



Dungeons and Dragons and the Critical Failure A Thematic Analysis of the TTRPG Communities Reception of the Leaked OGL 1.1

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Abstract

In the field of communication, there has been a distinct lack of a focus on table-top roleplaying games (TTRPGs), most notably Dungeons and Dragons. Research on this topic could provide a deeper insight into how a shared hobby can help large groups organize meaningful action in response to perceived threats to their ways of life. In the wake of the January 2023 Open Gaming Licence (OGL) Leak, hobby game company Wizards of the Coast, publisher of Dungeons and Dragons, has seen unprecedented drops in sales and customer retention. This report uses thematic analysis to find common patterns and themes present in the reporting of the OGL leak from both traditional media outlets, as well as creators on TikTok. Using the themes found in these sources, the sentiments of the respective comment sections have been recorded to find what effect the actions of Wizards of the Coast during this crisis has had on their brand and the impact it may have on the TTRPG community. The research concluded that many customers within the Dungeons and Dragons community had already harboured negative views of Wizards of the Coast regarding previous business practices and found the leaked OGL was the straw that broke the camel's back. This sentiment led to a substantial portion of the Dungeons and Dragons community cancelling subscriptions to D&D Beyond, a Wizards of the Coast service, and moving their buying power to other competitors within the TTRPG community. This has begun a shift towards the dethroning of Wizards of the Coast and Dungeons and Dragons as the top of an RPG monolith and a renaissance of independently published TTRPGs.

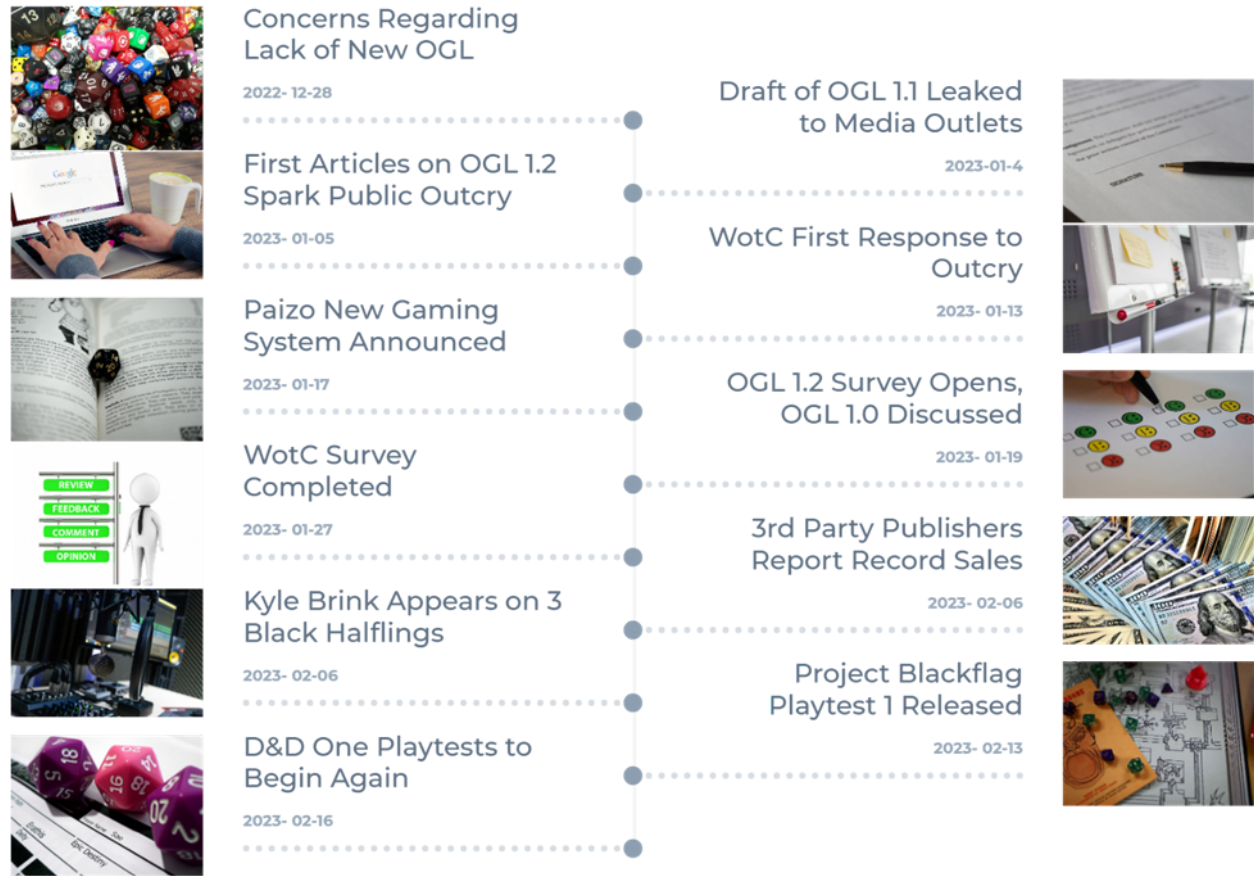
Keywords

Thematic Analysis, audience reception, audience perception, TTRPGs, role playing games, Dungeons and Dragons, user generated content, Wizards of the Coast



Figure 1

Timeline of OGL 1.1 Fiasco



Note. Abbreviations include, OGL = Open Gaming License, WotC = Wizards of the Coast. A playtest refers to the process of sending sections of the game to select community members to test the contents to find any issues with the content for the sake of balancing and debugging the game system before release.

Research Objective

When I started my research into the January 2023 leak of Wizards of the Coast's (WotC) new Open Gaming License, it was because I had seen the initial reaction when it was first leaked on TikTok and had, along with the community surrounding table-top roleplaying games (TTRPGs), a strong reaction to what seemed like the end of the hobby. As the situation developed, I started to see that the actual wording of the document, as well as what it meant from

a legal standpoint, was being sensationalized greatly by people posting on TikTok which led me to want to find out what was going on and if the facts surrounding this incident could overcome the hype that had been building and increasing the vitriol the community was directing towards WotC. So, I decided to look deeper and research this issue further.

I aim to further our understanding of the effect an audience's perception and reaction to changes regarding the intellectual property they are tied to through both the themes and patterns present in the selected samples, but also through the comment sections present within the samples. By looking at not only the reactions from media outlets and prominent content creators, but also the response from their community, I will get a more holistic idea of how communities/subcultures respond to perceived changes within their cultural artifacts. This study aims to provide a thematic analysis of the WotC OGL 1.1 leak and how this incident has affected the way the D&D community and the TTRPG community at large engage with D&D content. This is relevant to the field of COMS because it will provide an underexamined perspective on how changes in the commodification, digitization, and licensing of a hobby like D&D can lead to community action in pursuit of social/corporate change.

Specifically, I looked at how the D&D community through media outlets, content creators, and commenters view themes surrounding the commodification of D&D as a brand that was reported by WotC to be "under-monetized." (Codega, 2022), the trend towards digitalization that seems inevitable through both One D&D and changes in the OGL, and the perception of community action as a positive/negative reaction to a leaked document. Along with these three themes, I also collected the overall reaction of the comment sections attached to the samples regarding the new versions of the OGL, as well as the sentiments commenters have concerning WotC as a company and subsidiary of Hasbro. I believe this will also be relevant in future research into what communication decisions/crisis management styles would be more effective in maintaining customer retention for a brand. This is why my research question is as follows:

Through the analysis of the events surrounding the OGL 1.1 leak, can we see if the public's perception of the commodification, digitalization, and licensing restrictions of D&D has altered Wizards of the Coast's brand image?

By looking at these themes, I believe that I will find that the actions of WotC have led a substantial portion of their customer base/audience to move towards other TTRPGs that are analogous to D&D, or at least similar styles of RPGs. This would be because they find the proposed OGL to be blatantly disrespectful to creators/publishers who have worked hard creating unique content that has helped make D&D as popular as it is today. This kind of behaviour can be seen across many different IPs and corporations who faced a financial emergency due to a lack of communication with their audiences and not listening to what those audiences are looking for.

Literature Review

Since the early aughts, tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs) have increased in popularity, seizing the imagination of people of all ages due to the increased access of Web 2.0. Now in 2023, TTRPGs have become so culturally ingrained that publishers are moving to online content alongside merchandise, actual-play podcasts, and television shows. As D&D gained mainstream popularity after the WotC acquisition of TSR Publishing and D&D, they saw an opportunity for free advertising and the subsuming of the competition through the OGL 1.0 in the 00s (White, 2018). This allowed the D&D community and independent publishers to create and distribute their own content using elements from D&D with the requirements that the added content be labelled D&D compatible and that 50% of profits go to WotC and OneBookShelf. (Lemon, 2016)

In 2022, with the announcement of One D&D (what would have been the sixth edition), WotC expressed intent to move the publishing of new books and content to the digital realm and have it include new game rules that would be backwards compatible with the fifth edition. As the D&D community felt anxiety at this new proposed direction, a new OGL (1.1) was leaked by i09, a popular media outlet. It would reduce the publisher's/creator's rights to content generated, proposed a royalty structure that was unfavourable to creators, and a subscription pyramid for access to added content that would traditionally be a one-time investment as a rulebook. In response, the D&D community mobilized by cancelling subscriptions to D&D Beyond and supporting other systems like Pathfinder to force WotC to reconsider its positioning.

This literature review seeks to connect previous research on the effects of commodification, digitalization, and restrictive licensing on other TTRPGs and IPs to see if they had the same effect that the 2023 OGL incident has had on the D&D community. In today's cultural landscape, TTRPGs are increasingly becoming a major source of revenue for publishers beyond the sale of the core books into products such as real-play podcasts and merchandise. This has led to a trend towards the commodification of a hobby that previously prided itself on the free distribution of ideas, which has led to discontent within the community. An example of this situation can be seen with the Swedish gaming company RiotMinds, who in 2010 announced on their own discussion forums that they were working on 'the bomb' (Thorén, 2020). This turned out to be a full digitalization of their content, including publishing, which immediately created a divide between the company and its audience and led RiotMinds to the brink of bankruptcy until they managed to crowdfund enough money to start funding physical products again. This could have worked if it were implemented over time rather than all at once, the final nail in the coffin was the paywall that RiotMinds placed between their audience and the content that was previously accessible. In this case, digitalization was considered a negative thing because the audience considered it a threat to their access and enjoyment of their hobby, which was blatantly being commodified to obtain the maximum amount of money from their consumer base.

Despite the previous example, the commodification of TTRPGs is not an inherently negative thing, as can be seen by Critical Role, a real play podcast that was popularized by its use of D&D and, in return, ended up popularizing D&D for a whole new generation of post-2000 players. Critical Role eventually accepted sponsorships, most notably WotC, which led to the podcast becoming commodified further through the introduction of unique merchandise, subscription rewards, and their own D&D setting, Tal'Dorei, which canonized the podcast into D&D itself. Between August 2019 and October 2021, Critical Role generated approximately 9.6 million USD in revenue through these revenue streams (Švelch, 2022), of which approximately 50% went to WotC. This is the kind of revenue that WotC could threaten by implementing restrictive licensing, as Critical Role currently is not beholden to continue using the D&D system for their podcast and has previously done short campaigns using other systems for guest stars, which maintained the same number of viewers which shows that their fan-base will follow them to whatever system they choose. Beyond this kind of community action, Jenkins observed that

...fans have gained visibility as they have deployed the web for community building, intellectual exchange, cultural distribution, and media activism. Some sectors of the media industries have embraced active audiences as an extension of their marketing power, have sought greater feedback from their fans, and have incorporated viewer-generated content into their design processes. (Jenkins, 2002)

Without realizing it fully, WotC has set up its own audience as a major component of their content and revenue generation which could lend them power over decisions made at a corporate level due to their increased buying power.

Methodology

For this report I decided to use a qualitative methodology in the form of a deductive thematic analysis so that I could explore themes I saw present in my initial reading of the samples. This was to see if the discontent from the D&D community regarding the OGL has been caused by commodification, digitalization, and restrictive licensing policies. I explored this through the collection and analysis of both articles from traditional media outlets and TikToks made by creators within the community along with general sentiment responses from their comment sections. For the content of the samples, I primarily used semantic coding to look more so at what the content/creators were saying rather than purely implicit meanings.

In the preliminary stages of my data collection, I started by collecting articles that either explicitly explained the history of the OGL leak, which had already been resolved by the time of collection or was firsthand reporting on major events surrounding the OGL leak as it was happening. I used this initial data to create a comprehensive timeline of events, represented by Figure 1 at the beginning of the report, to both inform my data collection by giving me a range of time to look at as well as provide context on the various events for the sake of both me and you the reader. I then looked at articles from within the selected time range (Dec 2022 – Mar 2023) to find more context on the major events as well as minor events that provide context for how smaller publishers reacted, were affected, and responded to the events as they unfolded. As I started to understand the events as told by these media outlets, I started collecting my secondary data, the TikToks.

In my collecting of TikToks, I wanted to avoid selection bias, as I frequently use TikTok to look at TTRPG content, so I started collecting by looking up the hashtags #OGL, #OGLLEAK, #OPENDND, and #WOTC and selected TikToks by starting at the first results and working my way down. I saved the TikToks that pertained to the leak and had publish dates that coincided with events on my timeline to ensure that the reactions from both the creators and comment sections were timely and without the gift of hindsight. I believed these selections would give me the most comprehensive data as it would give me reactions that are more detailed and may provide a more honest opinion as most independent creators have no monetary incentive to be biased in the reporting of the events.

To code both datasets, I used a program called NVivo, which is used for qualitative research, to find the most common terms used textually in the articles and the transcripts of the TikToks. This allowed me to see which terms popped up most frequently and where they popped up, which made the coding process overall a lot easier for this section of data collection and confirmed that they had mentioned commodification and licensing issues a lot, along with referencing the OGL and WotC directly. Surprisingly, I found very little confirming my initial observation of digitalization as a theme, but I decided to keep it in as it was one of my preconceptions I wanted to explore. My final surprise was the presence of community action as a recurring theme in the data, which expressed itself as large collective actions like mass-cancelling D&D Beyond subscriptions and supporting independent publishers, or as smaller community action like spreading word that D&D Beyond users should remember to export any user-generated content like character sheets or world-building documents.

This helped me develop my categories for collecting the sentiments of the comment sections through both my preconceptions and patterns found in the data itself which ended up finalized as **OGL**, **Commodification**, **WotC**, **Digitalization**, and **Community Action**. A special category, **Neutral**, was added as I collected my next dataset as I was encountering a decent number of comments in my samples that did not pertain to any of my selected subjects or themes. So, when I started recollecting my tertiary data, I included these outlying comments in the neutral category by themselves without any parameters so the reader would be able to see the amount of discourse in the comment sections that did not address the subjects or themes selected for this dataset. Then, I collected the sentiment reactions of the comment sections of both

datasets by reviewing a set number of comments for each sample based on the average amount of comments per sample in each dataset, 50 for TikToks and 15 for articles. The parameters I selected to represent the sentiment on my chosen themes were **Positive**, **Negative**, and **Neutral**, which would allow me to record the positionality of each comment for each category.

Findings

After coding each dataset and recording the sentiments present in their comment sections regarding the OGL, commodification, WotC, Digitalization, and Community action, I found that some of my preconceptions had proved to be present in the data collected, while others proved to be far different than previously imagined. My initial reaction to the samples was that the community seemed to be worried primarily about creator's rights to their work and the fear that digitalization would lead to WotC using licensing policy changes to legally acquire these unique creations without having to compensate or recognize the original creator. As I did more digging, however, I found that while there was concern over creator's rights, there was less fear surrounding the digitalization of D&D and more support for it rather than condemnation from the community.

This was because digitalization had made D&D more accessible during the pandemic through the online mediation of D&D through virtual chatting services and Virtual Tabletop Simulators (VTTS). Another boon of digital accessibility is that having D&D as a digital product makes it readily accessible to the differently abled, whether it's the ability to have content read aloud for the visually impaired or having the content reformatted for those with dyslexia and dyscalculia. For these reasons, I left digitalization in the datasets despite very little feeling about the data one way or another within the community because it is important to show that digitalization can lead to a more accessible D&D, even if that is not the primary focus of this report.

Media Outlet Response

In selecting my sample base to both create Figure 1 and provide myself with deeper context regarding the entire series of events, the traditional media outlets were almost split in positionality on a few of the themes and very one-sided on others. The samples had a focus on

the issue of commodification as ultimately a negative thing in the context of the changes that the OGL would bring. For example, Montgomery likened WotC to a ‘gold-hungry dragon’ that was ultimately slayed by the collective action of the D&D community and finished their article, “The diverse party of adventurers came together and slew the gold-hungry dragon — this time. Now they’re organizing to ensure they never find themselves trapped in the dragon’s clutches again.” (Montgomery, 2023)

Figure 2

Article sample word bubble.



Note. A word bubble was generated using the 250 most frequent words found within the dataset. Common contractions and conjunctives were excluded to better represent the data.

This sentiment, while not always so black-and-white about the behaviour of WotC, is echoed across all the datasets, even when the samples try to either justify the actions of WotC or support them directly. Specifically, Codega had defended WotC in December 2022 when the first

rumblings of a new OGL were being felt in the community. (Codega, 2022) Codega eventually decried WotC for not staying true to their previous statement that the OGL would stay in effect for One D&D as it had for the fifth edition. (Codega, 2023a)

The only other theme that was as unanimous as the negative response to D&D's commodification was community action. Every article lauded the sheer force of will the D&D community mustered over the OGL changes, which resulted in various forms of collective action like the mass-cancellation of D&D Beyond subscriptions, drafting and signing an open letter to WotC and Hasbro, using their buying power to support other independent publishers, and smaller acts of support within the community. The bottom line seems to be: After a fan-led campaign to cancel D&D Beyond subscriptions went viral, it sent a message to WotC and Hasbro higher-ups. Codega (2023b) herself said that the immediate financial consequences of subscription cancellations were the main thing that forced them to respond because of a "provable impact" on their bottom line.

Along with this attention-grabbing tactic, D&D community members that work in legal professions worked with the community at large to draft a letter to WotC demanding that the OGL 1.1 be retracted and appealed to the community to boycott WotC until the OGL has been changed. In response, 77 407 community members have signed it as of the writing of this report (Downs, 2023). This kind of community response is reflected by the samples themselves, with various articles expressing that WotC is too little too late, having broken the trust of the community (Plante, 2023) and that the OGL 1.0 was a 'masterstroke of community support'. (Evans-Thirlwell, 2023) Kyle Brink, executive producer of D&D at WotC, expressed in an interview that WotC was not receiving the respect it deserved (Hall, 2023d). It is apparent in the response from media outlets and the community that respect is a two-way street, and with the OGL 1.1, WotC is not respecting their community.

While all this community action was taking place, the media outlets I sampled noticed that all these individuals who were 'fleeing D&D and WotC' (Hall, 2023a) were flocking to TTRPGs made by independent publishers. These publishers themselves were taking their own actions in response to the OGL leak, such as announcing project Black Flag and the Open RPG Creative license (ORC) (Russell, 2023). These decisions were being funded by community

While traditional media outlets seemed to present a more measured response giving WotC the benefit of the doubt, content creators went in the other direction and immediately showed their disdain for the proposed OGL 1.1 as well as for the response to community concerns (or seemingly lack thereof). Like the previous data set, content creators on TikTok had a big focus on the commodification of D&D but differed in that they also placed a great emphasis on community action by directly providing a call to action for their audiences rather than just acknowledging the efforts of others within the community. This can be seen in the Touchstone_Dice (2023) sample, where the video stitches two other clips, one from the Critical Role TikTok and one from RollForCombat, and expresses that WotC relies on their recurring D&D Beyond subscriptions to make a profit on their online services. This means that by cancelling, loyal long-time users of D&D Beyond have the power to force WotC and Hasbro to reconsider the OGL to save their biggest revenue stream.

The other side of community action, within TikTok more specifically, is the work being done to fight misinformation about what the OGL means for content creators and the community. This is, in part, since the OGL 1.1 was leaked, which makes it difficult to verify if the rumours were true or if the leak was being misread and used to make sensationalized, uninformed content. SideQuests Was one such creator who made TikToks early on in January 2023 that debunked rumours that were either unfounded or misunderstood and explained what the old OGL said, what the leaked OGL 1.1 said, and what it meant from the perspective of an independent publisher who has used the OGL previously. (SideQuests, 2023a)

Beyond community action, content creators directly expressed their disdain for WotC directly rather than having to remain ‘professional’ like journalists need to when reporting on events. This has given the community the ability to, in no uncertain terms, state how they feel about OGL, WotC, and Hasbro without the fear of losing credibility in the newsroom. This allows the community to provide an honest reaction that generally is echoed by a content creator’s following, which usually has similar values to their chosen creators. This can be seen in scene_four’s video on what the OGL is, where he said,

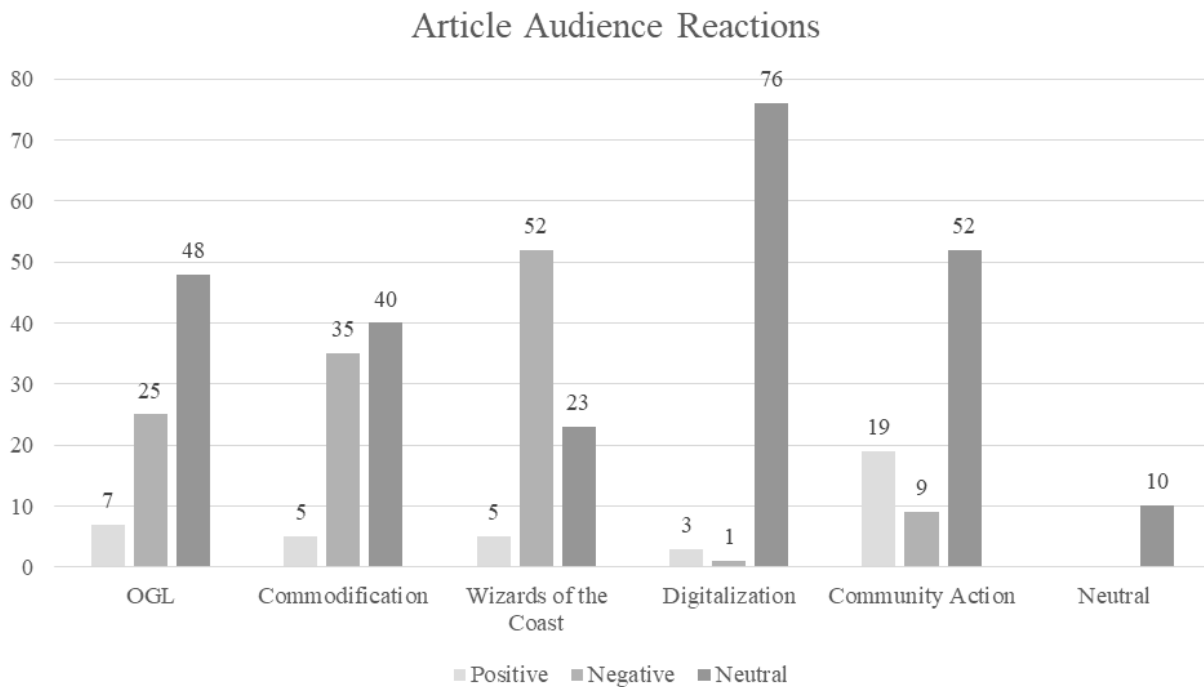
I’m not qualified to comment on the changes, but it does look like a garden variety case of corporate greed from Hasbro and Wizards of the Coast. The vibrancy and diversity of

the TTRPG sphere emerges from the free exchange of ideas, and I'll continue to support the creators who champion that. (scene_four, 2023)

We can see that in many ways, both datasets share most of the same sentiments and are expressed in the fundamentally diverse ways that exist due to the difference in medium.

Commentor Sentiment Response

Figure 3



Note. The above table is a representation of the data presented in Table 1. This chart adds all the positive, negative, and neutral values of every article sample together within each theme and represents its total sum. In total 90 comments were analyzed; any sample that did not have an open comment section was not included in this chart. The neutral column only has one bar to represent the total amount of comments encountered within samples that did not pertain to the selected themes and thus did not affect the rest of the data.

After I had collected my data for both traditional media outlets and content creators, I went into the comment sections to see if my previous assumption that a media outlet’s/content creator’s audience does tend to generally have similar views as their chosen media. There was a vibrant commenting culture within TikTok (see Table 1) that incentivises content creators to both engage with their audience directly and encourage discussion under their TikToks to ‘boost their profiles. On the other hand, of the article samples I reviewed, only five had open comment sections (see Table 2) that were semi-easy to access, and the rest did not have any discernable platform for their audience to directly engage with their content. This can be attributed to the culture surrounding traditional media, where audience engagement is mostly considered when selecting the media’s content.

Table 1

Article Comment Section Reactions to Selected Themes

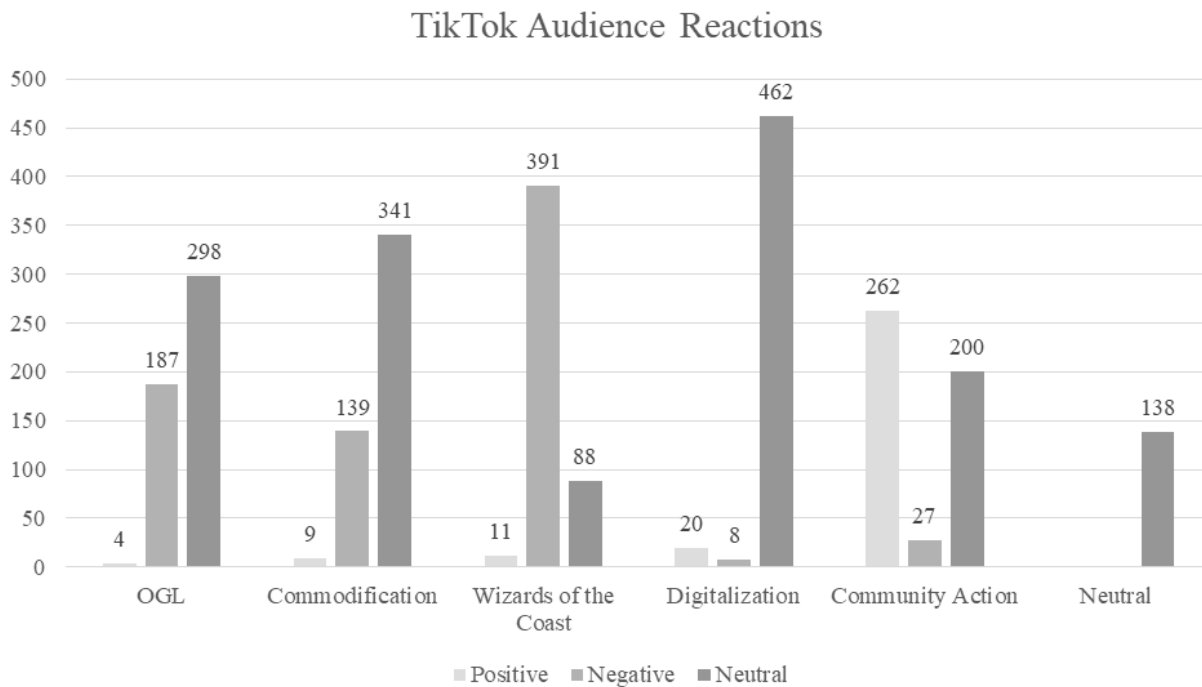
Articles	OGL Pos/Neg/Neu	Commodification Pos/Neg/Neu	WotC Pos/Neg/Neu	Digitalization Pos/Neg/Neu	Community Action Pos/Neg/Neu	Neutral
Brink, 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Codega, 2022	1/6/7	2/5/7	2/6/6	0/1/13	0/2/12	1
Codega, 2023	4/3/8	1/0/14	1/4/10	0/0/15	0/2/14	0
Evans-Thirlwell, 2023	0/10/3	0/10/3	0/11/2	0/0/13	5/3/4	2
Hall, 2023a	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Hall, 2023b	2/4/8	2/6/6	2/10/2	2/0/12	4/1/9	1
Hall, 2023c	0/2/10	0/3/9	0/9/3	1/0/11	10/1/1	3
Hall, 2023d	0/0/12	0/11/1	0/12/0	0/0/12	0/0/12	3
Law, 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
McCauley, 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Montgomery, 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Plante, 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Russell, 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Note: The titles for the sample articles were too long to put into the tables directly, so the in-text citations have been used instead for readability. The codes Pos/Neg/Neu stand for Positive reaction, Negative Reaction, and Neutral Reaction. This was done to provide the data for every article used in one table in a readable manner. It is also worth noting that most of the sampled articles did not have an in-website comment section, so they have been recorded as N/A, while the rest will be coded. This will be done to provide a full view of the audience accessibility and positionality on these media websites so they can be compared to the TikTok samples. Due to each article having a varying number of comments, only the first fifteen comments listed under each video at the time of collection were used to try to provide an equal basis for analysis. The process for selecting comments for this data was to use only primary comments and only visible replies to avoid entering a biased echo chamber surrounding the primary comment. I also recorded the reaction of each comment to each of the categories to get a more intersectional perspective on the comment sections’ positionality regarding these themes and any comments that didn’t pertain to any of the selected themes were placed in the neutral column.

I found that in the TikTok samples, out of all the selected themes and subjects, they were the most unanimous on digitalization and their opinion of WotC during the incident. For digitalization, as talked about earlier, the dataset was mostly unconcerned about it as an issue but had a larger response in support of it than I initially thought due to fear of losing accessibility gained over the pandemic. As for WotC, the vitriol seen in the previous datasets is emphasized here where comments analyzed had a negative reaction to WotC and their brand, separate from D&D, that hadn't died away after the announcement to place D&D in the creative commons. This is due to the loss of trust within the D&D community.

Figure 4



Note. The above table is a representation of the data presented in Table 2. This chart adds all the positive, negative, and neutral values of every TikTok sample together within each theme and represents its total sum. In total 628 comments were analyzed; any sample that did not have an open comment section was not included in this chart. The neutral column only has one bar to represent the total amount of comments encountered within samples that did not pertain to the selected themes and thus did not affect the rest of the data.

Along with that distrust came complete disgust at the commodification perceived by the community regarding the attempt to institute royalty and subscription structures that would be directly affecting these commentors. The same sentiments regarding the perception of WotC as nothing more than a power-hungry corporation are shared between the comment sections of both datasets. The biggest split between the comment sections of both datasets is that the article comment sections seemed to have more comments that either did not pertain to the content of the article or were more argumentative within the comment section than was observed in the TikTok comment sections. This is due to a lack of direct interaction from the writers of these articles, so there is less discourse focused on the content and more focused on tangential conversations.

Table 2

TikTok Comment Section Reactions to Selected Themes

TikTok Videos	OGL Pos/Neg/Neu	Commodification Pos/Neg/Neu	WotC Pos/Neg/Neu	Digitalization Pos/Neg/Neu	Community Action Pos/Neg/Neu	Neutral
Beardic Inspiration, 2023	0/10/37	0/7/40	1/43/3	0/0/47	19/3/25	3
Cast Party: A D&D Podcast, 2023a	0/14/26	1/5/34	2/24/14	0/1/39	25/3/11	10
Cast Party: A D&D Podcast, 2023b	0/0/8*	0/1/7*	1/5/2*	0/0/8*	6/1/1*	1*

Cast Party: A D&D Podcast, 2023c	0/7/26	0/13/20	0/32/2	0/1/33	22/0/12	16
Draveis, 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
geek the gm, 2023	0/16/16	0/9/23	0/27/5	0/1/31	12/0/20	18
JuliaGeez, 2023a	0/10/8*	0/5/13*	1/15/2*	1/0/17*	7/2/9*	2*
JuliaGeez, 2023b	0/8/29*	0/22/15*	0/32/5*	1/0/36*	22/3/12*	6*
M. Werewolf, 2023a	0/1/17*	0/3/15*	0/14/4*	2/0/16*	16/0/2*	4*
M. Werewolf, 2023b	0/5/24	2/7/20	0/21/8	1/0/28	26/1/2	21
Major Illusion, 2023	0/8/4*	3/2/7*	0/8/4*	1/0/11*	2/1/9*	5*
Miles, 2023	0/17/16	0/5/28	1/22/10	1/1/31	23/2/8	17
scene_four, 2023	1/13/23	0/15/22	1/26/10	0/0/37	13/6/18	13

SideQuests, 2023a	3/6/5*	3/2/9*	2/5/7*	4/0/10*	3/2/9*	3*
SideQuests, 2023b	0/16/34	0/12/38	1/46/3	0/0/50	9/1/40	0
Smurph, 2023	0/26/15	0/12/29	0/35/6	6/2/33	29/0/12	9
Touchstone_Dice, 2023	0/30/10	0/19/21	1/36/3	3/2/35	28/2/10	10

Note: The titles for the sample TikToks were too long to put into the tables directly, so the in-text citations have been used instead for readability. The codes Pos/Neg/Neu stand for Positive reaction, Negative Reaction, and Neutral Reaction. This was done to provide the data for every TikTok used in one table in a readable manner. Due to each TikTok having a varying number of comments on each video, only up to the first fifty comments listed under each video at the time of collection were used to try to provide an equal basis for analysis. It is also worth mentioning that some of the sampled TikToks either did not have fifty comments, which will be denoted by an * beside the data, or had the comment section disabled, which will be denoted with a N/A. I decided to leave these ones in to try and provide an unbiased view of the sample without pruning TikToks that had a smaller reach than others, as even large TikTok accounts can have low interaction on certain videos. The process for selecting comments for this data was to use only primary comments and only visible replies to avoid entering a biased echo chamber surrounding the primary comment. I also recorded the reaction of each comment to each of the categories to get a more intersectional perspective on the comment sections’ positionality regarding these themes, and any comments that didn’t pertain to any of the selected themes were placed in the neutral column.

Implications and Limitations of Findings.

This research implies that as an audience of a massive IP, the D&D community has proven that it is possible to organize large collective community action over the internet without requiring in-person mediation like a lot of digital activism. On the other side of the coin, this incident should be considered by large corporations who are seeking to make changes to existing licensing agreements that affect what is effectively a large contactor network and implement these changes over time with more interaction and feedback from their community. As for limitations within these findings, I had found most of the way through my research errors within my datasets due to my not considering that each comment should be placed under the same scrutiny as the others to ensure the results are not skewed. This setback required me to recollect the same data with slightly different parameters and, as such, could have an implicit bias from me as I had already once read these comment sections and was not going in blind. I also was the only researcher who was collecting this data, and while I have done my best to not let any implicit biases impact my research, I am fallible and am, myself, close to the issue as a part of the D&D community.

Evaluation

The study overall has plenty of value to the field of communications as it explores how collective community action can be mediated purely online, which has been a concern with new media for a long time. With this research as precedent, I believe that in the future, more research can be done into how the D&D community and other audiences like it can use their own platforms to enact real change within their communities. It also can be a precedent for research into how user-generated content can itself become part of the originating IP and in some ways become more important to the IP than the original base content. This can be seen in the way that D&D itself has become, in the eyes of its community, more of a culture than a brand. This could lead to very interesting research on how this incident may create a new culture surrounding TTRPGs where it is less of a monolith under WotC and a more collaborative exchange of ideas, which is exactly what the OGL 1.0 sought to do.

While this report is a great stepping-off point, I believe it could present a stronger argument if it did not have the limitation of time and labour. This report, being written over a short three months, immediately ensures that this report can not go as in-depth as I would have liked, and having the proper time to dig in with a larger dataset with many more samples would make this thematic analysis work. Along with that, this report is limited by having only one researcher looking at, collecting, and interpreting the data. This kind of research benefits from more labour to ensure that the research can be in-depth enough, with the ability to collect more data and ensure that the data analyzed is not being skewed by the biases of one person. Despite all of this, I believe that further research into the OGL leak would be beneficial to further our understanding of what draws people into an IP and makes them move mountains to ensure it will be available in perpetuity for newer generations of fans.

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