Chapter 3

Video Game Communication

ABSTRACT

Communication for video game players is not one dimensional. It exists within video games of course, but that in itself is extremely complicated: textual communication, UI communication with other players, and even built in voice chat with other players makes communication complicated. All of this becomes even more important to study and understand when the information environment, and how video game players as a subculture communicate, is understood. It is important to understand the context in which players communicate as well as understand the nuances of the communication that is occurring. This chapter explores video game communication.

VIDEO GAME COMMUNICATION

Gaming communication is extremely nuanced and difficult to understand, especially because it exists within a technological world, and comes with all of the issues brought up in Chapters 1 and 2: differences depending on what game, who is playing, how it is being played… Because of these issues, communication needs to be thought of from many different directions. First, gaming needs to be understood as a unique subculture, or even many different subcultures, that have unique ways of communicating. Some of these unique ways of communicating are just part of being a subculture, but some of them are because of the loss of nonverbal communication when trying to communicate in a fast paced textual format.

Once the idea of the difficulties and differences in communication help provide a foundation to understanding gamer communication, it is a matter of understanding how actual groups of gamers function; how the communication works. In the world of information science, this can be thought of as information behavior, understanding the information environment, or the information exchange between individuals. Understanding all of the different pieces to the information

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environment for gaming is important to being able to understand the communication patterns of gamers, because it can be completely different if any of the variables are changed.

**GAMING AS A SUBCULTURE**

Communication is an extremely rich area for research within gaming. As a subculture, players, like many other subcultures, have developed unique patterns of communicating. This is important because of the large number of gamers in the world; understanding unique communication patterns they have is an important area to study, but it is also important when studying other aspects of gaming. Being able to fully understand what is being communicated within the gaming subculture is key to providing accurate research.

Game players, as a subculture, are not different from the “norm” to a large degree. The difference with subcultures and communication is subtle and involves small changes, or specific patterns of language in specific situations. Being part of a subculture does not stop a member from communicating with the rest of society, it just gives the additional ability of being able to communicate within that subculture. According to Downing (2011), “a subculture does not ‘counter’ the norms and values of dominant culture but instead transforms them through a negotiated reinteretpretation.” (p. 752) People who are part of a subculture, game players in this instance, are still part of the dominant culture, they just have a time and place with other members of the subculture where communication patterns can change for various reasons.

Wright, Boria, and Breidenbach (2002) agree with the statement of the subculture remaining the same or similar to the dominant culture: “When you play a multiplayer FPS video game, like Counter-Strike, you enter a complex social world, a subculture, bringing together all of the problems and possibilities of power relationships dominant in the non-virtual world.” In essence, subcultures are not different on a macro level from the dominant culture because of the shared dynamics that are brought through to the subculture. The complex issues, problems, and possibilities of the larger culture still exist, and are brought to bear within the subculture.

While the larger issues of a dominant culture still exist within the subculture, focusing on these issues does not help to study or define the subculture of gaming. To understand the subculture better, research must be done to see how the subculture communicates differently, and in that way the subculture communication can be defined and understood. The different types of communication that exist within the gaming subculture are extensive, if taken at a very granular level, but what it does reveal is that the “diversity of game talk reveals a complex social world that participants enter willfully. It is a world of rules and social conventions that often appear invisible to outsiders and may well remain invisible to new insiders.” (Wright, Boria, and Breidenbach, 2002) Because of this, it is important to look at and analyze as much of the communication from the subculture as possible so that it can be understood to a large breadth and depth.

**NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

The first aspect of gaming communication that brings up a large difference from communication generally used by most people,