COLLECTIVE ACTION SITUATED IN VIRTUAL WORLDS

A Dissertation in
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by
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ABSTRACT

For the first time in the history of collective action, the offline world has experienced a virtually organized and enacted union strike. While this was the first publicly noticed political action in a virtual world, others have been going on for several years now. As virtual worlds continue to grow in popularity, this type of protest of action becomes more common. The issues experienced by the different groups involved in the virtual protest actions bring to light several new questions about the increased use of technology in protest movements. In particular, what role does technology play in social protest movements in virtual environments? Although the study of protest and protest movements has a long history spanning decades of research, the virtualization of these protests creates opportunity for change in some of the fundamental aspects and assumptions of protest actions. This large question encompasses many smaller pieces including: “In what ways does technology use change many of the accepted standards for how a protest or collective action is organized?” However, it is hard to narrow the many aspects of technology use and virtual protest into only a few questions and refinement of the research questions is inevitable in the future.

The data for analyzing these questions were drawn from two cases of protest actions in virtual worlds: a labor strike within Second Life and a corruption scandal in EVE Online. These two cases exemplify the differences in technology use and virtual world interaction that are often common in virtual world protests. In order to complete this study, mixed qualitative methods were used. The purpose of mixing methods was to increase validity and to cover the many aspects of protest in a virtual world. Case studies were used to develop fully-fleshed examples of virtual world protests. Computer-mediated discourse analysis of forum threads, and blogs relating to the case studies were used both to develop commentary from actual participants and a theory of how knowledge regarding the process of a virtual world protest. Five additional of interviews were conducted with protest organizers in order to better articulate the planning and changes which virtual world protest engendered.
From the analysis of the collected data, a new framework for understanding how the process of virtualization changes protests emerged. A conceptual kit of eleven dimensions were identified as important to virtual world protests: degree of virtualization, legality, shared identity, barriers to entry, cost of information, repression response, influence, message diffusion, framing, anonymity, and organization flexibility. Each of these dimensions underwent alterations when converted to use in a virtual world, and is discussed in detail before a synthesis of all variables is achieved.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

In 2007, the offline world experienced for the first time a virtually organized and virtually enacted union strike. This strike against IBM was fought in Second Life and caught the attention of not only labor activists worldwide, but also the international and business media. It was followed, only months later, by a second labor strike meant to build on the momentum of the first. While this was the first publicly noted collective action in a virtual world, other protests have happened for almost as long as virtual worlds have been in existence. Some, like the sit-in held within There.com and the two Second Life strikes, were tied to events in the offline world. Others, like the violent takeovers and protests of World of Warcraft, EVE Online, and Ultima Online, can only be explained through the context and of the worlds in which they occurred. One thing has remained consistent within every virtual world that has gained a moderate level of popularity: they experience some type of collective action.

Despite the ubiquity of these phenomena, collective action in virtual worlds has only recently begun receiving attention from both the academic sphere as well as from the mass media. Theorists have just put forward the idea of collective action online and frequently resort to using theories that were developed for offline collective action to explain uniquely online phenomena (McCaughey and Ayers 2003). It is understood that these worlds engage their users in a level of emersion that approximates the offline world in terms of complexity and interactivity. By bridging the gap between the offline and online, users can develop this connection to transfer social processes, beliefs, and habits into the virtual world where the social sphere is often lacking. This transfer brings along with it all the complications and struggles of the offline world since the social concepts are not easily divested of their usual context. When many actors within the virtual world are struggling with the process of building an online sphere, using their own interpretation of what it means to be social in a virtual space, contention and collective action
becomes inevitable. Only through understanding the nature of collective action in virtual worlds can new theories and possibilities for the study of virtual worlds be expanded for future researchers.

In order to address this need, this study asked the question, “How does the virtualization of collective action repertoires change how collective action is organized and enacted?” Due to the general nature of this question there are several sub-questions which seek to break down this larger problem into its constituent parts in order to better grapple with the complexity of the context. In particular, these sub-questions focus on how do the technological affordances of a virtual world change actions and reactions and how does the media play a role in the perception and credibility of the protest? The goal of examining this question was to engage with two cases of virtual world protest and conduct interviews with the participants of both protests so that these cases may highlight the differences that exist between the developed theoretical framework and existing theories of offline collective action. Both these questions, and the goals behind them, aim to address not only the current state of virtual world protest, but to also develop a theoretical framework from which future research may proceed.

1.2 Virtual Worlds

Virtual worlds epitomize a new realm of self-representation. These worlds have taken the advances of technology within highly developed societies and applied them to the realm of entertainment through video games but with an added form of social interaction. The size and social complexity of virtual worlds allows their users to develop new identities that are difficult to experience in the offline world (Turkle 1997). The power and availability of common computers and high speed internet, along with the cheap overall cost of virtual world software, make it possible to access these technologies in many different places and times. For example, Second Life can be run off of a USB drive and runs well,
as long as there is a high-speed internet connection. This combination allows the virtual world to run almost anywhere the user could find a computer: at home, in a public library, at work, or school.

Originally marketed as video games, virtual worlds have seen increasing popularity and acceptance in the wider technological and social communities. Strategy Analytics predicts that the global population of virtual world users will grow from 186 million in 2009 to 640 million in 2015 (Engage 2009). While 67% of American households play some form of computer or video games, the growing market for virtual worlds is among the youngest category of users, eventually resulting not only longer and more familiar usage, but also breaking the overall industry trend of increasingly older users (Engage 2009; Association 2010).

While Gartner Vice President, Steve Prentice, sees that the role of virtual worlds in the business field is currently undefined, he states that, “Despite the concerns within companies, don’t ignore this trend. They will have a significant impact on your enterprise during the next five years” (Pettey 2007). This advice has continued for businesses into 2010, with a predicted growth of $2 billion dollars from 2009 to 2014 (Tuttle and Waite 2009). Others have echoed this sentiment stating that “By 2018, virtual worlds and serious gaming will likely be major, even dominant, platforms for business applications and opportunities” due the rapid development and increasing sophistication of the supportive technology (Ives and Junglas 2008). Already there are individuals who have made thousands of US dollars creating and selling digital goods for virtual money (Rose 2007). Companies like Electric Sheep and Millions of Us have sprung up simply to act as a mediator, meant to help corporations create a presence and events in these virtual worlds (Rose 2007). Both companies state that they’ve received many contacts from among some of the largest and most well known corporations to integrate their work into the corporate web and Internet presence, leading to potentially large investments by these firms in virtual world technology (Rose 2007).
Many events in the offline world have been translated into their digital equivalents, so that the denizens of the digital realm can experience them. In 2008, the famed tree lighting ceremony in Rockefeller Center was re-created in Second Life so that people all over the world could experience the beauty of the event without having to fly to New York City (Weber 2006). The company behind There.com was approached by the Department of Defense to create a virtual Earth that could be used to simulate warfare experiences, as well as social development of interpersonal skills and non-combat duties such as peacekeeping, reconnaissance, and social interaction with non-military personnel (Thorsen 2004). Virtual plagues erupted as an abuse of in-world mechanics which allowed the Center for Disease Control to examine the flow of plague through a population and human reactions to the outbreak (Bannerman 2007). Their research plans to help these the CDC develop effective strategies for disseminating information about mass infections as well as handling quarantine events (Science 2007). Even the US government has started using virtual worlds. They’re examining the use of these worlds by terrorists to coordinate activities as well as studying the formation and dissolution of in-game “terrorist cells” (Thier 2008). Finally, the fusion between the offline and the online has been accomplished through the hiring of a professional economist to study the complexity and development of the virtual economy in EVE Online, a world built around the idea of a truly free market experience (Games 2007).

Game-based virtual worlds are becoming more popular with both players and developers. Joystiq, a gaming news site, lists over 46 different Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games (MMORPGs), like World of Warcraft or Everquest, that were slated to be released between the summer of 2006 and winter of 2009 (Lees 2006). Strategy Analytics, an independent market research firm focusing on innovative technologies, predicts the revenue from MMORPGs will account for 11% of the total revenue from games by 2011. The same group also predicts a growth of 50 million in the total subscriber base of these games by 2011 up from the 30 million subscribers recorded in 2006 (Kuchera
Considering that the video game industry alone grossed almost $32 billion dollars in 2006, this is no longer a small market for study (Kuchera 2007).

1.3 Power and Collective Action

The opinions of a population are expressed through collective action. As the history of the United States shows, collective action accounts for large changes to the social structure of society and the outline of governing laws and bodies. The Civil Rights, Feminist, Peace, and Life movements have all been successful in shaping society’s views about culture and self.

The increasing diversity and interconnectedness of the world has created more points of intersecting social contact, where different viewpoints and ideologies come into conflict. These crossings are ripe for the rise of contentious politics. As Tarrow (1998) describes, “Contentious politics occurs when ordinary people, often in league with more influential citizens, join forces in confrontations with elites, authorities, and opponents.” This type of politics can occur over any issue, but some of the most influential conflicts in the last century have erupted around the politics and legitimization of identity. In particular, many of the large movements in the United States since 1950 have focused on marginalized groups who had little to no power or recourse in the political systems they lived under. For many, the only way to make their voices heard was to turn to unconventional avenues of expression. These avenues run the gamut from the rallies, marches, and sit-ins used in the Civil Rights movement, to the unique forms of dress and music of the punk rockers. Since political options were few, groups gathered and used non-political means of disruption to bring attention to their demands, sometimes through direct interaction with their opponents, and sometimes through interaction with the mass media.

The give and take between groups that engage in contentious politics and the authorities accounts for the current shape of our government and political sphere. Both groups engage in a constant game of
action and reaction, shaping their goals and activities to the latest methods employed by their opponents. These actions help to form a repertoire of contention, or the collection of all actions that are “culturally inscribed and socially communicated” that social movement groups may draw from to frame their goals, causes, and actions (Tarrow 1998). Actions within the repertoire are known by both the movement and their opponents, and have acceptable limits and structures that can be used to define the action and to oppose it. Known actors or favored groups may choose new tactics that result in a temporary power imbalance in their favor (Tarrow 1998). This power imbalance often exists only briefly, as the opponents take time to understand the new situation and adopt strategies to counter it and restore the balance of power (Tarrow 1998).

The only way social movements can gain enough followers to successfully engage in collective action is by creating a shared identity among their constituents. They must create a shared understanding of their situation, and what means are available and necessary to solve it. This process involves other groups who attempt to disseminate the identity that the group develops or who institute contradictory identities. This creation of a shared identity can make or break a social movement. Often, movements end up spending as much time building and sharing in identity as they do engaging in collective action or contentious politics.

1.4 Collective Action in Virtual Worlds

Virtual worlds are viewed as another medium that individuals may consume. The rise of highly adaptable and reciprocal flows of information through other media forms have conditioned individuals to believe that they should be able to customize how and where they view their information. However, the nature of many virtual worlds as commercial enterprises places limitations on the ways that individuals can interact with one another or the software.
These pressures from consumers and corporations set opposing viewpoints that engage in a struggle over the power to control information presentation and flow within virtual worlds. This project aims to better understand these power struggles, and how they shape the overall social structure of both virtual and offline worlds through developing an updated framework that takes into account the nature of virtual worlds as a socio-technical artifact. The nature of virtual worlds allows the forces of repression and contention to come together in new ways which suit the unique context and goals of their situation. As the old strategies for repression and contention are reshaped, new strategies are developed by the unique structures of virtual worlds. The outcomes of these struggles shape the repertoires of repression and contention within virtual worlds, creating standardized forms of action that shape future events.

As virtual worlds continue to grow in popularity, this type of collective action becomes more common. While the smaller populations of the early virtual environments were often passionate and outspoken about their community, the scale of the world made it much easier to adjust to consumer demands or balance the needs of different stakeholder groups. Today, with populations of several hundred thousand to tens of millions, the original flexibility that allow companies to satisfy the needs of their consumer base have largely vanished underneath the need to please stakeholders and maintain financial growth. Companies that host virtual worlds need to become aware, not only of who their audience is, but also how that audience mobilizes and the likely outcomes of their mobilization. In particular, as the diversity of the audience for virtual worlds increases, there is more collective action against the worlds and the politics inherent to them.

The technical considerations of virtual worlds make them different from similar situations in the offline world. Many assumptions that are made about the protesters no longer hold true in a virtual environment. While regular protesters have outside activities that they need to engage in, online avatars have no such considerations and may remain active despite the lack of a person at the keyboard controlling them. People need to go to work, get at least a couple hours of sleep, and see their family and
friends. Avatars do no need to eat or sleep and can socialize with others in a virtual world without having to move or visibly disrupt the protest through the use of private messages visible only to themselves and the player they are addressing. One of the most important differences is that there is no longer a 1:1 ratio of body to protestor. While there are some equivalent protest processes in the offline world, such as flooding the mailbox of a politician, the investment of resources in a virtual world in terms of time and money are of an entirely different scale. In the offline world, participating in collective action involves getting to the site and preparing for the action, spending time at the site during the action and then the time spent returning home after the action. People in the online world can teleport most places in an instant and return to their activities just as quickly. It is also possible for them to have many “bodies” in these virtual worlds, all of which may be involved in the collective action, increasing the apparent number of participants, or may be doing several activities at once.

The virtualization process also changes technical considerations including arrest and policing. The digital equivalent of jail time, a temporary suspension, does not carry the same weight of punishment. While an individual in jail has few liberties, a person who has been suspended may go about their normal lives, or may even use another avatar. While violence to a person is used only as a last resort by many authorities in the offline world, the digital equivalent to this, the deletion or permanent suspension of a person’s avatar, is almost the default form for dealing with virtual collective action. However, unlike the real world, losing a digital body doesn’t mean a new one can’t be obtained.

Getting to a site for collective action may be easier for the participant but it means that it is also easier to be tracked around the world by the authorities during and after the protest since avatars leave a digital trail and record. There is no such thing as running from the authorities, unless simply logging off and not returning is counted as running. The anonymity of a virtual world also plays to the activists’ favor, so long as they are not fighting the hosting company. There is often very little in terms of identifiable offline connections tying an individual to their avatar: names, ages, habits, and friends can
often be very different. This allows activists to engage in activities that would be very dangerous for them personally in the offline world.

It is important to understand the nature and structure of collective action in these virtual worlds. There is currently only a small body of research that examines this area. While the importance of this nascent period of technological and social development is understood, the process of theory development still trails behind the technological and social advancement of virtual worlds. The repertoires of action for virtual worlds are not yet set and are developing as the social structures and possibilities for collective action in virtual worlds are explored. This lag needs to be addressed as the process of repertoire development is happening, so that the future virtual worlds may be more clearly understood. This research describes these new phenomena.

1.5 Impacts

There are many impacts of this research. The percentage of individuals who are exposed to virtual worlds is increasing every year, and many already congregate in the popular virtual worlds that are available today. This research contributes to making a more enjoyable experience for these individuals by providing a basis for understanding how technology impacts social communication patterns. Results from this research can be used to help enable communication methods and technologies that allow for greater adaptation to social processes making for a richer and more enjoyable environment. Currently the governing structures of these virtual worlds are very limited and in many cases the citizens of the worlds have no definable or protected rights. By showing the richness of social communication and structure in virtual worlds, it is possible to create a general push or argument for a Virtual Bill of Rights or at least an extension of some rights which players have as humans.
The framework discussed in this research expands theoretical understandings of protest. Having a framework on which researchers may ground their studies and findings enables them to make a solid exploration of the area of virtual world protests. By laying this foundational piece, this research helps to open an interesting and unexplored area to future scientists. In particular, this research highlights the areas of protest that are most dramatically changed by the process of virtualization. These areas act as a starting theoretical platform, within a current void between existing theoretical areas. This platform provides a base upon which future explanations may ground themselves.

The connections drawn by this research between technological mediation and the adaptation of social processes to an online world shows how features of technology directly impact the development of a social sphere. The results of this research help to explore how technologies may be altered to better support all forms of social interaction. Players have already shown great interest in the development of complex social spaces online. However, the technological limitations have forced them to combine various ad hoc fixes to support their needs. By grounding the social needs within a technology viewpoint, this research highlights the social needs of players drawing a connection to how the two areas, technological and social, must be addressed simultaneously.

Currently, members of the virtual worlds industry handle each protest event with alarm and dismay. This research has created a model that shows how individuals within virtual worlds approach their social interactions, and how they think about concepts like protest, within it. In particular, since the focus on this research was upon the organizers of the protest, it clearly emphasizes the considerations and concerns of those individuals who step up to enact protest within virtual worlds. This information is invaluable to companies who host virtual worlds, allowing them to not only understand the motivations of their population, but to also provides them a guidebook on the facets of their world, population, and a protest to consider. This helps to create a less alarmist view, and enable authorities and protestors to work...
together in the future to achieve collective action that leaves all parties feeling more secure and less threatened by the outcome.

### 1.6 Structure and Overview

Several steps were taken during the course of this research to address the questions and issues raised above. This research project addressed these issues and built a conceptual understanding of how the synthesis of collective action and virtual worlds impacts our understanding of both areas. To clarify the process of how this was accomplished this dissertation is broken down into the following sections.

The second chapter is a literature review. It focuses on examining the history and development of virtual worlds as both a technology and an area of research. This review covers the literature of social movements including the major theories within the area and the processes by which social movements develop, change, and die. The final section of literature is the interaction of technology with social movements. This section concludes with an examination of the gaps within the literature.

The third chapter is an overview of the kit of concepts used for this research. It outlines each of the concepts, as well as provides a background of how that concept is applied or understood in offline settings.

The fourth chapter covers the research questions of this study. The methods that were used to answer these questions are addressed as well. In particular, this section focuses upon how the methods were employed and shaped during the research process and the valuable tools they added to the research overall.

The fifth chapter contains the detailed overviews of the two cases selected for this research project. It outlines the major events, actors and consequences of the protests. The first case is within the science-fiction based massively multiplayer online game EVE Online. The second draws from the virtual
world Second Life and a virtual strike that was held against IBM. These cases frame the descriptive analysis that follows in Chapter 6.

The sixth chapter reiterates the theoretical dimensions outlined earlier. Each dimension is broken down, and examined, within both cases to better illustrate how that dimension shifted in the move from an offline to an online context. Selective quotes from text and interviews are used throughout this section to highlight a case or a dimension.

The seventh synthesizes the information found in the previous section to more comprehensively state how the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 3 was altered. In particular, the role of virtual worlds as socio-technical artifacts within the process of protest is examined to better understand the degree of change that each dimension underwent.

The final chapter concludes this paper by reviewing the dimensions and findings of this research through examining the contributions this study makes to theory and science. It examines the implications of this research for several areas by discussing future research and potential limitations.
Chapter 2 Background - Virtuality

Virtual worlds developed from video games but have evolved to be complex software that mimics the offline world. They often have similar physical laws, like gravity. They also have large populations that develop social structures and norms that members of the society are expected to follow. Players within virtual worlds represent themselves through a character that is visible to others in the world, their avatar. It is through these avatars that the players speak and interact with one another and the larger environment. The worlds themselves have attracted academic attention and have proven to be a fertile area of research for many. There is a long history of research programs based around some of the earliest virtual worlds that span multiple disciplines and interests.

The opinions of a population are expressed through collective action. As the history of the United States shows, collective action accounts for large changes to the social structure of society and the outline of governing laws and bodies. The civil rights, feminist, and peace movements have all been in shaping our views about what is a right or what is open for civil debate. The increasing diversity and interconnectedness of our world has created more points of intersection where different viewpoints and ideologies come into conflict. These cross sections are areas ripe for the rise of contentious politics. As Tarrow (1998) describes, “Contentious politics occurs when ordinary people, often in league with more influential citizens, join forces in confrontations with elites, authorities, and opponents.” This type of politics can occur over any issue but some of the most influential in the last century have erupted around the politics and legitimization of identity.

Several factors have been around since the very introduction of virtual worlds to the public, people enjoy organizing into institutions and any changes made to the world are taken very seriously. This seriousness in a realm of play has occasionally resulted in protests by members of a virtual world’s community. These protests create an overlap between these two areas of academic interest that is becoming increasingly relevant as the populations of virtual worlds climb. This chapter first looks at a
brief history about the development of virtual worlds and then examines some of the social sciences research that has already occurred. Finally, it addresses the development of social movement literature and how technology has already been observed to change these social movements.

Each area is highlighted separately before the areas of overlap are examined. After careful examination, the papers were grouped together by common themes and then labeled. These labels are used to head the section discussing that particular grouping of papers.

2.2 The Development of Video Games

For many individuals the first time they heard about video games was in the early arcade craze of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In these arcades, players would gather with their friends to play games in a shared social setting. Many were single player and the ones that did allow multiple players were often turn based with little interaction between the two players (Smith 2004). While the games were focused on players individually, advancements regarding multiple players were being made by game companies around the globe. Gauntlet, which was released in 1985, allowed four players to interact at the same time on the same board both co-operating and competing at the same time (Smith 2004). This style of play fit nicely within the social context of many existing arcades.

This inclusion of simultaneous play in arcade games corresponded with the development of very similar circumstances in the budding Internet. Modern virtual worlds had their early beginnings in pen and paper based games that were played in the 1970s (Yee 2006). In these games, players took on the role of a character and acted out a story with that character, often called role-playing. As technology became more popular, the tedious actions in these games were digitized, often ones related to mathematics. With the adaptation of the Internet to public uses, the full pen and paper concept was translated to the new realm and Multi-User Dimensions (MUDs) came into being (Curtis and Nichols 1994; Bub 2002;
There is some academic debate over how the ideas for MUDs came into existence. Yee (2006) argues that MUDs developed simultaneously with similar tabletop role-playing games like Dungeons and Dragons. Others argue that MUDs were derived from games like Dungeons and Dragons as individuals that enjoyed these games in the late 1970s moved apart from each other and became attracted to the Internet to communicate (Curtis and Nichols 1994; Bub 2002; Mortensen 2006). While the origins of the two systems are disputed it is readily acknowledged that many of the characteristics of these games are very similar. Both the tabletop and digital versions rely on mathematical calculations. Most standard interactions in the game are based in math, such as combat. They also often have a high fantasy or science fiction based storyline where the players act out the roles of barbarians or wizards attempting to kill dragons and evil sorcerers (Krzywinska 2006; Mortensen 2006; Yee 2006)

2.2.1 Rise of the MMO

In 1997, Ultima Online was released to the public and heralded the beginning of a new breed of MUDs, the Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game or MMORPG (MMO for short) (Yee 2006). Ultima Online featured many of the same types of game play that the earlier MUDs featured, but instead of presenting these fantasy worlds through text options Ultima Online actually presented the user with a graphical world (Day 2001). These MMOs, as exemplified by Ultima Online, were persistent worlds, existing and changing whether there were players online or not (Day 2001). The worlds developed their own economies that focused on the trade of raw material for crafted pieces, services, or currency (Day 2001). Ultima Online was also the first game to host over a hundred thousand players at the same time, a feat that the older MUD software, computer hardware, and computer networks could not support (Krzywinska 2006; Mortensen 2006).
This feat was soon surpassed in 1999 by the release of Everquest, the first MMO to feature a first person view of the action. At its height Everquest supported 400,000 users and remained the most popular MMO in the American market for at least 6 years (Yee 2006). Everquest, or EQ as it was often abbreviated, was also the first MMO to gain national media attention. This was due to its commercial success and the devotion it inspired in its players. It wasn’t until the release of World of Warcraft (WoW) in 2005 that Everquest was completely surpassed. At the time of this writing WoW remains the dominant MMO on the market with a total support base over 10 million people worldwide (Entertainment 2008).

2.2.2 Social Research in Virtual Worlds

LambdaMoo, one of the most popular MOOs (MUD Object Oriented, a type of MUD focused on user created content) was developed in Xerox’s famous PARC research lab (Curtis and Nichols 1994). As such, scientists attempting to understand how people combined play with other social, psychological, or economic factors frequently used them as sites for research. Two issues lead to the initial decline of MUDs as a research platform: 1) independent video game development and 2) changes in the growing video game market. It was only with the introduction of large-scale persistent worlds like Star Wars Galaxies and World of Warcraft with millions of users, and large economies generating thousands of dollars in offline money that many researchers began to renew their interest in researching these worlds. However, the interest in these virtual worlds was no longer limited to the basic research that was first conducted in the early days of LambdaMOO.

From the beginning of MUDs, there was a strong interest for many researchers in finding out why individuals chose to play these games (Ducheneaut and Moore 2004). Richard Bartle, developer of the original MUD, was the first to try and craft a descriptive framework of what motivates people to play MUDs (Bartle 1996). He felt that there were four basic types of players: Killers, Achievers, Socializers,
and Explorers (Bartle 1996). Others have tried to improve on Bartle’s framework in order to make it more descriptive or update it for more modern MMOs (Yee 2002; Yee 2006, 2006b, 2006c; Yee, Bailenson et al. 2007). However, the descriptive strength of the original framework remains even after these modifications since the newer authors end up only modifying Bartle’s framework instead of replacing it.

While Bartle was looking at the motivations for playing, other researchers were examining what it meant for individuals to take on whole new identities online. Sherry Turkle was the leading voice of this movement. She looked at how these online worlds allowed players to explore new identities and personalities that they could not pursue in the offline world (Turkle 1997; Turkle 1999). Bruckman (1996) looks at how individuals acting out these identities online formed communities that matched their interests and pursued social relationships. However, not all researchers felt that players gave as strong a value or weight to their online identities as they did to their offline ones. Linderoth (2005) reconceptualized avatars as tools, social roles, and props whose use changed according to the desire of the player and the social situation (Linderoth 2005). Others examined how these changes and new identities changed communication in the virtual world, both enhancing and making it more difficult (Kolko 1999; Roberts and Parks 1999).

As the number of players began to increase, the small group environment that made observations of motivation and identity possible began to shift. The new focus was on the actual worlds and their appeal to a mass populace. Concepts drawn from Human Computer Interaction (HCI) and Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) were applied to virtual worlds, in order to make recommendations about how worlds could better support large-scale social interaction. Cornett (2004) focuses on the experiences of new players in these worlds. The authors found that new players were frequently confused and verbally abused by other players in the worlds (Cornett 2004). While Bartle saw socializing as an important part of interactions in virtual worlds, Ducheneaut & Moore (2004) found that many of the modern MMOs were not designed to facilitate such sociability. Others found that friendships formed in
these virtual worlds could be as rich as ones in the offline world (Utz 2000). Concepts from CSCW were also frequently applied to MMOs. There was a focus on information management and tool production meant to increase the ability of player organizations, called guilds, to communicate and work together within the game (Seay, Jerome et al. 2002 2004; Seay 2004).

Researchers in these worlds also examined the antithesis of cooperative work, which they called griefing. In many worlds, individuals chose to play in such a way as to reduce the enjoyment of the game for other individuals (Foo and Koivisto 2004). In the attempt to understand these types of grief play, it was common for researchers to try and create taxonomy of griefing, categorizing the severity of the crime on a scale of either offline or known online equivalents (Smith 2004). Others attempted to find technical solutions to the problems caused by griefing through reputation systems (Tulathimutte 2006). Finally, some chose to look at the role of moderators and game world owners and how their actions or inactions resulted in changes to players’ social behaviors (Taylor 2006).

HCI and CSCW both focus on communication but can often fail to examine how individuals’ communication can create a social discourse within a virtual world. Researchers out of Sociology and Communications stepped in to help fill in this gap of analysis. Lowood (2006) represents this more recent trend through his examination of the rise of a separate player developed movie industry that focuses on telling stories within a virtual world. Others examine how people shape their lives and habits around the time they play, representing a different type of lifestyle choice (Whang and Chang 2003). While many consider these virtual worlds to be games and used only for play, a small number of researchers have found them to be useful in the offline world as tools for teaching and development of pedagogy (Steinkuehler 2004). Finally, Williams et al. (2006) examine the meta-social structures of guilds in World of Warcraft. They find that these structures often shape the opinions and goals of the players who participate in them (Williams, Ducheneaut et al. 2006).
No matter how far social research has extended into the new virtual worlds there remain large areas of social life in these worlds that are sparsely explored. In particular, protest and collective action have been a part of virtual worlds from almost the beginning. In order to understand the intersection of these two areas, the specifics of Social Movements needs to be examined to understand what areas from this large body of research are important.

2.3 Gaps

The realm of social movements has had many years to develop its area of expertise and theoretical insight. Its boundaries are well established and the area can be said to have moved beyond the argument of what counts as social movements research and what does not. The study of gaming within academic and social science has also made some progress in this area with the establishment of a deep and developing body of research as well as research communities and organizations devoted to its study.

While many social movement scholars have addressed the development of the Internet and its role in some of the more prominent actions of this and last century, there remains a primary focus in the field on non-computer-mediated Communication and activities. Often when technology and the Internet are addressed they are viewed as simply another communication medium that is adopted but with marginal impacts on the theories about mobilization, as can be seen with two of the last three theory lenses discussed in the previous section.

However, with the rise in broadband Internet access throughout the United States and the growing popularity of virtual worlds, it becomes necessary to break beyond these views of Internet, virtualization and mobilization which has dominated the academic discourse to this point. At this time, there exists no clear theory or independent research about the impact and structure of mobilization and protests in virtual worlds. The development of the Internet as a community has dramatically changed the quantity and
quality of actions on the Internet and through virtual worlds. It becomes increasingly possible that an individual can participate in a “second life” during their free time, socializing and fulfill both their personal needs, as well as, the needs of any alternate persona that they adopt online. However, as the barrier between the virtual and the real diminishes it is inevitable for social issues of the offline world to make the transition to a virtual world.

Some research on this has been conducted on the first steps to this path, the Zapatista Movement is the clearest example given in the literature. But focus on movements such as this is only the beginning since the degree of digitilization in any movement moves beyond the favoritism for the offline world that is shown in these early movements and into increasingly virtualized mobilization actions.
Chapter 3
Social Protest: Moving from the Offline to the Virtual

3.1 Social Movements

Since the establishment of social movement theories by academics, many groups have attempted to develop theories that detail the how and why of protest formation. As the face of protest has changed in the last century, so have the theories been adapted to the new circumstances. During the last century, social movement theory saw number of new developments. While one social theory may gain prominence for a decade or two, another would be raised after only a brief period that would be able to better, or more rationally, explain the circumstances.

3.1.1 Framing

Frame analysis of social movements is frequently employed by these researchers to examine how individuals understand the environment around them. They have also been used to describe social movements themselves. In this point of view, the social movement organizations (SMOs) contain and produce views of the world that resonate with their individual members while also shaping how those members think about certain topics (Snow and Bedford 1988; Snow, Soule et al. 2005 2005). These frames are frequently tied into larger cultural ideals, giving them both grounding in the popular psychology and allowing them to align with other frames, hopefully creating a resonance with these other frames (Snow and Bedford 1988). However these additional frames can change the ability of the organization’s current frame to gain acceptance or motivate action if no bridging between past frames and the new one can be made (Tarrow 1983). Through the use of framing SMOs can recruit individuals,
motivate them to action, and tie themselves into the larger culture of the society, making a stable place for their institutionalization (Snow, Rochford et al. 1986).

As Benford and Snow (2000) point out in their examination of framing analysis, the theory has become tied closely to Resource Mobilization and is seen as an important concept when studying the institutionalization of social movements. However, framing theory has been applied beyond the resource mobilization view of social movements and has also been readily accepted by new social movement researchers.

3.1.2 New Social Movements

New social movement research developed in the European community during the 1970s and is currently the major competitor to resource mobilization theory (Carroll 1992). New social movements are theorized as focusing on different goals and having different motivators than previous social movements (Carroll 1992). In new social movement theory, the struggle over identity and social roles becomes the primary area of contention (Habermas 1981). For these authors, the social world is facing a variety of crises about who people are within the society and what roles are legitimate, acceptable, or outdated. The goal of these academics was to avoid the reductionist tendencies of previous social movement scholars (Offe 1985). They also seek to move the power of social movements away from the state or social class as the key actors and instead focus on how groups form identities within a society, defining society through their frame of analysis.
3.2 Motivations for Enrollment and Engagement

With the rise of each new social movement theory there is an apparent change in the reasons why individuals chose to engage in mobilization activities by joining a social movement. Very often these reasons allied closely with the dominant theory of the time and the common perception of what is meant to be a member of a social movement.

3.2.1 Diffusion

How these additional groups identify similar social movements and ideas is often contested. One of the major areas of thought about how these ideas spread to new individuals and groups is through diffusion. Diffusion is often identified as how a new process, thought, or concept spreads throughout a culture or society (Soule 1997). Diffusion is a largely rational process, although it may be unconscious. Strang & Meyer (1993) has examined diffusion in terms of the student divestment movement and shows how similarities between two groups are required for the diffusion of ideas or for processes to spread from one group to another. Through this process of identification, one group adapts new ideas directly or indirectly through mediation from another group (Strang and Meyer 1993).

There are many discussions of what are the channels between groups that allow for diffusion. Social network analysis has become one of the strongest arguments for why diffusion between groups is possible (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994). In social network analysis there is an examination of the ties between individuals and groups (McAdam and Paulsen 1993). Often these ties are referred to as strong or weak depending on a number of factors regarding connecting entities and communication between the individuals. For diffusion theory however, social network analysis plays several roles. The first explains the importance of secondary group members and the weak ties these members often make between two groups (Granovetter 1973). These weak ties often are exposed to the
thoughts and workings of two groups and have contact with primary members of the groups (Granovetter 1973). Through these secondary group members, ideas can become spread through their network of weak and strong ties to other groups those members are affiliated with (Granovetter 1973).

3.3 Collective Action Formation and Structure

In more recent years, many protests have become transnational. These protests don’t affect just a local area, but can affect multi-national and possibly international affairs. These transnational events frequently share a high level goal, but are composed of separate national level groups that work together across geo-political boundaries to achieve their goals (Smith 1998; Smith, Pagnucco et al. 1998). This allows the organizers to gain some level of legitimacy and bargaining power when dealing with others (McMichael 1996). It increases the total amount of resources potentially available to the groups, while also making it more difficult for newer groups to find an area to develop, leading to higher specialization among groups (McMichael 1996). Another unanticipated result of this move to transnational groups was the segmentation between populations within the group as individuals focused their attentions to the local, regional, national, or international levels (Meyer, Frank et al. 1997). It has however, brought up questions about the organizational culture of collective action as different cultures in these segments must be navigated for the accomplishment of the goals of the social movement (Gerhards and Rucht 1992).

3.4 Change Triggers and Factors

Protests have proven to be a very fruitful area of analysis. Because of their shorter and more volatile life cycles, it is easier to see how changes ripple through the protest and affect the outcomes.
These changes can come from many different sources but very often they are grouped into one of three main influences: leadership within the protest, policing and policy, and media.

3.4.1 Leadership

Unsurprisingly, the leadership of a protest has a strong influence and is a primary motivator for many changes during the course of the protest. Often leadership initiates changes when faced with external forces that change the rules of action that the protest had previously been acting on (Imig 1992). It’s during these times that leadership choices can keep a failing protest viable by making strategic decisions about how to handle the changes and respond to the changing situation (Imig 1992). DiMaggio & Powell (1983) identify three types of organizational changes that leaders make which have an impact on the protests success: coercive, mimetic, and normative. They must decide on whether the protest takes a similar structure to other protests in the area, goes back to older models of protest, or forges new paths for protest organizational structure (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Minkoff (1999) has several points that all leaders of protest needs to consider when faced with decisions about the course of a protest. The author points out that making changes once the structure of a protest has been determined increases the chance of failure for that organization (Minkoff 1999). In addition, the effects of any changes that a leader may make face diminishing returns as counter organizations adapt to the new tactics (Minkoff 1999). Each change also has the potential to limit what changes and directions are possible in the future (Minkoff 1999).
3.4.2 Policing

After leadership initiated changes, protests are most frequently changed by triggers initiated by the policy the protest is addressing or the actions of policing (policy enforcing) agencies. McAdam (1983) found that opponents were able to adapt to tactical innovation on the side of the protest leadership and eventually neutralize the effects of changes by the protest group. Through his analysis the author showed that periods of high innovation features much higher protest activity, but that activity quickly dies off as policing and opponent agencies adapt to the changes, forcing the protest group to adapt different and new strategies again (McAdam 1983). These interplays of power relationships can often trigger dramatic changes in protest groups (Koopmans 1993). Often repression by counter groups and policing agencies group fall into one of several strategies: innovation, increased participation of members and through recruitment, and increased militancy in their goals and viewpoints (Koopmans 1993). The actions of the policy makers and state regarding protests have been shown to have dramatic effects on the number of protests (Khawaja 1994). Khawaja (1994) found that protests actually increased when it appeared that the state and policing agencies were purposefully repressing protests and discussion on particular topics. However, when the opponents seems vulnerable on these issues, the number of protests decreased since fewer individuals were willing to provide resources for a protest on a topic that was not seen as central (Khawaja 1994).

3.4.3 Media

Recently the media has gained the attention of protest scholars, as a central influence on how protests are developed, engaged, and viewed. As McLaughlin and Khawaja (2000) noted, media plays a large role in developing the legitimacy of a protest group. When a group has made it into media coverage, they are seen as being both legitimate in terms of the goals that they are pursuing as well as the methods
they use to do so (McLaughlin and Khawaja 2000). However, as others copy these protests, after viewing them in the media, their total impact is reduced as competing groups also gain legitimacy in a similar manner (McLaughlin and Khawaja 2000). The media also acts as a gatekeeper to the general public for many protest groups. Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) discuss how general airtime with the public is limited. Given this fact media outlets become the gatekeepers of important news happenings (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). The selection of media sources to highlight a particular protest underlines the importance of that particular issue, especially if multiple sources cover the same protest (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). This process not only makes the public aware of the issue but it also underscores it as an important issue for public attention (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). However, it is possible for that issue to just as quickly drop from public attention as the media sources withdraw their attention for other matters.

3.5 Protest and Technology

Even before it became popular to browse the Internet, many activists had moved some part of their political life online. Student protesters in China partially organized their resistance in Tiananmen Square through a popular bulletin board system (McCaughey and Ayers 2003). The Zapatista Movement of Mexico had its message reach the world through the newly available World Wide Web (McCaughey and Ayers 2003). Protesters have always been quick to adopt new and emerging technologies to their needs. At the same time, as these technologies become more readily accessible and heavily used, many argue that the ability of movement groups to use these technologies becomes limited.
3.5.1 Utopianism and Dystopianism

When the first public notions about the Internet were being formed in the mid-90s, views about the ability of the Internet to aid in protest were also being developed (Bentivegna 2002). These groups of thought are frequently classified into two categories: utopian and dystopian (Bentivegna 2002). Within the utopian groups, ideas about the ability of the web to spread information and ideas in an unregulated and free environment were common. In particular, many authors chose to examine how this new environment would help to create a “new town hall” where the political issues that mattered to the public could be debated in an equal and open manner and where decisions could be easily reached by consensus (Rheingold 1993).

For the dystopians, this new technology offered several disadvantages. They were quick to counter the idea of a “new town hall” by pointing out that simply being able to answer yea or nay to a question doesn’t actually make for an intelligent debate on a matter (Abramson, Arterton et al. 1988). They additionally argued that the type of debate that the utopians envisioned required very knowledgeable subjects. While the Internet did provide the individuals who used it with easy access to information it also didn’t discriminate between legitimate information and illegitimate information (Shenk 1997). Thus it became more difficult for the public to make a sound, informed decision since they had no clear way of knowing if their information was valid (Shenk 1997). In addition, they saw the Internet as providing the government and corporations with new avenues of power and manipulation (Abramson, Arterton et al. 1988). With this technology, messages and advertising campaigns could be targeted to specific sections of the population, creating a segregation of interests and knowledge among portions of the population that would potentially be allies in the offline world (Abramson, Arterton et al. 1988).

These views continue to hold some control over dialogue about the Internet. Groups, like many open source software projects, Anonymous, the Reddit community, and others use utopian based
arguments to support their efforts. At the same time, national discussion over network neutrality contains many familiar dystopian themes.

### 3.5.2 Types of Activists on the Internet

Others have attempted to engage with how the technology is applied by groups actually using it. Hill and Hughes (1998) examine the groups of individuals that perform some type of activist work online. The authors found that, while the population of general Internet users tends to be middle to upper class and very liberal in their political views, much of the recordable debate that occurs online is very conservative (Hill and Hughes 1998). However, the authors did find some of the points of both the utopian and dystopian writers to be correct. They discovered that web pages allowed for a more equal access to all groups and opinions (Hill and Hughes 1998). In particular, they found that “fringe” groups and ideas were more than proportionally represented in online web pages and discussions, something that is not common in offline political activities (Hill and Hughes 1998). It was also possible for many of these groups to gain a level of legitimacy that they could not get in the offline world by associating themselves, through links and references, with larger and more publicly acceptable social movements (Hill and Hughes 1998).

They also found that citizens of countries outside of the US found the Internet to be a safer haven for political discourse than more traditional print media or face-to-face interactions (Hill and Hughes 1998). This was found to be doubly true in countries whose leaders were less democratic and more given to control of counter or anti-government movements and media (Hill and Hughes 1998). The authors found that many of the citizens in these countries who felt displeased with their government would take their protests online, creating websites meant to spread their viewpoints to the public worldwide (Hill and Hughes 1998). However, if changes were made within that government which favored the protesters point
of view, the number of the protests were found to decline (Johnson, Stone et al. 2008). For these individuals the Internet acts to extend their current realm of protest in the offline world.

3.5.3 Internet as a Continuation of Offline Protest

Many authors have tried to theorize why these protest groups are drawn to the Internet as a new medium for their actions. Kreimer (2001) succinctly summarizes these viewpoints by placing the new medium of the Internet into a continuum of strategies used by protestors throughout American history. The author examines the use of boycotting and pamphlet making by the Revolutionaries of the 1700s up to the emergence of civil disobedience in the 1960s and 70s (Kreimer 2001). Kreimer theorizes that these new technologies enable a sudden growth in protests following their release, eventually to fall to the way side as new forms are enabled by new technology (Kreimer 2001).

Other authors have focused on the fact that Internet based protest and mobilizations often employ the same theories as their offline counterparts but with only limited results due to limited implementation (Wall 2007). Wall (2007) finds that Internet enabled protest communications often have some of the same goals as offline meetings, protest organization and collective identity formation. She did show however that this technology was better suited towards the former since most groups only employed one aspect or part of the process for symbolic development, instead of approaching it from three sides (Brunsting and Postmes 2002; Wall 2007). Russell’s (1999) data contradicts this however. The author discovered that the Zapatista movement was able to successfully create a collective identity both within the group and to the outside media and world through Internet based protests and communications. Russell found that it was the use of mythology to form relationships within the organizations (Russell 1999). It was the usage of these myths and symbols that allowed the geographically divided protestors to form an identity and work together to meet the group’s goals (Russell 1999).
3.5.4 How the Internet Changes Social Movements Theory

Other authors feel that viewing the use of Intent as a simple continuation of protest groups’ habits of absorbing new technologies to be too narrow. Many of these authors feel that the Internet has created a break in Social Movements theory that was not seen after the introduction of previous technologies. In their eyes, theory must be revised or rewritten before real understanding about protest and the Internet can move forward.

Clarks and Themudo (2005) take this point of view when they argue that “Dotcauses” help to create Internet enabled protest identities that break with traditional views of how movements act and organize. The authors believe that politically active websites help to create “transnational action, leaderlessness, profusion of concerns, tactical schisms, and digital/language divides” (Clarks and Thermado 2005). This is a large break with most social movement theories that have traditionally relied on the organization around charismatic leaders, formal organizations, and state level interactions to make their explanations. Other authors point out that these breaks in traditional social theory have arisen because the motivators for mobilization have also changed due to the globalized nature of the Internet (Langman 2005). Langman (2005) argues that these new motivations have created allegiances between social movement organizations require the formation of new collective identities that take into account updated motives and definitions of truth (Langman 2005).

Schussman and Earl (2004) argue that leadership can still be found within these new social movements but that the basis for who becomes a leader has changed. For the authors the role of identity and background play larger roles in determining the course of the movement. However, they also found that these influences do lead to more diverse paths than more traditional views of leadership would theorize. Peckham (1998) argues that these leadership changes are due to the fact that Internet enabled mobilizations bypass the theorized level of the state. With this move away from the state as the central actor comes a change in what resources are being vied for between mobilized forces.
3.5.5 Internet as an Enhancement to Offline Protest

The third point of view taken by many theorists is that the Internet acts to enhance the activities of offline mobilizations but cannot stand as a realm of mobilization by itself. Leizerov (2000) uses this lens to argue that mobilized groups who engage with the Internet as a tool make creative use of the medium to achieve a variety of goals, including leveling a power difference between the group and large corporations. Many authors focus on the use of the Internet as tool for education and rapid dissemination of information. Riemer (2003) examines the case of an anti-mining mobilization that used the Internet to react to changes in the plan for the mine as well as assist in other offline activities like fund raising and recruitment.

Others argue that the process is often the same between online and offline groups; it is simply the scale that needs to be taken into consideration. Blickstein and Hanson (2001) studied the example of Critical Mass using the Internet to spread their concepts about sustainability, a method that does not waste resources and agrees with the movement’s beliefs. Earl (2006) argues that the Internet increases the total segment of the population that is available to the mobilized group for recruitment and funding at lower costs than was previously possible. She also shows how the Internet and activist website engage their audience with a wider availability of actionable protest possibilities, creating a greater diversity of simultaneous protest actions initiated by one group (Earl 2006).

Finally, others show how both online and offline forms of mobilization can complement each other in ways beyond just increased reach for recruitment or funding. In particular, non-traditional Internet news sources can often change and supplement an individual’s knowledge and opinions about political events (Nah, Veenstra et al. 2006 2006). However, both traditional offline media as well as online media need to be present for this effect to take place, with the views of traditional media trumping online media when they are not used together (Nah, Veenstra et al. 2006 2006). Postmes & Brungting
(2002) showed that many activists considered online forms of mobilization to be as valid as their offline equivalents but that motivations for participation can change between the two mediums.

3.6 Key Protest Dimensions

This research employed a comparative structure similar to those used by McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996) and van de Donk, Loader, Nixon and Rucht (2004) to examine how the virtualization of protest alters the nature of protest dimensions. These dimensions were selected from the literature and represent the mobilizing and social structures within social movements (della Porta and Diani, 2006; Garrett, 2006; McAdam et al., 1996). The goal of these ten dimensions is to compare how concepts for social movements have been impacted by ICTs and how they may change when adapted to virtual worlds (McAdam et al., 2001). In particular, these activities are of importance to protest organizers and remain active concepts that can be organized, interpreted, and driven by the leaders of a protest. Although these dimensions are derived from a number of different theoretical backgrounds they may be synthesized together to form a complementary kit of concepts which describe the important dimensions to organizing and enacting protest through all its stages.

3.6.1 Dimension 1: Legality

*Legality* is a measurement of how legal the actions of the protests were both in planning a protest and holding it (della Porta and Diani 2007; Snow, Soule et al. 2007). A second theme that emerges from within the protest literature is the *legality* of the actions taken by the members of the protest instead of focusing on if the protest itself is legal (Haines 1984; Beyerlein and Andrews 2008).
While protest activity and violence are separate concepts within the academic field, the tie between the two is often conflated in order to better understand how they interact when it comes to understand the legality of a protest (Eisinger 1973). The actions of individuals are associated with the legality of the entire event as can be seen in the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle which is frequently viewed as riotous and dangerous event, regardless of the fact that the planning and overall participation was peaceful.

However, this connection between violence and protest is not the only interpretation of legality which may be taken. When the concept of “the law” as an independent representation of a society is associated with a protest a new view of legality emerges. As Marshall (1965) discusses, the non-violent protests of the civil rights movement were seen as illegal by many people within the society simply due to the fact that they disrespected the rule of law that existed at that time (Johnson and Post 1996).

3.6.2 Dimension 2: Shared Identity

*Shared identity* is a measure of how similar individuals within the protest are to each other in regards to their cultural views and identity. Solidarity as a dimension remains important to the study of protest and social movements since the forming of social groups around a shared identity acts as one of the strongest motivators for participation. The role of solidarity within protest theory has shifted from the focus on economic class-based theories of participation supported through Marxian analysis, to more identity based concepts such as gender and feminism, or community and environmental movements. This can include the perceived cultural identity of the protest participants.

Solidarity is caused when a group makes a connection to another group’s cause (Klandermans, 1992; Strang and Meyer, 1993). This connection acts as an important conceptual bridge which highlights the shared goals and purposes between the two groups. By further expanding upon this shared connection
the bridge can be utilized during times of protest to pull from a large field of potential participants. This can utilize social networks built upon shared goals or ideals (McAdam and Paulsen, 1993).

Solidarity creates important structures that protesters may activate to build support on short notice (Stern et al., 2009). In particular, the solidarity between southern churches and the goals of the civil rights movement helped to create structures which provided financial and personnel support, as well as sustaining the focus and message of the overall movement.

Solidarity can be established naturally or created as an attempt at expanding the group of protesters. The usage of slogans and symbols allows geographically divided protesters to form a common identity (Kahn and Kellner, 2004; Russell, 2005). The symbols and messages drawn upon common cultural or sub-cultural concepts which evoke in the viewer a sense of bonding (Hunt and Benford 2007). The protesters are seen as people of a similar background whose goals take an individual’s desires and preferences into account.

3.6.3 Dimension 3: Barriers to Entry

*Barriers to entry* is a measure of if and how individuals are prevented from participating in the protest. This list can contain a number of issues including technical, social, and organizational limits on who may participate. The structure and development of social ties are an important factor for the diffusion of knowledge across a social network. If a network is new enough, because of the introduction of a new communication medium, then it is likely that the ties between individuals are weak, having not had the time that is required to develop the stronger ties. The effect that the strength of social ties and network longevity has is often very important when considering offline limitations on participation.

The easiest way to get individuals to participate in a protest is to ask them. This type of request often comes from within an individual’s social network and is the first step of recruitment in many
movements (McAdam and Paulsen 1993). The strong ties, or close friends and relationships, which people have among their network are the key points through which individuals are drawn into protest actions (Somma 2009).

In addition to networking, some form of consciousness raising or information spreading campaign must also be enacted (Hunt and Benford 2007). As is often the case in offline protest, there are many groups spreading competing messages about a particular political issue and any group who wishes to overcome the inertia of potential participants must address this (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole et al. 2007). In particular, inaction is a very important factor that protest organizers must contemplate when beginning their protest campaign since it is a frequent drain upon the pipeline from uninvolved bystander to a full participant (McVeigh and Smith 1999).

Given the frequency with which protest occurs within modern society, studies of protest have focused upon what factors are important for motivating people to participate (Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Verhulst and Walgrave 2009). In particular, people are inundated with requests for some form of participation frequently but only rarely respond to these requests. As such knowing, what makes these individuals respond to a call for action the first and subsequent times remains important (Verhulst and Walgrave 2009).

3.6.4 Dimension 4: Cost of Information

**Cost of information** is a measure of how much of an investment is required to spread a group’s message to a large group of people. The cost could be measured in terms of time invested, money required, or skill involved in spreading the information.

Cost of Information is the recruiting dimension of protest. Cost of Information seeks to create a broader base of support (Klandermans et al., 1987). Failure at this stage can result in failure of the protest
There are often a large number of movements within a sub-cultural area that are competing for a limited number of participants; being well known benefits the group increasing access to limited resources (Hannan and Freeman, 1987).

Each media channel offers a different number of cues that affect how rich a communication may be and how well the message is communicated (Wellman, Salaff et al. 1996; Wellman, Haase et al. 2001; Haythornthwaite 2002; Haythornthwaite 2005). However, the medium through which it is communicated often has costs associated with it. Channels that offer video as well as audio require more equipment and technical skill in their assembly and use. Email, a text only format, requires very little skill to use but is also poorer in the communication. A group must choose wisely how it wishes to balance this trade-off when desiring to communicate with others online.

Traditional media costs limited the spread of protest messages in the offline world (Bimber, 1998; Riemer, 2003). It is possible to find information about many different and sometimes specialized communities through selective viewing of media (McCaughey et al., 2003). Control over presented information allows groups to also create specifically crafted images through the selective representation of information in order to attract a larger support (Hara, 2008; Hill et al., 1998).

### 3.6.5 Dimension 5: Repression Response

*Repression response* is a measure of when the authorities in a protest situation choose to respond to the protesting group. A proactive response is planned ahead of the protest and is meant to control or diminish the protestor’s impact. A reactive response occurs either during or after the protest. This type of response rarely occurs ahead of time and is meant to allow the authorities to respond to changing events, but at the cost of slow to respond to action taken by the protesters.
The feelings of authorities towards the protesting group and their anticipation of events affects how they respond in these instances (Lichbach 1987; Koopmanns 1997; McPhail and McCarthy 2005). How the authorities chose to respond to protestors has a large impact upon the outcome of the protest and how future protests are received. A strong, repressive response can often lead to more protesting as individuals push harder for their rights (Haines 1984; Barnes 1987). A soft response may lead to fewer protests as the needs of the protesters are met and overall they feel they have a say in the system. The interaction of protest and repression for a cycle in which small changes by one side result in shifting the overall premise of the protest between two poles of cooperation and competition (Tarrow 1993). As the concept of protest cycles or protest waves shows, this give and take between repression and protest plays an important role in the violence, frequency, and support which protests may receive during any particular time frame (Tarrow 1983; Tarrow 1993; Tarrow 1998).

3.6.6 Dimension 6: Influence

Influence is a measure of how much control and power a group has over the decision making process within their community (Amenta and Caren 2007). The power to actually make changes in a situation closely resembles the battles of the early 1960s where individuals decided to pursue protest in order to ensure that their desires and needs were represented within the local, state, and national levels of culture and government (Snow, Soule et al. 2007). For these people, protest was not only a way of expressing a personal identity or solidarity with members of a group, but also a political claim that they had a right to make changes to their spheres of interaction (Gamson 1995). The concept of protest was no longer seen as a simple method for achieving political or economic equality but instead was framed as one of making sure that those who represented the larger population sough to include and validate the experiences of all members of that population equally.
Although this is often viewed from a rigidly objective perspective the emotions and interactions which arose as part of this dimension of influence play an important role in how protest events play out (Jenkins 1982; Kitschelt 1986). Those who are emotionally tied to the concept that they belong within a community and have some type of representative power within that community draw upon their emotions as a motivating and mobilizing factor which spurs and sustains protest (Jasper 1998).

3.6.7 Dimension 7: Message Diffusion

*Message diffusion* is a measure of how communications before, during, and after a protest are spread to the protesters and the larger population (Tarrow 1998). There are many potential media channel choices, each of which comes with its own benefits and shortcomings (Haythornthwaite 2002; Haythornthwaite 2005). A channel may be interactive, allowing for both the senders and the recipients to discuss the message with each other. It may also be broadcast. This is a one-way message that offers no feedback from the receivers and requires very little input overall.

Each type of media offers specific affordances regarding its richness and cost, and each has a certain degree of interactivity that it permits (Wellman, Salaff et al. 1996; Haythornthwaite 2002; Haythornthwaite 2005). A web video hosted on a site like YouTube provides a lot of richness to any message due to the ability to include visuals as well as sounds. This format however does not allow viewers to reply or otherwise give feedback to the message of the video. A newspaper article on the other hand provides for a somewhat more interactivity since people are welcome to reply to the paper with comments or opinion editorials.

Within protest studies message diffusion is often viewed in terms of media effect or how the choice to consume a form of media changes participation (Salzman and Aloisi 2009). Protests can be described in many different contexts and through many different media. The choice of which media is
allowed or sought to publish news about a protest can have very dramatic effects on that protest
(McCarthy, McPhail et al. 1996; Green and Pearson 2005). In particular, the type of media chosen can
impact how the public views the protest, the likelihood of success, and continued existence of a protest
group (McCarthy, McPhail et al. 1996; Smith, McCarthy et al. 2001). Within this view, media and
movements are two interacting forces which both have goals, desires, and failings which they try to
accomplish or overcome by working together (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Gamson 1995).

3.6.8 Dimension 8: Anonymity

Anonymity addresses how identifiable an individual is at the current moment and in the future
given a record of their current presence. Although anonymity is a concept which is discussed in many
analyses of protest it is usually used in reference to tracking communications or preventing repercussion.
Kreimer (2001) addressed how the role of anonymity within communication aided protesters during “each
era of American history.” Within communication practices, anonymity has a long history of use as a tool
for achieving a groups aims, going all the way back to anonymous death threats in the early 18th century
(Weils 1979).

Kreimer (2001) particularly addresses how the increased use of the Internet among protest
groups has decreased some of the anonymity they came to expect previously, stating “Visibility entails
vulnerability.” The role of identity is particularly important for many protest groups since remaining just a
face in the crowd enables activists to mix with larger groups or for organizers to keep from being
identified early in an event (Kreimer 2001).

Others have pointed out that anonymity is an important concept under both the First Amendment
and within the development of communities. Branscomb (1995) views anonymity as being one of the key
forces within modern discussions of free speech, alongside autonomy and accountability. Unbalancing this triad creates dangerous situations that impede the rights of individuals.

3.6.9 Dimension 9: Organizational Flexibility

Organizational flexibility refers to the ease and speed with which an organization responds to contextual changes or new pressures placed upon it. The ability of an organization to meet changing demands has long been considered one of the basic tenants of collective action theory (Gamson 1990). It is through this view of organizational flexibility as important for the success of a protest that many new theoretical advances within the understanding of protest organization have been made (Gerhards and Rucht 1992).

Unlike the commonly held view, the age of a social movement is not necessarily more flexible than older and better established groups (Minkoff 1999). A willingness to adapt to changing circumstances if often seen as a beneficial trait but the chance for failure does not decrease over time (Minkoff 1999). Being too flexible of an organization can often lead to less success as a social movement and eventual failure.

Given the demands placed upon modern organizations it is often seen as a positive when an organization can adapt quickly and is not constrained by the physical aspects of its management. As Child & McGrath (2001) show the positive face value of a flexible organization can be balanced against the pitfall of one that is too destructured if several core issues are adequately addressed (Child and McGrath 2001).
3.6.10 Dimension 10: Framing

Goffman (1974, p. 21) introduces the concept of frames as follows: "When an individual in our Western society recognizes a particular event, he tends, whatever else he does, to imply in this response (and in effect employ) one or more frameworks or schemata of interpretation…[which] is seen as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful." In other words, we use frames to interpret our experience, to create a package of ideas, phrases, and rhetorical constructs that would encourage certain interpretations and discourage others.

Frame analysis of social movements is frequently employed by researchers to examine how individuals understand the environment around them. They have also been used to describe social movements themselves. In this point of view, the social movements contain and produce views of the world that resonate with their individual members while also shaping how those members think about certain topics (Snow and Bedford 1988; Snow, Soule et al. 2005). These frames are frequently tied into larger cultural ideals, giving them both grounding in the popular psychology and allowing them to align with other frames, hopefully creating a resonance with these other frames (Snow and Bedford 1988). However these additional frames can change the ability of the organization’s current frame to gain acceptance or motivate action if no bridging between past frames and the new one can be made (Tarrow 1983). Through the use of framing social movements can recruit individuals, motivate them to action, and tie themselves into the larger culture of the society, making a stable place for their institutionalization (Snow, Rochford et al. 1986).

Collective action frames differ from the frames used in everyday life in that they are intended to “activate adherents, transform bystanders into supporters, exact concessions from targets and demoralize antagonists” (Snow 2004, p. 384). In addition, social movements are more likely to arise when extant cultural frames are ambiguous, open to question and contestable (Snow 2004). Another difference from everyday interpretive frames is that collective action frames are more likely, and more quickly, to become
encoded within organizations. Lastly, unlike everyday interpretive frames, the collective action framing process takes on a special role in that the use of language, the discursive framing process is seen as essential to the elaboration and articulation of the frame. This is particularly important when we focus on two key elements of the framing processes, the process of frame alignment and the process of frame articulation and elaboration.

3.7 Conceptual Framework
When each of these individual dimensions is understood, their role within a protest may be better articulated so that the interaction and change each dimension undergoes during a particular event may be analyzed to form a comparison between the application in the offline and the virtual worlds. While a protest may be spoken of as a single event there are several stages or steps through which it must go and in which many different dimensions of organization are working. Each of these stages and the relevant dimensions are shown in Figure 1 shown below.

By examining the completed kit of dimensions throughout their application to the cases, the alteration caused by their application to a virtual world becomes clearer. The goal of this research is to understand how the dimensions of protest are adapted to a virtual environment. After examining the two cases, it is clear that these dimensions can be successfully applied to virtual environments and protests.
outside of their original areas. This allows the existing theory about protest to be expanded into the virtual
realm. However, the changes caused by the transition to the virtual need to be highlighted since they
cause the dimension to shift, making a break with the original definition and requiring the establishment
of new theory for the virtual instead of simply application of existing theory.
Chapter 4  
Research Methods and Design

The gaps within the literature examined previously bring to light several important questions about the theories for understanding protest in virtual worlds. The purpose of this study is to develop a framework for addressing these theoretical gaps. This framework is developed through an analytical response to the questions posed by the current theoretical understanding of collective action repertoires and their adaptation to virtual world “realities”.

4.1 Research Questions

The issues experienced by the different groups involved in the virtual collective actions raise several new questions about the increased use of technology in protest movements. Since the trend in creating more socially involved and immersive worlds is unlikely to reverse, there needs to be a better understanding of how the offline social processes of the offline world are adapted to the virtual realm. Given the ubiquity of collective action in virtual worlds and its importance in shaping power interactions between authorities and social groups, this area provides one of the richest data sets available to begin researching such social processes. In light of these trends, this research project examined what is the role of technology in the adaptation of collective action repertoires to virtual world situations.

The goal of this research has three parts: 1) to develop a framework for understanding the rise, power, and dissolution of protest in virtual worlds, and 2) to use this framework to extend current social movement theory to virtual worlds, and finally 3) to apply traditional methods of qualitative analysis to new areas of study. To achieve these goals this research answered the following questions:

RQ0: How does the virtualization of collective action repertoires change how collective action is organized and enacted?
This question covers the broad intersection of technology, society, and collective action that may be found in virtual worlds. To better answer this question it must be broken down further to examine how power structures and repression are handled and changed by virtualization (RQ₁), and how the combination of entertainment and marketing that surrounds many of these larger worlds affects the mass media’s portrayal of any collective action (RQ₂).

RQ₁: How do the affordances made by virtual worlds in collective action affect the outcomes of the action and reactions by the authorities?

RQ₂: How do the mass media’s views of virtual worlds affect the credibility of the collective action?

This research is primarily a case study meant to examine two historical virtual collective action events and expand current collective action theory into the digital realm. This study is interdisciplinary in nature and draws on the literature and work accomplished in sociology, political science, culture studies, and information technology. This study should be understood to draw from all these areas and create a bridge between these distinct disciplines.

### 4.2 Data Collection

Unlike the requirements of other forms of research, the study of virtual worlds shifts the focus from travelling across geo-spatial distances to an expansion of knowledge regarding uniquely online culture and locations. While the physical and monetary travel requirements are reduced there is a significant increase in the amount of exposure time needed to successfully complete a virtual world study. This increased demand for cultural immersion requires several unique such as: access to each of these virtual worlds and their associated communication technologies, the available time and concentration to
record and involve oneself with the data and culture of each world, and the flexibility to navigate the many, sometimes subtle, differences that exist between them. The social and environmental context of each of these virtual worlds is different enough that access to each of them was a requirement for this study to develop a rich contextual understanding. The data for this study was collected and analyzed over a period of two years. Two data collection techniques were used in this study to build the case studies for analysis: 1) computer-mediated discourse analysis, and 2) semi-structured interviews.

These techniques are well established as valid and reliable methods for data collection within the academic community. Soon after starting this research however it quickly became apparent that these accepted and standard methods for studying social interaction were not well adapted for their application to a virtual world. The study of virtual worlds provided unexpected challenges that changed the nature of my research and forced me to adapt my tools to the context of doing research in this environment. Particularly, the textural nature of virtual worlds meant that a strong focus upon interaction needed to be well supplemented with an awareness of how communication could be limited or intentions altered in such a setting. Also, being unable to watch as individuals interacted meant that identifying one individual as an important resource or player within the community was difficult. The scale of most virtual worlds means that it becomes impossible to know and be present for important actions and interactions. Finally, information needed to be carefully considered and substantiated before it could be incorporated into the data collection. Individuals have few reasons to invest in providing accurate information to researchers and can often provide unverifiable or unreliable information.

4.2.1 Overall Study: Case Study

This study employed comparative case studies. The case studies were drawn from protest events that have been reported or otherwise recorded in two virtual worlds. The case studies were of major
importance to the authorities and denizens of each virtual world. The two cases developed for this work are from within Eve Online, and Second Life. These protests were selected because they occurred in well-known and impactful virtual worlds and represent a good sample of action over a number of years. Second Life and Eve Online were selected as sites for the case analysis because of their representation of the different types of virtual worlds that are available for use today. Each world also has been around for several years and has undergone developmental changes during that time that mimic the growth and change of an offline environment. The environmental and structural differences between these virtual worlds lead to the adaptation of different methods of collective action. Table 1 below gives a brief description of each virtual world and the collective action that occurred within it.

**Table 1: List of Case Study Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IBM Strike in Second Life</strong></td>
<td>Italian IBM workers bargaining with the head corporation over a new contract strike after having a beneficial pay program cut. Large population. 2000 people show up for the online protest. Many others lend support through a digital network and series of support sites. Many of the union demands were met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eve Online Steering Board Formation</strong></td>
<td>Players of the game EVE Online accused the developers and hosting company of the game of manipulating the game and additions to content to favor some in-game entities over others. CCP the hosting company of EVE Online selected representative players from the protesters and flew them to the hosting company. These members formed an overview committee meant to oversee any changes to the world before they are implemented.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This research made use of comparative case studies. The selection criteria for these cases were based upon Yin’s (2003) concept of the logic of theoretical replication. The cases were used to create two contrasting studies that highlight theoretical consistencies regarding how collective action strategies and repertoires are adapted for use in virtual worlds.

Within the original selection of potential cases, some alternative cases were explored as part of a thorough data comparison prior to the selection of the two cases addressed in this dissertation. These
additional cases cover some of the most recent as well as the earliest recorded instances of virtual world protest.

Table 2: Alternative cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **World of Warcraft**        | **Warrior Protest**  
  • Warriors protesting changes that they felt would make them less useful overall.  
  • Between normal server lag for this city and the influx of new people in it the server crashed  
  • Blizzard now monitors city populations more closely and begins to break up and ban people trying to form similar protests quickly. |
| **Everquest Protests**       | • In 2003, Warriors from Everquest staged a sit-in due to what they felt was a neglect of their class.  
  • Players allowed others to use the area in order to avoid disruption of the protest by moderators.  
  • Outcome: Sony Online started a chat session with the warriors to discuss changes they were planning on making. They did this before the set date of the sit-in. The organizers postponed the sit-in until after this chat period. |
| **Ultima Online Protests**   | • Individuals upset with a series of bugs and glitches found within the game system storm the castle that holds the avatar of the game’s primary designer and kill his avatar.  
  • Population: Small  
  • Outcome: The hosting company began a series of patches meant to fix many of the bugs pointed out by the protest’s participants. |

This group represents the largest virtual worlds that Western society has experienced since virtual worlds became a popular past-time and solid market within the gaming industry. While each cases represents only one virtual world they also stand in for many additional protests which happened in all five worlds on multiple occasions. For example, World of Warcraft alone experiences some form of civil unrest on a yearly or bi-annual basis, including the formation of a players’ union, revolts by other classes, and massive dot bombing campaigns meant to make the main forums at World of Warcraft’s website useless.
The two cases that were selected for this study are representative of the larger sub-set of virtual world protest which is experienced by players and corporations regularly. Given the time period and internal frequency that all the cases represent this is obviously a common phenomenon. The Second Life and EVE Online cases represent more recent events among the wider case selection.

Given the nature of Internet-based research, these two cases were pursued for study since much of the information regarding them would still be available and could be relied upon for additional data gathering or analysis. When some exploration of the alternative cases was pursued it became noticeable that the sometimes ephemeral nature of Internet data made a complete collection of data sources impossible. In regards to the Ultima Online and Everquest cases, many of the pages which are still online contain only brief overview’s of events or are simply a collection of hyperlinks to other pages which are no longer in existence. While the use of Internet archives, like the Wayback machine, is possible, the nature of archiving data proved to be hard to overcome. Occasionally, the page needed for data simply wasn’t archived during the relevant period of time. Often, when such a page was available, it would contain some useful information but would be missing others, such as internal hyperlinks which were broken, only one page of a website would be archived, or pictures and other alternative, non-text media would be missing.

This process further compounded the difficult nature of case selection and justification. Both cases selected for this study were of successful protests. Of the five cases considered, all cases had some level of success in achieving their goals, even if they did so incompletely or in a fashion which they did not intend. When gathering data from online sources, like is necessary when doing such Internet culture studies, memorable, big, or very successful stories are the ones which are most likely to be recorded and preserved. This introduces a bias into the researcher’s ability to select cases carefully since examples of unimpressive or unsuccessful protests will be buried and quickly lost within records or are simply never recorded at all. Of the previous examples given for protest within World of Warcraft, collectable datasets
are now difficult to find simply due to the fact that most were unsuccessful in achieving their goals or were simply not very large. The reason that they are remembered is due more to the author’s inclusion and long history as a World of Warcraft player and community member than from any particular piece of collected data.

While the Internet does allow for many pages and pieces of information to remain in existence for long periods of time, it also allows for older pieces of information to disappear, leaving only references to their existence behind. Due to this, more recent cases, such as those within Second Life and EVE Online, would be the most likely to contain valid, fully accessible data sets from which a detailed study could be founded. Since the nature of this project was to view the actions and events of the protest with the lens of theoretical analysis a wide selection of data sources was needed to ensure that the material would be deep enough to allow for analysis, something which the cases like Ultima Online simply can no longer provide.

A case study is a method of research that excels at placing an action or problem of interest within its contextual setting. Cases are frequently complex and social in nature. These two factors make it difficult to separate or remove the problem and its results from the context in which it occurred (Yin 2003). It is by looking at these problems within their setting that the richness of the give and take between context and problem is best understood (Yin 2003).

There are several reasons why case study was selected as an appropriate methodology for this research project. The first is that case study, as a tool for looking at complex social situation and interactions, has become an accepted methodology within the field of Information Science. The need for theoretical development in this area means that this study needs to address the contextual conditions that lead to the actions that occurred in these virtual worlds. The second is the fact that these individual protests are tied directly to the context which they are situated in and cannot be understood as a separate and disconnected entity. The third reason is that case studies excel in understanding problems in areas where there is little previous research to guide the work of the researcher. As established previously, the
area of virtual world protest, as a body of research, is underdeveloped within both Information Science and the broader social sciences community. While there is some research that occurs in other areas, the unique manifestation of this social phenomenon meets a level of difference which makes established work only partially relevant.

Case study is a valued method for this research due to the need for theoretical development in this area. This study needs to address the contextual conditions that lead to the protest within each virtual world. The needs of developing and testing the theoretical model described in this research means that the full process of the development and implication for protest in each of these virtual worlds needs to be understood. Case studies have long been accepted as a valuable tool in the performance of similar goals (Stake 1978; Benbasat, Goldstein et al. 1987; Darke, Chaiken et al. 1998; Flyvbjerg 2006). This goal is reached by examining the shared contextual features of both virtual worlds which prompted or promoted collective action. The specific contextual details that occurred within each virtual world also provided valuable insights into the features of collective action within that world. The goal of this research is to make claims regarding the causes for the adaptation of collective action strategies to social situation in a virtual world. This focus on causal explanations requires a longer historical viewpoint that extends the time period being studied beyond just that of the actual collective action into the actions and repercussions that occur both before and after the event. These requirements made the use of case study analysis an excellent methodology for this study.

Given the unique affordances of the Internet, there are many data sources available that can act as potential sources for the development of a case study. There are archived web pages, forums, blogs and journals. The Internet as a communication tool at heart also means that interviews and surveys also are available to the researcher. Each of these different methods can be used in case study development and can help lead to a richer and more fully developed case. This study used each of these forms of textual data as it was possible to collect, but each type may not have been used for support of every case. These
sources include: news websites, forums, blogs and journals, general web sites, as well as interviews with the organizers who planned each action. These records contain information regarding the details surrounding the event but also include information about the different perspectives and the social context that the groups involved perceived in the event. The interviews provided more specific details regarding personal interpretations of events.

4.2.2 Method 1: Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis

Computer-mediated discourse analysis was used to build a general understanding of the timeline of events based upon documents which were posted before, during, and after the date(s) of the protest. Discourse analysis was used to provide environmental context for the mindset and social atmosphere of each virtual world at the time of the protest. Additionally, the third thing discourse analysis was used for the identification of key actors within the protest event. The documents selected for analysis were written by or focus on the viewpoints of specific stakeholders regarding their view of and role in events.

Computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) is a method for looking at how the adopted language in a social situation explains not only the obvious information passed through the text but also secondary, implicit information regarding social features and viewpoints not directly discussed in the body of the work (Wodak 1989; Herring 2004). This viewpoint sees the work as being a rich and complex object that has many layers of meaning and structure present (Kaplan 1990). CMDA uses a language-focused approach to look at phenomena at different level, from the micro-level of sentence structure to the macro-level of identity expression (Herring 2004). This means that the meaning of any particular object of study does not draw its meaning from the words written on the page but instead from the ability of the author to encode their views and the reader to decode the author’s views but to also create their own meaning of the work (Kaplan 1990; Kress 1990).
While the level of focus for computer-mediated discourse analysis may vary, the view within this research focused upon the highest two levels: interaction and social behavior. Within these levels language is seen as a type of social practice that results from actors who are grounded in a particular viewpoint and context (Herring 2004; Stommel 2008). This is different from other forms of discourse and text analysis since it understands that the contextual surroundings of producers and interpreters of text may have many different possible relationships (Kress 1990). The community is not a passive receptor of information processed and passed along in a text. Individuals are active in their interpretation of a text and apply a meaning that is relevant to their social context and unique relationship to the text and the author. Unlike other forms of discourse analysis, CMDA understands there are additional social factors, like history and ideology that shape the relationship of a reader to a specific text or to all text from a specific source. Authors encoded an ideology into a body of text through their selection of materials and sources that stories are drawn from and their word choice and positioning of objects within the story (Kress 1990). Continued use of ideological frames by a single author become their “voice” and are understood and interpreted by the readers of the text. These may become familiar over time and even taken for granted, creating a history between the author and reader.

While CMDA employs the use of the term text in their analysis, text is understood to be not only the wordage that appears on any type of document but any information that is encoded and stored, such as video, images and diagrams, sounds, etc. Many other forms of textual and document analysis focus on the meaning encoded within a single text and do not examine these texts comparatively (Dellinger 1995). CMDA is one of the few that focuses on the larger social context of a document. Each text or document represents one sample within a larger social discourse and interpretive history between and author and their readers. CMDA seeks to examine these larger structures through the encoded language. As such, this methodology does not focus on analyzing the specifics of a single document but frequently draw from many documents or text written about a particular event or by a particular author (Herring 2004).
Herring (2004) identifies four ways, or levels of linguistics, in which CMDA can be applied: structure, meaning, interaction, and social function. Since CMDA is a linguistics based method of analysis, each of these levels focuses on communication at a verbal (textual level). However, the application of CMDA at each level of application produces very different results for analysis. For this study the level which is of greatest interest is social function in order to find identity markers, humor and play, face management, conflict, use and abuse of power, norm articulation and enforcement. The first step in the process for all text sources is to identify the Technological Variables before addressing Situational Variables (Herring 2004). After this analysis the social function of the language was assessed for each of the relevant markers for this study. Of particular interest are identity markers, play, conflict, use, abuse and negotiation of power and norm articulation and enforcement. The use of identifiers such as in-group abbreviations, jokes, etc. are used as reference points to analyzing these social functions. It is through this analysis that the broader concepts and conflicts between the various groups are encoded within specific linguistic features (Herring 2004).

To apply this method to a specific example from this research the following screenshot of a discussion from the Kugutsumen forums will be analyzed:

Figure 2: Example textual conversation
As stated previously, the first step in the application of CMDA is to identify the technological variables. We know that this is an asynchronous message. There is a message-by-message transmission and only 25 messages or so can fit on a single viewable page but there can be an almost unlimited number of pages. The message is persistent unless one or both users choose to delete their conversation. While these two examples are text only the forum does allow for limited use of images and emoticons. Both posters are identified but there is no verification process at the forum so their identities may be manufactured or real, so identity is ambiguous. Within this forum filtering of messages in uncommon and except for true spam messages, most will be posted for viewing.

The second step is to address the situational variables which are at play here. The discussion shown in the picture involves at least two people but would be recorded as a many-to-many public conversation in which no one is using their real identity. The characteristics of two individuals are unknown in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, socio-economic class but assumptions can be made given basic information about the larger population (probably white, male, adults, of middle class or higher standings, well educated). Both are obviously players of EVE Online either currently or in the past and are experienced users of internet forums. Given the nature of the ambiguous identities it is impossible to determine if the individuals know one another but the overt hostility implies they do not. The purpose of the communication is to address the question of how legal the actions taken by member of the community were and whether there is a legitimate legal case. The tone is extremely hostile and aggressive but this fits within the norms accepted by this community. Code is written in U.S. English using ASCII text.

At this point in the analysis the particular linguistic phenomena that are relevant to the researcher’s level of observation are addressed. Given that the interest for this study is mainly upon social function, this will be the primary analysis completed now. The first noticeable social function is the selected identifier in the first message. This individual wished to be known as a “dev alt” or developer for CCP on a computer that is not their work or home machine. This implies that they wish to have their
position of authority on the topic under discussion understood by others in the forum. The tone this user 
adopts through the usage of the *sigh* textual and tone of their message “You have NO case” 
underscores this focus on themselves as a belabored authority who should be respected and listened to by 
the community. The use of larger words interwoven with common cultural abbreviations along with 
references to GoonSwarm’s history within the community, as well as the threat of a lawsuit, show the 
aggressive and hostile nature of this communicator. They do not mean to clarify the discussion or calmly 
address the topic, despite what the literal interpretation of their words suggest. Given both of these, their 
power relationship that this individual sees is IADA > forum member. This individual sees those on this 
board as their inferiors who must be corrected forcefully when they make a mistake.

The same analysis would then take each of the messages following this one into account using a 
similar method of analysis. After the social function analysis is complete, analysis of phenomena at any 
other levels which may be relevant for this document are recorded such as the meaning of exchanges or 
symbols that were recorded. In particular, the meaning behind this exchange could be recorded not only at 
the basic level, as was done in the situational awareness, but also in regards to intent. For this particular 
example, the intent of creating a distraction or “trolling” would be recorded.

Given the nature of this research project, computer-mediated discourse analysis was an excellent 
methodological fit. First, the goal of CMDA in understanding the larger social context of a text fits well 
with the method and goals of case study research. Secondly, while an individual text may be of use to this 
research, the discourse that occurs within the larger virtual worlds’ community regarding a particular 
event can only be understood through a cross-document analysis of ideology and social meaning. CMDA 
excel in this form of comparison since its goals are to understand the larger discourse instead of any 
specific meaning found in a single work. Thirdly, CMDAs viewpoint as a critical method meshes well 
with any studies that are political or contentious in nature since it attempts to understand ideologies and 
their spread and consumption within a community. CMDA views all text as attempting to spread a
viewpoint to the interpreters of the work. It does not view documents or text as value-neutral objects, but instead sees them as value laden ones. Since there are often many stakeholders that participate in virtual world protests, understanding the texts and messages that are being passed implicitly within a body of text helps to shape an understanding of the viewpoint of each group regarding the event.

Publically accessible documents acted as the body of textual and social work upon which the discourse of a protest rests. The majority of the documents that are used for this study are available on public websites. Similar types of documents were looked at across all the case studies in order to maintain a consistent and reliable analysis. There were two types of websites from which texts were selected for this study. The first set was drawn from forums, both official and unofficial, dealing with the virtual world in question. These forums often contain inputs from many participants of the virtual world and their opinions at the time the post was made. Several types of forums were drawn from in order to make sure that the posts were not biased towards a certain viewpoint. These forums included the official forums hosted by the virtual world, unofficial forums at popular websites like allakhazam.com, and large forums hosted by individual guilds or in-game entities that are frequented by many visitors or players outside of that guild. For the EVE Online case, the majority of documents were collected from two forums:

EVE Online official forums: These are the official forums for EVE Online which are hosted by CCP and connected to the website for the game. They tend to draw a diverse group of players from the casual “weekend warrior” to the dedicated experts. Due to the diverse background the topics in the forum can vary widely and often feature heated discussion. However, they rarely incite discussion among the larger community.

Kugutsumen forums: This one of a number of unofficial forums run by a player and devoted to the topic of EVE Online. The goal of this forum is to post interesting or new facts about the political structure of the game or the player organizations within it. Anytime there is a major promotion, kill, conquest, or loss within EVE Online it is likely to be discussed on Kugutsumen. Additionally, the site
acts as a rumor mill, taking in theories and guesses about player organizations and utilizing data found elsewhere on the forum or internet to substantiate its hypotheses. The community often considers the Kugutsumen site and its features a controversial but valuable resource.

There were approximately twelve documents which qualified for this category. Most of these documents were forums related to the world of EVE Online. In particular, the official EVE forums and the forums for Kugutsumen.com were the most common sources for documents which match these criteria.

Topics or issues in forums that have lost popularity tend to be pushed into the archives and rarely have comments made after the event has happened. This provides a snapshot in time approach to finding relevant information about how individuals felt about the buildup of the event. It also gives some idea of how long a topic was under discussion. If a forum thread has an origination date that is several months previous to the timestamp on the last comment it can be deduced that this thread dealt with an issue that remained relevant for that time period. Forum threads also excel at getting multiple statements from players in the virtual world that contain their opinion on a topic of interest in only a few sentences or paragraphs. This type of sample is a way of gaining a “general consensus” opinion of the participants and moderators of the forum and through them an idea of the possible opinions of the population at large. The documents within this category were selected upon how closely the topic of each document was related to the events of the protest. If the protest was mentioned in only one or two posts that document was unlikely to be counted. However, a document where the protest or surrounding context was the major point of discussion would be saved for analysis. Additionally, some documents from the Second Life case were classified as this type if they contained many comments in which a discussion formed, even if that was not the original intent of the document.

The second area that was drawn from includes personal web logs (blogs) that were updated during the time periods before and after the events. Blogs provide an individual’s opinion on an event or
issue that they feel strongly about or are interested in. Given many of the qualities of virtual worlds there
are numerous blogs available that focus on the events that occur in a particular, or across several virtual
worlds, and are frequently updated. Blogs feature a long post by the blog’s author in which they cover
some event or issue, often framing the piece in their own opinion and worldview. Very often, blogs also
include a section for commentary from readers where they may debate the point of view of the author or
provide additional information that they feel needed to be addressed in the original blog post. The benefit
of blogs over forum threads is that the posts tend to be better thought out and longer in terms of the
contribution of the individual to the topic. If the topic is something of interest to the readers of the blogs a
discussion involving the blog may arise which expands well beyond the scope of the original topic and
may continue for some time after the interest in the same topic in a forum has died out. Blogs also act as
centers for information from many different sources to come together into a single discussion providing a
larger basis for discussion and enhancing the topic in terms of its applicability to other areas of interest for
the blogger and their readers.

These blogs were the most important data collection site for the Second Life case. Within blogs
there are many examples but really only two types:

The personal blog (Loic Le Meur Blog): The blogger Loic Le Meur exemplifies this type of blog.
The topics are selected because they either interest the blogger or fit within the narrow definition of the
purpose of the blog. Instead of simply relating events the bloggers focus on providing insight and
interpretations of the stories they post. They often assume their reading audience is well grounded in the
material they address and do not fear pontificating or including their personal opinions alongside
objective observations.

The professional blog (AFL-CIO blog): These blogs are run by one or a small group of
individuals who are part of a larger corporation and who restrict their blogging to topics provided by or
relevant to that organization. The AFL-CIO blog focuses on the actions of the American union and upon
other actions which it considers important. The bloggers are more restricted in the materials that they may post. Since their posts reflect the opinion of the group they are affiliated with they must maintain politically correct discussions and are not really allowed to voice opinions outside the “company line”. Opinion and observation are also interwoven here, as they represent the opinion of the company or group instead of the individual.

In addition to blogs, the second category also includes online news. Articles from news sources tend to focus on a topic or issue at a higher level and get comments or opinions from several different sources, something both blogs and forums are poor at doing. Many news articles provided a level of classification to show how the article impacts other news and issues that the news outlet is reporting on. While blogs and forums tend to focus on the point of view of the individual, new articles move up the ladder, looking at an issue from a group, corporate, regional or national level.

Online news had two varieties or types of websites within it:

News Aggregators (The Register): These websites, in which The Register featured prominently, draw from user submissions to determine interesting and popular topics. They usually include some type of rating or view system that will track the popularity or “hotness” of an item. The Register provides a brief overview of the news item, links to contacts or additional information, and a comments section for others to leave input. These aggregators are often built around a particular topic or theme but can also draw upon topics outside of their normal material if enough users consider the story important enough to submit.

News Websites (The Guardian): News websites like The Guardian differ from aggregator sites by focusing on more generalized content that can be modified or included in the offline print version of the publication. While these websites have thematic sections, the purpose of the overall site is that of a generalist explaining events to a broad population base who may have little or no background in the story.
These websites reach the broadest number of people and often take the highest level of discussion in order to clarify the point of the article and provide a sound understanding of events.

The bulk of documents collected fell within the second category of blogs and news articles. Around fifty-five pages of this type of document were saved, far outnumbering the total documents within category one. The documents saved cover a wide range of users, from human resources personnel at IBM to union interest blogs. Many new website were also included in this category, including write-ups by Slashdot, WIRED, PhillyInfo, and The Register. These documents were selected and saved if they occurred within a certain timeline of the events. They represented a new level of observation of the event, or added a new perspective or analysis of the event. Documents which simply repeated press releases or other blog posts were not saved since they often had few comments and added no additional information.

Iterative use of discourse analysis was not only used to create a description of the events in the communities’ perspectives, it was also used to look at how the community builds meaning and a shared definition through iteration of the news events and community based discussion of them.

4.2.3 Method 2: Interviews

Interviews were used to supplement the events detailed in the timeline for each protest with more precise details or viewpoints of individual actors. They were also used to develop an understanding of the processes that lead to the outcome of the collective action in each world. Finally, interviews provided the rationale behind the decisions made leading up to, and during, the collective action.

Interviews are a very common method of collecting data from individuals where not only the data that an individual may have is important but their viewpoint and personal interpretation of the data is needed as well. Interviews engage an interviewer and interviewee in a question and answer session where the interviewer engages in a conversation with the interviewee using questions (Mason 2002). There are
generally held to be three types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. This research used a semi-structured format. In this type of interview, the interviewer poses a list of questions to ask the interviewee, but may alter or add additional questions to the interview process depending on their needs or the flow of the conversation. This differs from a normal conversation since the interviewer is directing the entire conversation with some specific goal in mind. In addition, an interview is frequently non-reciprocal since the interviewee is asked to answer questions but only rarely is the interviewer expected to do so.

The responses of the interviewee were recorded using both a digital recorder, either hand-held or software based (i.e. Call Graph for Skype), and through notes and quotations written down during the course of the conversation. These recordings then became the basic data for analysis further on in the study. Each recorded interview was anonymized and transcribed by the researcher and saved as a word document. The recorded and transcribed interviews were examined to find particular repetition of themes, to identify ideological beliefs or the interviewee’s feelings, or to generally build a response to an event or object. Typically, interviewees were selected from stakeholder groups who were responsible for the organization of the protest event. In this case, the interviewee represents not only their personal opinions but also the opinions and viewpoints of the larger stakeholder group.

Stakeholders within this study of virtual worlds fall into one of several groups. Each category of stakeholder has been given a generic name that focuses on their role within the virtual world during non-contentious times. The names of stakeholder groups or composition of group members may be different from one world to another. These differences are only minor variations however, and do not affect the overall effectiveness of the classification. Interview participants were drawn only from the protesters and beneficiaries groups. In particular, the interview process focused upon those who organized the protest event. Two additional categories of stakeholders representing the media are included in Table 3. These
were included due to the fact that much of the document data collected included these stakeholders and the interviews often discussed these groups in great detail.

Originally this research featured eight stakeholder groups including these four which were removed: Hosting Company, Game Moderators, and Bystanders. Each of these group was seen as being important not only in the cases analyzed for this study but also throughout protest literature. At the beginning of the data collection phase the Hosting Company and Protesters stakeholder groups were identified as those who were the most likely to yield interviews since many individuals within these groups were already identified and could be purposefully targeted. These two were focused upon due to the fact that they have easy to access contact information as well as extensive connections to members of the other stakeholder groups, which they would hopefully pass along during the snowball sampling phase of the interview. After collecting the contact information and personally contacting many PR departments and direct emails to specific individuals within these corporations, no success was made in receiving any reciprocation or interaction from the hosting companies of any case. Given the nature of hosting companies as a hub contact for other stakeholders, most notably the game moderators, the lack of contact meant that this group of stakeholders and its connected groups would need to be dropped from the research since no personal contacts were available to go around the more formal organizational barriers.

This left only stakeholder groups who were present at the protest and either organizers, participants or uninvolved in the protest. Since organizers, represented in the Protesters (Conscious Constituents) group were the only remaining hub of contacts, they were approached and responded at a much higher rate than the hosting company group. Snowball sampling within this group also proved fairly effective in identifying other organizers. However, this left out bystanders as a group, who because of their uninvolved nature were not necessarily recorded as participating in the protest. Due to this fact, it is unknown who would adequately fill the role of the bystanders group since mentions of them within other data sources and by organizers retained no specific information.
### Table 3: Stakeholder Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protesters (Conscious Constituents)</td>
<td>These are individuals that have decided to engage in collective action as a response to a social situation. In many cases these individuals may be players of the virtual world but they do not have to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficiaries</td>
<td>These are individuals who receive the benefit if the goals of the collective action are met. These individuals may be numbered among the protestors but often this is only a small sub-set of the total population. These individuals may also be players of the virtual world but they do not have to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaming Media</td>
<td>This a subset of the media that deals almost exclusively with news stories related to video games. The area that this media draws its stories from differs from the regular news media. The main audience for this media outlet is the players of video games. Events in virtual worlds are more likely to be covered by the media outlet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Media</td>
<td>The larger media that exists within society. They have a broad focus for news articles. They only rarely cover events particular to video games and more rarely virtual world collective action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is unlikely that any individuals within the sample pool experienced more than one of the events under analysis. Due to the non-exclusive nature of virtual worlds it does remain possible to find such an individual, however unlikely. The media groups pose the most likely risk of this type of error, but their removal from the direct occurrence of the events, and the fact that many different writers may work for the same publisher decreases the risk of overlap.

The interviewing process followed the outline of an interview guide (Patton 2002). This guide allowed the interview to hit upon many of the important facets of the protest, gathering the information required for this study. However, unlike a more formal interview questionnaire, the interview guide allowed the interviewer to restructure questions or to develop and ask new questions during the course of the interview process. The questions for the interview were phrased in such a way as to allow the individual respondents to answer in a more freeform way than structured interviews often do. In addition, fruitful or interesting topics of conversation that developed during the interview but do not fall within the original interview were followed, allowing additional information to be brought forward in several cases. These topics developed from additional questions asked by the interviewer to increase clarification or
expansion of a previous answer (Berg 1989). By following an in-depth structure to the interviews, these ideas may be expanded, which allowed the intricacies and depth of thought or feeling of the participant to be highlighted. This helped to overcome canned responses that less in-depth interviewing methods tend to elicit. This format provided enough structure for the interview to be pulled back to its main points when needed. This interviewing method is referred to as a semi-structured interview.

Interviews were a good method for this study for three reasons. The first is that they matched the other methods well. Interviews are a common qualitative tool used to build case studies. They excel at revealing opinion and processes that are involved in an event and can provide many explanatory details that may otherwise be left out in other methods of gathering data. Secondly, they highlighted the differences between the description of the protest event that built through document analysis and an individual’s experiences in the event, which resulted in updates to the event description. This in turn created a richer and more robust case that includes a better understanding of the context. Lastly, Interviews were excellent for understanding a dynamic situation that evolved over a period of time. There are many factors that lead to, occur during, or result from a protest. Each interview was used to explore these different factors and highlight how they affect particular stakeholders.

While there are many other methods for collecting similar data, e.g. focus groups, other types of interviews, surveys, etc., the semi-structured interview was selected because of the developmental nature of interview process, as well as the unique attributes of virtual world protest. Focus groups were not selected due to the fact that they usually require a shared presence of a group of individuals who were involved in the protest. Since virtual worlds are hosted online and accessed through the Internet, it is rare to find any locally concentrated group of players who would all have experienced the same protest. To perform a focus group then would require bringing together individuals from regionally distant areas to a single location. This is a fairly unfeasible process given the distributed nature of many participants. Additionally, focus groups tend towards consensus thinking in their results as participants build upon one
another’s ideas. Much of the data for this study comes out of intra- or inter-stakeholder opinion comparison. So creating a consensus removes the ability of the research to pursue potential conflicts in viewpoints that would otherwise arise.

Structured interviews and surveys were also not good fits for this study since it was very difficult for a researcher to anticipate all questions that were relevant to the study before data gathering began. Often during the course of a structured interview or survey it is easy to miss potentially rich areas of discussion because they do not fit in with the researcher’s anticipated line of questioning. The nature of protests in these worlds, and the fact that protest is culturally embedded in the world, means that there are many factors that may come into play when studying any particular virtual world protest. Given that the aim of this research was to perform a cross-comparison between different virtual world protests, it was safe to assume that there are very different cultural contexts to each of the worlds that impacts how the protest developed.

Unstructured interviews were also unfeasible for similar reasons. Since virtual world protests are culturally embedded they have many connections to the culture and community of each virtual world. This means that there are many side- or non-relevant issues that are associated with the protest in the mind of the interviewee. In addition, many of these protests built on other events that occurred in the world. It such a situation, it would be very easy to have lost track of the goals of the interview by becoming lost in explanations of the history of a particular community, or in ancillary stories about the community, and events that do not provide reliable or valuable data.

Given these facts, semi-structured interviews made an excellent comprise for this research. They performed through a variety of communication devices and did not necessarily require the travel of either the researcher or interviewees. They gained individualized insights into the events being studied. They had enough structure to allow the interviewer to remain focused on the goals of the research project. At
the same time, they did not limit the interviewer’s line of questions and allowed for additional details or threads of data to emerge as the interview progresses.

4.2.4 Sampling and Coding

This study used a snowball sampling method for most of the interviews collected. The purpose of this sampling method was to identify additional or potential interview candidates. The initial groups of individuals selected for an interview were drawn from data gathered during the first round of document analysis. These individuals were then asked as a part of the interview to identify other potential participants that may be willing to conduct an interview with the researcher. Through the use of this sampling method it was possible to identify and contact all the key organizers of each protest event. This method was shown to be particularly useful when the target population for the research is hidden or could be considered deviant. Often these groups have reasons for not being easily accessible to both the general public and researchers. Referral sampling methods have been shown to be very effective at finding individuals who are members of social groups that are hidden. Individual members are often very willing to participate in research given the fact that the researcher has the implied support and trust of the individual who referred them.

The participants for many interviews were selected by limiting the suggestion of snowball samples to other individuals who played a role in organizing the protest. It particular it was specified that these individuals should be able to answer questions about the collective action in question. This method of sampling is often called purposive sampling and sought to understand what it is like for an individual inside the social movement or protest action (Mason 2002). By using only a few of these participants an understanding of the culture and process within the movement is developed, something that is harder to understand or see from the outside point of a researcher. This method of sampling is quite different from
other commonly employed methods in that it does not look for a theoretical saturation point or a sample that represents the statistically diverse population of interest (Trotter and Schensul 1998).

This method of sampling did provide for several complications during the course of data gathering and analysis. The first was taken as a given that interview participants are willing and able to provide additional names and contact information at the end of the interview. Additionally, it assumes that the contacts given will also be likely to participate in an interview. During this research, both of these assumptions were broken during the data collection phase. In the Second Life case, several participants had excellent connections to others who had helped to organize a protest but felt that sharing their contact information would not be ethical or right, given how they agreed to use that information when it was initially shared with them. Within EVE Online, many individuals contacted after the initial interview simply failed to respond or were uncooperative in establishing a date and time. This resulted in a fair amount of time spent contacting participants, following up with them, or waiting for interviews which did not occur. This represents a form of passive aggressive denial of participation and stretched the amount of time needed to conclude the data collection process.

Within analysis the method of sampling, as well as the complications from the data gathering made analysis more difficult or resulted in the dropping of promising threads due to lack of data. In both cases more time was required to validate information or statements by interview participants with other interviews or through analysis of collected documents. Non-validated statements had to be excluded from much of the analysis process since it became difficult to separate what was personal opinion from what could be interesting data narratives.

The interview participants were comprised of four men and one woman. Most participants ranged in age from their early 30s to their late 50s, although exact ages were not asked of each participant. In general most of the interview participants were technologically savvy, ranging from the ability to use and perform basic software problem solving to very adept hackers and web consultants. Many were also
engaged with some form of technology in their work experiences. In one case the individual set up and ran their own web and security consulting firm from their home. Most individuals were also adept at social interactions and had at least passable organizational ability, shown through both their personal experiences as protest organizers and from how they provided additional information during interviews. In general, the intelligence of this group was high, shown both within their discussions with the interviewer, often in a language which was not their native tongue, and through their responses to interview questions and problems within the context of the protest. Any additional data regarding the interview participants is difficult to ascertain due to the need to record as few identifying characteristics as possible in order to maintain anonymity and safety upon the publication or release of this research data.

Each interview was given a pseudonym by which it was identified on any digital copies of the interview, quotes, papers, or other writings. An overview of the five interview participants is as follows:

Tyr (Interview 1): Male. Age: Adult. Tyr was an employee of IBM Italy and organizer of the union protest. He had an extensive knowledge of the many stages of the protest and much of the background information about events before and after the actual day. Tyr was often quite gregarious and willing to go into longer explanations about any aspect of the protest.

Baldr (Interview 2): Male. Age: Adult. Baldr was associated with IBM and the unions before the events of the protest. He became very knowledgeable about the events as they progressed and helped with some of the lower level organizing. Although happy to speak about the events of the protest, he often referred back to Sif and Tyr as better, more relevant sources.

Sif (Interview 3): Female. Age: Adult. Sif was a female union organizer who had significant experience with both offline organizing and Second Life participation. She was a strong force in outlining what information and organizing was needed in order for the virtual protest to be successful.

Thor (Interview 4): Male. Age: Adult. Thor was a player within EVE Online, although no specific affiliation was given during his interview. He was involved in the Kugutsumen website and was
important in the creation and release of information about Band of Brothers. He was an outspoken and boastful individual who was happy to talk about his role and his groups’ interpretation of fun and fairness in EVE Online.

Loki (Interview 5): Male (assumed). Age: Unknown. Loki was a member of the Band of Brothers organization before its demise and had a role in organizing the counter-protest. During the interviews he was often short of reply and provided a very different interpretation of events and motivations than other forms of collected data.

The basic measure for the text documents gathered is the page in this research. This format has a balanced weighting across all the different document sources and types. A single news headline would be counted as 1 page. If the event were to be covered on two separate days by the same website it would then count as 2 pages. However, if a forum thread has 30 pages of discussion each one counts separately. This is one of the fairest units of measure available. Counting all the information out of a single source as a page is possible but it downplays the wealth of data that could be gathered from a single site, like a forum that has many long detailed topics covered in it.

Both cases were conducted simultaneously. This method of data collection had three benefits. First, it allowed information gathered during each session to cross-pollinate. Secondly, it allowed the researcher to engage in an iterative process. Findings from one round of data analysis allowed the researcher to examine the study and refine the future rounds to better guide the research. This was done in order to gain as much relevant information as was possible. Finally, this allowed the data collection process to remain consistent. If new information, like an interview question that was very important but not premeditated by the researcher, arose during a stage in the data collection, the necessary changes could be made across all the cases. This meant that all cases were built on the same data collection processes. Whereas if a consecutive method was used, any changes that were discovered during the
middle of the data collection phase would have resulted in entire cases that lacked complete information or would have required that the case be revisited.

In addition to the documents mentioned above, this research also sought directly recorded logs of game play sessions, screen shots of protest events, or video recordings of the events themselves. Where and when these additional documents were found they were added to the analysis, either as annotations to a recorded interview or included as a recorded document. One of the affordances of the Internet is the ease of capturing data while events are unfolding, typically requiring only built in software and a little know-how. There were several instances where such data, e.g. in-game jokes, or logs of chat conversations, was provided by an interviewee in order to give additional context or sources which were then parsed and added to the collected data as appropriate.

This study used a mix of coding approaches. This method combined features of both deductive and inductive approaches to coding data. This form of coding is often called analytic induction. There were some preliminary codes developed from the research questions and general interview guide, which were theoretically derived from the information gathered in Chapter 3. These were developed before data collection began and the codes were used deductively in the first round of analysis. This form of coding was very useful with the semi-structured interviews since the first round of interviews were based on theoretically derived questions and assumptions (Hicks 1994). After this an open and selective coding was carried out on each interview, resulting in a set of themes and categories that emerged from the data. This was an inductive approach to coding that allowed patterns within the data set to come forward, so that they could be compared not only across the data gathered but to the theoretically derived codes as well. Much like the data gathering process itself, this coding occurred in an iterative process that is meant to capitalize on the ability to compare the data as it was collected (Seidel 1998). This form of coding allowed the researcher to accurately represent, not only the broad categories derived from theory, but also the smaller classifications that occurred as the researcher’s understanding of the situation increased.
4.2.5 Reliability and Validity

Reliability in this study was reached through the effect of triangulation. By using many different data sources to build the case studies this effect was achieved (Mason 2002; Patton 2002). Using two different data gathering methods allowed for the corroboration of any evidence found during the analysis of one set of results. It became possible to check this evidence against data found using the other method, resulting in methodological triangulation. If evidence from the two data sources did not match or support each other, the particular issue was further researched by gathering additional data from new sources. In addition, the researcher was the only individual who coded any of the data obtained during the data collection process. This meant that there were no issues regarding making coding schemes and definitions match between multiple coders.

Due to the fact that an individual’s view of the events may differ from others because of their association with or role in a particular stakeholder group, data was gathered from several different individuals within each group of protest organizers. This intensive interviewing process also served to increase the validity of this research. Intensive interviews allowed the researcher to pursue detailed descriptions and interpretations from each interviewee. These produced richer data sets and allowed the researcher to have higher quality information to examine and compare.

As mentioned previously, the document analysis and interviewing process built upon one another throughout the entire data gathering and analysis periods. This action provided two benefits: 1) it served to remove bias within individual pieces of data by supporting themes or examples found within multiple data and 2) it allowed the goals of the data gathering process and study to be refined throughout the procedure. Within this study, document analysis was first used to develop a general understanding of the timeline of events for each case study. It was also used to identify key individuals that participated in each event. This information was then used to develop and refine the interview guides. Findings from the interviews were then supported or spurred on additional data gathering and document analysis if more
facts or supporting evidence was needed. This iterative process helped to achieve triangulation as well by supporting the researcher’s analysis across several data sources.

Despite these safeguards, the difficulties I experienced during the data collection process may have influenced the findings of this dissertation. In particular, the lack of interview subjects forced me to seek out alternative sources of information, usually text-based documents, to supplement my data collection. As the search for additional sources widened the criteria for what could be collected was broadened in order to find what was available. Although precautions were taken to ensure that any unreliable or unverified information was not included within the data, it remains possible that findings within this project are based upon individual biases that entered through this alteration in the collection process.

Limiting the interviews to just protest organizers also created a bias within the findings that favored not only an organizational lens of analysis, but also perceived many points from only one point of view. Given the number of individuals and stakeholder groups that are involved in each case, and within the worlds generally, this bias limits the applicability of the findings. Alternative stories, view points, and concepts were excluded from the data collection due to this limitation. Being able to provide these viewpoints would have made for significantly more robust an analysis and possibly a reinterpretation of the findings.

4.3 Evaluation Criteria

There are two major criteria for judging the quality of any qualitative research: validity and reliability. Validity can be split further into three classifications: construct validity, internal validity, and external validity (Yin 2003). Construct validity was handled in this study through two means. The first was the use of multiple sources to gather evidence and build the case studies and data triangulation. The
second came from the use of member checking. Interview participants were given copies of their interview, rough interpretations that the researcher developed, as well as any finished and published pieces that arose from their data. These were reviewed by the participants and assessed for their similarity to the participant’s memory and personal interpretations. Internal validity was aided through the use of triangulation methods throughout the study. These methods allowed the researcher to examine alternative explanations, as well as give rich details for the chosen explanation. As stated previously, the selection of multiple interviews and the structure for how data collection was completed helped to reinforce triangulation and internal validity. External validity was handled through replication logic. Each case study was examined using the same criteria and process and were built using the same methods and sample types. This consistency across all the cases being studied fulfilled the requirements for replication logic, and through that, external validity. Reliability was achieved through the rigorous recording of the steps and procedures used during the course of this study. The use of additional protocols and guides during various steps of the study also supported its reliability and enables the study and findings to be replicated by others.

4.4 Methodological Changes

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, virtual worlds provide a unique platform for performing research. Although the process of performing virtual world research seems to mirror that of many other cultural studies found in anthropology and sociology the application of standardized methods must be changed in order to elicit similar quality and quantities of data.

Firstly, the researcher always acts as a participant-observer within virtual worlds. Due to the nature of the software, it is impossible for others within the community to identify one as an outsider or observer. The loss of physical queues like gaze means that individuals cannot tell when they are being
observed or recorded. This raises ethical issues which must be addressed before data collection can begin. The researcher needs to be able to integrate themselves within the community while also making others aware of their unique role and the fact that they may be observed or recorded. This matter is only further complicated by the fact that being truly invisible is possible in many cases and provides for the temptation to gather great quantities of data without providing acknowledgement.

The application of a method like an interview is very similar to the standard used for other platforms. What may be unexpected is how the culture of the virtual world and its context seep into other contexts for the players. Researchers need to be aware of the community they are dealing with and prepared to handle difficulties that arise because of it. In particular, virtual worlds as a type of computer game or software draw heavily from online geek culture. This culture is hyper-masculinized and devalues the contributions and status of non-heteronormative individuals. As a researcher this may lead to additional challenges during the interview when it becomes apparent that the academic does not fill this niche. In particular, there is often a subtle layer of knowledge and power negotiation which must be managed and which can become quite frustrating and demanding. In some cases the language may become simply insulting, such as in the use of the popular phrase “Tits or GTFO” in a forum post about a paper based upon this research.

Beyond the hyper-masculinized nature of many virtual worlds, there are often many sub-cultures at play within these communities which should be understood before they are approached. One community that was a part of this research is particularly hostile to academics, having had a clueless researcher approach them one too many times. Although these individuals are often intelligent members of Western society, they must sometimes be treated as potentially dangerous and very hostile. Usually, this level of caution is not needed with data collection methods like interviews and text analysis but groups like this often will delight in hacking the computers of or sharing disgusting images with those they hold in contempt.
Finally, the method of textual analysis must be considered carefully in virtual worlds research. These documents often represent living and ongoing discussions among a community. As such they are not static pages to be observed and recorded once. Instead, they should be returned to several times to look for changes that suggest additional cultural shifts within the community. Although the Internet is seen as being a great archive of man’s knowledge, information can also be easily lost among broken hyperlinks, changing domain names, and popular media fads. Instead of bookmarking a page for later analysis, more permanent saved documents should be made which go through any and all relevant materials on the website so that they will be available at a later date.
Chapter 5
Case Study Introduction

5.1 EVE Online

EVE Online is a science fiction based MMORPG that focuses heavily on economic development and militaristic rivalry between player organizations for the control of important sections of space. Players can have a number of different roles within the game, from deep space miners, to merchants, or even pirates. However, within each of these roles the view that the player takes is that of the captain of a space ship, exploring a vast a beautiful universe. The game itself is very expansive and has won high praise for the sense of scale and beauty which the developers have managed to create.

Unlike many other virtual worlds, EVE Online has all of the players connect to the same region so that every player in the world can interact with one another. The developers have managed to balance the demands this places upon their systems by creating space sectors in which players and computer
controlled characters operate. These sectors may be neutral, owned by a player organization or dangerous wild territory prone to roving bands of pirates. With the exception of “safe” zones, any of these sectors may be taken over by players for an advantage within the game. When a territory is claimed by a player organization, they are given complete control over that section of space and may dominate the materials, build new ships or space stations, or kill opposing players.

Being able to control a large number of these space sectors is considered a high accomplishment within the game and it is over these sectors that many player organizations compete. To be one of the biggest organizations a group of players must own a large number of space sectors and be able to defend that territory from others, sometimes quite aggressively. This requires a great deal of cooperation within the organization as the demand for resources within the game, and among the players’ time, are quite high.

The player base of EVE Online has been known to take an unusual pride in their community and its focus on aggressive playing and laissez-faire economics. The EVE Online community has experienced several scandals and protests, both within their forums and within the game world itself. Excluding the case below, there are at least six other instances of similar protests which united the EVE community. Due to the immersive nature of the game, it is not surprising to see the commonness of such protests. Many individuals are heavily invested in the storyline of the EVE world and engage in their role within the game seriously. Much of the information about this protest arises from this dedication to, and immersion within the plot. During 2007, many members of EVE's community had their confidence in developer CCP shaken, due to allegations of corruption in several incidents. What first brought these incidents to the forefront of the community's consciousness was a collection of information compiled by a player using the handle “Kugutsumen”. Kugutsumen made his in-game living as a mercenary spy. He established a diverse, far-reaching network and used his connections to access secret information
circulating within message boards of player corporations (EVE's version of player organizations) and alliances (multiple corporations working together).

In early 2007, Kugutsumen was perusing private messages between directors of Band of Brothers, largely considered EVE's most powerful alliance, on their forums. He found an interesting message from a player named Lord Stone, hailing from Reykjavik, Iceland, where CCP is based. Lord Stone had joined a corporation called Reikoku, part of Band of Brothers, in March 2005. One year later, he was appointed a director, making him one of a handful of players near the top of the organization. Kugutsumen stumbled upon a message Lord Stone sent to a fellow director as he was leaving Reikoku for “unforeseeable reasons” that contained a link to CCP's “Jobs” page and the following message:

"If you're still interested in working for us, we have an opening in SysAdmin department. Send your CV to xxxxxxxx@ccpgames.com."

Kugutsumen proceeded to post all of this information to his website under the title “Reikoku Makes its Own Luck, Part 1” on January 30, 2007. While it was public knowledge that CCP employees play EVE, Kugutsumen's find seemed to suggest that at least one person in Band of Brothers was aware of Lord Stone's status as a developer, a violation of CCP's policies. On Kugutsumen's forums, the post was not met with much surprise. At this point, BoB was such a dominant force in EVE that many considered it a given that they had developer assistance. Instead, most of Kugutsumen's readers met the post with anticipation, sensing something much deeper was to be revealed.

In part 2, once again through the posts and private messages taken from BoB’s forums, Kugutsumen outlined the story of one Ishos Rerajan. Ishos joined Reikoku's forums on December 13, 2005. Kugutsumen could find no trace of how he was recruited and suspected that this was done in-game. In March 2006, Ishos was promoted and put in charge of Reikoku's fleet of capital ships, the game's largest and most valuable class of ships. It's notable that part of Ishos' job was to monitor members' in-
game training progress, and to do this he was given their login information – a violation of the game's terms of service. A few months after his promotion, on July 12, Ishos announced abruptly that he was “taking a break” and had to leave the corporation.

However, four days before he made this announcement, Ishos secured 10 rare items for Reikoku, a collection of items which were statistically impossible to acquire legitimately. All 10 of these rare items allowed a corporation to manufacture the specified item indefinitely for massive profit and/or strategic advantage. At the time, the only way to acquire these items was through a lottery run by CCP, and it was unheard of for any individual to have as many as Ishos did.

According to private messages among Reikoku's directors, the real reason Ishos had to leave was because someone outside the corporation had discovered he was a CCP employee, and notified a game master. CCP's policy at the time was that any developer whose true identity was revealed had to take a new name in-game and sever ties with any factions they were involved with, hence Ishos bowing out of Reikoku. The shocking part, however, was the directors' response to the news. Private messages between the directors of Reikoku revealed that not only were they unsurprised about Ishos leaving but that everyone knew he was a developer. So not only was there a developer dispensing in-demand items to his corporation, but the higher-ups knew who he really was.

This post set off a firestorm across the EVE community. The official forums became flooded with posts from Kugutsumen's and BoB's enemies and advocates. Many people called into question the validity of the claims Kugutsumen made as well as the ethics involved in obtaining his information. Some people jumped to the defense of Band of Brothers, claiming they had done nothing wrong, while others defended CCP, reminding everyone that it was, in fact, their game, and they had the right to do whatever they wanted. Some called for immediate destruction of Ishos' items and that the developer should be fired. Others shrugged off the allegations, saying it was commonplace for developers to be involved in high
level alliances, or that Band of Brothers had obviously been cheating for a while and it was just something everyone had to deal with.

CCP did their best to censor discussion on the topic initially, deleting threads en masse. Eventually, however, a CCP developer named Kieron posted a thread with an official acknowledgement of the situation, stating that CCP had investigated and would continue to investigate the allegations, and that discussion would be allowed, as long as it remained on topic. Members of Band of Brothers decried the allegations. Many posters were skeptical of the whole situation and suggested waiting for CCP's official investigation, while others scoffed at the notion that the developers would out one of their own and suffer such damage to their image.

As controversy erupted, previous allegations of developer misconduct came to light. One person claimed to be a former moderator for the official forums and posted on Kugutsumen's forums saying that staff use inside information to gain an advantage frequently, citing his own personal abuses of power. Some posters on the official forums brought up previous stories of alleged misconduct – an individual buying up all of a certain item the week before a patch made it highly desirable, allowing him to corner the market; a GM spawning a capital ship in dangerous, uncharted space in what many believed was an attempt to deliver it to a friend, though it was cut short when he ran into a group of pirates; a corporation supposedly given a heads-up about an in-game event, allowing them to easily snag the lucrative reward.

Three days after Kugutsumen posted all of this information, he announced that two of his accounts were banned from EVE. In an effort to cooperate with CCP to encourage a thorough investigation, Kugutsumen shut down his forums temporarily. However, two days later, all of his accounts were banned from EVE. The next day, Kieron posted a response on the official forums in full damage-control mode. He stated that CCP's internal affairs division had conducted a thorough investigation on what he claimed were the main issues raised by Kugutsumen’s posts.
As for the allegations themselves, they consist of two parts. The first part involved a case that happened seven months ago when a CCP employee’s identity became public knowledge within his corporation. Per company policy, the incident was investigated and actions taken where appropriate, including the removal of characters whose identities were compromised.

Kieron said nothing to address the items left behind by Ishos or the allegations of developer protection for Band of Brothers members. Kieron's handling of the situation proved to be extremely divisive. Some players were satisfied and ready to put the matter to rest, but many were outraged and even felt insulted. Many echoed the sentiment that this was an “end of subject people, move along” post and that there was no real closure. The term “Nixonian” was tossed at CCP's response by more than one player.

Band of Brothers continued to be harassed within the game setting as other players took advantage of what they perceived as a weakness. Two years later, a member of the corporation GoonSwarm was in talks with a director of BoB and convinced them to leave BoB and disband the group. The director agreed and Band of Brothers was disbanded, leaving most of their property open to be claimed by other groups or individual players. Although the hierarchy of Band of Brothers acted quickly, they were unable to reclaim their items and territory and CCP did not respond to their request to have the actions undone. CCP’s official position was that this was a legitimate in-game action.

The protest within EVE Online involved several complex actions. There are message and mailing campaigns, sit-in style takeovers, and some violent attacks. Although there was a high level of organization within each action, the overall structure remained loose. Groups of protesters used whichever form they felt was most appropriate for their goal at the time, and depending upon who was their target the methods they used changed.

Due to protest among the population, and CCP’s response to it, the entire landscape of EVE Online was changed. Before this incident BoB was the biggest player corporation within the game and
dominated almost every important aspect of the world, from the economy to warfare. After they were disbanded, entire sections of space became available for others to claim. This power vacuum created a brief struggle for control over these spaces and altered the balance of power shifting it to a plurality based dominance of several organizations instead of just one. CCP was questioned in the broader gaming community and their reputation was damaged for many players and gamers. Many players quit during the events of this protest, determining that there was no way to win in a rigged system and that they goals they thought that they could achieve were highly unlikely. The fallout from this singular event altered the structure of EVE Online, changed the hierarchy of CCP, tarnished the company’s reputation, and caused the loss of players.

5.2 Strike in Second Life

![Figure 4: Protesters outside IBM](image)

A labor strike against IBM was fought in a virtual world, Second Life, and caught the attention of labor activists and the wider public worldwide. It was promptly followed by a second labor strike meant
to build upon the first. Second Life, currently the most popular online social virtual world, is a world in which users inhabit the environment via avatars and not only interact with one another, but also build the world in real time. The arrival and growth of Second Life has led to the emergence of social virtual worlds in which the inhabitants primarily use the environment to interact with one another. These worlds are not games: the world does not impose a goal or objective on the user. In these worlds, the user drives his or her experience. In a world like Second Life, this often involves users creating custom content using tools provided within the world.

Due to the nature of Second Life, the immersion of players within the world is low when compared to other virtual worlds, like EVE Online. Users interact with the world, but their focus is primarily other users. This holds true within this case. The protesters did not involve themselves deeply with Second Life. While they did make efforts to involve the Second Life community, many retained little interest in becoming regular members or users after the day of the protest.

IBM has established a strong presence and tie to Second Life. To date IBM has spent $10 million establishing a Second Life presence, including about 50 virtual facilities used for research, induction of new employees, and meetings. About 5000 of its employees work or operate in various virtual worlds, including Second Life. On October 10, 2007, IBM announced a partnership with SL developer Linden Lab to establish standards for online worlds, with an emphasis on interoperability of avatars between worlds.

IBM and Rappresentanza Sindacale Unitaria IBM Vimercate (RSU), Italian IBM worker’s official union, were in talks for several months leading up to the strike. RSU asked for what they called a “small salary increase” of 60 Euros per year, along with “health and pension investments, informative rights, etc.” This was based on the rising revenue and income of the corporation. IBM responded by offering a 6 Euros increase and canceling the workers' “productive results benefit”, a yearly bonus of 1000 Euros. RSU decided to stage the first virtual strike, with the help of UNI Global Union.
UNI Global Union planned to stage the protest sometime between September 17 and 30. UNI Global Union asked the Second Life community, as well as any union workers or members of the general public sympathetic to RSU’s cause, to join in the protest. Leading up to the event, UNI Global Union reported having participants from at least 18 countries on board, including about 500 IBM employees, as well as unions from 16 countries involved. Notable organizations that backed the protest include Unite, UK's largest labor union, and the AFL-CIO, a federation of 55 national and international unions. Included in the AFL-CIO is Alliance@IBM, the fledgling IBM employees' union in America.

UNI Global Union reached out especially to try to mobilize people unfamiliar with Second Life. On their website, they offered a basic tutorial on creating an account, installing the software, moving around the game world, and getting to Commonwealth Island. They included pictures at most steps, with an emphasis on helping the tech-illiterate – for example, when mentioning the four arrow keys for movement, there is actually a photo included of arrow keys on a keyboard.

The instructions also informed people about obtaining and equipping a custom “Strike Kit” created for the occasion. The kit contained an official T-shirt, several signs, as well as several wearable floating “fish”. T-shirts had “IBM is deaf to its employees [sic] demands” emblazoned across the chest in white letters, available on blue, red, or yellow shirts. The fish were giant, floating, red objects shaped like Goldfish crackers with spinning tails and messages written on the side. The signs were large, a little wider than the average avatar's height and about half as high, with white text on a blue or red background. Instructions were to wear a shirt with either a sign or a fish, but not both. Participants were told not to wear any of the equipment in public before the strike, the date of which would be announced through the strike's private mailing list. In addition to these text instructions, UNI Global Union ran training courses at their house inside Second Life from September 12 to 16.

IBM released no official statements regarding the strike, but one IBM developer, Jo Grant, posted to his personal blog (on IBM's domain) on September 18 suggesting how IBM should handle it. He
weighed the strict approach – exercising IBM's rights as a land owner inside Second Life to eject protesters from their property – against the lax approach – treating the protesters just as they would any other members of the public, so long as they follow the same rules. Grant decided that in this specific case, if it were up to him, he would treat it like a real world protest. He suggested meeting with leaders to discuss the protest, and if UNI Global Union would be cooperative and set a specific start and end time, to allow the strike.

When the time and locations were announced, UNI Global Union asked protesters and supporters to sign an online petition, which was sent to the CEO of IBM Italy. Instructions to protesters, sent through the private mailing list, were to meet on Commonwealth Island at an outdoor theatre, consisting of a raised wooden platform and circles of benches. There each protester would be teleported to one of the IBM locations. On Commonwealth Island and the various protest locales, UNI Global Union workers would be stationed in distinctive white t-shirts with the organization's logo, holding large banners with protest instructions.

The protest took place on September 27, 2007 from 4 am – 4 pm EST. Protest staffers counted 1,853 participants from over 30 different countries. The protest spanned seven IBM locations within Second Life, primarily IBM Italia and the IBM Business Centre. UNI Global Union reported that “technical difficulties” perhaps limited the number of participants. Bloggers at the event mentioned that some teleport stations set up by UNI refused to work, and also that many of IBM's islands had a 40-70 avatar limit. Commonwealth Island had a 400 avatar limit, though this was large enough that it probably did not contribute to the technical problems.

As with a real life strike, the UNI strike attracted some off-message protesters and griefers. Two of the most talked-about oddities were an avatar in a banana suit, actually protesting against IBM with a sign that read “Fair work, Fair pay! Please don't take all our money away!” and a large green triangle holding a sign that read “I AM A LARGE GREEN TRIANGLE”. There was also, an avatar comprised
entirely of stacks of flat, black squares held a sign that said “Seriously guys what has Korea ever done for us”. When asked about it, he claimed someone had given him the sign and he actually had no idea what it said, then left to find another sign. Second Life artist, Gazira Bebeli, in support of the strike, flooded one of the IBM locations with floating, self-replicating Paper Mario cartoons. Some bloggers mistook this act to be griefing, but it was endorsed by UNI Global Union. A counter-protester from union watchdog group The Center for Union Facts arrived with an enormous sign bearing the group's logo and a shirt that read “This strike sucks, get back to work.” Protest helpers were alarmed when an avatar wielding a gun showed up to the strike, as weaponry is specifically banned on IBM's property, but it seems he was quickly taken care of and this incident didn't contribute negatively to the strike's image.

During the strike, IBM's in-SL workers did their jobs unperturbed, standing around providing standard information when legitimately asked. When asked about the strike, staffers simply replied, “No comment.” or said nothing at all. At one point, parts of IBM's Business Centre had to be shut down to lock protesting avatars out. After this happened, one avatar slipped by and managed to make it into an IBM staff meeting about the corporate website. Realizing where they were, they quickly teleported 20 other protesters in. They started shouting slogans, making beeping noises and blowing horns, waving signs and flooding the room with giant fish. The IBM staff, confused, asked them to go protest outside. The protesters demanded to speak to management, and the meeting was abruptly dismissed.

UNI declared the strike a success, citing an international showing of solidarity and extensive media coverage of the event. During and immediately following the strike, IBM refused to comment.

On October 24, UNI Global Union reported that Andrea Pontremoli, CEO of IBM Italy had resigned after IBM Corporate supposedly made a complaint to IBM Italy regarding how they handled the negotiation situation. He had apparently been responsible for the pay cut in the first place. When asked whether Pontremoli's departure was related to the protest, IBM denied any connection; however, UNI Global Union claimed it as a major victory.
The form of protest within this case primarily took the form of a picket, much like a union would hold in the offline world. Avatars marched around the IBM locations holding signs and chanting slogans. They also engaged in messaging and mailing campaigns to build a support base and express their dissatisfaction with IBM. The ramifications of this protest can be interpreted in two ways. The first is that the actual impact was rather small but it did embarrass IBM within the international community and force them to address the staffing issues at the Italian branch of the company. The second interpretation is to view this protest as having a very dramatic impact upon the concepts of unions and strikes in the 21st Century. In this interpretation, not only was IBM forced to address the issues but a powerful new tool was added to the collection available to union organizers. Additionally, the younger, disenfranchised members of unions found a home in digitally active participation and felt a connection to the cause of European unions that they had been missing previously. Regardless of which interpretation was chosen, this case made many individuals aware Second Life’s existence and increased the awareness of the impact that “silly digital games” may have upon “real” businesses.
Chapter 6
Theory Development

The goal of this chapter is to examine the theoretical framework that arises from the application of the package of dimensions to a process for a protest. This chapter first examines each of the 10 dimensions which were originally addressed in Chapter 3 before looking at the three stages of protest. During each stage the relevant dimensions will be addressed and it will be shown how that stage alters the application or definition of the dimension due to the virtual nature of the action. After each of the stages, the updated theoretical framework is addressed. Finally, the detailed breakdown of how the virtualization of each dimension alters that dimension will be summarized. This section highlights how the unique facets of virtual worlds require the development of new theory.

6.1 Developing a New Model of Virtual Process

Each of the dimensions described in Chapter 3 above were proposed to relate to one another to create a protest process that is consistent across virtual world protests. As shown in Figure 5, each dimension contributes to at least one, but possibly more, steps within the process as a protest is enacted. Within this section each dimension will be labeled with the stage and name to avoid confusion, e.g. Build Up: Repression Response.
Figure 5: Protest Dimension Stages

This protest process begins during the first time stage where a balance of power has been struck between the various social actors. Called *Time 1: Status Quo in Figure 5*. It is during this period that a critical incident or incidents may occur which act as the base for the developing protest. During the next period, labeled *Build-up*, many dimensions begin to act on the player’s decisions to protest. Questions of legality and potential success are considered. How well the groups who feel aggrieved also feel a shared cultural understanding impacts the ease of organization and how the protest is structured. The group begins to spread their message and plans out to others, recruiting them to either join or simply making others aware. These are marked as *Message Diffusion* and *Barriers to Entry* respectively. Finally, the chance for the authorities to develop and respond to the growing unrest is possible depending on whether they chose to enact a proactive or reactive response.

The next stage is called *Developing Events*. In this stage several of the same variables remain in play. Groups are still acting to recruit new members and protestors, including ones who join in the middle
of the protest. The choices of the authority to act again come into play as they may chose to act during the protest or once again wait for after the protest. There is the first stirring of reaction during this stage as perceived influence comes into play. This can be a variable held by both players and the authorities. Authorities use this variable to break up or hold in check any type of protest activity. Players may use it during this stage to both support their cause among the general populace or to repress counter-protesters who are being invasive.

Then there is the Repercussions stage. During this stage, the protest has effectively passed and the response from authorities and the community is heard. It is here where authorities’ that have waited to act often do so. Legality becomes a variable again due to the authorities’ view of how legal the player actions during the protest were. Influence also plays out in a similar way to Legality as groups maneuver for better social positions or perceived benefits/decreased losses.

This finally leads to a new establishment of power balance between all the stakeholders. This has been represented by Time 2: Status Quo in the diagram. This is not necessarily the same state or balance of power that was found during the first time period but it does represent one of relative stability within the realm.

6.2 Stages of Protest

6.2.1 Build Up

The first stage during the flow of events of a protest involves a building up of information, organization, and resources before the protest event begins. This phase involves the beginning of formulating where a group stands, who supports them, and what they wish to achieve. Often the main organizational work is completed at this stage, as the protesters prepare to move forward to the next stage.
This stage has the largest number of dimensions within it due to the fact that many facets of organization and context must be considered. In particular, groups begin to question legality of their own and others actions. They focus on building a common bond, or culture, that will hold them together during events. The proto-organization also begins to solidify and reach out to others to build their structure and support base. This is usually the first stage where the group begins to experience push back from others within the community and from the targets of their protest.

Each of the dimensions which come into play at this stage of events resonates within the community. As such it represents an important building time for many protest groups, and the two groups studied here in particular. The challenges raised during this stage often set the theme of how events will continue for the group during the course of the protest.

### 6.2.1.1 Build Up: Legality

Legality during the Build-up period focuses on an examination of both offline law and virtual social institutions. Since this period acts as a foundational base for the rest of the protest action, it is the one in which protesters take the largest and most reflective view about legality. The protest organization make focus on creating three different types of legal viewpoints which they will follow through with during the actual event and afterwards. The first is that they may preference the social context and potential social shunning or ramifications which they may experience from the community of the virtual world. The second is that they will preference the ability to enforce or otherwise meet the stipulations of offline laws which may affect their protest. Finally they may try to maximize both of these by attempting to address highly relevant offline legal code while incorporating the view of the community in their planning.
When this dimension is put into action through the examination of this study’s two cases it can be seen that the narrative nature of virtual worlds and their focus and creating clear characters and plots, even in more realistic settings like Second Life, stresses the creation and connection of legality not only to actual law but also to fictional concepts found within the social context of that world. This narrative based focus by the protest organizers heavily influenced their selection of which legal viewpoint to emphasize in their planning for events.

Within EVE Online, the nature of the storyline made taking legally questionable actions seem more acceptable. One recurring theme throughout this protest is the availability of detailed, private information about individuals due to a lack of good security. As one participant states:

*Most people are really dumb with security and they reuse passwords so the password they use for email they will reuse everywhere else. If they set a password on your forum they will reuse that password everywhere else. (Thor)*

Due to this fact, the developers’ personal information became directly tied to how they handled security for their private EVE Online accounts. Gaining information, such as a common password allowed the spies not only into the developer’s private game information but also to company information that they were able to abuse.

For the Second Life strike, the narrative developed connected the offline world and the virtual protest required that the organizers adhere to laws regarding assembly, the ability to unionize and strike, as well as network access and proper usage. Since the strike retained its offline ties it was necessary for UNI Global Union to form the “IBM Second Life – Strike International Taskforce” to take into account many additional offline legal aspects of holding such a strike. This taskforce researched and structured the strike so that it complied with the many laws regarding the ability of the protestors to picket IBM.

Many of the organizers drew on their experiences as union members. There were committees established to examine legal precedence, not only within Second Life but also among the different
participating countries. In many cases, these meetings were held in private locations within Second Life so that they could reduce potential spying. As another organizer states:

Also we were trying to do is keep it as secret as possible to the date of the protest for IBM so we used different spaces in Second Life that were protected so we could only invite a certain number of people to come in these areas where we couldn’t be seen or heard to guarantee the fact that our meetings to plan the date would be secret to IBM workers. (Sif)

The taskforce had a secondary issue regarding legality that was different from the normal understanding of laws governing protests and strikes. The users of Second Life all signed an End User License Agreement (EULA) that specified how any person was allowed to use the Second Life program and what the outcomes of improper usage would be. While the EULAs do not count as national law, the do add a new layer of legality. The taskforce needed to take the appropriate usage clauses into consideration when developing the organization of their strike and successfully managed to organize the large strike without violating the EULA.

The planning stages of a protest in a virtual world require many additional legal considerations for organizers. They must craft a narrative for their event and group, decide to focus upon either offline regulations or online community, and consider how far they wished to reach when examining ramifications. In addition, other factors added new layers to this planning, such as additional software contract agreements or privacy and security considerations.

### 6.2.1.2 Build Up: Shared Identity

Shared Identity during the Build-up phase required some careful consideration since both groups could not only focus on creating a new shared identity but also leveraging shared identities which already existed. Since there was a concentration upon generating larger support for the efforts of the protesters it
was important that the organizers find a way to create identities which would focus the already dedicated
protesters while also drawing in potential support from the far reaches of their social network.

Within EVE Online, the scandal moved from a fight between two different player organizations to
a topic of heated debate for the entire community. Outside of the players of EVE Online, the larger
gaming and technology communities were alerted to the protest through news sources. This information
spread through the existing ties between players within the virtual world and highlights how effectively
virtual world protests can leverage this type of shared identity, from the tightly coupled identity of a
player organization, through the weaker ties of a shared virtual world community, to the very weak ties of
the larger technology community.

The level of dedication that players develop through their interaction with the game shapes their
actions within and outside of the game world. This is highlighted by the degree of anger within the
community over in-game actions. For players within EVE Online there was a very strong commitment to
the identity that the community as a group developed.

That's why I say it's not right in a way to play the game just to make people suffer
because I think they really suffer. But it's an interesting experiment because in real life
probably I would not be running a mafia, going around killing people, doing rackets or
running all sorts, doing all sorts of crime. But this is an environment where they let you
do it and its lots of fun. As long as there is no law against griefing people in the game
then we’re fine. (Thor)

Virtual worlds add an additional layer of community to existing social connections. Individuals
identify with virtual worlds and look favorably upon others who are active in their world. This can help in
the establishing of solidarity and social networks by creating a weak link between the protest group and
others in the virtual world. This helps to connect to younger or disenfranchised groups but also introduces
negatives, such as acting as a turnoff to others who feel that the technical nature excludes them.

Second Life provides a valuable tool for creating connections between different protestor groups.
It creates a shared interest that different groups can use to find commonalities and then build bridges for
collaborations in the future:
As this organizer discusses, the Second Life strike was able to create a shared experience that helped to bond younger and older unionists together.

In addition, the nature of the players’ characters within Second Life remained ambiguous. One organizer points out the confusion that adding a second identity to communications between distant organizers can cause. An avatar doesn’t always have to appear human:

*IBM has a widely reported presence on Second Life which is now set to face, at the very least, a picket line of characters that come straight out of the darker recesses of wild imaginings.*

[http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/08/24/ibm_italy_strike/]

Given the nature of many virtual worlds in allowing users to appear in any number of forms, the visual appearance of other players often leads to encounters where details about the person are difficult to ascertain. This can create a break in the dimension of shared identity. Often, individuals at events like a picket line go to great lengths to make sure that everyone is identifiable as part of the group. However, when individuals within a virtual world can show up as rats, gnats, robots, people, etc. It becomes much harder to create the shared visualization of the common group identity.

### 6.2.1.3 Build Up: Message Diffusion

Message diffusion is one of the most important goals of protest organizers during the Build-up stage. This is the critical time period for organizers, who must make sure that others within and outside of the virtual world are aware of the story behind the protest, details for events, who may participate, etc. Alongside the creation of a shared identity, message diffusion makes use of the vast social networks which organizations and players have at their disposal. Additionally, this is a time in which to clarify and
address confusion since trying to do so once an event has begun or has ended rarely produces a protest of significant impact or relevance.

The organizers of the EVE Online protest sought to make sure that their message was understood and spread to the wider community. In order to do this they provided details and information in a format which encouraged comment. In particular, they created a series of posts which revealed only part of the information at a time. In fact, to gauge interest the organizers even stated:

“The more you donate [in-game money] the faster I’ll post part 2...”

This not only benefited them by gathering financial support for their organization, it also allowed them to gauge the interest of the population in information that is similar. The speed at which they received donations made them aware of the importance of their information and encouraged them to push further with their announcements about corruption.

Within the greater protest, the most common form of communication was to make a post on the EVE Online official message board. Even if the information in the original post was not updated to reflect changes it still allowed individuals to discuss the post with others and with the protesters. This greatly increased the involvement of many members of the community because they could debate the facts which were being posted and gather additional information if they felt that details were needed. This form of diffusion for the protesters created a sense of deliberation and, as consensus was reached among the many discussants, the anger and stance of the group was solidified as a whole. By giving the general population a more interactive form of communication, the protest organizers managed to win many individuals over to their side and increase their base of support.

The Second Life protest organizers had a great amount of work on their hands when they first began organizing the strike. They needed to establish lines of communication among coordinating bodies while making sure all of it worked together. The organizers focused on creating a media storm around the idea of having the first virtual world strike. The need for this first event was to raise public awareness.
There was a strong focus by the organizers on getting different bloggers around the world to pick up the news story. Given that the original group of protesters was rather small, creating a media storm was an important goal in their overall plan.

As one organizer says:

*I think our meetings were mainly organizational. [...] I really was there to make it happen and to think of the strategy to make it happen because we had never seen such a huge event being planned before so we just went through all of the stages how we’d communicate about it.* (Sif)

The nature of the virtual world and protest action meant that much of the work establishing lines of communication had to be built. Within this quote, it becomes possible to see the some of the different subgroups that were established within the leadership.

The entire process of creating such a protest in a virtual world draws upon organizations, norms, and business plans from the offline world. This strike was organized and enacted by offline union organizations and many of the participants were motivated to participate through offline social networks. As one organizer discusses, word of the original idea of a virtual protest was spread through union communication networks:

*We used UNI’s communication channels that we’ve built over the years with communicators forums. All of the mailing list that we have form people subscribing online or through our address book. We relied on people forwarding messages regarding the strike onto others.* (Tyr)

These networks were then utilized, along with marketing within Second Life, to help organize and plan the protest among geographically dispersed groups. The nature of the virtual worlds allowed these individuals to come together into a planning committee and leverage their experience and knowledge to develop a work plan.

One organizer stressed the worries that the group had going into the event. The creation of a media focus on the group’s goals was important to the overall success of the action in the long run. As they said:
There was a huge media impact and I think that was the strongest part of the campaign. (Sif)

For the organizers, keeping in constant communication with the media was a pressing need in order for the concept of a virtual world strike to spread. Given that this was the first of kind protest, the organizers spent significantly more time making sure that it was well organized and attended by getting the word out early and maintaining anticipation for the event through continual updates.

The organizers also focused on creating media bites that would attractive to technology and labor bloggers as well as some of the smaller media news websites. In particular, the organizers stressed the novelty of the protest and how the selection of the event matched the profile IBM had established:

They [bloggers] just liked the fact that it was in SL and that there was this huge employer IBM so if you just forget about UNI’s channels of communications the media was the, far bigger than anything that we’d ever expect. (Baldr)

Although UNI Global Union had developed significant contacts and resources on their own and did rely "on people forwarding messages regarding the strike onto others” they found that the impact that the blogging groups had on actually reaching out to different groups around the world was significantly greater. Once this was realized, there was a focus on making and utilizing this important media group as a tool for spreading information and recruiting new participants.

6.2.1.4 Build Up: Barriers to Entry

The Build-up stage is the first chance for protest organizers toasses and attempt to address what they see as barriers keeping their supporters from joining in the protest. Within virtual protest this is an important time for them to consider the technical nature of their platform and begin to think about how the many different protesters may make use of, or fail to be able to use, the virtual world software.

Given the narrative-based and focused group that backed the EVE Online protests, there were specific barriers that were added to join the protesting group. Although many individuals became
members of the protest simply by engaging in discussion or attacking the other groups within the game, to become part of the group of organizers was significantly harder:

*We make mirrors of many forums so we give them access. Then if people give us services for example by compromising another corporation’s forums we will give them access to a special section.* (Thor)

Individuals who wished to be able to join the organizers were required to show not only their dedication to the group but also their ability to participate and provide the group with something of value. This meant that these individuals needed to not only have technical access to the virtual world, but they needed additional technological skills, hacking, in order to gather the required type of information that would gain them access. This system of barriers was continued throughout the entire process of moving up within the organizational ranks. As individuals sought promotions, they were required to demonstrate some valuable skill, either gathering, analyzing, or disseminating information.

This was seen as a valuable set of barriers since it required a high degree of dedication for members to move up within the ranks of the group. The organizers knew that having such barriers meant that the organization was strong and unlikely to contain many moles or other potential people based weak points.

Unlike the EVE Online organizers, UNI Global Union was forced to examine barriers which blocked individuals from joining. The blocking of protesters from the space was an important issue. IBM owned all the sites of protest potentially allowing them to lock the protesters out. It also allowed for particular individuals to be blocked from the protest sites, such as organizers. As said in an interview on one website:

"We are expecting some very bad reaction from IBM," Barillari said in an interview conducted in Second Life. "I'm sure they will try to do something to limit our demonstration."

(http://wraltechwire.com/business/tech_wire/news/story/1849345/)
An easy way for IBM to limit the demonstration would be to collect the names of the organizers’ avatars and lock them out, effectively beheading the protesters. Given the need for order in a protest, having the leaders removed effectively dismantles the ability for the protest to achieve its goals.

The technical difficulties of establishing and entirely new type of protest were particularly troublesome for the organizers. Throughout the planning they needed to account for the many different technical problems that people may encounter from dropped connections to unavailability of the Second Life service. In particular the organizers needed to conquer the fear that many potential participants faced when contemplating moving into a new technology:

> And then you’d have barriers such as the actual digital barrier. People not being comfortable to use a computer other than to write an email or use word. So there were people who would reply and say we will sign your petition but we don’t feel comfortable going into SL even though you’re offering this training. (Sif)

One of the ways that the organizers attempted to overcome these barriers was through providing training to new Second Life users. Guiding them through the basics of using a virtual world and making sure they were prepared to protest on the correct date. Others included providing individuals who would staff the protest and help new protesters during the event, as well as creating a “Union Island” where all the information about the protest and materials needed for it would be centralized.

6.2.1.5 Build Up: Repression Response

Repression Response is an unusual variable within the Build-up phase. The group being protested against has the opportunity to act at this point, as the messages and shared identities are being built by the protesters. Depending upon their reaction it may be possible to end the protest before it has effectively begun, or to actually increase support for the protesting group by acting out in ways which exemplify their arguments or turn off neutral observers. It is also possible that the response to any actions taken by the protesters at this stage is to simply provide no response. Within the two cases studied for this project
CCP, the owners of EVE Online, acted out repressively during the initial phase of the protest and ended up creating greater support for the protesters among the community.

CCP also chose to use message boards to broadcast their information to the general EVE population. However, instead of engaging with the larger EVE population, the developers simply posted their facts and then ceased discussing the topic. Even though a message board is an interactive form of communication, CCP did not make use of it in that way, instead using it simply as a broadcast platform. This method of interaction went along with the other form of communication most often used by CCP when dealing with this protest, which is simply to make a blog post about the issue and lock out comments. The biggest example of this comes from the confession of wrongdoing by one developer:

**Figure 6: Developer Blog**

Despite having many complaints against them, and being implicated within several other allegations of corruption, this is the only response which CCP showed on their site. Since posts similar to this communicated very little to the larger community, CCP’s method of communication did little to gather
them any support and often frustrated many individuals who had not decided which side they would support.

Comparatively, IBM and Linden Labs made no obvious response or action to the information that was being broadcast by the protesting group. Although the protest in the Second Life case continued despite this lack of response, IBM successfully managed to avoid adding any fuel to the claims held against them.

This doesn’t mean that the Second Life organizers didn’t experience any pressure at this stage however. During this critical period the protest organizers also experienced pushback from their supporters who did not understand the value in a virtual protest. The traditional union organization could not place a value upon a system that was so divergent from their methods and values. The union groups involved in this protest were well established and did not align with the relaxed and game-like nature of a virtual protest. Traditional media dismissed and ignored the event as a serious labor action and instead covered the story as a youthful spectacle.

They [the unions] are not able to understand what is web 2.0, what is SL. So they are not giving us this innovation in unions. (Tyr)

The very thing that was bringing a great deal of support to the union organizers actually encouraged the more traditional union groups to attempt to repress the event before it began. Although repression is usually seen as occurring from outside a protest group, the new and untested nature of virtual worlds means that such pressure can come from inside a group as well.

6.2.1.6 Build Up: Organizational Flexibility

Besides the pressures of gaining supporters and diffusing a message through the population, protest organizations experience their first organizational stresses during the Build-up phase. In some cases these pressures are purposeful, meant to test the resilience of the group and their dedication to their
cause. In others they are simple pressures that occur to any group attempting similar organizational activities. Often this stage is the first time groups test their organizational flexibility and attempt to successfully manage stressors without damaging the organization.

There is one main connection between EVE Online and organizational flexibility. This connection is through how individuals adapt their own abilities to the needs of multiple organizations within the virtual community. Much of the information which spies are able to gather is due to the fact that many individuals refuse to acknowledge their role and responsibility within their in-game organization. In particular, in-game organizations are structured to take advantage of opportunities quickly while not becoming so loosely organized that they are inefficient or fall apart.

Participating in games, like EVE Online, can often be like having a second job (Yee 2003; Williams, Yee et al. 2008). Often these games involve a great deal of player organization and repetition of boring tasks in order to complete a goal. Within EVE Online this if further heightened through the complex player created organizations that gather in-game information. Well-placed individuals can create a work-like organization that refines the raw data collected by the spies into usable information:

*That’s the thing playing inside the game takes me too much time so I’m still involved in the game spying on corporations, creating scandals, exposing cheaters and corruption between developers and players but I don’t play in the game anymore.* (Thor)

As this player actually states, they spend all of their time “playing” the game through the organization and delegation of duties, much like a manager delegates regular tasks to employees. These individuals handle menial jobs like writing summaries of information, pattern recognition, and basic reconnaissance. This is done for traditional reasons as would be found an offline job, recognition of their talents, increased trust, advancement, increasing fortunes, power, etc.

Within this scandal, playing of the game became not just a series of actions but a strategic assault that focused on routine data gathering and processing to create an organized response to the scandal:
This organization shows how the players approached the situation to engage in the culture of the game through a systematic and work-like process of repetitive tasks and actions that remove the actual process of playing the game from the context and make it into something very different than what was originally intended.

Within the Second Life case, there was an understanding that this strike presented something new to the world of organized labor. The strike was used as a testing ground to “demonstrate to our unions that we can start a new battlefield operation.” Union organizers understood that the changing nature of business meant that unions had to find new avenues of engaging their employees. As one website explains, there is a great value in expanding on the role of virtual worlds in union operations:

This has the effect of breaking down isolated employees working for multinational corporations and strengthens international communication between unions and the IBM workforce worldwide. (http://www.amipp.org.uk/phorum5/read.php?8,3314)

Using a virtual world as a testing ground for new business practices allows unions and other involved organizations to create new experts in a technology as well as test the limits of that technology to see how well it could be adapted to their purposes.

In addition, this technology appealed to youths who had been disenfranchised by traditional European unions, and the organizers of the virtual protest understood that this group would be a key supporter for actions in the future. There was an inherent appeal in using technology that they engaged with in their free time to approach work-related issues. It removed barriers of location, social practice, and time from the occasion, creating a more approachable union. Many unions took advantage of these elements after the first protest to create a support base within the Second Life.

But at the same time I saw all the people that were participating in this initiative were young people. People who were not experienced in unions. This is the first time they’ve come to an initiative and they start to join this international movement. So I saw a bad
approach from the traditional union but at the same time new involvement a new approach from a young workers. (Tyr)

When planning the organizational structure for their protest against Second Life, UNI Global Union understood the importance of organizational flexibility. During the course of the protest process they experienced many unanticipated changes and pressures which they were forced to adapt to or fail trying. They created goals for this virtual world protest that not only sought to achieve several short term aims but also that would set up a solid foundation for longer term goals which benefit the union system as a whole. Within EVE Online, the unique structural organization of the protesting group allowed them to make maximum use of their resources, such as players interested in managing others, to support their group against one with significantly more power and control. By blending their knowledge of the online and offline both protest groups were able to create a sufficiently flexible organizations which successfully implemented their respective protests.

6.2.1.7 Build Up: Anonymity

During the Build-up phase, anonymity was seen by some to as a positive concept that allowed individuals to carry out their actions in peace, to others it was a negative that disrupted or altered how actions were performed. In light of these perspectives, anonymity could be seen as a barrier to be overcome. Within the data sets of the two cases anonymity was an important factor in regards to both player choices and organizational decisions.

To the interviewees, anonymity was the simple ability to hid behind an avatar’s name and not be forced to use or otherwise display information about one’s offline self. Avatars are easy to come by; they can be created or deleted on a whim, and the naming of avatars is often just as flexible. This means that identities within virtual worlds are easier to come by than in the offline world, with no paperwork, background checks, or dangerous black market dealing necessary to completely become another person.

As can
be seen in EVE Online case, there are a few additional ways that anonymity can be bypassed within virtual worlds. Given that many individuals do wish to develop an online persona, they often represent themselves through the use of the same name in all the different media that they consume related to that virtual world. Through careful tracking of these names, it becomes possible to build a pattern of behaviors that a particular user has and use that pattern to determine some characteristics or information about the individual behind the screen.

They wanted to kill one titan pilot. At the time the titan were really hard to kill. So the plan was to find the pilots real life address and send someone to his house and cut the electricity during the middle of the battle. They were really serious about it. (Thor)

The few pieces of information about this individual that was associated with their in-game character provided only partial anonymity. For individuals within the protest who were skilled enough to trace internet connections, additional information was easy to find, and eventually destroyed anonymity when compiled together, leading to the initial series of posts made by Kugutsumen.

In particular, one of the ways that the spies in EVE Online are able to gather such vast amounts of information is through the fact that it is very possible to create anonymous characters within the game and on other forums. These are individuals who act like undercover agents, gathering information from the inside of competing groups headquarters and passing it along, sometimes even incriminating themselves in order to buy reputation with the group from which they are stealing. As one interview described:

When you’re a spy a really good way to gain the trust of everyone is to volunteer to be the scout. So people, they always hear you on Teamspeak. On Teamspeak there is only two people speaking: the fleet commander and the scout. So I gained the trust of everyone really fast. [...] after three weeks I had access to everything in the hanger and I just stole everything and they died. (Thor)

Since the group had no way of tracking this player’s history and other characters, they were open to being scammed. The anonymity of characters and player’s accounts means that finding out such background material is extremely difficult and time consuming, making it unlikely that a thorough job is done.
Within Second Life, anonymity was an important part of the organizer’s planning strategy. They relied on being able to connect to the Second Life platform, pick a location, and have a private organizational meeting since the group was geographically dispersed. However, if the organizers used the same avatar for every meeting then it would become easy for others to track or follow these meetings. However, there was a need to balance this through understanding that total anonymity would be difficult, simply since they would need to engage in extensive organization before each meeting. One organizer describes the compromise that was finally settled upon:

Also we were trying to do is keep it as secret as possible to the date of the protest for IBM so we used different spaces in SL that were protected so we could only invite a certain number of people to come via SLURL in these areas where we couldn’t be seen or heard to guarantee the fact that our meetings to plan the date would be secret to IBM workers because we had a strong feeling that all of our meetings were being monitored and that we were being spied. (Sif)

Within this environment, mission critical information must be handled carefully so that protests retain their impact. The setting for these meetings helped to meet this goal by allowing individuals to attend in a semi-anonymous form, as well as easily create an environment where security precautions were possible.

There were members of each committee who checked the identity of the attending members, not only protecting against spying, but also as a method of record keeping. One interview participant who handled this job found it to be difficult to perform:

It’s a really odd feeling and it’s kind of awkward having to ask people really personal questions so you can try to hopefully identify them and sometimes it was really quite hard to actually find out that I was being maybe too familiar or too inquisitive with people that are way high up in the ranks of trade unions. (Sif)

For an individual who is handling a job much like ones they may perform in their offline capabilities, addressing others in an informal and somewhat anonymous setting made the etiquette of the offline workplace come into conflict with the requirements of operating in the virtual environment. However, the role of anonymity within the EVE Online case shows the wisdom of pursuing such a strategy. Within virtual world protests and their planning stages, anonymity can often be a double edged sword.
6.2.2 Developing Events

It is during the second stage of the protest pathway that the actual protest happens. Within this study this stage is called Developing Events. In this stage several of the same variables as within the Build-up stage remain in play due to the continuing need to organize and plan the protest as events unfold. Groups are still acting to recruit new members and protestors, including ones who join in the middle of the protest and it is up to the organizers to find and quickly bring these individuals up to speed. How the organizers choose to share information about changes to their supporters or outsiders at this stage reach their highest costs since miscommunication could be devastating. The choices of the authority to act again come into play as they may chose to respond during the protest or once again wait until after the protest. There is the first stirring of reaction from others during this stage as perceived influence of the protesting group comes into play to shape the rapidly approaching outcome.

6.2.2.1 Developing Events: Cost of Information

During the Developing Events stage, the role and importance of cost of information is brought into clear focus. Any form of communication contains some type of cost associated with it but it is only during this stage that the intense time pressures create a period where the relative costs of communication channels cannot be compared or otherwise reduced. The choices about how to communicate which groups make at this stage create an impact which is very disproportionate to that found during any other stage.

Many within the EVE Online community invested their personal time and energy into creating promotional materials as the protest began. During the development of the scandal, many individuals on the official EVE Online message forums changed their signatures, a small message at the end of all their posts, to include a statement or image which stated their position on the scandal. Many times these images and phrases became rallying cries which others would pick up and duplicate as a message for the protest.
One clever example not only lambasts CCP, but also Band of Brothers, by looking like a recruiting message instead of criticism.

![Figure 7: EVE Online Protest Signature](image)

The creation of the original post which started the protest involved a great deal of cost for the group at Kugutsumen as well. As one organizer explains:

> I wasn’t so good at writing [the posts] so I courted help from [an outside group], there was one [person] who was basically rewriting the posts. And everyone participated in a way but I think we were, there were about 10 to 15 people who had access to this information. With another 150 that could possibly have seen and dealt with this information. (Thor)

They had created a pyramid shaped organization whose duty is to gather, analyze, clean, connect, summarize, and translate information which can be used by spies or other player organizations within the game. This process was quite intense for the information which lead to the protest and as the quote shows, the number of individuals involved is rather high. Many people needed to contribute their time and resources to creating the marketable data which Kugutsumen released. In order for the protest to happen each of these individuals needed to put their time into this process for the final and complete information to become apparent to the larger EVE population.

The protest organizers within Second Life did not have the same structural efficiencies to fall back upon when they needed to communicate something to the group during the actual protest event. This resulted in them being forced to use the default communication channels which the virtual world provided them. This proved to be rather difficult since there were many individuals at the event and any particular piece of communication could be rather easily lost among the general noise of so many avatars.
As can be seen in this photo from the end of the event, the important news regarding the number of people who attended the protest becomes lost in the general commotion of people talking in the open channels.

![Image of chat history](image.png)

**Figure 8: Victory Announcement**

Additionally, it becomes difficult to tell who is a member of the protest organizers and who are people that came to watch the protest. The individual making the announcement was a key figure within the event, while the one asking others to come to a similar event was simply a bystander making the most of an opportunity.

The comparison of the cost of information between these two highlights the importance of considering this dimension before reaching the stage at which it becomes important and costly. The members of the EVE Online case took steps to ensure that clear communication could be maintained during the protest, minimizing their costs if anything needed to be communicated during the event.
Within Second Life, there was an increased cost of information as general chatting obscured important information that the organizers were trying to share with the group.

6.2.2.2 Developing Events: Barriers to Entry

The barriers to entry that are likely to be experienced during the Developing Events stage are often quite different than those that were addressed in the previous stage. In particular, the technical nature of virtual worlds introduces some unusual complications into the process of involving and communicating between protesters and the population.

CCPs response to the protest created a serious barrier to entry for many of the players. Since CCP engaged in two methods of repression, refusal to share information and active censorship, players were forced to look for additional information, or read between the lines, in order to understand the protest. In addition, many needed to show persistence in their protesting since they may need to post, edit or alter, and then post again before any of their messages were allowed to be shown. It was not uncommon to see the message:

*CCP have not nor will not discuss GM decisions with third parties - Cortes*

This type of censorship was very common in areas where the developers had control over the context, such as the official EVE Online forums.

At the same time, a large social barrier for many individuals was simply not becoming sidetracked or distracted by other discussions. In particular, individuals defending the actions of CCP and Band of Brothers would frequently make posts in forums or other conversations where the protest was the main topic of discussion. Often these topics would attempt to shift the focus or discussion onto the actions of the protest organizers or to begin and argument that was more pedantic and draining in nature.

“You have NO case.”
And yes we can do a lawsuit for the disruption and direct attempt at destroying CCP.”
(Kugutsumen Forums)

By trying to sidetrack the conversation onto the legality and chance for an actual lawsuit this individual managed to get several people to begin discussing their point, instead of the protest. This theme was particularly successful with many threads discussing the legality or ability of individuals to face prosecution for their actions. These types of conversations were an interesting barrier since they were very tempting for many players who enjoy the argument.

The virtual and digital nature of a Second Life protest introduced complications due to the fact that people must be connected to the virtual world in order to communicate with others and attend events like the training sessions or the protest. This was an issue that was faced by the organizers:

We had a bunch [of people] that would appear then disappear, bump into you and then they’d go all black. [...] they tried very hard but were stuck because they couldn’t get things they couldn’t click, they were only half there, it was a big issue. (Baldr)

As this organizer states, these individuals could only be half present. They could not engage with others around them in the virtual world. Nor could they gain enough information or access to the virtual world for them to give an accurate understanding of the protest or the training sessions.

As the Second Life case demonstrates, the limitations imposed through insignificant technical influence can often be worked around by implementing social tactics. Second Life encouraged protesters to adopt a welcoming attitude to individuals who approach the picket or strike areas. In some cases, this included courteous directions to confused users or counter-protesters:

I don’t remember seeing that many of them [counter protestors]. That would have banners above their head or holding something that would say “I had a peanut for lunch” kind of thing. And we would just kindly approach them and say “you’re not holding the right sign. Would you like one of mine?” (Sif)

Barriers to entry during the Developing Events stage of a virtual protest can have significant impact upon how that protest ends. Technical barriers may remove part of the supporting population from the protest, meaning their support is largely negligible. Social barriers can fragment and distract the
protesting population, lessening their impact as members focus on addressing many different issues instead of staying focused.

6.2.2.3 Developing Events: Influence

Influence is a very important dimension to the communities of both protests during the Developing Events stage. It was during this stage that power balances were their most malleable. By making the most of their momentum, the protesters would be able to gain significant influence within the virtual world.

The dimension of influence is central to the protest within EVE Online. The basic complaint of the protesters was that influence was not fairly distributed among the many different player groups and that certain groups were given significantly greater influence due to having developers as members. This view of influence within EVE was made clear in the title of the posts with which Kugutsumen exposed Reikoku and Band of Brothers as having developers within their groups:

![Figure 9: Screenshot of Original EVE Post](image)

As can be seen in Figure 9, this series of posts was called “Reikoku Makes Its Own Luck”. Given that many of the outcomes or possible achievements within virtual worlds are meant to be randomly generated the title and overall post highlight the idea that this group had undue influence over this process.
In particular, even members of the groups who were accused of manipulating the game by having developers within their ranks were afraid to associate themselves with any type of excessive influence. One interviewee responded:

**Question:** Would you ever [want to be/want players to be] a force for creating or deliberating over changes in the game world?

**Response:** This already exists, it’s called the CSM (Council for Stellar Management) and, no, I have no wish to be involved. (Loki)

This player stressed that they wished to stay as far away from any hint of influence over the game as possible. Given that these player groups had taken a great deal of scrutiny and attacks during the course of the protest, this point of view is understandable.

The more relaxed and welcoming nature of the strike within Second Life was a result of the medium used for the strike. Besides an environment of openess, the organizers acknowledge that they had little control over the spaces in which they were protesting. The fact that the organizers could not remove or silence counter-protesters forced a more open approach to deal with them when they arrived.

In other instances, the strictures of the technology can be manipulated to achieve a sense of influence and control that do not exist otherwise. In some instances protest organizers went to extreme measures in order to make sure that their voices were being heard by IBM. As one protester explained:

> I was snooping around in one of the, I think it was the business centre, got into this meeting and tried to talk to the people but they just ignored me and kept talking about this meeting. And I put that big flying fish above my head and they realized what was happening so they closed off the whole area and ejected me. So my avatar was outside this invisible wall to their meeting center. But I kept clicking on the map and I managed to get back in again and when I got back in again I broadcast my location and started to teleport other people in. (Baldr)

The lack of response by IBM up to this point forced the protesters to make sure that their voices were being heard by the company. In this instance one protester was able to shut down the meeting that several IBM employees were having within Second Life. Much like in offline protests, the picketing group could not simply be ignored or worked around but forced their issues and presence. Instead of using...
social methods to beat a technical limitation, the protesters in this instance took advantage of a limitation within the technology to impose social control over a situation.

The issue of influence remains an important point of debate within EVE Online. The player oversight committee that resulted from the protest is very political in nature as players attempt to gain every competitive advantage that they can. The events that unfolded during this stage dramatically changed the balance of power between the players and CCP. For the protesters of Second Life, influence was not as obvious at changing the balance of power but the small technical advantage they were able to leverage meant that they were able to receive some feedback from IBM, something they had so far been unable to do.

6.2.2.4 Developing Events: Repression Response

The Developing Events stage is the second major chance for there to be a repression response. It is often during this stage that some type of response to the protesters will be solicited from their opponents. It is also the last time that the opponents have the ability to forestall any consequences of the protest instead of simply reacting to them. During this stage it is not uncommon to see counter-protests or events happen as well as the main event.

Band of Brothers attempted to launch a counter-campaign which targeted the actions of Kugutsumen as simply an attempt to showboat and gain some advantage through false accusations. Even well after the end of the protest many members of this group held on to this position. Often, their response was not only against the individual groups which benefited the most from this scandal but also against the larger community:

*Question: What were the overall goals of the others (larger community) in the outing of the EVE employees?*
Response: They were looking to use the outing of CCP employees as a catalyst to gain in-game advantage (Loki)

Many members of BoB attempted to shout down the protesters within discussion by posting multiple times with attacks against Kugutsumen and other players or player groups. Their efforts met with mixed results as their arguments were often either ignored or rejected by the larger community. As the screenshot below shows, one attempt at closing down a conversation through intimidation is met with derision and continuation of the discussion.

![Screenshot of BoB Response]

Figure 10: Screenshot of BoB Response
CCP, the company that develops EVE Online, responded very differently to the accusations. They initially announced that they would open an investigation with their Internal Affairs department but then quickly ceased giving any further information to the players. When it became clear that the players would continue pushing for a response CCP released several generic statements and then proceeded to begin deleting additional conversations about the topic as they appeared. They also began to heavily edit the discussion of the topic in the conversations that were allowed to remain open.

Figure 11: Edited EVE Post

Posts like the one above were not uncommon and in some instances a player’s post would be deleted altogether, instead of simply having pieces of it removed.

In addition to trying to curtail any discussion of the protest, CCP also sought out the individuals who were involved in the gathering and release of the information and removed their access to the game. The leaders of the protesters were targeted as an example for the community, not only having one account banned but having every account they owned or that was associated with their IP address locked out. As one organizer discussed in their interview:

_The CEO of CCP threatened to resign if they unbanned my characters. A lot of people we exposed were CCP people playing with their friends. Even though they were wrong they were not happy that we exposed them._ (Thor)

IBM and Linden Labs, the owners of Second Life, were aware of the initial announcements made by the protest organizers. During this period, both companies remained relatively quiet. Neither company
released their own statements or utilized their personal news agencies. However, IBM did release internal statements highlighting their policies regarding Second Life use during work hours and confirming that they had plans in place to handle the protests.

This message was repeated again in the media when reporters approached IBM managers for a comment:

_A spokesman for IBM Australia declined to comment on the impending industrial action saying IBM had a policy of not discussing internal staffing details._


They also did not ban workers from blogging these internal announcements and many were posted on either employees’ IBM or personal blogs. However, this lack of a clear company response meant that mixed messages were often passed along to the press creating an unclear picture of what the response by IBM would be on the day of the protest. As one protest organizers and IBM employee stated:

"The high offices of the company are worried, because this action will turn on the lights on the project of creation of a global union alliance, that is engaging the unions from over 16 countries worldwide, including the new IT boundary: India," the statement said.

(http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/08/24/ibm_italy_strike/)

Even though many of the messages passed along by IBM were reassuring employees that the company would handle any protest the tone within the company made for a very different picture. This dual response by IBM created some confusion but also had the effect of minimizing the ability of the protesting group to use their actions against them. The response by CCP was very repressive in regards to how they handled groups releasing information about their employees. They made every attempt to control, dominate, or remove discussion among the population. Failing that, they made sure that the individuals who were easily identifiable in their participation were banned from the game permanently.
6.2.2.5 Developing Events: Anonymity

Anonymity remains an important dimension during the Developing Events stage since being able to address the issue appropriately allows the protest organizations to deal with the challenges of enacting the protest. In some cases, the semi-anonymity may provide the group with additional material to rally supporters around. In others, it meant that keeping the group together and organized effectively meant extra work at a time when many resources were already dedicated.

After the spies within EVE Online had exposed at least one GM who was playing within the regular game world without keeping his identity secret, they began to search the information they compiled to see if they could recognize the same patterns elsewhere. In one instance, 6 months after the news broke, the members of Kugutsumen were able to track down a player who they believed to be the same GM that started the whole mess.

*120's new character is Kalhystia and he plays in Coreli.*

IP: [xx.xxx.xx.xxx] (CCP)
Nationality: French
Passion: Capital Ships
Likes: Spawning T2 BPOs


Through careful analysis of this player’s conversations with others, as well as, tracing the computers unique address and connection location they determined that it was likely the same individual and that they needed to watch the situation to see how it developed.

The spies within EVE Online used the semi-anonymity of their players to the full advantage. They gathered and cross-referenced information to determine who was possibly a developer and who was not. In particular, on post produced a great amount of discussion about how far to take such gathered intelligence.
All these guys registered on RKK with icelandish email addresses.


(http://www.kugutsumen.com/showthread.php?138-Suspected-Devs-In-BoB)

Although the group had some information, like what is posted above, the semi-anonymous nature of it meant that there was often some uncertainty regarding how well this information matched their guesses. In the above example, the information was hotly debated due to the fact that an Icelandic corporation had just reformed, meaning that many of the players discussed were bound to have Icelandic IPs and email addresses.

This uncertainty of associating an offline identity with an online one was also relevant within the Second Life case. Semi-anonymity can cause confusion as people protest together, only to find out that some of their assumptions about the others are incorrect. One protester came across while organizing the strike:

Are you really a man or a woman? Because my SL avatar is actually a man SL. [laughs] because [my boss] felt like that was the best way to represent [my company]. (Sif)

To this individual, it was important that they present a male face to the others. However, once an outside connection occurred it became difficult to reconcile the differences. The semi-anonymity granted by Second Life allowed this individual to present a different identity from their physical form that confused others.

To some this form of deception could be off-putting, reducing support for a group right at the stage where it is most needed. Being uncertain of identity can also lead to reducing the potential information that can be shared with others since confirming identity online is difficult. However, providing the information without checking it runs the same chance of alienating supporters.
6.2.3 Repercussions

The last stage of protest is called the *Repercussions* stage. The actions of the protest have largely been completed and the power structures and influence are once again forming solidly. The name arises from the fact that it is common to see opponents respond now, their last real chance to do so effectively. Since this stage is about examining the results of the protest event those dimensions which have long term impacts occur here. Legality becomes a dimension again due to the authorities’ view of how legal the player actions during the protest were. Influence also plays out in a similar way to *Legality* as groups maneuver for better social positions or perceived benefits/decreased losses that they may gain before their opportunity is lost.

6.2.3.1 Repercussions: Legality

The steps taken to ensure legality earlier in the protest are tested during this final stage of the event. This is often when data collected about a protest and its organizers will be collected and parsed by opponents to check for legal openings, filing of lawsuits, or other forms of retaliation. In some events this could be seen as the closing of accounts used to access a virtual world to offline consequences like loss of a job or other threats.

Within EVE Online many players faced some type of legal repercussion from their involvement in the protest. In particular, several organizers were made to fear possible lawsuits from others looking to get revenge for their online actions. This fear of the repercussion arose as a type of paranoia when discussing events in detail:

*Question:* If it is all right with you I would like to record the conversation […] is that alright?

*Answer:* Yes it is all right. I should just do a background check just to make sure [laughs] you’re not being hired by CCP to get me. (Thor)
Many individuals who had been involved with the protest and who were spotlighted during the actual event felt similarly to the individual interviewed. Given the response which Kugutsumen received from CCP for his involvement this type of fear was very justified. However, it wasn’t just the hosting companies which had EVE Players worried, many were afraid of their fellow players. Players could play with slightly more illegal methods to pursue their desire for revenge on an individual they felt had wronged them.

Many IBM employees took the reaction by the company as both an ok for them to participate in the protest but with a definite caveat to do so discreetly. As one organizer stated while talking about protest participants:

"It's hard to predict how many IBM employees will join as most of them have given us their private email addresses to join the strike. A few of them have given IBM addresses, which has just allowed us to confirm the participation of IBM workers in a number of different countries." (http://www.escapistmagazine.com/news/view/77044-Italian-IBM-Union-Stages-Strike-in-Second-Life)

These employees knew they could participate fairly but they gave other email addresses fearing the fallout of the event if they should be identified later.

Although IBM did not threaten any of its employees many chose to remain cautious when dealing with this new development that went beyond their normal union experiences. As the Alliance@IBM, the union for US based IBM workers, made public on their website, caution needed to be taken in such instances:

All US IBM Employees participating: Use your own computer on your own time, to join in the virtual strike. (http://www.endicottalliance.org/newsupdate.htm)

This caution showed the awareness that many employees and unions had about the consequences they could face after the protest had completed. While unions may not have many legal issues, employees could face losing their job or other issues like arbitration or possible lawsuit if they were not careful.
Within the two cases studied here the legal outcomes that many protesters feared never occurred. However, the specter of such actions effectively changed the way individuals acted during and after the event. There is a clear focus on making sure that negative legal complications are avoided as the new power balance is being established.

6.2.3.2 Repercussions: Influence

The Repercussions stage is when the final balance of power comes into existence. The groups which were involved in the protest have come to accept their new positions and groups are working to establish themselves firmly within their roles. Groups must now examine how their influence on the virtual world and their community has changed in order to understand how they may go forward into the future.

Even the results of the EVE Online protest, which many considered successful, were viewed askance due to the changes to influence they generated. In particular, the Council for Stellar Management was seen as being a new avenue for players to manipulate the game to their advantage, despite its goal being to ensure equity. As one player summarized:

_Is anyone really gonna trust 8-9 people you don't personally know to do anything [about] EVE?_


This feeling was echoed by the population in general. Since much of the game depended upon a very competitive atmosphere, any change in control that favored only certain players was seen as being exploited by others and making the game unfair.

The role of influence had shifted dramatically from the balance it held during the original status quo within EVE Online. A group of players had risen and CCP the owners of the virtual world ceded a
good amount of power to this group, creating a distorted form of constitutional monarchy within the 
virtual world.

For UNI Global Union, the momentum and backing which they gained during the Second Life 
strike allowed them to put increased pressure upon IBM to meet the union’s demands. While UNI Global 
Union did not gain much influence within Second Life itself, they were able to leverage their experiences 
to create a beneficial outcome for the workers they represented:

“Are you thinking it was only a funny game? 20 days after the virtual strike, the IBM 
ITALY CEO resigned and the works council signed the union agreement. YES IT WAS A 
BEAUTIFUL DAY.” (YouTube Video)

Through their clever application of Second Life to the offline power struggle, UNI Global Union 
managed to gain a significant influence over contract negotiations which they did not have previously. They have made the most of this influence since the actual protest, creating a Second Life union office 
and holding several more events meant to bring attention of small union negotiations.

The change in influence which results from a protest has the largest impact within the 
Repercussions stage. By acting upon changes in influence protest organizers are able to make use of this 
flux period to meet goals that were not addressed directly by the protest. Additionally, they may make use 
of this change in influence to shape and plan their future actions.

6.2.3.3 Repercussions: Repression Response

During the Repercussions stage of the protest, repression response is associated closely with the 
dimension of legality. Since legal options cannot be pursued until after the actual event they are some of 
the most common types of repression that occurs. However, there other forms of repression which may 
occur at the final stage that are meant to limit the power of the protest organizers or prevent such an 
action from happening again.
One of the organizers of the EVE Online protests recognizes that there are repressive outcomes that affect more than simply the protesting group:

*A lot of people we exposed were CCP people playing with their friends. Even though they were wrong they were not happy that we exposed them.* (Thor)

As a matter of dealing with the future consequences of employees playing the game with friends, CCP was forced to limit their abilities as players, even outside of their jobs. This action was meant to keep employees from engaging in any type of action which could harm the company in the future but was still seen as being quite repressive to people who not only play the game in their free time but are devoted enough to work there as well.

IBM remained reactive even at this final point. They only responded to the protest at an individual level when it became a disruption to their activities within Second Life. However, they did pay attention to what happened during the protest in order to better understand the event and plan for such actions in the future.

IBM employees were reminded of their legal standing and warned internally and by their individual union groups that they needed to take caution. In particular, one IBM guideline was highlighted as important:

***legal note for IBM employees*** Usage of SL is permitted by IBM following the Virtual Worlds Guidelines for IBM employees [...] You can join the SL protest during normal working hours ONLY if your national union declares an official union initiative (it's also regulated by national law, please check it). (http://www.your2ndplace.com/node/612)

This is the first time that any type of communication about participating in the protest during work hours was shared with the larger blog community. In particular, there is a much clearer stress on the corporate and national regulations that control and oversee union activities. This was meant to be a much clearer message to employees that their actions could be observed and may be followed up on if they break the guidelines.
IBM did respond internally after the conclusion of the protest to acknowledge that they learned from the situation. One protest organizer and IBM employee commented:

*IBM was really impressed from this experience so I think they are thinking for sure how to react in the future.*  
(Tyr)

Even though IBM treated this protest reactively, only responding to disruptive tactics and not sharing much information with the media, they still sought to learn all they could about the protest and its organization. As this organizer acknowledges this information was valuable to IBM as a tool to moderate their response to any virtual world protests they face in the future.

### 6.2.4 Central Dimension - Framing

The central dimension of the diagram differs from those that occur at the discrete phases of the event. This dimension touches upon every stage and can never be said to cease or alter in its degree or implications at any particular stage. Unlike the other dimensions which may begin and end within one stage, or occur at one before being used again in a different way in another, framing is a continual process throughout. Although the individual frames that are identified during different stages, the process behind them is what is represented within the yellow circle.

Within virtual worlds the use of *framing* theory revolves around the concepts of identity and self-actualization. Movements form group identity frames that they then project into the public as a way of arguing for the validity of that same identity. Framing conflicts can occur between members of groups, or between separate groups and their interpretation of larger narrative of the game world. These conflicts not only require groups to reflect and further define their frames but also to articulate how their frame fits within the larger reference of the virtual narrative in order to create resonance with the general public that exists outside of their group but within the conflict.
Within both cases, there were two major frames which were used by the protest organizers to attract followers, sympathy, and support from the general public both within the virtual world and outside of it as more individuals adopted these frames they often began to shape the entire discussion of the protest, even becoming integrated into the messages being passed by opposing groups.

**EVE Online Frame 1: As Long as You’re True to Your Code of Conduct**

A contradictory frame that was used by the protestors is the idea that as long as a group remains true to a personal code of conduct their actions are largely unquestionable. This framing was achieved through continued reference to the established governance policies. When others questioned legality of the actions by the players who exposed the scandal, the protestors countered with how the groups that exposed the corruption never pretended to be anything besides a spy ring.

Often these players acknowledged the open secret about the Kugutsumen’s method of obtaining information. As one player stated:

*Kugutsumen is a sort of freelance hacker that delights in getting access to private information and publicizing it when he knows that it will provoke people. As far as I know, he's never actually lied about anything or published anything that was patently dishonest.* (http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/editorials/interviews/1234-Jumpgate-EVEs-Devs-and-the-Friends-They-Keep-Part-2)

Immediately following this statement the individual distanced themselves from such actions, acknowledging their illegality while supporting their credibility. Protestors fell back on the continued credibility of information to show that legality doesn’t always affect believability.

This frame encouraged many players to use these differences between expressed and enacted values to pressure CCP for resolution to the issue. As this poster says:

*Nobody cared that developers were in Band Of Brothers, kieron. People cared about the free handouts such as the Sabre BPO. What's the status of those, anyways? Were they*
Since the players had access to the governance policies, they were knowledgeable regarding the punishment for any “cheating” within the game. However, these protestors used the disconnect inherent within this frame to further build a case that CCP was not following its own policies. The player lists several common punishments for cheating as they are listed in the player codes of conduct and asks for clarification about how the matter was handled.

**EVE Online Frame 2: Hosting Companies Require Decision Transparency**

The second frame established by the protestors is that the hosting companies within virtual worlds are the government of those worlds and should have decision transparency. The protestors achieved this by directly making comparisons between government actions and those of CCP or by playing off of the benefits that the company would receive by engaging in some transparency regarding their actions and decisions.

One poster directly makes the comparison between CCP and an offline government by describing how they see the same situation playing out in the offline public sphere:

> A government can't just keep saying, 'We are not corrupt.' No one will believe them. Instead you have to create transparency and robust institutions and oversight in order to maintain the confidence of the population. Eve Online is not a computer game. It is an emerging nation, and we have to address it like a nation being accused of corruption. (http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/07/arts/07eve.html)

This poster uses the rhetoric surrounding government corruption to make an interesting point about the role of EVE Online in many players’ lives and the damage to them as well as their perception of the world when this “corruption” is allowed to continue. The player, after adopting the frame’s view, surrounds their demands for action by CCP in the rhetoric of political action and sensibility.
An interesting point used by many protestors engaging with this frame is that without outside viewpoints proper governance would be impossible for CCP to achieve:

*The problem is that it's impossible to tell how far the alleged corruption really goes. A corp or alliance with devs/GMs for friends would be extremely loathe to say a word because of the possible benefits of association.*


As this commenter points out, human interactions and friendships lead individuals to provide trust and blur the lines between acceptable and unacceptable actions. While the Game Masters (GMs) and developers have an official position, many of them remain active and engaged players who wish to succeed at the game just as much as any other player. The difficulty is that the positions of power that these players hold greatly exceed the normal player’s. The implied method behind this frame is that only outside eyes could allow such individuals a clearer understanding of where the line between acceptable interactions and unacceptable ones.

The interesting thing about many of the frames employed by the protestors in EVE Online is their heavy borrowing of concepts from Western democratic societies. The two frames discussed here blatantly reference democratic styles of governance and concepts. The players place an increased value on these styles of governance and argue that they have certain rights over both their digital lives and their digital worlds. The players use arguments about the benefits of a “transparent” system of governance within the game while also providing vague threats about “tarnished reputations” and “continued drama.”

Within the frames used by the protestors there seems to also be a confusion regarding whom they were protesting. In part this may be due to how the information about the scandal was addressed and handled by the company. However, as the situation developed further and the actions, or inactions, of CCP gained greater public focus the main target of the framing process changed focus from Band of Brothers, a player organization, to CCP itself. Given the success in building support and setting the tone of the conversation that the protestors had in their early framing of the engagement, it is likely they kept
many of the same themes, governance and borrowing democratic language, in order to keep their current base of support as well as successfully continue their campaign.

Second Life Frame 1: Hit’em Where It Hurts

In many press proceedings and interviews, the protestors carefully employed their framing of IBM’s involvement in Second Life and how the public image that IBM was developing in the virtual worlds was at a cross with IBM’s actions. The media adopted this frame’s lens of understanding as they wrote their releases and reports, highlighting the cleverness or effectiveness of using a platform in which IBM has such name recognition. As one blogger commented:

*Big Blue has been cheerfully reiterating its commitment to the metaverse as the platform of the future by crewing its Second Life based Business Center with full time attendants. However, you may want to avoid the area for a while - the union that represents Italian IBM employees is somewhat peeved at a recent pay restructuring package, and has called a strike to picket in SL instead of meatspace. (August 23rd, 2007, http://futurismic.com/2007/08/23/ibm-faces-virtual-strike-in-second-life/)*

And another noted:

*I believe this is the first real strike demonstrating in Second Life and really I think it is a great idea. Not Second Life specifically but generally online: no doubt the influence and impact of a virtual strike can be as important as a street demonstration and it does not take anybody as hostages. (http://loiclemeur.com/english/2007/09/italian-ibm-emp.html)*

The organizers made choices regarding the symbols they perpetuated to highlight the importance of Second Life to IBM but also separated the importance of a virtual realm from other offline holdings the company may have. In both cases, there is an acknowledgement of the importance of Second Life to IBM, showing partial use of the frame, but a devaluing of that importance compared to “meatspace” or the offline world.
The organizers structured this frame to also bring to light the weakness of IBM as a multinational firm. The protestors framed their arguments in the idea that by taking the strike to Second Life and using IBM’s investment to draw attention to the strike, union organizers could also bring to light other issues:

"The high offices of the company are worried, because this action will turn on the lights on the project of creation of a global union alliance, that is engaging the unions from over 16 countries worldwide, including the new IT boundary: India.”
(http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/08/24/ibm_italy_strike/print.html)

IBM had succeeded by keeping the inner workings of each of its national branches separate from the larger discussion of the company. Media adoption of the protesters’ frame helped the organizers capitalize on the branding that IBM had already invested in the virtual world, the union organizers were able to bring together the vast and separate holdings within IBM for discussion and collaboration.

**Second Life Frame 2: Novelty and Union Solidarity from the Comfort of Home**

This frame was structured to highlight the advantages and usefulness for participants in holding a strike within Second Life. This frame was distributed among media outlets that had come to learn more about the strike before it occurred. The most common symbols in this frame were the amount of development that went into the online tutorials and strike kits, the physical symbols of the strike within Second Life. In addition, the organizers focused the viewpoint within this frame on how long the protest lasted, as well as how the software that has no sense of day or night.

The success of the adoption rates of this frame among the media encouraged the protest organizers to speak more about the advantages in using Second Life. The organizers used this frame to play upon the comfort aspects and encourage individuals to participate. As one person says:

*Hope to see you there - if only because this is one union picket that definitely won’t get rained on!* (http://www.johninnit.co.uk/tag/second-life/)
Adherents to this frame focused on shared experiences to create a sense of understanding with the potential audience. Highlighting the uncomfortable but shared experience, not only encourages participants to act, after all it will be much easier physically, but also offsets some of the uncertainty and fear that may be felt at attempting such a new action in an unfamiliar location.

Many interviews and reports after the protest included comments similar to Davide Barillari’s:

*What is clear, however, is that the union does not see this as the last action of its kind. “This Second Life strike is the first step of a bigger ‘Unions 2.0’ project: we will use the ‘innovation’ to build a new version of unions, worldwide* (http://www.pcp.co.uk/news/125840/ibm-hit-by-second-life-strikes?searchString=ibm)

The unions looked towards this new technology not only as a useful platform for organizing but also a tool to encourage more general participation. This frame highlights a plan to employ new technologies in union activities to reshape people’s understanding of how unions operate. Organizers within UNI Global Union mentioned that creating a new type of union that would appeal to the disenchanted and younger workers. This frame was structured to give the strongest reasoning for the appeal of a technologically savvy union, since it shows that the unions not only understand the technology.
Chapter 7
Virtuality of Protest Dimensions

7.1 Virtual Legality

Virtual Legality came to have a unique definition for virtual world protests. While this dimension is often treated as a black and white variable, the cases covered in this study show that there is a much fuzzier concept at play. How groups defined virtual legality often changed according to their desires, goals, and community. The dimensions were at once broader, as in the transnational laws considered in Second Life and narrower, as in the ability or inability to sue in EVE Online. Across both cases it is obvious that virtual legality includes not only the offline laws, and online software agreements, but also the shared moral code of the virtual society. Both groups bound their definitions of virtual legality to this moral code and grounded their discussion of the other forms of law, as well as the actions of the event, in this code. This dimension of relative legality is not often discussed or dealt with in such concrete fashion in offline protests. The fact that an alternative to binary considerations of legality exists within a virtual world significantly expands this dimension.

In both cases, the dimensions of virtual legality bridged the boundary between the offline and the online. The organizers of the Second Life protest went to great lengths to ensure that their actions would be legal in every definition of the word. This included forming a committee for analyzing the legal rules of operation not only for Second Life itself but also for each nation where they knew members from which members would be connecting from. This committee took a very broad definition of virtual legality, since it would be unlikely that many individuals would face any danger of breaking the law by connecting to Second Life, at least as long as Linden Labs was okay with the event. However, their focus also showed a great deal of foresight about the issues of virtual legality which surround virtual world
protest. They knew that they would like to use this method of protest again in the future and completed the work for such planning early, reducing potential legal costs and resources.

The players within EVE Online were looser with their interpretation of virtual legality. In particular, they hold the concept of maintaining the character’s role to be more important than actual law that would apply. Given that some instances of information gathering in the EVE case were tied to the hacking of websites or user’s accounts there should be a clear line of legality that was crossed. The perception, however, is more that the ends justify the means and these hackers were doing nothing illegal since they obtained information which was damning about the developers.

Across both cases it is obvious that virtual legality includes not only the offline laws, and online software agreements, but also the shared moral code of the virtual society. Both groups bound their definitions of virtual legality to this moral code and grounded their discussion of the other forms of law, as well as the actions of the event, in this code.

When you compare the conceptualizations of virtual legality which were developed within the two cases interesting similarities between the offline definition of the term and the application of it in the virtual world emerge. The two definitions which are given previously in Chapter 3 focus on determining if an event falls within the actual definition of the law and if it meets the “spirit” of the law within the community.

This second definition of virtual legality is the one that proves most interesting within this study since it not only takes into account the literal translation of texts but also a level of cultural interpretation of correctness. This definition can be seen within the EVE Online case in the outrage of many community members regarding CCP’s violation of what they professed to be cultural beliefs. The calls for transparency and other forms of open communication could be based in this concept of CCP disrespecting the rule of law that it established.
Alternatively, a new definition of virtual legality also emerges within EVE Online when the players okay the use of cheating and hacking by the protesters because they fit within the identity they professed. By looking at the second definition of virtual legality from this light it becomes clear that the cultural rules are not necessarily as binding as previously thought. Instead it’s the consistent application of identity as a narrative of personhood which grounds the concept of virtual legality. Unlike the civil rights movement, the violation of cultural rule of law as well as the literal one was forgiven by the community since the protesters never engaged in any form of deception regarding who they were or what methods they used.

The literal definition of legality has many similarities between its application in offline settings or within virtual ones. In both realms there is a check that must occur before a protest to make sure that any laws that exist within a community are not violated, or that only specific ones are violated if that is the intent of the protest. At this basic level the two applications are quite similar. The only difference that can be seen between them is within the depth of analysis which is required before the check is fully met. For the offline protest there are national, state, and local laws to consider mostly those having to do with free speech, intent to gather, building access and safety, damage to property, permit requirements, etc. However, the virtual world protest includes those levels and areas, as well as digital harassment, digital property law, contract law, hacking or data destruction and several others. Besides the officially made laws there are also the Terms of Service and End User License Agreement which must be considered and which may be interpreted much more loosely.

7.2 Virtual Shared Identity

Virtual worlds present a unique challenge to forming a shared identity for a protest. While the storylines and social communities within the worlds are very strong and act to reinforce a common
cultural identity the fluid nature of identity within the virtual world works to undermine traditional means of identifying oneself with a group. Virtual worlds shift the emphasis of a virtual shared identity from status or in-group symbols to the shared actions and experiences of people who engage within a community. The issue of time allowed for the development of a player culture is also an important differentiating aspect between the two case studies.

The communicative aspects of virtual worlds enable players to participate in the discussion and feel involved in their community. This allows for the development of virtual solidarity among the community since they were able to discuss their problems together as a community within the game and form social ties with each other. These social ties allowed for the development of a shared understanding of experience and community to develop. By calling on this community and the ties that it formed with the protest, organizers were able to use the numbers of players to make a strong impact upon their intended targets.

For many of the participants of the IBM strike in Second Life, this was the first time that they had set foot in a virtual world. Many of these protestors were drawn from organizations that were connected to UNI Global Union in the offline world but did not necessarily have any strong connections with the organization in the virtual world. This was highlighted by the extensive use of training materials provided by UNI Global Union leading up to the strike. This system bypassed in game tutorials and made it simpler for new players to go to the two important locations, UNI Global Union’s home and the IBM Island.

Many of the individuals logging in for the first time were drawn to the protest through weak ties with the strikers. Many were participating in a virtual world for the first time and had no social network there before the assigned date of the strike. There was little feeling of virtual solidarity because these weak ties did not foster cultural experience and the feeling that this was a permanent community. This was highlighted by the presence of groups with only partial connection or interest in the meaning of the strike joining in to shout their own slogans.
The community that formed in Eve Online encouraged participation by all players of the game. The fact that this game is meant to support independence and cut-throat politics of economics meant that players were quick to jump on an advantage against the dominant group. The fact that all this information was disclosed on websites and forums that allowed public access meant that many players were able to participate in the discussion and feel involved in their community. This allowed for the development of virtual solidarity among the community since they were able to discuss their problems together as a community within the game and form social ties with each other. However, this nature also brings up problems for the proposed solution by CCP. Given the overall community nature many players who were able to act together to keep the issue in the forefront feel that acting together in an oversight committee may be impossible. The nature of the game means that the individual members of the committee are more likely to look after their own interests, rather than the larger community interests. They were able to come together in their discussion since it was an issue that affected all the players and put everyone at a disadvantage.

When compared to the offline definition of shared identity the main feature which stands out regarding the virtual application is the very contextual nature of it. Within Second Life, the organizers of the protest were able to draw upon many of the offline connections in order to build support within the virtual world. Due to this they met the literal definition of solidarity, where the members that committed from the offline world did so because they made a connection to the organizer’s cause. In most cases the organizers were able to use their common experience as unionists to create a shared goal and purpose which was simply translated into the virtual world.

Within the EVE Online case the change in shared identity arose not from an offline goal or purpose but from the narrative driven community which developed within the world. The virtual world created a common ground between very diverse individuals who were geographically dispersed all over the world. The common culture of EVE Online and shared narrative that the world was based in acted as
the key point around which the virtual shared identity of the protesters formed. Unlike in Second Life, the organizers were able to make use of the existing community, repurposing it to meet their goals instead of importing one from their offline experiences.

7.3 Virtual Message Diffusion

The choice of virtual message diffusion methods depended heavily upon the stakeholder group sending the message and the intended goals of that group for each individual message. As the Second Life case shows, protest organizers used both interactive and broadcast diffusion strategies to their advantage. During the actual events they constantly monitored communication and engaged in an interactive form of diffusion that allowed them to rapidly adjust to changes. However, during the organizational phases, they tended towards a more broadcast method which allowed them to distribute information about the protest and how to use Second Life to a significantly larger group.

For the organizers of EVE Online, the focus of the group upon their shared community experience as players encouraged the use of discussion based media for the creation and dissemination of information. Most of the protesting and organizing occurred on a forum, like Kugutsumen, or within the virtual world. While these channels of communication were not very rich, they did allow for the creation of clear messages which could reach a large audience quickly and which would be relatively permanent. They also allowed for feedback to be incorporated into the message and actions as responses were posted after the initial message.

How organizers chose to diffuse each individual communication played an important role in the eventual outcome of each protest event. The reactions of the organizers, policing forces, and general population were related to how they received information and how they could respond to pass along that information to others. While virtual message diffusion was very important for both protests, the actual
application of this dimension to the virtual world setting showed limited to no differences when compared to applications in the offline space. Similar findings can be seen in the study of offline protest despite the dramatic impact media selection had within this case.

### 7.4 Virtual Barriers to Entry

Virtual barriers to entry is uniquely altered by the virtualization of protest. Many barriers that exist in the offline world simply do not have a digital equivalent and are therefore rendered meaningless in a virtual world protest. However, the virtual nature of these protests introduces additional barriers that are not found within offline protests. There are additional technical requirements which must be considered, both in terms of access, training, and feasibility for each protest. While the barriers for communication are low in a virtual world protest, the barriers affecting participation may be much higher. As the Second Life case demonstrates, it is easy to make sure that many people hear about the protest, but it is much harder to make sure that they have a useable and effective avatar at the site of the protest. The dependent nature of virtual world protests upon software, computers, and networking access imposes a universally serious barrier. There are some shared similarities between the cases presented above in terms of limitations on who could participate. As in all virtualized protests, access to a computer and the Internet are required for participation. In addition, the protests required specialized software, which may or may not cost money, to be installed on the computer before participants could access the protest site. Distinctions can be made between the two cases in the roles that social ties play in determining participation in the protest.

The main difference between virtual barriers to entry and ones in the offline world is in the degree of technical barriers which would prevent participation. While most offline protests have some form of technical, social, and organizational limits, situating a protest in a virtual world significantly
increases the technical limitations and to some degree the social ones as well. The technical limitations are similar to those mentioned in the previous paragraph but the social ones are also worth addressing. Particularly the technical nature of the protest means that often individuals of particular socio-economic or national identity are excluded from the potential group of protesters. The ability to access a computer, high speed internet, the software, and pay for any additional fees creates a barrier to all but the most privileged within the world, if not within individual nations. However, the same could be said for many protests around the world, where there may be a desire to participate but travel expenses or lack of awareness limit the ability of many to participate.

7.5 Virtual Repression Response

Within the cases examined, the virtual repression response was not as clear cut as it often can be in offline cases. Because of the nature of virtual worlds, there is the ability to provide no response at all to a protest. Unlike in the offline world, where organizations are forced to at least partially interact with a group of protesters, this interaction is entirely avoidable in the virtual world. From locking down a location to simply using tools like teleportation to avoid areas, the act of avoiding a response was made easier. However, the ability to repress a response was also increased. The control that many organizations, like CCP, have over a virtual world makes them the sole arbiter of what is a reasonable reaction. If they so desire, they have the ability to completely crush their opposition within a virtual world. The differences between a hard and soft response by policing forces is well illustrated within these cases.

Within the cases examined, the virtual repression response was not as clear cut as it often can be in offline cases. However, the differences between a hard and soft response by policing forces is well illustrated within these cases. Within the Second Life case, there was a lack of response to the protest by IBM and Linden Labs which could be described as very reactive or possibly no response at all. Given that
the protest was certainly discussed in these settings it is more likely that the response is a well considered reactive lack of repression.

IBM had clearly not prepared them in advance for any type of strike within Second Life and was forced to react to the initiative which the protesters showed in the location selection. Unlike how they may handle a strike in the offline world IBM did not have a standard policy which they could use to deal with any type of media attention the case drew. In fact, it could be argued that they tried to use a similar tactic to that which they employ offline, simply wait the protesters out, but unlike in the offline world the Second Life protesting group was not under the same time pressures to reach an agreement.

By taking a soft approach in this situation IBM not only avoided bringing more attention to the issue but also was able to make a deep analysis of events so that they could plan for similar actions in the future. Given the nature of IBM’s tie to Second Life this was a pragmatic response in both the long and short term goals. By not admitting that the protest led to their management changes IBM avoided making the Second Life protest seem like too useful a tool, while also subverting the power base around which the event was organized. Much like many groups in offline protest, IBM manipulated their response so that it would encourage a relationship with the protesters that benefits the corporation in both the short and the long term.

For EVE Online, the timing of the response was very reactive. The developers only reacted to the protesters once they had been pushed into doing so. However, given the length of time in which this case developed, the developers alternated between reactive and developing responses to the protest. In some instances they acted to repress information or discussion as it was happening on their forums, in others they reacted to the release of information over which they had no control. This case highlights the difficulties to responding to protest within a virtual world. It is very easy for a company to go overboard in their response, generating outrage and additional support for the protesters in the process.
In the offline world, this has become harder to do since often the only way to limit or repress similar protests requires the cooperation of law enforcement. In most places, a group gathering to discuss with management an issue which is upsetting them violates no laws. In offline cases such as this, the police will often not get involved in the issue. Even in offline cases where some laws are broken, such as blocking the entrances to buildings or parking facilities, the police will often simply come to make sure the laws are followed, and encourage protesters to stick to the areas where the protest is allowed.

There are no police in a virtual world. The hosting company is not only management but is also the supplier of all resources and governance. In many ways virtual worlds mimic the “company towns” of the early industrial age since the users of the virtual worlds are locked into their location and character by the company. Much like abuses of power occurred within the company towns of old, the temptation to react repressively to any type of protest exists for hosting companies today.

7.6 Virtual Cost of Information

Virtual environments challenged the nature of costs of a protest by lessening the actual costs in dollars and increasing the costs in expertise. For many organizations, virtual worlds may offer a cheaper way of enacting protest since much of the software is freely available and the costs for purchasing space within the virtual world is low. In addition, the availability of computers to many people creates a perceived chance to reach a much larger source of participants or volunteers than an offline protest could achieve.

However, this lowered cost can be offset by these challenges, requiring the organization to involve more time, effort, and resources into getting a complete and well-manned protest. While recruiting new participants from within the virtual world was made much easier, recruiting from the wider, non-virtual, environment became more difficult. In particular, UNI Global Union spent much of
their time organizing and focusing attention on making sure that all the digital participants had materials they could use. They also went to great lengths to ensure that their non-digital participants had a smooth transition to the virtual world by offering tutorials on use and instructions about how to participate in each step of the process. This level of organization was seen as costly but invaluable for the protest organizers.

Although traditional media were important to both the Second Life and EVE Online cases they were not seen as being the sole source of potential recruitment that they often are in offline protests. The organizers within both cases relied heavily upon social media, social networks, and alternative or niche media to spread their message for them. This aided the groups in the reduction of costs for their message to a wider community. In both cases novelty was a draw but it did not need to be highlighted as much within the message as it does in the offline world. The lower cost of drawing media attention meant that the protest groups did not have to shift their message or form to meet the demands of traditional media for violence, shock, and ratings.

The largest change from the offline dimension to the virtual one arises from the focus upon when the cost of information is relevant. In traditional protest the cost of information is seen as being the most useful for analysis during the recruiting stages. However, with the two cases studied here the virtual cost of information really became an important factor during the Developing Events stage. It is during this stage that the limited communication channels of a virtual world change the ability of the organizers to share information and the cost increases greatly. When time is not as sensitive a factor organizers may find alternative ways to spread information. But when time because short they are reliant upon forms of communication which discourage discussion, are easily lost or confused, and which are limited in the number of people they can reach. All of these changes greatly increase the cost of not only spreading a message to the other protesters but also the chances that the message will not be received, adding additional costs like increased chance of failure, loss of support, or disintegration of the shared identity and focus.
7.7 Virtual Influence

Virtual Influence is an important lens of analysis within virtual world protests, as shown within these two cases. The desire for, or implication of, any change in influence can be an intense motivator for the creation of a protest. Acute knowledge of the lack of technical influence within a virtual world can also lead protesters to change tactics in order to respond appropriately to situations during a protest. Within both cases, there was an acknowledged split between the virtual influence of the social sphere and the virtual influence over the technical sphere. All stakeholders within both cases understood that the social and the technical nature of a virtual world were intertwined but they also understood that particular groups had more control over one aspect or another. This forced stakeholders to adapt their strategies in order to meet limitations or advantages they had when dealing with one sphere of virtual influence. Understanding this difference between the two spheres was often a key factor in determining the outcome of the protest.

It is rare in the offline world to ignore peoples’ opinions about how they are managed and governed. Even if those opinions are not taken into account, there is an assumption in most of the modern world that individuals should still have the basic right to voice their opinions. This is the main difference between influence in the offline world and within the virtual protest. Within the offline protest, the most basic definition of influence is presumed to exist, and levels higher than that are socially negotiated between groups.

However, in virtual worlds there is an acknowledged fact that even this basic definition does not exist. If the hosts of a virtual world do not want to listen to customers opinions they have many technical options to make the expressing of those opinions impossible. They do not feel that they need to make “sure that those who represented the larger population sought to include and validate the experiences of all members of the population equally.” While the larger population in an offline setting may refer to social status or demographic numbers, within the virtual world it refers to technical power. The hosting
company has exclusive technological control over the virtual world and therefore is the one making the decisions about whose experiences and opinions are validated.

This can be seen from within the EVE Online case when CCP attempted to edit or otherwise silence all debate and discussion around their relationship to the Band of Brothers. The population of EVE felt that they were not being fairly represented and fought for the ability to make CCP listen to them, to gain the most basic level of influence over their community. Eventually, through persistence and public scrutiny the protesters were able to achieve this goal but it did require a significant effort on their behalf, something which few of them would ever have to experience for the same results offline.

7.8 Virtual Organizational Flexibility

By taking a flexible approach to virtual organization, player groups were able to take advantage of unique opportunities, ramping up their workload for a brief period of time before going back into the lull of the normal routine. Having a higher tolerance for flexibility allows player groups the chance to take advantage of time limited opportunities without having to dramatically overhaul their entire process. At the other end of the spectrum having little or no organizational flexibility, be it personal or group-based, caused serious complications and potentially important security leaks.

The particular nature of EVE Online, when combined with the ease of finding information on the Internet, has helped to create the rise of such flexible virtual organizations. The existing narrative of competition between player organizations for limited resources creates an interesting story background that players can take as far as they want. Within Second Life the virtual organizational flexibility allowed for the development of an entirely new form of union organizing. Since the older unions were unable to adapt their methods to attract younger workers, the new virtualized union group was able to capture a significant portion of the future market.
Within the interviews for both cases, participants spoke about their difficulties in organizing their events and how these barriers were overcome. It became apparent that the success of the events was at least partially dependent upon the fact that organizations were able to adapt to the changes during the rapidly changing events before and during the protests. The organizers of the EVE Online protest were able to develop a very flexible, but unexpected, virtual organization in order to play the game but which also provided them with a pre-existing group of supporters when the protest began to develop.

Additionally, the inflexibility of many players provided the spies within EVE Online the chance for access to other websites and information, which would otherwise be unavailable to them. With Second Life, the organizers were able to develop a flexible virtual union organization, which could take advantage of the interests and needs of the supporters they gathered during this protest and develop contacts with previously disenfranchised young workers.

The inflexibility of the traditional European unions’ allowed them to take advantage of this support base to make space for the development of a new type of digitally collected union, something which would have otherwise been difficult. Due to the pace of events and pressures of organizing a protest in a virtual world being organizationally flexible was important in allowing both groups to adapt and successfully complete their protests. The applications of the flexibility within both cases were uniquely online, taking advantage of the many different forms of flexibility, which are built into online organizations. While flexibility is important for offline organizations it rarely plays out in such dramatic circumstances where the consequences of flexibility are so immediately obvious. These offline organizations have physical resources, staffing, buildings, and locations which must be managed carefully and do not change easily. Unlike the online organizations that were set up for the cases in Second Life and EVE Online, the focus and work of an offline protest organization cannot be changed or moved on a moment’s notice. Additionally, resources that are financial or tangible cannot be reallocated quickly since they must be accounted for, recorded by the organization and then moved to their new location. Since
these resources are seen as important goods, making it a slow process means that they will not get lost or misappropriated.

When the organizers of the Second Life protest saw the opportunity to start a new type of virtual union they were able to create a space and presence within the community in almost no time. From nowhere the entire union sprang into existence overnight, reallocating resources and staff from other locations to serve its purpose. An offline organization would not be able to have nearly as quick a creation. Instead of simply buying a chunk of land they must carefully and slowly make decisions about location, etc. This limits their flexibility and slows their response time.

7.9 Virtual Anonymity

Virtual anonymity was a flexible dimension for virtual world protest participants. The nature of virtual worlds allows for an ambiguous type of anonymity to form. Users are not completely anonymous, nor are they fully identified with their offline persona. Players often deal with a type of *semi-anonymity*, where they have some ties to the offline world, IP address, emails, communication patterns, etc. but also have major points of disconnect, personality, and lack of a name/face/history. This means that protesters can take advantage of both aspects either using anonymous characters to gather and plan events secretly, or using identifiable information to track down others in the virtual world and tie them to specific actions taken by an avatar.

The semi-anonymous nature of avatars in Second Life meant that individuals attending a meeting must be vetted against the official roster, creating additional work and complications. However, the nature of virtual anonymity also allowed the protest organizers to remain off the radar of policing forces for IBM or Linden Labs, who may have wished to track and remove their avatars before the protest happened. Within EVE Online, virtual anonymity was seen as an obstacle to overcome. The anonymous nature of
avatars allowed the complicated corruption to happen, creating a separation between the developers as an offline person and their identities as online avatars and players. The protesters in this case needed to overcome the barrier of anonymity to track, trace, and record the identity, both in-game and offline, of the developers in order to prove their allegations. This process involved significant information tracking, analysis, and synthesis in order to build the appropriate usage and identity profiles of the online users involved.

To the interviewees, virtual anonymity was the simple ability to hid behind an avatar’s name and not be forced to use or otherwise display information about one’s offline self. Avatars are easy to come by, they can be created or deleted on a whim and the naming of avatars is often just as flexible. This means that identities within virtual worlds are easier to come by than in the offline world, with no paperwork, background checks, or dangerous black market dealing necessary to completely become another person.

While there is some information about the offline individual requested when one makes an account with a virtual world it is not difficult to forge or otherwise fabricate that information. Additionally, even if the correct information is given it is typically held as highly private information and is not shared with anyone else. Some other forms of potentially identifiable information may be shared through the simple use of the virtual world software, such as Internet Protocol address, which is needed to connect to the Internet and virtual world servers. IP addresses are usually assigned in large blocks to a particular Internet Access Provider. If this information is carefully examined it becomes possible to generally locate an individual within the world or possibly regional location. However, since Access Providers tend to reuse these IP addresses many times and occasionally change the address that a particular user is given. There is no guarantee that the person using that address when it is located is the same individual that was using it when it was recorded.

Unlike in the offline world, an online avatar has the ability to completely mask identifying characteristics about themselves and may disappear from the world in an instant, leaving only a recording
of their connection information behind. While in offline protests individuals may be able to mask many of their characteristics, it remains difficult to mask all of them and very simple to reveal some, by physically revealing the person. Additionally, no one can completely disappear from the offline world. In order to escape from a situation or location a person must move physically away, which takes time and is traceable by others who are watching or if the individual is not careful.

Given these facts, virtual anonymity is much stronger as a dimension in a virtual world protest than it is in an offline one. The history of protests contains many examples of leaders being captured or groups being disbanded due to physically being identified. Any form of offline protest leaves behind physical trails which can be followed. While an online protest does the same, the information which is left is not nearly as identifying or easy to track, making anonymity a much more useful tool.

### 7.10 Virtual Framing

Across both cases of protest discussed so far, there are many interesting aspects to the virtual frames selected by the protest organizers and adopted by the protestors. Given the unique motivations, settings, and participants that engaged in these protests in both cases, there are a surprising number of common points or similarities that may be compared across the frames. However, it is obvious that the virtual frames selected are still unique to each case and were developed to fit well with an image of the protest which the organizers wish to become institutionalized within the larger population.

Adoption of virtual frames within both cases encourages a focus on the rights of the players and organizations in the virtual world. Without this focus on framing the cause as a virtual civil rights movement, many players would not be aware that such rights could exist within a virtual world. The active framing of rights raises awareness and turns a simple group of angry people into a slighted, focused protest group.
In EVE Online the organizers framed their argument through the use of rights rhetoric when describing the actions taken by CCP during the course of the scandal. The players engaged with this framing of civil and consumer rights to imply that their digital personhood has been violated by the developers’ misconduct. After adopting this frame, the EVE community felt that they had the right to privacy, fair governance, and input and feedback on the control of the game. While in the Second Life case, the framing of digital rights resulted in actions by the strike organizers to make sure that the rights were protected, EVE players’ demands for the protection of their rights cause the hosting company, CCP, to make changes. In particular, the players’ demands for personhood and rights as citizens of the EVE community resulted in changes to the organization structure of CCP and the establishment of an oversight committee meant to prevent a similar scandal from happening in the future.

Not all the virtual frames used in these cases were widely adopted. Those that rejected the virtual frames discussed here often took a contradictory framing and questioning the “real world” impact of both cases. The blogging community and larger mass media questioned how the protest organizers hoped to hurt IBM with their strike in Second Life. While the organizers framed the strike as hitting IBM in a vulnerable spot, the alternative frame suggested that it would not have an impact, even if IBM were invested heavily in the project. This was a counter frame that argued that anything that happened in Second Life was virtual and not real. How much damage could a virtual strike inflict when it couldn’t even effectively force confrontation with the company? By articulating each of the virtual frames together, creating an alignment between the different messages the group espoused, the resonance of the frames were able to overcome such suggestions. The apparent softness of protesting a digital realm is offset by the impact organizing such a large group of IBM workers had. By framing this as a joint international venture and backing the framing with the goal of creating an international and digitally savvy union, the organizers add a real threat to IBM by holding a virtual strike. The ease of the technology, as well a planning and extended time period, allowed for IBM employees across the world
feel that they were able to work together and communicate. They built bridges that could be used again in the future.

The framing articulation within the EVE Online protest was much trickier since the question of player rights is further outside of the rhetoric of the game. Players largely have no rights in many games and because of this often can have little impact on the decisions made by the companies producing the virtual world. However, the alignment and articulation of the virtual frames employed by the protestors in EVE Online helped to overcome these limitations by engaging the company and forcing a discussion of players’ rights, proper governance, and matching words to deeds. The rapid and widespread adoption of this frame among the community moved the entire debate in a very favorable area for these protestors since they could now speak on terms that gave them an equal footing to the larger company, regardless of legal standing.

The framing of the protesters’ arguments for transparent government, made clear their demands about what they wanted CCP to do to encourage the protestors continued patronage. Leaving the protestors, their consumers and citizens, unhappy could have major economic and public relations impacts upon CCP such as a loss in profit or even closure if profits and populations shrank any significant amount. The virtual frames used by the protestors clearly defined what the players were unhappy about and what exactly they wanted done to fix the situation, giving CCP a way out but also drastically changing its operating procedure and structure as the democratic oversight committee was introduced.

The nature of virtual protest has shaped the frames within each case. In particular, several frames could only be articulated because of the virtual nature of these protests that could not exist in the offline world. The first is the demand in the EVE Online protest for digital rights to avatars. Because virtual worlds encourage engagement with the in-game narrative as well as the creation of new identities that players remain attached to, they enable the creation of extensions of an individual’s identity that are embodied in an entirely new space that mimics the real world.
The second is the access to global identities and people. Virtual worlds unbind the individual from their physical space by giving them a third realm of interaction that allows them many of the affordances of the offline world but removing the restrictions of time and space. Within the Second Life protest this is most clearly highlighted since the members of the protest and the frames regarding globalized action were dependent upon the fact that the many individual IBM employees could meet in a third space cheaply and conveniently for all.

### 7.11 Overview of Changes

In the section above a careful analysis of the virtual protest dimensions within the data of two cases illustrate how virtualizing social protest has changed the act of organizing. In Table 4 below, we briefly describe the changes wrought by the virtualization. We have found both positive and negative changes, from the point of view of the organizers in terms of how these alterations change each dimension.

**Table 4: Comparative Pros and Cons of Protest Dimension Virtualization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension Name</th>
<th>Virtualization Alteration</th>
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| Legality         | • New definition of the “spirit” of a law increases the methods which are considered acceptable.  
                     • Significantly more legal awareness is needed to properly understand the multiple fields of law which apply to virtual world protest. |
| Shared Identity  | • Highly contextualized to each virtual world  
                     • Group identification must be understood before active solidarity building is attempted |
| Barriers to Entry| • Significantly increased technological and social limitations on participation            |
| Cost of Information | • Large potential for using alternative channels to bypass traditional costs  
                           • Focus now upon the actual event instead of upon recruiting |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Diffusion</th>
<th>No differences between virtual and offline application</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repression Response</td>
<td>Lack of law enforcement or participative government increases potential of repression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>No concepts of participatory democracy more like a “company town”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framing</td>
<td>Increased ability to articulate frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unbinding of physical from identity increases options for participation and recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymity</td>
<td>Stronger impact and potential usage within online setting due to digital nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Flexibility</td>
<td>Increased organizational flexibility allows for rapid response to changing political opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Needs may be met quickly but with less accountability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those wishing to use virtual worlds as a tool for protest in the future must consider the changes important aspects of protest undergo when adapted to this environment. While this study focused on the organizational aspects, other viewpoints would also see changes to these dimensions when they are applied to a new setting. By examining how dimension change according to their context, a more robust and useful theoretical framework for virtual world protest analysis has been generated.

**7.12 Theoretical Justification**

While this research draws heavily upon the bodies of literature in several other disciplinary areas, it also serves to provide an interdisciplinary framework, which touches upon, and can be used within each of those disciplines. As such, this theory could not exist without the support of each theoretical area but acts as a bridge between the areas, opening them to new research and expanding their conceptual and theoretical boundaries.
Virtual world protests are theoretically different than non-virtual world protests in the following ways:

- They have no inherent social structure and must have one built actively by their population.
- They have technological limitations to communications and actions which cause the protest to become tied to the technology.
- They require an understanding of BOTH the technological and the social aspects in order to be fully understood.
- They are manned not by people but by representations of people, which may or may not align with an actual person.
- They are disconnected from geo-spatial considerations which complicates their relationship to geographically bound dimensions.
- They provide protesters with new tools, like semi-anonymity, which enable new types of actions but also presents unique complications.
- They have a unique relationship to their environments and selves since the degree of control of influence is highly flexible and more extreme than in offline forms.
Chapter 8  
Conclusion

As virtual worlds continue to grow in popularity, collective action becomes more common. In particular, as the diversity of the audience for virtual worlds increases, there is more collective action within the worlds and against their inherent political nature. People and their avatars, who believe they are simply playing or exploring a virtual world, are drawn into protest and new forms of collective action. Their actions within the world mirror the complexity of social life as it is found in the offline world. The increasing ubiquity of virtual worlds means that for many people, the outcome of this research is increasingly relevant for their online lives and livelihood. Currently, this area of research is understudied and requires increased attention from the academic realm. It is essential that scholars build on the decades of solid research exploring collective action and protest in an offline setting and note the changes and implications of moving those behaviors into a virtual setting. It is equally important that scholars of virtual world protests draw upon qualitative and interpretive tools in their research so that the social sciences gain an understanding of the basic processes of generating meaning in virtual settings.

The goal of this research was to identify how the process of virtualization changes the nature of protest within virtual worlds. In order to address this goal, this research drafted a list of theoretically derived variables from within the existing research areas to better understand how the separate areas of the technological and social may play into this process. Although the body of literature from which this research draws is very extensive and spans several disciplines, an extensive review of the literature within each area failed to produce an existing theory that covered all the key elements which are needed to explain virtual world protests. With the dimensions from these areas acting as a base of analysis it was possible to approach the two cases of virtual worlds protest and gather information that was not only relevant to the individual examples but also to the more general questions raised in relation to that case.

Within this research several concepts stood out as being particularly important to virtual world
protests. *Legality, organizational flexibility, anonymity, framing, repression, and influence* were all seen as being not only important dimensions but ones that were greatly altered through their existence or adaptation to the virtual environment.

### 8.1 Contributions

This research sought to create several discrete contributions through its analysis and completion. These contributions resulted from the development and application of the theoretical framework that this work created. As Figure 12 below shows, the updated framework takes into account not only the many areas of existing theory which are drawn upon and altered in virtual world protests, but also includes several dimensions which are unique to this phenomenon.

**Figure 12 : Updated Theoretical Framework**

Besides the creation of this framework, this research has also contributed in the following ways:

- **EXPLORATION** of descriptive cases which are in an unexplored and new area of interdisciplinary research.
• METHODS expansion to understand the application of traditional qualitative methods to virtual worlds and creating potential for new methodological advancement within these spaces.

• APPLICATION of existing theories in new spaces, bringing in older disciplinary understanding to new spaces and testing these theories to see where their explanatory power is insufficient.

• DIMENSION IDENTIFICATION and categorization of thematically relevant groups across the protest cycle and disciplinary boundaries. Identification of new virtually inspired or altered theoretical dimensions.

• DEVELOPMENT of a dynamic process for understanding how the theoretical dimensions interact through the expansion and application of theory to an understudied area.

• TERMINOLOGY expansion through the introduction and clarification of the concept of Virtual World Protest Theory.

8.1.1 Contribution: Exploration

The first contribution of this research is the development to two case studies, which examine virtual world protests and substantiate the framework described above. The development of these cases and the application of the framework to them emphasize the importance of each dimension to a virtual world protest, as well as, highlighting the role of the virtual world in altering each dimension. These cases substantiate the framework within actual instances of protest and allow its descriptive power to be tested. Although information about these cases was recorded as they occurred, few sources gathered as comprehensive a data set as was conducted to build the two cases within this research.
8.1.2 Contribution: Methods

The second contribution is the expansion of traditional qualitative methods to the study of virtual world protest. The current method of case study development through textual analysis and interviews with participants was an excellent method of developing a general understanding of the social context of previous virtual protests. It allowed the researchers to identify keys areas of observation and interaction that were highlighted within the cases. At the same time, this application of traditional qualitative methods to virtual spaces exposed some of the deficiencies and conflicts when these methods are applied, in particular, the creation of case studies that were not pursued to their theoretical saturation due to the differences between methods.

This deficiency opens the door for the development of new methods to study virtual world protests in a way that reaches the desired theoretical saturation. Engaging with new methodological development within this research would strengthen the research program further by allowing triangulation of the data gathered in both phases as they are tested and further expanded against each other. Aspects of the social context that were missed due to the historically based nature of the research may be further fleshed out.

8.1.3 Contribution: Application

The third contribution is the creation of an interdisciplinary bridge, which creates connections between the several areas of theory, which undergird this project. Theoretical knowledge is often replicated within separate disciplines since discovering existing theories in unknown disciplines is difficult. By creating a bridge between disciplines, this research lowers the cost of searching for theory between disciplines by both interdisciplinary and disciplinary researchers. Additionally, this research
allows others to follow the theoretical supports of this project to examine and understand the larger bodies and interconnected nature of many theoretical studies.

By applying theories relevant to the offline world, to virtual world protest, this study tests the explanatory power of these theories. It seeks to find their limits or breaking points and address these flaws in such a way that the original theories are strengthened through their application to new areas of study. Particularly in the area of collective action, the theoretical understanding must connect to peoples’ situations and lives. Given the increasing role of technology within many peoples’ daily lives, creating a bridge between existing collective action theory and this realm of application provides a valuable service, maintaining the relevance of existing theory through extension.

### 8.1.4 Contribution: Dimension Identification

The **fourth contribution** is identification of dimensions and their thematic organization into descriptive categories. Due to the complexity of collective action, many dimensions are potentially theoretically relevant to an event. By organizing the existing theoretical dimensions into descriptive classifications, it becomes easier to preview and understand what each category or dimension adds to the theory.

These dimensions create the important break with existing theory that is required to name this framework as new theory. Without the addition of these dimensions, it could be said that there is no gap between existing social movement theory and its application in virtual worlds. Any updates that would be required in such an instance would be simple expansions. With the inclusion of these codes the gaps between existing sociological theory and virtual world protest are made clear.
8.1.5 Contribution: Development

The **fifth contribution** which this research makes is expanding the theoretical support and understanding of virtual world protest. This research contributes to this area by drawing upon a kit of concepts regarding collective action and examining how the dimensions of protest are altered through their application to a virtual world medium.

The major findings of this research arise from the nature of virtual worlds as a socio-technical artifact. Virtual worlds have been analyzed with many different theoretical viewpoints previous to this research and many of these studies introduce a bias towards either the technical or social explanations of a phenomenon. As such, they often offer only a partial solution to the problem being studied. The dynamic nature of virtual worlds as socio-technical artifacts is addressed through the development of a process of protest which may be altered or adjusted as the repertoires of contention for virtual world protest become settled. Through the application of the originally proposed framework to existing cases of virtual world protest, it becomes possible to see how such alterations to this theory may be made in the future. By having a theory which provides a solid, but not rigid, understanding, researchers are able to account for the changing nature of both technology and the social structures of virtual worlds.

8.1.6 Contribution: Terminology

The **sixth contribution** which this project makes is in the creation a new terminology to discuss the events analyzed within this research, Virtual World Protest Theory. While some research has examined similar cases, these studies have traditionally applied offline theories to the analysis of the event. Even when research has addressed a theoretical misfit due to the unique nature and affordances of virtual worlds, it has often been seen as simply requiring an update to what theory already exists. This research project addresses virtual world protest as a break from traditional theories about protest. The
view that virtual world protest requires a break with traditional theory lends not only a motivation to the establishment of new theory, but also the requirement that this new interdisciplinary area be described. In order to address the lack of research that exists regarding virtual world protest, the field must be loosely bounded by other disciplinary fields, theories, and methods.

Coining and disseminating the term virtual world protest theory, acts to define the limits of the area of exploration for this study, as well as, future studies that make use of this theoretical framework. The term that this research contributes contains many of the important aspects and contributions of this research. It provides an area, in which the theory should be applied, includes inferences to the bridges this theory establishes with existing bodies of research, and summarizes the concept that this is a new thing, separate from existing theory.

### 8.2 Implications

The results of this research project not only addresses questions raised by the extension of existing theory to a new disciplinary area but also exposes new questions about how the existence of virtual world protest affects the virtual world, users, and academic theory. The model developed within this study, and new methods for analysis, need to be tested further to see how well they can explain the changes which virtual worlds enforce on adapted social processes. The future for this research lies in its application to additional cases and studies of virtual world protest to see how well the descriptive power of the framework matches the variety of circumstances under which these protests occur. Given the many stakeholders which are involved with virtual worlds and the enacting of protest within them, there are many future possibilities for the application of the findings of this research and the framework which developed from it. These implications include:

- **Implications for Qualitative Methods**
Implications for Information Systems Research
Implications for Social Movements and Protest Research
Implications for Players
Implications for Builders/Owners of Virtual Worlds
Implications for Law and Policy Regulation
Implications for Law Enforcement
Implications for Unions and Other Virtual World Protest Organizers

8.2.1 Implications for Qualitative Methods

Our current method of case study development through textual analysis and interviews with participants is an excellent method of developing a general understanding of the social context of previous virtual protests. It allows the researchers to identify keys areas of observation and interaction that are highlighted within the cases but not pursued to their theoretical saturation due to the differences between methods.

Beyond the scope of this research project, such an expansion of qualitative research methods provides a valuable tool to the larger area of information systems research. Due to the fact that more work, the dominant area of study for IS research, is becoming digitized or virtualized strengthening the ability of IS research to work in virtual realms would allow it to keep pace with the changing nature of work. While the percentage of work that has been virtualized remains small, it is continuing to grow over the last decade. Due to this there is a great likelihood that IS researchers in the future need to be able to have research methods that enable them to deal with work that bridges the gap between the virtual and offline since work that exists solely in the offline is harder to find and less relevant to the nature of work.
8.2.2 Implications for Information Systems Research

These uses of qualitative methods in virtual worlds fit nicely within the realm of information science research, continuing the information systems trend of applying new methods of research to new areas. As work became increasing computerized, IS adapted to new requirements, in order for researchers to better understand the needs of current workers and make changes to how information and computer systems were situated within the work environment. The methods discussed in this paper continue that trend, moving on from the simple computerization of existing business practices to the virtualization of work within virtual worlds. Given additional work trends that call for increased balancing of work and home life, better and more interactive managing of customers, and greater productivity of the worker during time spent at work and elsewhere, increasing virtualization is likely to occur.

Virtual worlds allowed a greatly increased benefit to information systems researchers through a number of different features that these worlds create. The first is through increased data acquisition and storage. Researchers are no longer limited by the physical need to be present to perform observations since virtual worlds and the digital researching tools can be everywhere, observing content for the researcher. Secondly, the cost of engaging in this research is greatly reduced due to the fact that researchers no longer need to travel to a distant work site to observe the work environment and interact with the different individuals. The increasing virtualization of work means that many of the advantages of travel to a work site can be mimicked in the virtual world since workers may be spending increasingly larger portions of their workday in these virtual worlds. Thirdly, the amount of data that can be captured and stored is greatly increased for any researcher. The same methods that allow researchers to gather data regardless of presence also allow for a greater capture of that data, such as details about objects held by the players, communications and interactions. While previously many conversations could be recorded there would be some loss of quality due to background noises, inaudible speakers, distractions, etc. In a virtual world all of this data is gathered in a much higher quality since there is little background noise in
voice communications and many textual communications. In addition, all these conversations can be recorded and saved for later analysis by researchers alongside much of the visual and environmental information.

8.2.3 Implications for Social Movements and Protest Research

Social movements and protest researchers will find several valuable concepts within this research that they may apply to their own work, the methodological application within the field, and the theoretical support for future works. In particular, the literature upon which many protest studies draw identifies only a limited use for the Internet and other cultural media as platforms for collective action and protest. This research identifies that the medium through which a protest is enacted may have very dramatic effects upon the outcomes and analysis of that protest. Researchers will need to take into account the changes which virtual worlds, and potentially other forms of technology, have upon a protest and not dismiss their importance as simply another interchangeable tool for interaction.

Methodologically this research draws upon several traditional methods for protest or collective action research. As it shows from the difficulty experienced during the course of this project, methods must be altered or considered carefully before their application to new cultural and technological settings. This project has identified several difficulties that arise from attempting to apply traditional qualitative social methods to the study of protest in a virtual world. While the application is narrow the findings from the methodological changes made during the course of the study provide valuable insight to researchers outside of this area.
8.2.3 Implications for Players

Players’ usage of virtual worlds is likely to change as they become aware of how this research and its findings can be applied to their personal world or interests. Players within a virtual world are more likely to assess the software environment as a potential tool for more practical purposes than they may have previously. Additionally, they are aware of the large number of opportunities which the virtual world presents them on a regular basis in terms of the tools for change or interaction. Often, the interesting aspects of the two cases examined in this research result from novel applications of tools within a virtual world. With the dissemination of this research, players have new views for examining their worlds and seeing how they can be manipulated to their advantage.

8.2.4 Implications for the Builders/Owners of Virtual Worlds

Companies need to carefully consider their interactions with virtual worlds if the concept of inter-real law were to be implemented. The developers of virtual worlds would need to examine their existing user contracts and carefully consider the legal implications of expanding or changing those contracts in the future. Companies which buy into virtual worlds would need to examine how property works within that world, what are the rights granted to citizens, what are the rights granted to paying customers, and consider how they approach not only interactions within the world but potential actions outside of it which may spill over into the digital. Many companies also need to examine how their employees use and interact with virtual worlds both within their personal lives and within the work setting in order to establish employee policies that are descriptive and consistent with the values of the company while remaining even handed about employees’ rights.
8.2.5 Implications for Law and Policy Regulation

With the increasing numbers of people going online to spend time in virtual worlds, national policy makers and the government must consider how virtual worlds are connected to the offline world that they govern. Virtual worlds exist as digital software running on a server located in a physical spot. Currently, all actions are considered to be under the jurisdiction of that server’s location. However, within the world the boundaries between one place and another are not as clear. Users from around the world can access that virtual world and participate within it building a separate society and nation within the digital realm. National policy makers and government must start to consider what it means to have a digital space that mirrors the offline world but transcends the physical boundaries around which we base most of our policy. In addition, they need to consider the complicated layers of policy under which many of the users are already operating when they use a virtual world. Conversations have arisen within the United States government regarding the taxation of digital income and currency. However, these discussions often ignore the differences that exist between one virtual world and another. When looking at the Terms of Service and End User License Agreement many developers claim ownership of everything that exists within that virtual world, meaning when users generate digital currency within the game they do not technically own any of it. National policy makers need to be aware of differences such as this when drafting laws about virtual worlds in order to avoid creating redundant or unenforceable policy.

8.2.6 Implications for Law Enforcement

Offline enforcement agencies have some additional considerations to take into account. In particular, this framework raises the expected level of technical knowledge expected of the police force. They must understand the types of harm or unique complaints that individuals have related to the virtual worlds they use. Much like the expansion of cyber crime laws, this requires additional educational
training or task groups that specialize in this form of crime. However, most importantly this type of crime requires rethinking the seriousness of virtual worlds as a tool for criminal activity. To many, virtual worlds remain a game or toy that is not used for serious purposes. But many of these virtual worlds are grounded in the offline spaces and have legal as well as financial ties to them. Enforcement agencies need to be trained to take the problems and citizens of these worlds with a more serious focus than they have in the past.

8.2.7 Implications for Unions and Other Virtual World Protest Organizers

Finally, unions need to consider virtual worlds when reviewing their collected tools of protest. UNI Global Union had great success with their virtual protest and has since used the tool twice more to put additional pressure on companies during union negotiations. Unions operate at many different levels of awareness or action and virtual worlds can be a valuable tool for increasing awareness of smaller actions which may often be overlooked by the media and public. Additionally, as the Second Life case shows, there is great support among younger workers for integrating technology into the union experience. By employing virtual worlds, either as a tool for protest or organization, unions are more successful in reaching out to these younger unionists, gaining their support for actions ten to twenty years into the future, something with which many traditional unions are struggling.

8.3 Future Research

Research on this topic has already been presented and well received at several conferences and journals. From the data collected and analyzed to this point six papers have been written. Additionally,
several journal articles have been written and are in the various stages of revising or resubmission to alternative venues.

However, even with the success of this project to date there remains many avenues open for future research. In particular, the limitations that arose through the unwillingness of interview subjects could allow for research continued in the same vein as this project. Reaching the theoretical saturation point of interviews would allow for much stronger comparisons and commentary to be made in regards to the model developed for this project.

The model itself can be the basis for many future projects, including the expansion to existing or new cases of protest within virtual worlds. There were originally five cases proposed for this research project and the three cases that were not pursued would provide excellent starting points for this form of expansion. There are some theoretical areas which have impact upon virtual world protest that were not included in this research due to the existing theoretical limitations. Future research could address these limitations, expanding and incorporating new theories or areas into the platform developed in this research.

8.4 Limitations

There are several limitations to the findings of this research project. Three stem from the methods used within this research study or the selected groups for observation. There are additional limitations imposed upon this study due to the theoretical selections made in building the framework that was the focus of this project.

This study draws upon public records and information available both online and in archived print media. As such the cases built are highly dependent upon the information that was stored or otherwise deemed relevant to post to news and current events websites. Often these sites focused are hosted by the
players and participants in these virtual worlds, giving the data and information presented in them a one-sided point of view. Information regarding the official stance of any hosting company or targeted opponent in a collective action is often hard to come by since few feel the need to make public statements regarding the event. In addition, the nature of virtual worlds makes archiving the actual data of the event hard to access or simply unavailable since currently no standardized method of archiving virtual worlds exists.

This study is also selecting relevant individuals for interviews from the archived information that is available. Very often this information alludes to a participants or organizers name within the virtual world. The nature of these names means that it can often be hard to track or otherwise confirm the identity of the individual as the same individual that participated in the action. In some cases, alternative individuals may be selected to fill in blanks left untraceable organizers and participants and may limit the resulting data to their understanding of the overall scheme and development of the action.

One limitation which was not originally anticipated was the active resistance to any form of academic study by several of the organizing groups. In particular one group within the EVE Online case, The Goon Squad, is deliberately hostile to all forms of academic study of their organization and culture. These individuals not only resist providing other contacts, such as are needed in a snowball sample, but they can often time up many hours of preparation which does not result in any form of data collection. In some instances their hostility can be seen in their treatment of the researchers themselves, but that was fortunately not experienced within this research project. Due to this unanticipated fact collecting interview subjects for this study was difficult and a full saturation of the sample was not achieved. However, due to the generosity of some interview participants this limitation was partially offset through access to additional sources of text documents which included a great deal of organizational discussion which could reasonably substitute for interview data.
REFERENCES


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There are a few key terms that are used repeatedly throughout this study. These terms may also be found in Appendix A. They span the many areas of literature this study draws from and are meant as an aide for understanding some of the jargon used within this paper:

**Affordance:** The perceived or suggested mode of interaction which is built into a designed object.

**Avatar:** a user’s personal representation within a virtual world. Can often be very generic or highly customizable depending upon the control given within the world and a user’s personal preference.

**Class:** The role that an avatar plays within a virtual world, i.e. identity. Not related to traditional movement and Marxists definitions.

**Collective Action:** Actions taken by a proportion of the population meant to either change or retains the status quo. These actions may be institutionalized (acting through the current political system and structure) or non-institutionalized (acting outside the political structure).

**Contentious Politics:** Actions taken by individuals who have no recourse in the regular political system to address issues held by them. Often completed in league with other influential citizens or elites and against the authorities of government and other opponent groups.

**Frame/Framing:** A frame is a way of interpreting events so that they may be understood in light of a social movement’s actions and goals. There are many groups that attempt to frame events so that they
may be beneficial to their organization. Often frames of the same event may come into conflict with each other, as these groups become known more widely.

**Guild:** Guilds are the basic unit of social grouping that exists in MMOs. They are provide additional benefits to members, like new clothes, extra storage space, other people to play with, and private communication channels. Guilds can often come to mean more to a person and could be considered something like a group of friends. Alternative words: Corporation, Group, PUG, Alliance.

**Hacktivism:** The name given to theories that are meant to explain the transition of traditional collective action repertoires to the World Wide Web. Many actions are labeled with this term due to the response by the authorities of listing these actions as breaking laws regarding proper use of the computers and the Internet (i.e. Hacking).

**Hosting Company/Developer:** A company that develops a virtual world and which usually pays for the costs of supporting the technology that makes these worlds available to the public. However, it is not infrequent for such companies to develop a payment plan that sells goods or services to their customers to cover this cost.

**March:** A form of non-violent protest in which a group gathers to march towards a site that represents either the change that they are motivated for or the current system that is keeping the change from happening. These sites are often symbolic in nature. The march is frequently used alongside the rally in a Rally/March/Rally format.
Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game (MMORPG or MMO): A specific category of virtual world that specializes in entertainment. An offshoot of the video game industry these virtual worlds tend to be large but limited in the power a player has to control the world and their interactions. Usually it has some type of story associated with the theme and organization of the world. There are several MMOs being examined in this study.

*MUD*: An abbreviation for Muli-User Dimension (or Dungeon). These were the first computer based role-playing games that were based off of the more traditional pen and paper games, like Dungeons and Dragons. While never very popular they did provide a unique experience to their users and are an important foundation for more modern games.

*Offline World*: The physical space you exist in, the “real world”. I chose not use to real world in this research because it implies a synthetic valuing of the actions and lives in that world over those that occur in the online world. While the dualistic concept is maintained, this research helps to show it as a false dichotomy. But such terms continue to be used for lack of better qualifiers.

*Persistent World*: In computer games, when a player turns off the game, the world that exists within that game ceases to exist. Nothing happens or changes in that world while the player is away. A persistent world continues to exist even after the user has walked away from the game. It continues to change and develop and remains active.

*Petition*: an institutionalized form of collective action that involves the creation of a political statement that requires changing the current laws of the system. This statement is then signed by other members to show their agreement and support for the statement and change.
Physics: The virtual set of rules and laws that dictate the actions and range of motions possible within a virtual world. These are the rules that allow a play to fly or take physical damage when falling from a great height. Often many interesting forms of virtual collective action make use of flaws and loopholes within this set of rules.

Protest: a non-institutionalized means of collective action in which a group gathers to make their position on an issue heard. Protests can encompass several different types of actions.

Rally: A form of protest in which individuals gather on a spot to make their opinions on a matter known. Rallies are often the site of shared identity building speeches, songs, and other activities by protest organizers.

Repertoire of Contention: the learned social conventions of how to enable or enact a collective action. The repertoire is drawn on to decide the most effective form of collective action that enables the group to meet its goals. It is also drawn on by the authorities and opponents to suppress or contain social movements.

Shared Identity/Solidarity: The commonality between individuals which provides impetus for a social movement. Solidarity is the active up keeping of these common traits by a social movement organizer in an attempt to maintain momentum within a movement or to overcome hardships experienced by a movement.
**Sit-in:** a non-institutionalized form of collective action in which a group of individuals enter a relevant site to their cause (a foreman’s office during union negotiations for example) and refuse to leave the site until their demands have been met. Often the resistance to police or other authorities attempts to make the group leave. Resistance to removal takes the form of sitting on the ground and acting as dead weight when forcefully ejected.

**Social Movement:** a group that engages in contentious politics around a specific issue but that manages to maintain sustained challenges and vivacity over long periods of time. Most social movements require successful framing of their goals and actions and a shared identity that motivates their supporting base.

**Virtual World:** a computer-based environment that allows a user to interact with each other and the general environment in a persistent setting that continues to change and evolve without any specific users involvement. There are several virtual worlds being examined in this study.

These terms are used throughout this paper. When they are introduced for the first time they are accompanied by a short definition again.
Appendix B
Interview Guide

• Background
  o What Massively Multiplayer Online Game (virtual world) do you play?
  o About how long have you been playing in this virtual world?
  o How many hours a week would you say you play?

• Community Participation
  o How many guilds/organizations have you been a member of?
  o Do you try to find out additional information about the virtual world?

• Legality
  o Was there anything you considered before taking part in the protest?
  o Did you consider motivations or factors that occur outside of the game world?

• Cultural Homogeneity
  o How many of your friends or associates (both offline and online) also participated?
  o What were your goals in this protest?
  o What were the overall goals of this protest?

• Barriers to Entry
  o What were the general steps that you had to take to participate in the protest?
  o Did you consider these steps when thinking about joining the protest?

• Proactive vs. Reactive
  o What do you see as the outcomes of this protest?
  o How would you say [the hosting company] responded to the protest?
  o Do you feel that the nature of the virtual world affected the protest?

• Cost of Information
  o How actively did you have to seek information on this protest?
  o How did the organizers pass along information about the protest and during the event?
    • Did these channels differ depending on the time or the matter they were trying to communicate?

• Ownership
  o Do you feel that [the hosting company] should consult the player base before making any major changes to the game world?
  o Would you ever [want to be/want players to be] a force for creating or deliberating over changes in the game world?
VITA

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