (1.4) <u>THREE</u>:: <u>MONTHS</u> AGO PHIL.
02		(0.3)
03	PHIL:	YOU <u>SAID</u> THREE MONTHS (.) [WHAT DO YOU <u>MEAN</u>?
04	TECHNO:	[NO I DID NOT (.) I THOUGHT YOU WERE GONNA TAKE LIKE (0.2) <u>TWO</u> <u>DAYS</u> TO READ THAT BOOK PHIL YOU YOU— IT'S BEEN (0.2) LIKE <u>NINETY</u> DAYS (0.2) I'VE BEEN IN JAIL FOR THREE MONTHS= =YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO HIT THE E— THE STASIS PEARL LIKE <u>TWO</u> <u>DAYS</u> LATER BRO (0.3) [I ALMOST <u>DIED</u>
05	PHIL:	[YOU SAID <u>THREE</u> ↑MONTHS
06		(0.7)
07	TECHNO:	I did [NOT say <u>THREE</u> MONTHS
08	PHIL:	[wait wait wait ((checking a book)) (0.7) oh my god you said three days—

Before leaving his home, Technoblade gave Phil instructions for his rescue if he failed to return in three days (line 4). However, due to scheduling problems arising from everyone's personal commitments, as well as Technoblade's real-life cancer treatments, the intended three-day in-game imprisonment was extended to three *months* instead. This synchronization of time passage serves as an example of transforming scheduling issues into plot developments and adding depth to characters, like Phil's character misreading instructions without finding them suspicious (lines 3 and 8).

Furthermore, it emphasizes the improvisational and authentic nature of the storyline, further intertwining it with the real-world experience of its live audience. It is generally accepted that if one stream happens on Monday and the next one on Friday, the same duration of time passes within the narrative world of Dream SMP.

4.2.3. Blurring the Lines of Two Worlds

The Dream SMP narrative is a type of performance, in which streamers are very aware of the presence and the number of their audience. This awareness may influence their decisions and actions during improvisational role-play, occasionally causing the dialogue to appear stiff, which some viewers criticise as poor acting. Providing an authentic reaction becomes challenging when the observed person is aware of their audience, a phenomenon coined by William Labov as the *Observer's Paradox* (1972). However, this challenge can be avoided when some members, like the audience, are unaware of upcoming plot twists, allowing their reactions to story developments to happen naturally.

Additionally, this audience awareness introduces the concept of breaking the fourth wall. In traditional theatre, the *fourth wall* refers to the additional imaginary barrier separating performers from their audience. The actors then typically ignore the audience's presence. *Breaking the fourth wall* occurs when this convention is violated, such as when the performers directly address the audience (Hoover et al., 2018, 219). In the context of DSMP, this violation is quite common, as streamers frequently interact with their audience during several segments. However, instances of stepping out of character entirely have been observed as well, especially when streamers react to unexpected combat situations.

Since there is a three-lives rule system, there are occasions where characters accidentally lose their final life, often due to taking too much fall damage or forgetting to avoid an explosion. In these moments, labelled as bloopers, DSMP members tend to break the fourth wall to retcon the unexpected situation to not change the plot trajectory too drastically. Such a situation is exemplified in the following example.

Data Sample 30: Dream and Tommy, DSMP blooper

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	TOMMY:	oh no don't do— (0.4) NO DON'—
02		(0.8) ((Dream lights up TNTs around Tommy's chests))
03	TOMMY:	NONONONONONO NO— (0.9) MY <u>THING</u>—
04		(1.8) ((Dream accidentally blows himself up as well))
05	TOMMY:	PFPFPFPFPF HEH [HEH HEH HEH
06	DREAM:	[HEH HEH HEH you guys that wasn't in the script >that wasn't in the script that wasn't in the script< heh heh heh

However, some of these moments can be intentionally integrated into the storyline, allowing the narrative to seamlessly continue. An example of this happened right before the Manberg festival. Tommy and Wilbur were discussing their plans for the event when Tommy abruptly got up from his computer and walked away.

Data Sample 31: Incorporating an out-of-character moment.

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	WILBUR:	Tommy this is your <u>last</u> cha:nce to get on my side man.
02		(3.6)
03	TOMMY:	you've already <u>laid</u> the TNT?
04		(1.8)
05	WILBUR:	#↓yes#
06		(2.4)
07	TOMMY:	hhh one second. (0.7) ((out of character)) hm 'M JUST PUTTIN' MY COCA-COLA INTO BIN °oh shit°
08	WILBUR:	((in character)) g-<u>good</u> you always seem to walk <u>away</u> whenever I offer you [questions↓] heh
09	TOMMY:	[one sec] °I always seem to <u>what</u> sorry↑° [I was-]
10	WILBUR:	[you just-] you always walk <u>away</u> when I offer a question to [you Tommyinnit.]
11	TOMMY:	[well yeah <u>yea:h</u>] it's 'cause I always have to spend a minute (.) <u>thinkin</u>'

While Tommy briefly steps out of his character by walking away (line 7), Wilbur, instead of waiting for his return, decides to remain in character (line 8), seamlessly integrating this interaction into the narrative as if Tommy's character had also walked away from him in-game. This not only puts pressure on Tommy to answer Wilbur's initial question, but it also blurs the difference between actions within the game world and those in the real one. It expands the concept of what behaviour is considered as part of the narrative. Essentially, every streamer's reaction can be considered as part of their character; a concept which broadens with the use of face camera.

This becomes a challenge especially in fandom discussions about DSMP characters, as they share the same name as their content creators. To differentiate between the two, the DSMP fandom has adapted specific tags when referring to an individual content creator (cc! Tommy) or their character (c! Tommy). Additionally, tags like /rp for role-play and /dsmp for the DSMP fictional universe provide more context to people who might not be familiar with the DSMP universe. This prevents the actions of DSMP members, which they did in character, from blurring with their real-life situations.

The dramatic climax of the DSMP narrative consisted of four back-to-back streams from Jack Manifold, Tubbo, and TommyInnit, starting on 10th November and ending on 13th November 2022, a whole two and a half years later since its beginning. These four streams concluded with the entire server being accidentally blown up by Tubbo, Tommy, and Jack Manifold, involving Dream and Punz in the finale as well. Such an ending sparked various reactions within the DSMP community. While some viewers celebrated the end of the long journey, others disliked the rather bittersweet ending as some conflicts and questions were left unresolved.

Despite the interaction between Tommy and Dream in the finale, suggesting that genuine conversation might have helped to solve their differences as they finally listened to each other, they, unfortunately, missed their mark to reach their full understanding.

Data Sample 32: The final conversation between Tommy and Dream

#	Speaker	Utterance
01	DREAM:	#Tommy#
02		(2.0)
03	TOMMY:	°yeah°?
04		(4.5)
05	DREAM:	°why can't it just be° #simple again# (1.8) >why can't it just be like that forever?= =we can live< (.) forever and we can— .hh everyone can be:
06		(3.6)
07		y'know #friends# a:nd
08		(3.7)
09		>I feel like it—it just—< everything got s: (.) it's just— so jumbled.
10		(1.5)
11	TOMMY:	°along the ↑way°
12		(6.4)
13	TOMMY:	°I'm with you ↑man°
14		(3.8)
15	TOMMY:	°I'm with ya°
16		(10.2)
17	DREAM:	#is it not too late?#
18		(2.3) ((Safety sirens start blaring))
19	DREAM:	we can work [↑together=] =we can— figure ↑out—
20	TOMMY:	[oh no.]
21		(7.1)
22	DREAM:	↓what
23		(1.5)
24	TOMMY:	°you hear that right°?
25		(4.4) ((Sirens intensify))
26	DREAM:	what is that.
27	TOMMY:	(4.0) it's too late Dream.

In this final conversation, Tommy and Dream reflect on the server's early days, where simplistic Minecraft gameplay held more significance than the server's complex narrative (line 5). This dialogue subtly breaks the fourth wall as the characters yearn to return the server to its roots, where everyone simply enjoys playing Minecraft together as friends (lines 7 and 13). With only a few characters managing to escape the server's destruction, such as Niki, Phil, Connor, and Ranboo (Philza VODs, 2022b), this ending ultimately created a clean cut between the in-game world and reality. As it brings an end to DSMP characters and their narrative, it also offers a fresh start for every member of the DSMP, giving them creative freedom in exploring new content and moving on to pursue personal projects.

On 10 April 2023, the DSMP members gathered on the server for one last time, where they decided to finally undertake a final mission of freeing the End (Gutelle, 2023). This mission involved killing the Ender Dragon, the official final Minecraft boss, reaching this way the ultimate ending of the game, which had mainly served as their live stage until that very moment. This event effectively wrapped up the long DSMP journey and definitively separated the content creators from their characters, allowing them all to move back into the real world.

5. Conclusion

This research aimed to analyse how group interaction within an online video game environment shapes the emergence of collaborative narratives and its impact on the social experience of modern society. The work is based on a detailed analysis of the Dream SMP, a Minecraft role-play server. Utilizing the global isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic with the iconic blocky world design (Figure 2) and user-friendly mechanics of Minecraft, the players co-authored a survival story within a virtual community.

Data for the analysis were collected through a detailed examination of recordings of the DSMP broadcasts available on YouTube, and DSMP Transcriptions, a collaborative fan project, which served as the inspiration for this research. As indicated by the analysis, natural conversation and collaboration stood at the centre of the Dream SMP narrative. With the primary goal of entertaining the live audience, players rarely remained silent. They often interacted with their chat or other players, maintaining viewer engagement by providing commentary on the unfolding events as exemplified in Technoblade's continuous flow of speech in his Introduction (Data Sample 3–5). From the original transcripts, a wide range of data samples were selected and rewritten, following in principle the transcription system developed by Gail Jefferson (2004). These samples, consisting of authentic conversations between players, were subsequently analysed using Conversation Analysis, with a focus on identifying their distinct speech patterns and understanding the dynamics of player interaction.

With foundations in the work of Michael Toolan (2001), the concept of Dream SMP narrative was defined as an *overarching storytelling experience*, involving tellers (players), a tale (storyline), and addressees (live viewers). While the narrative of Dream SMP was partly scripted to ensure coherence and entertainment value, the analysis of the collected data revealed how the unpredictable nature of the real broadcasts often transformed even a well-made plan. Players could engage in an unexpected conflict, as shown by The Butcher Army (Data Sample 20), or take too long in traversing a server, when Technoblade had to stall for time, waiting for other players (Data Sample 5).

The central point of my thesis resided in Chapter Four, where I outlined eight different segments of the Dream SMP multi-party streamed narrative: *Introduction*, *In-character Gameplay*, *Conversations*, *Internal Monologues*, *Travelling, Negotiations*, *Combat*, and *Ending*. The internal as well as sequential ordering of the interaction within these distinct segments often directed the progression of the story, the trajectory of the

streamed interaction and gaming action, and their ultimate outcomes. As the analysis illustrated, the ordering of these eight Dream SMP narrative segments did not unfold mechanically but was always subject to the immediate context of players and the stimuli that directly influenced their speech.

While some segments naturally began with new conversations, others required smoother transitions, which were signalled by explicit *framing phrases*. Through these phrases players communicated their narrative intentions to alter the framework of the broadcast, prompting other characters into similar action (*Follow me*, *Don't give him time to think*, *Let's have a conversation*, … Figure 7). Once a specific segment was initiated and understood by other players, it continued until another framing phrase, a new stimulus, or action of players prompted a shift within the narrative framework.

Introduction and *Ending* segments, with their fixed positions at the start and end of each livestream, served as boundaries of the live episodes. Initiated with explicit greetings and goodbyes to their live audience (Data Samples 1–2, Data Samples 23–25), players typically ensured everyone had the same narrative context by providing recaps or foreshadowing of past and future events, respectively (Data Sample 2, Data Sample 25). In these segments, streamers were out of character and engaged in casual conversation with their viewers. The direct connection to the audience via live chat ensured immediate feedback, allowing the streamers to adjust the storyline accordingly.

The exact progression of the six main plot-developing narrative segments was not rigidly predetermined. Instead, it was shaped by players' choices and the immediate in-game environment, aligning with the principles of natural continuity outlined by Aristotle. This flexibility allowed events to unfold dynamically, influenced by various factors such as the outcome of *Negotiations*, the occurrence of *Combat*, or the narrative need to travel to different locations on the server (*Travelling* segment). For example, failed *Negotiations* often escalated into violent *Combat*, as seen in The Butcher Army (Data Sample 20), while successful *Negotiations* resolved conflicts, as exemplified by Tommy's exchange of his music discs for L'Manberg Independence (Data Sample 18). Similarly, *Travelling* segments often preceded *Conversations* as in Tommy and Tubbo's Disc Confrontation journey (section 4.1.5), while *Travelling* during *Combat* could signify an attempt to retreat from the fight, as in, for example, L'Manberg members did in Data Sample 13. This flexibility in the sequence of events fostered a dynamic and immersive gaming experience for both players and their audience.

While *Travelling* segments and *In-character Gameplay* cultivated mostly casual gameplay, allowing players to simply relax and enjoy the game, *Conversation*, *Internal Monologues*, *Negotiations*, and *Combat* segments were all driven by narrative elements. Players explored their character's psyches, as exemplified by Wilbur's (Data Sample 10) and Tubbo's (Data Sample 11) *Internal Monologues*, or faced difficult decisions, such as Tommy's direct choice between material possession and people (Data Sample 19) or Technoblade's decision to execute Tubbo (Data Sample 22).

Upon reflection, the analysis of the Dream SMP has provided valuable insight into the intricate collaborative storytelling within the online gaming realm. Through a detailed examination of group interactions and narrative emergence, this research provided insight into how players collectively craft stories in a virtual space. As online streaming platforms and gaming communities continue to grow in popularity understanding the construction of these narratives becomes increasingly relevant.

One of the notable contributions of this study lies in its detailed exploration of the interactive storytelling nature of online gaming environments. With a vast foundation in the comprehensive data collection efforts, including the analysis of DSMP broadcasts and their transcripts, the study sought to capture the richness and complexity of in-game interactions. By analysing the nuances of player interactions and narrative construction, the research has offered an understanding of how multiplayer streamed gaming narratives unfold and evolve in real time. This approach enabled a deeper exploration of the intricate narrative dynamics, going beyond their surface-level observations. The characterization of this genre potentially not only enhances our academic understanding of narrative creation but also holds practical implications for the broader gaming industry and online communication platforms.

Furthermore, the relevance of this research extends beyond the realm of gaming itself. While the setting may be surreal, the verbal interactive behaviour observed within online gaming communities frequently mirrors real-life communication patterns to a significant degree. Players practice a multitude of real-life skills, including negotiation, conflict resolution, and decision-making, all of which contribute to the development of collaborative narratives. This highlights the importance of viewing digital narratives not merely as recreational activities but as complex socio-cultural phenomena that both reflect and influence our offline interactions.

In summary, this thesis marks the first step in uncovering the intricate dynamics of narratives in online gaming environments. While this bachelor thesis offers a detailed examination of narrative dynamics within the Dream SMP, it is important to acknowledge that the limited length of the study only allows a surface-level exploration of this medium. Indeed, there is much more potential for deeper investigation, particularly in the *exceptio regulum probat* of individual framing phases and segments from various perspectives. Additionally, it is worth noting the gender dynamics within the Dream SMP community, where female perspectives are noticeably lacking, as indicated by Figure 3, featuring only four female players (Nihachu, CaptainPuffy, Hannahxxrose, TeanaKitten). This gender imbalance reflects broader trends and challenges faced by women in engaging with male-dominated spaces and entering gaming communities.

By shedding light on the interactive storytelling nature of these platforms and the real-life skills exercised within them, this research offers valuable contributions to both academia and industry. Moving forward, further exploration of these themes promises to uncover deeper understandings of the ever-evolving landscape of collaborative online narratives and their broader societal implications. Future studies could aim to overcome these limitations by incorporating diverse viewpoints to further define the complex nature of narrative creation within online communities. After all, narratives and the lessons they convey can emerge from various influences in the world around us, even if they originate "just" from a Minecraft game.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary of Transcript Symbols (Jefferson, 2004).

Symbols	Description
[word] [word]	Square brackets indicate overlapping speech. *A left bracket* marks its onset; *a right bracket* indicates the end of where utterances overlap.
= =	*Equal signs* indicate no break or gap. *A pair of equal signs,* one at the end and one at the beginning of the next line, indicate no break between the two lines.
(0.0)	*Numbers in parentheses* indicate a timed pause in tenths of seconds.
(.)	*A dot in parentheses* indicates a brief interval between 0.08 and 0.2 seconds.
wo:rd wo::rd	*Colons* indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound. The longer the colon row, the longer the prolongation.
word	*Underscoring* indicates particularly stressed speech.
WORD	*An upper case* indicates especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk.
°word°	*Degree signs* bracketing an utterance or just its part indicates that the sounds are softer than the surrounding talk, such as whispering or distant speech.
<word> >word<	*Carats* bracketing an utterance indicate a change of pace. *Right/left carats* indicate a quickened pace of speech, while *left/right carats* indicate that the pace of the speech has slowed down, compared to the surrounding talk.
word–	*A dash* indicates a cut-off or glottal stop.
↑↓word	*Arrows* indicate a weak change in intonation, either rising or falling.
.?	*Punctuation marks* indicate a change in intonation for rising and falling intonation as at the end of a typical utterance or question, accordingly.
.hhh hhh	*A dot-prefixed row of 'h's* indicates an in-breath. Without the dot, the 'h's indicate an out-breath. Three letters indicate 'normal' duration.
heh heh	*'Heh'* indicates a voiced laughter.
~word~	*A tilde sign* bracketing an utterance indicates a shaky or wobbly voice.
#word#	*Hash sign* bracketing an utterance indicates a creaky or hoarse voice.
(( ))	*Double parentheses* indicate transcriber descriptions of non-lexical events, such as sound effects or movement.

Appendix B: Glossary of Acronyms and Initialisms

- SMP: Survival multi-player
- DSMP: Dream SMP
- CA: Conversation analysis
- RPG: Role-play game
- TTRPG: Tabletop role-play game
- LARP: Live-action role-play
- PVP: Player versus player
- POV: point of view
- OOC: out of character
- IC: in character