Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Financial Technology and Business Analysis
DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.39045

Cross-Screen Emergence in Game IP Transmedia Expansion: A Case Study of Blizzard Entertainment

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Abstract. To maintain audience engagement between individual releases, game firms are rapidly expanding their Intellectual Property (IP) across many media. Drawing on Blizzard Entertainment as a case study, the paper explores that process from the analytical standpoint of Cross-Screen Emergence. It draws on published literature and secondary case materials on novels, comics, animation, films, esports, merchandising, and offline events. The investigation indicates four interrelated mechanisms: core-setting anchoring, layered narrative release, community migration, and screen-external value extension. Their capacity to contribute to cumulative value is hampered by loss of agency in linear adaptations, fragmented release dates, unequal deployment of resources across the IP portfolio, and diluted creative control in external licensing. The governance strategies concerned are: transforming the emotional experience of a choice into a linear narrative; synchronizing the story and release schedules; allocating resources according to the IP life cycle and media function; and separating protected core settings from flexible forms of expression. The case indicates that the cross-media value rests on what each extension adds to the audience's understanding and continuous engagement. The resulting structure connects narrative creation with production and commercial coordination. The postulated correlations are yet interpretative and need to be further examined by audience research and comparative case studies.

Keywords: Cross-Screen Emergence, Game-IP Transmedia Governance, Transmedia Storytelling, Interactive-to-Linear Adaptation, Blizzard Entertainment

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

Game firms are increasingly competing on the ongoing creation of intellectual property, merging game updates with community activities and content in other media. According to Newzoo, the worldwide games market was worth US$201.6 billion in 2025 and is expected to earn US$234.4 billion by 2028 [1]. Those numbers illustrate the commercial magnitude of the industry, but on their own, they don't prove demand for transmedia extensions. In transmedia brand storytelling, the platforms provide complementary material in a recognizable brand and story universe, yet each piece is coherent enough to stand on its own [2]. The development of these extensions also needs

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DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.39045

cooperation between development, distribution, licensing, marketing, and community teams [3]. This paper employs Cross-Screen Emergence as an analytical lens to consider the value that can emerge when consumers encounter a game IP across computers, consoles, mobile devices, film and television, and related offline experiences. This kind of value can arise when knowledge and activity in one medium influence engagement with another. So the analysis is focused on the stable core settings, the large narrative expansions, the coordinated releases, and the community engagement. Blizzard serves as a valuable example here, as its existing game worlds span multiple media, so the study may explore both the benefits of growth and the challenges of adapting interactive experiences.

1.2. Literature review

Game IP evolves in different media through many pathways described in the literature. Blom's idea of dynamic game characters deals with the changes that player decisions create and the problem of keeping character identification over texts [4]. Joyce's examination of The Witcher takes the mothership medium idea further by showing how a game can organize other texts and shape audiences' knowledge of a shared tale world [5]. Chen and Li discuss transmedia storytelling within the framework of problems between gameplay and narrative, such as ludonarrative dissonance [6]. Banks and Wasserman identified a number of motives behind people's consumption of games in films, such as enjoyment, extended experience, fan development, community recognition, and personal connection [7]. Thomas sees adaptation between film and video games as a creative endeavor, defined by the capacities of each medium [8]. Papadaki and Volakis connect the dissemination of fantasy narrative in cultural objects to participatory fandom [9]. These reports offer a foundation for the study of how complementary material, adaptation, and fan participation shape cross-media engagement.

In the present literature, there remain several problems for the questions discussed here. But accounts focused on cinema, television, or literary texts may not always account for what occurs to player agency when a game is the source medium. Story expansion analysis also offers little insight into how release timetables, portfolio decisions, and licensing arrangements impact story continuity. More generally, the relationships between narrative consistency, audience migration, and commercial synergy should be explored. In this study, the investigation of the Blizzard case is concentrated on its links.

1.3. Research framework

The research is based on fundamental settings, content layering, and value accumulation. It investigates how Blizzard can expand a game world into a connected body of content that viewers may revisit across media, and what structural tensions may impede that extension from providing cumulative value. Examining novels, comics, animation, movies, esports, merchandising, and offline events, using published studies and secondary case materials. The approach first asks how identifiable environments, complementary storylines, and community participation encourage sustained engagement. Then it explores where adaptability, release scheduling, resource allocation, and licensing can break down that process. The recognition of these contradictions underpins governance methods put up later in the paper. Given the study's reliance on secondary materials, this framework structures an interpretive case analysis, not a test of causal consequences.

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2. Case description

Founded in 1991, Blizzard Entertainment is known for the Warcraft, Diablo, StarCraft, Overwatch, and Hearthstone franchises. These titles are part of a company that depends on digital distribution, in-game expenditure, and ongoing game operations, according to Activision Blizzard's 2022 annual report [10]. This model is a starting point for thinking about the value of an IP beyond its first sales. Characters, world-building, and other tales can keep going, and you already have communities of players to see related releases. Blizzard's extensions are narrative additions, audiovisual adaptations, and items or events for fans to interact with the IP outside of normal play. Table 1 provides a summary of the chosen cases and their roles in this wider system.

One such stretch of its scope is the live-action film Warcraft (2016). Box Office Mojo forecasts a worldwide gross of about US$439 million, with US$47.37 million of that coming from the home market [11]. The numbers demonstrate an uneven geographical distribution of revenue, but they do not tell us why this is so. But the instance does pose an important question: how much can an established game world appeal to consumers with varying degrees of familiarity? Blizzard's deep lore, identifiable characters, and communities of players offer resources for expansion. It is contingent upon how the individual projects are coordinated in terms of their content and delivery schedules, and this is discussed in the following sections.

Table 1. Selected Blizzard IP transmedia extensions and functions

IP	Core Game Medium	Selected Extensions	Primary Function
Warcraft	MMORPG/strategy	Novels, comics, film, collectibles, events	World-building, audience acquisition, identity display
Diablo	Action role-playing	Novels, comics, promotional animation, merchandise	Lore enrichment, tonal continuity, retention
Overwatch	Team-based shooter	Animated shorts, comics, esports, and merchandise	Character exposition, community circulation
StarCraft	Real-time strategy	Novels, comics, esports, collectibles	Backstory expansion, competitive identity

Note: Compiled from the company report and the cited transmedia literature [2, 4, 10].

3. Mechanisms and structural contradictions of cross-screen emergence

3.1. Positive mechanisms of Blizzard IP transmedia expansion

3.1.1. Core-setting anchoring: reducing cross-screen cognitive costs

Core-setting anchoring provides audiences with a familiar reference point as they go across media. New text can draw on information audiences are already familiar with, as Blizzard's tale worlds feature recurring character designs, key conflicts, and historical locales. Then an extension can add more information without them having to rebuild the whole environment. The blend of familiarity and fresh information may reduce the cognitive costs of cross-screen migration and strengthen the recognition of the IP. Its value is also for manufacturing. Teams in diverse media need a common account of character motives, visual identity, and important events for their contributions to be compatible. Without that context, good decisions in one project can lead to conflicts in another.

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Thus, core parameters offer practical limits to collaboration. Each medium can have its own way of expression, while it can inform new narratives.

3.1.2. Layered narrative release: transforming media specificity into complementarity

Complementarity is built from the diverse capacities of media, layered narrative release. Games let viewers explore, act, and develop over time. Novels have more space to provide historical context and an internal perspective of characters, while comics and animated pieces can present a character or conflict in a shorter manner. A film can introduce selected pieces of the story universe to those beyond the existing player group. These are potential functions, not hard and fast rules for any medium. In a game-centered transmedia system, the game can provide the core story, while other texts can expand on information that it leaves less completely explored. This bond is helped by Joyce's mothership medium notion [5]. The audience needs a reason to follow the IP across formats, and each extension needs to bring something of its own.

Connections matter when one text influences the way an audience interprets another. For example, an animated short may describe a character's motives that players would link with that character throughout play. A new novel about a past fight can lend meaning to a quest or faction. How much of this will be determined by the audience's attention and the connections they make between the texts. The distinction that matters is between just coming across the IP in a number of places and using information from those encounters to get a more complete picture of it. Layering can facilitate cumulative meaning if the extensions are coherent in their own right and if they provide information relevant elsewhere in the story world.

3.1.3. Community migration: converting fandom into a circulation network

Community migration helps related content to travel through networks that already exist around a game. Players can share knowledge through guilds, competitive events, strategy debates, and fan creations. A transmedia release gives fans content to understand, juxtapose with existing lore, and share with others. That effort carries the circulation beyond the company's original promotion. Participatory fandom research characterizes audiences as co-constructors of meaning through conversation, reinterpretation, and collective participation [9]. In this light, an established community may facilitate the arrival of a new expansion by linking it with familiar discourse. Sustained circulation depends on fans' perception of the new material as meaningful, and a huge player base does not automatically mean ongoing participation.

Changes across media can also make a fan's attachment to the story world evident to others. Buying a lore book, showing a collectible, or going to an event. This is a different sort of participation than playing the game. These methods can help embed the IP in daily routines and social contexts. They help to explain how attachment can survive between releases, even if the meaning of that attachment changes across audiences. A purchase can be a statement of identity, of interest in a particular character, or of preference for the product itself. Therefore, community migration is better understood as a series of potential links between media use and fan interactions than a linear trajectory from playing to purchasing.

3.1.4. Screen-external value extension: merchandise and experiential formats

Screen-external value extension means the ways an IP makes its way into tangible and shared experiential environments. Merchandise provides fans with recognizable characters and icons as

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objects to collect or utilize. Esports and offline events are places for collaborative engagement, and concept art books are a means for viewers to revisit the visual development of a gaming world. Audiovisual extensions can also reach out to others who have not played the games, offering potential pathways to these activities. Combined, these formats can extend attention through major releases and continue to generate revenue via merchandise, events, or licensing. Cross-media creation incorporates cultural as well as commercial aims [3]. What will make it valuable in the long term is not how many goods wear the name, but whether these encounters continue to have a link with the IP.

3.2. Negative mechanisms and structural contradictions

3.2.1. Agency attrition in the translation from interactive to linear media

Agency attrition is the result of the shift in involvement that happens when a game is translated into linear media. Players play the game according to the rules of the game, explore the places of the game and react to feedback from the game. It is contingent upon the game, how much the players influence the pace or the outcome. Films/animation/novels etc. have a sequence, which is mostly pre-determined by their creators. "A conversion can bring back familiar characters and places, but might lose some of the engagement that comes with taking action." Hence it may lessen the emotional involvement of existing fans. If the text is too dense in terms of prior knowledge, then there is a different dilemma facing the newcomer. The work on game-to-film consumption and adaptation is to determine the need to consider both the expectations of the audience and the capacities of the receiving medium [7, 8]. Fidelity and accessibility should be treated on a case-by-case basis for each project; they are not necessarily competing goals.

Warcraft's foreign gross is considerably larger than local gross, which is a useful starting point for discussing the reaction across markets [11]. It can't know if the difference is from player agency, or narrative complexity, or something else. The film shows a possible difficulty for the current analysis: how to create a rich story world while maintaining the connections that are important to current fans. Simplifying factions and character histories can ease entry, but dilute such linkages. Retaining a lot of background material may keep the details but puts more expectations on newcomers. The story conflicts are believable, they are not facts supported by the box office data. We'd have to do audience research to see how the adaptation was received and responded to by people with varying degrees of exposure to the game.

3.2.2. Temporal fragmentation and weak release coordination

Temporal fragmentation is when it is not possible to clearly order related texts in terms of audience encounters. Games are always in flux, while movies and other long form content have different development and release cycles. A subsequent update of the game can alter the state of a character before the text is presented to the audience. Without coordination between teams making these changes, the relationship between texts is not easy to follow. A difference in the time of production is not in itself a logical contradiction. This decoupling of narrative dependencies and release decisions may mean that audiences do not know how new material relates to what they have previously seen.

The spacing of releases also affects the chances for conversation. If a number of similar projects are released close together, they may compete for attention, while a long delay may weaken the connection between an extension and the game event it is based on. The right interval depends on

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the topic and the audience. There is no one timeline that works for every project. Transmedia brand storytelling is a way to explore how interconnected encounters contribute to an ongoing experience [2]. Such continuity can be aided by a release calendar that allows time for one text to be understood before another works out its consequences. Scheduling therefore serves both a narrative and operational role. It determines the sequence of information presented to audiences.

3.2.3. Uneven resource allocation across the IP portfolio

This is a resource allocation problem, in a portfolio problem. Blizzard products have different cadences, different audiences, and different mediums that they work in. You can continue to bet on a few properties, you keep the recognition, but it leaves other franchises with little room to produce fresh material or reestablish their communities. The danger in this allocation of resources to each IP and medium is that each project is too small to sustain a team and a budget. The documents do not document Blizzard's internal allocation decisions and these findings should be considered governance issues, not recorded financial findings. The analytical challenge is matching the investment to the life cycle of an IP, the role of the proposed expansion, and audience overlap with other initiatives. Equal spending is not necessarily a good answer.

3.2.4. Creative-control dilution in external licensing

External licensing is a coming together of production processes and commercial interests of different partners. A game studio might have to be more careful about existing lore and expectations of its existing player base, while a film producer or publisher has to appeal to a wider audience within its own budget and timeline. These priorities are not mutually exclusive but require agreement on the purpose of an adaptation. A licence concerning the use of names, designs or branding can result in under-designed character motives and narrative relationships. If there are no explicit review roles and disagreement resolution mechanisms, a project can stray from the basic logic of the story world, while retaining its visual recognition. This is a licensing risk. The study doesn't know how often this happens in Blizzard's relationships without access to the relevant agreements.

One technique for mitigating this risk, without imposing uniform constraints on all expressive choices, is tiered creative control. Partners must keep storyworld parameters defined by core lore. Other things such as pace and audiovisual presentation can be adapted to the media it is being received on. Blom's idea of dynamic game characters is relevant because changes made in games make it difficult to choose a character version for another text [4]. It's up to the studio and partner to determine whose relationships and motivations inform that character in the proposed adaptation. Clear boundaries can protect narrative consistency while still allowing the partner space to make a work that works in its own medium.

4. Governance strategies derived from cross-screen emergence

4.1. Translating agency into linear form

The emotional weight of player action must be the starting point for a response to agency attrition. Linear media can't simulate direct control, but it can make a character's choices and consequences the core of the experience. In films or animations, parallel storylines or a change of perspective could be used to show what was at stake in a choice. The idea is to move some of the decision-

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.39045

making involvement to techniques that are appropriate for the new format. Studies on game-to-film consumption and adaptation highlight the role of fan expectations and medium-specific experience [7, 8]. Instead of assuming the experience of play is preserved by the approach, we should be judging the approach by audience responses.

Blizzard could start with small things like supporting characters or the time between major game events. These stories can provide current players with additional context and give newcomers a conflict they can understand even if they don't know the whole timeline. Each adaptation will have to find its own central relationships and stakes within the text. Early screenings with both players and non-players would reveal where background information becomes a hurdle, or where a decision doesn't land with emotional weight. The results can inform changes to exposition, pacing, and characterization before production decisions become hard to change.

4.2. Synchronizing narrative and release calendars

A story calendar that matches a release calendar would help teams manage narrative dependencies. The story calendar should keep track of the timeline of key events, character status and gaps for further development. The release calendar should outline when game updates, books, comics, animation, and related events are released to audiences. This would keep the two linked, but separate the fictional event's location from the audience's own experience of location. This is important when projects are created at different speeds, or released out of chronological order.

Projects should explain what information they are adding and what prior information, if any, the audience needs to understand it. This then allows teams to plan intervals to allow discussion to develop, and avoid unnecessary competition between related releases. For example, an animated short could introduce a conflict that leads up to a game update, and then a comic could explore its ramifications. If one production is delayed, the teams must review the dependent releases and adjust the order as needed. That would make it less likely that audiences would see information before the context for it is there.

4.3. Portfolio allocation by life cycle and media function

Portfolio allocation should take into account the life cycle of the IP and the purpose of each extension. It might be good to have a quick little intro that is accessible and community activities that build recognition for a new or returning franchise. A franchise that has been around for a while might have longer stories or merchandise that is marketed to people who already have a connection. These are options to be weighed against audience needs and production capacity. The success of a franchise in one medium does not prove it would be useful to extend it to every other medium. When you make investment decisions you need to be clear about what you expect the project to contribute and what it will take to deliver it.

On the portfolio level, Blizzard could look for overlaps in themes, target audiences and release windows when considering proposed projects. Projects targeting the same audience could be staggered, while complementary releases could provide a path into another franchise. Smaller productions allow teams to test the interest before investing in more expensive adaptations. Evaluation should include repeat engagement and movement between media as well as direct revenue. And, an extension that helps audiences understand or re-engage with a game may have a supporting function that its own sales do not reflect.

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4.4. Tiered control in external licensing agreements

External licensing agreements should recognize the distinction between protected core settings and forms of expression that can be adapted. To be true to the IP, you can't just say broad requirements, but give clear descriptions of core world-building, key character relationships, central values, defining visual features, etc. Pacing, audiovisual style, and other techniques should be appropriate for the medium on which they are received. If a game has more than one version of a character, the agreement should mention which version is relevant for the project. This solves the cross-media identity problem mentioned by Blom and enables the partner's creative input [4].

Blizzard and its partners need to decide who their audience is and what story they want to tell before they start producing. Departures can be recognized at the outline, script, design, and final production stages, although revisions are still possible. The agreement should assign responsibility for decisions in dispute and document how approved changes are recorded. A common reference guide can then be updated when a decision affects related projects. These procedures would make creative boundaries usable in day-to-day production and help keep a familiar visual appearance from covering up inconsistent character motivations or storyworld relationships.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Key findings

The study uses Cross-Screen Emergence to explore how Blizzard's game IPs can build value through connected media experiences. The analysis reveals related mechanisms of core-setting anchoring, layered narrative release, community migration, and screen-external value extension. Familiar settings help the reader locate himself in a new text, and complementary information provides him with a reason to continue reading. That material can circulate in community activity, and attachment can be brought in other settings by merchandise or events. These connections also help explain why sheer number of extensions is not a sufficient measure of transmedia value. The question is how the extensions build on each other and keep the audience engaged.

The analysis additionally emphasizes the potential breakdown points of agency attrition, temporal fragmentation, uneven portfolio allocation and diluted licensing control. The suggested responses include emotional meaning of choice, coordination of story and release calendars, investment by IP life cycle and media function, and tiered control over adaptation. They connect narrative development to the organizational decisions that make it possible. The study introduces these relationships as an interpretive governance framework.

5.2. Research significance

The framework connects narrative consistency, audience migration and business synergy in an analysis that starts with games as the originating medium. It offers questions that game companies can use to figure out if an extension adds something new to the table and if audiences understand how it relates to other content. It also highlights production schedules, selections of resources and partner responsibilities that can support or disrupt those connections. Its wider relevance to the cultural and creative industry lies in this relation between creative work and coordination. The case of Blizzard points to the need for both a standard sustain the relations with the audiences across the forms of participation. Whether the framework can be applied to other companies is yet to be seen.

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.39045

5.3. Limitations and future research

This study employs secondary case materials and published literature. There are no interviews with the production teams, player surveys, internal budgets or project-level performance data. Therefore, it cannot establish causal relationships between the suggested mechanisms and audience or commercial outcomes, and cannot validate the effectiveness of the proposed strategies. Future research might look at changes in understanding, emotional involvement, and consumption intentions in audiences before and after they are exposed to related media. Interviews with production and licensing teams may give insight into how coordination decisions are made. Comparative cases with other companies and IP types would help to evaluate which elements of the framework travel across contexts and which are contingent on Blizzard's particular franchises and communities.

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