

Role of Language in Metastasizing Virtual Gaming in Social Spaces: Identity, Addiction, and Communication

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(First received: June 8, 2024; accepted: October 14, 2024)

Abstract

This research article deals with the competitions and contestations in the cybernetic world that are expanding its virtual territoriality and spaces in unique ways. This paper contributes to the knowledge by analyzing the role of “spaces” performing four distinct social functions: 1) the creation of exclusive virtual space, akin to Gramsci’s spaces; 2) metastasizing gamers from the real to the virtual world; 3) the creation of virtual identities, power structures, and ideologies; and 4) social addiction leading to an adrenaline rush among gamers. Foregoing in view, this research aims to signpost the linguistic dimensions of spatiotemporal peculiarities of virtual gaming spaces, examining the implications of gamers’ language for spatial identity, communication, and addiction. This research concludes that there is a significant role of the spatiotemporal interplay of language in these virtual gaming spaces, creating hierarchies, and identities influenced by diverse communication patterns.

Key words: spaces, identity, ideology, power, virtual gaming language, communication, social addiction

Resumen

Este artículo de investigación aborda las competencias y contestaciones en el mundo cibernético que están ampliando su territorialidad y espacios virtuales de maneras singulares. Este artículo contribuye al conocimiento analizando el papel de los “espacios” que desempeñan cuatro funciones sociales distintas: 1) la creación de espacios virtuales exclusivos, similares a los espacios de Gramsci; 2) hacer metástasis de los jugadores del mundo real al virtual; 3) la creación de identidades virtuales, estructuras de poder e ideologías; y 4) la adicción social en los jugadores. Esta investigación tiene como objetivo señalar las dimensiones lingüísticas de las peculiaridades espaciotemporales de los espacios de juego virtuales, examinando las implicaciones del lenguaje de los jugadores en su identidad espacial, comunicación y adicción. Se concluye que existe un papel importante de la interacción espaciotemporal del lenguaje en estos espacios de juego virtuales, creando jerarquías e identidades influenciadas por diversos patrones de comunicación.

Palabras claves: Espacios, identidad, ideología, poder, lenguaje de juego virtual, comunicación, adicción social

Introduction

This research paper recognizes the fact that the advancements in the technological spheres have affected almost every intellectual domain of studies of culture, psychology, sociology, and language. Within these contemporary digital domains, virtual gaming spaces have transposed from their intended purpose as mere entertainment platforms, into multifaceted interactive ecosystems. These platforms occupy and metastasize into distinct and unique ecologies, typologies, genealogies, psychologies, and spaces, providing immersive realms, where individuals forge complex identities, engage in intricate social and financial interactions, and struggle with challenges such as cyber addiction (Fuster et al., 2014; Mehroof & Griffiths, 2010). Language is situated at the core of this transformation, performing dual purposes and functions including the creation of platforms (using the programming language), and modes of communication among the users (players' language), acting as a catalyst for the proliferation and expansion of these virtual realities.

An increasing body of literature points to the significance of virtual (gaming) spaces as arenas for identity negotiations and contestations. In this expanding domain of virtual interactions, human behavior is altered in strange, and sometimes incomprehensible, ways. Virtual gaming acting as exciting entertainment platforms is also concerned with the creation and alteration of virtual identities, social interactions, the use of distinct forms of language, and challenges related to virtual addiction. However, scant attention has been paid to many social aspects in the technological literature, necessitating an understanding of the impact of language on these technologies/spaces as seen through the lens of sociolinguistic and behavioral theorists. Foregoing in view, this research performs three objective functions and aspires to investigate the linguistic mechanisms utilized by individuals in constructing and negotiating identities within virtual gaming spaces. Secondly, this research explores the role of language in facilitating social communication and spatial community formation among players/users in online gaming arenas. Thirdly, this research also examines the correlation between linguistic patterns associated with gaming addiction and issues such as compulsion, escapism, and reward-seeking in these virtual spaces. The research also endeavors to answer multiple queries such as: 1) how online gamers employ language constructs to negotiate identities, power structures and ideologies; 2) what language strategies facilitate social communication and community formation, creating exclusive/inclusive virtual spaces; and 3) what the language patterns associated with (virtual) addictive behaviors are.

Focusing on the vitality and the role of linguistics in the field of technology, this research contributes to the knowledge by signposting the formulation of virtual identities, social spaces, and interactions leading to distinct social behaviors within virtual gaming spaces. It also investigates the digital culture discourses in the growing domain of virtual gaming spaces. In this vein, this study examines the intricate interplay between (virtual) identity construction, addiction dynamics and social communication within virtual gaming spaces, with a specific focus on the pivotal role of language concerning technology.

The paper begins by explicating disciplinary, theoretical, and conceptual underpinnings, presented through a synopsis of the literature review followed by a succinct note on methodology. Then follows an exposition of online gamers' communication, including their words and slang. The subsequent section deals with the data and data analysis, and the findings and recommendations sections will be presented before the conclusion.

Technology, and Sociolinguistics—a Theoretical and Conceptual Interaction

Language and technology continue to interact in innovative ways signifying the vitality of this relationship. This section examines the literature related to linguistic constructs and the development of some of the terms coined by online gaming communities and individuals. It also presents a review of these words, jargon, slang, and acronyms being increasingly adopted by online gamers. The literature examination also includes certain theoretical aspects associated to this research.

The history of virtual gaming dates back to the 1970s with the evolution of Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) and the development of individualized games related to strategy, role-playing, and board/card games (Deterding, 2009; McKinnon, 2012; Robinson et al., 2021). Incidentally, during the same period, many universities in the USA were linked together for research purposes by ARPANET and DARPA (Cerf & Aboba, 1993; Perry et al., 1988). These networks were later extended to the University of Essex, Colchester, England, where two undergraduate students wrote a text-based fantasy game called MUD of “Multiuser Dungeon” (Slator et al., 2007). This cross-continental entertainment connection gave birth to online gaming. Graphics, images, and many other innovations were soon added to MUD opening doors for other gaming ideas. South Korean developers went a step ahead and created a massively multiplayer online game (MMOG) called “Lineage” (Bainbridge, 2021; Lee, 2016; Whang & Chang, 2004). This game remained popular for a long time due to easy availability of high-speed internet in South Korea.

However, the popularity of MMOG in South Korea came at a heavy cost with the death of a large number of Korean players due to exhaustion after marathon gaming sessions (Epstein & Jung, 2011; Rea, 2019). This excessive engagement with online games raised serious concerns and necessitated the examination of this phenomenon as cyber/gaming addiction. This addiction was officially confirmed by the South Korean government’s 2005 survey declaring “internet addiction” or cyber-addiction, as a seriously prevalent phenomenon (Kim et al., 2006). As a result, many governments worldwide imposed in-game penalties for players who spent more than three consecutive hours in online gaming (Choi et al., 2018; Jiang, 2014; Lee, 2011). In this regard scholarship also points to the problem of online gaming addiction, drawing parallels between this and substance addiction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012). Language plays a dual role in this addictive tendency—a medium through which addictive behaviors manifest and as a vector for rationalization and denial of the addictive behavior. Clark and Zack (2023) contend that gaming addiction is a behavior that revolves around the themes of compulsion, escapism, and reward-seeking. Excessive virtual gaming is linked to addictive behavior through the desire for ‘one more level’ or ‘one more game’, reinforced by the solace and validation provided by anonymity (Griffiths, 2000).

The literature also observes an association of cyber-addictive behaviors with other psychological aspects of virtual gaming. Such psychological considerations include a need for appreciation (Bowman et al., 2016; Possler et al., 2020), sensation seeking (Lavin et al., 1999; Mamatha & Ayappa, 2021), anxiety (Gioia et al., 2022; Lee & Leeson, 2015), aggression (Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2020; Lopez-Fernandez, 2015; Mehroof & Griffiths, 2010; Yang, 2012), and dual identity/personality (Fuster et al., 2014; Gong et al., 2021), etc. However, literature is yet to explore how these vivid behaviors of addiction and learning are influenced by online gaming. A literary gap exists in understanding this from Bandura’s

theory of social learning (1971, 2001) which emphasizes the role of social influences in shaping behaviors.

Resonating Bandura, Smith (2021) posits that individual behavior is determined by personal factors, environment, and the individual behavior itself. Learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling of others' behaviors, including addictions. Its applicability in online gaming becomes relevant when, within a particular gaming community, players inspire each other to stay in the game for longer periods, resulting in reward/victory. Bandura's theory also points to the acquisition and reinforcement of behaviors through various corroboration processes. When approval/disapproval from peers and societal norms are added to behavior copying patterns, internet addiction is reinforced and is seen as a learned process.

However, a lust for increasing pleasure, recognition, and entertainment from gaming continues among gamers, pilfering in other individualization desires. Explaining the causes of expecting more from technology (instead of social and human interactions), Turkle (2017) holds that individuals use digital avatars as a source of self-expression, identification, and virtual existence, adopting a persona that diverges from their offline selves. Increasingly avatars are being used in combination with a specific language that allows users/players to articulate their desires, fears, and aspirations within the portals of virtual realms.

The omnipresence of social communication in virtual gaming spaces also engenders a sense of belonging among players. From chat channels to global multiplayer interactions, language acts as a vital point of contact, binding these individuals into cohesive communities living in certain (virtual) spaces (Yee, 2006). Through shared interests, narratives, slang, and humor, gamers collude, play, form teams, engage in financial transactions and group formation, forging enduring associations and virtual social spaces.

Literature also reveals a culture of creation of (mostly exclusive) online spaces based on gender and sexism (Hayday & Collison, 2020; Naidoo et al., 2020; Nic Giolla Easpaig, 2018), color and race (Rusk & Ståhl, 2024), virtual worlds and third spaces (Nic Giolla Easpaig, 2018), etc. However, the relationship of these online spaces, although increasingly recognized as similar to the real (controlled) geographies or territories, has not been addressed in literature. As part of the framework of cultural and political analysis, Gramsci (2005, 2011) introduced the notion of contested spaces, arenas, and domains within a society where hegemonic power is exerted, challenged, and negotiated. This power includes constructing and disseminating identities and ideologies through spaces, practices, discourses, structures, and institutions. This complex interplay between identity, ideology, and hegemony fosters spaces—both real and virtual.

The communication within these virtual (gaming) spaces follows distinct patterns and forms of linguistic genres—mostly understood by a specific community or by the gamers sharing the same space. In this vein, Gramsci's conception of spatial control and insight into hegemony offers a lens through which spatial relations can be understood (Ekers et al., 2012; Jessop, 2005; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2016). Gramsci posits that the dominant groups maintain control not only through coercion but also through the establishment of cultural and ideological hegemony—something vividly visible among online gamers. This hegemony manifests spatiality, influencing the organization of cities, regions, territories, and spaces (Mitchell, 2000). Gramsci's conceptualization of such spaces underscores how power is exercised and contested within physical and social spaces and elucidates the assertion of control by the dominant group over spaces shaping these landscapes. Their authority is

further perpetuated by the perpetual domination of these spaces and resistance to social change within these spatial contexts (Swyngedouw & Jessop, 2001).

Authors also explicate the processes of identity formation in online gaming spaces (Jenson et al., 2015; Vasalou & Joinson, 2009). Identities are formed for gaming characters (avatars) in many complex and interesting ways, creating a gulf between their real and virtual lives, also reflecting a tone and perceived expectations of the context in which they are likely to present themselves. Within this conceptualization of self-presentation, there is a gap in understanding these identities through theoretical scholarship. Goffman (1956) affirms that individuals engage in impression management to shape how they are perceived by others. Goffman points to the creation of certain “front stages”, where they perform specific roles and behaviors to convey desired impressions while privately maintaining “backstage”, where they can relax and express their true selves. Self-presentation involves the manipulation of verbal and nonverbal communication cues, such as clothing (avatars in gaming), and gestures (emojis in today's virtual world).

Gaming language used by the players is characterized by the words and jargon that distinguishes a group of gamers from other gamers and non-gamers. Moreover, the language and choice of words within a group also contain words that are appreciative, offensive, sarcastic, abusive, sexist, friendly, distinct, and exclusive. Most of the literature, however, discusses the role of gaming language from the perspective of the second language, language learning, and bullying language (Abrams & Walsh, 2014; Corredor & Gaydos, 2014; Thorne et al., 2009).

Methodology

This study employs a theoretical, qualitative, and interdisciplinary approach to explore the role of language in virtual gaming spaces, and to understand its impact on identity, social dynamics, and cyber/gaming addiction. This study is guided by an interdisciplinary theoretical framework drawing on Gramsci's theory of spaces (Ekers et al., 2012; Jessop, 2005; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2016), Bandura's theory of social learning and addiction (Annis, 1990; Bandura, 1971, 2001; Smith, 2021), and Goffman's theory of self-presentation (Goffman, 1956; McNay, 1992). To understand the role of language in virtual gaming spaces, this inquiry also triangulates the theoretical approaches and synthesizes them with a set of selected words, slang, and jargon used by online gamers (Suryanto, 2016). These functions are being performed in this research by using online sources, and purposive sampling through interaction with ten online gamers (all male, ages 10 to 15 years old).

Data triangulation of these linguistic constructs to three theories allows for an approach to understanding online gaming social behavior and answering the research questions. As a final step, this review also includes the online search for relevant data from the Web of Science, Social Sciences Citation Index, Google Scholars, and other online literature repositories. The next section presents selections from the language used by online gamers.

Gamer's Communication—Slang, Jargon and Acronyms

The gamers' language and modes of communication are changing rapidly. Referring to online gaming spaces as “interstitial spaces”, Thorne et al. (2009) contend that these spaces are a continuum of three-dimensional graphically rendered virtual environments. Their findings reveal an extended period of socialization language and sophisticated

communicative practices by online gamers and these exchanges act as tools for identity development and management. This collection has been adopted from multiple online sources (See, for example, Bawa, 2018; Belda-Medina & Calvo-Ferrer, 2022), and compiled as a result of informal interaction with the respondents. The majority of these words are acronyms used by the gaming community and were obtained through online sources and in interaction with online gamers.

These words are sometimes modified and, depending upon the time spent by a player in a particular gaming community, the interpretation might alter over time.

Table 1. List of Game Chatting Words

| Word | Explanation |
|------------------------|---|
| "Cheese" | An unherhand strategy that helps a player to win |
| "DC" | Disconnected |
| "EZ" | "Easy" time enjoyed by a player |
| Feeder / Feeding / Fed | Feeder is someone who dies repeatedly. If done on purpose this act serves the "fed" |
| "FF" | Firendly fire. Also represents "forfiet" if friendly fire becomes too intense the players may decide to end game |
| "FTW" | "For the Win" is used as a terminal comment after killing an opponent (before getting killed) |
| "Griefer" | A person who provokes other players to spoil their fun. "Don't be a griefer" |
| "GG / BG" | Good Game or Bad Game is written at the end of a game. Good game may also be used as sarcasm against the loser. |
| "GG no re" | "Good game no remake or replay" when a player decides not to play with same people again |
| "Hacks / Hackz / Hax" | Cheating. If someone's landing headshots left and right, he's either very good or hacking. This can also refer to cheating software itself. |
| "HF" | "Have Fun" usually written at the start of a game |
| "IGN" | In game name is an an online gamer's character name. |
| "INC" | Incoming is a warning against an approaching monster |
| "LEET" | Short form of "elite" showing superiority |
| "LFG / LFM / LFP" | "Looking for group/more/party" Players trying to run a dungeon usually use this |
| "Noob / n00b / newb" | A player who is new to the game. Or is performing poorly regardless of the experience |
| "OHKO" | One-hit knockout is a term used in fighting games when a player knocks out with one hit |
| "OOM / OOR" | Out of Mana/resources. When the main resource runs out |
| "OP / Imba" | Over powered or imbalanced is used when one character is too powerful as compared to other things |
| "OTW" | On the way. When a player is time typing |
| "PK" | Player kill. To kill another character controlled by another player |
| "PUG" | Pick up group is set of actions to achieve same objective such as forming a dungeon |
| "QQ" | QQ shows a crying character, with tears dripping |
| "Rekt / Owned / Pwned" | Wrecked, used by players after a one-sided game |
| "Rez" | Resurrect. It is requested when the leader doesn't realise that a player is dead. |
| "Salty" | Upset or bitter. If one continues to lose in a game repeatedly. |
| "Smurf" | An experienced player who makes multiple accounts to play against weak players |
| "Toxic" | When a player curses or complains excessively |
| "WTB / WTT / WTS" | Wants to buy.trade/sell an item or thing |
| "Xpac" | An expansion pack, that wasn't the part of the initial release of the game and players need to pay money to access this |

Table 1 above shows the list of acronyms/words used in different gaming arenas during players' chats. As noticeable in the list, only the regular/intense players will be able to understand and use these words in their communication, and it is challenging for beginners to understand and use them. Some acronyms are used for sarcasm, bullying, and outright exclusion as observed by Johansson (2013). The second noteworthy aspect is the use of certain technical terminologies borrowed from the game developers, making this

communication more specialized and exclusive. Beginners or relatively newer entrants might not know these terms and may take some time to learn/understand them, resulting in them becoming the victims of some of the sarcasm or exclusion.

However, most of the words mentioned above facilitate a more professional gaming experience. It is also noteworthy that being these entertainment platforms compared to many socializing sites, online gaming players use comparably fewer offensive words in their vocabulary (Ashton, 2009).

Analysis

As stated in the previous sections, this section presents an analysis of the gaming language viewed through the theoretical lens of Gramsci's spatial conceptualization (Gramsci, 2005, 2011), Goffman's self-presentation (Goffman, 1956), and Bandura's social learning (Bandura, 1971, 2001).

As argued by literature, online gaming language conforms to certain rules (Johansson & Verhagen, 2011). However, these rules are mostly related to game developers and include: 1) constitutive rules, or the mathematical rules of the game; 2) operational rules, or the rules of play or how to play the game; and 3) implicit rules, or the rules regarding the spirit of the game, what is considered a fair play.

However, the last set of rules is easy to avoid or bypass because the developers have limited control over the players' behavior. The governing rules within a gaming community are mostly agreed-upon by the community guilds and are routinely communicated within a group and even to the joining members.

To keep the (mostly) unsupervised online gaming arenas and to optimize the entertainment experience, it is important that the players, operating beyond geographical bounds, collaborate, form groups, display sportsman spirit, avoid offensive language, and follow certain rules. This set of rules has been summarized as the Ten Commandments (Johansson & Verhagen, 2011):

| <i>The 10 commandments of Online Games</i> |
|---|
| <i>Thou shall treat others the same way thou like to be treated</i> |
| <i>Thou shall play fairly and just</i> |
| <i>Thou shall show respect to fellow players</i> |
| <i>Thou shall watch thy tongue and speak fairly</i> |
| <i>Thou shall play as a part of team</i> |
| <i>Thou shall be loyal to thy group</i> |
| <i>Thou shall not steal thy co-players treasures</i> |
| <i>Thou shall not sail under false flag</i> |
| <i>Thou shall not weep or cry</i> |
| <i>Thou shall be merry</i> |
| Few more |
| <i>Thou shall obey thy Leader</i> |
| <i>Thou shall obey the rules</i> |

Most of the players follow the rules and stay within the bounds of these Ten Commandments. However, some players may engage in certain activities that are contrary to the norms and may engage in “kill stealing”¹ or “ninja looting”, and taking advantage of others for personal gains are usually declared as intolerable behaviors by most guilds.

Virtual Spaces, places, and Territoriality

Although most of the virtual games, MMOGs, are open to players across the globe, players or groups of players can form their exclusive communities using the virtual worlds. The creation of these spaces or virtual place-making involves regular social interactions among and with other players. MMOG players' sense of space, place, and territoriality can also be judged by the familiarity and knowledge of a particular game (what roles are to be played, and how). Choice of avatars and identity (that is also a depiction of an individual's characteristics and qualities) also define the space and territory in which these gamers are likely to operate.

The players also create exclusive spaces through various strategies, including in-game guilds, formation of factions, and player-owned territories. These territories act as spaces that serve as social interaction hubs where players congregate, collaborate, and establish hierarchies. Within these exclusive spaces, certain players dominate and may wield power by virtue of their status, influence, or in-game resources. These guild or faction leaders have sway over the members and dictate strategies, distribute rewards and even mediate disputes (Jang, 2007).

These power dynamics reflect the hegemonic spaces postulated by Gramsci, wherein a dominant group's assets control physical and social territories to maintain a grip over power and authority (Gramsci, 2005, 2011). In a replication of physical space hierarchies, MMOG players or groups establish hegemonic spaces by monopolizing resources, controlling key strategic locations, shaping and dictating gaming rules, norms, and narratives, and exercising control over reward and punishment. These hegemonic spaces not only facilitate the accumulation of in-game wealth and influence but also enable leaders to perpetuate power and reinforce dominance. Such actions are akin to real-world power within the domains of the virtual world.

Moreover, a Gramscian analysis of these spaces signifies the presence of hierarchal and hegemonic relationships in MMOGs. Just as the hegemonic spaces perpetuate and reinforce inequalities, and marginalize dissenting voices, these virtual spaces also exclude, defame, and disrespect players who do not conform to the norms or power structures (Bainbridge, 2007).

Avatar Naming—Identity, Language and Character

In MMOGs, players engage in a virtual identity creation and an avatar naming. This process has a considerable resonance with Goffman's theory of self-presentation, which refers to individuals actively managing their self-presentation to shape how they are perceived by others (Goffman, 1956).

Yee (2006) argues that when creating their avatars, players often draw upon their own identity, character, aspirations, or desired appearance. The process may include a selection of physical characteristics, such as race, gender, color, religion, etc., reflecting the

¹ When a player claims excessive credit for killing the enemy, whereas another player may have contributed more towards the killing.

player's self-presentation or an idealized self-image. Moreover, players may choose names for their avatars that convey specific traits, qualities, and roles within the gaming world. For example, players might use names such as *Leader X²* to evoke impressions of leadership, high character and anonymity.

The portrayal of the virtual self also allows the players to manage their appearance and create an impression of their persona in the gaming environment. Avatars also serve as the performative representatives of the player's chosen identity, allowing them to experiment with a variety of roles, personalities, and social interactions. This impression management also facilitates the players to elicit a particular response or reaction from other players.

Naming the avatars also relates to Goffman's notions of "front stage" and "backstage". The front stage is the persona presented by the player to the virtual world, whereas the backstage represents the private realms where the individuals can relax and express their true selves (Goffman, 1956). Similarly, as posited in Goffman's front-stage persona argument, MMOG players often create identities, naming their avatars specifically tailored for public interactions and displays. This is carefully created to project a specific image or identity to other players. However, as argued by Barkhuus et al. (2005), behind-the-scenes (offline) players engage in a more authentic or relaxed mode of self-expression free from the constraints of the virtual portrayal/depiction.

Naming the avatars is also influenced by many other factors, including game narrative, game mechanics, cultural norms, and individual preferences. Taylor (2009) asserts that the players seek easy and sociable interaction with other players and, therefore may resort to names that are easy to pronounce and memorable yet distinctive, making communication smooth. Moreover, players may incorporate humor, wordplay, or cultural references to their avatar names to spark conversation and controversies, fostering connections with other players. All these factors strengthen the process of virtual metastasizing and make the players feel in their comfort zones.

Notably, Huh and Williams (2010) argue that the identity creation and naming process in MMOGs is not without certain limitations. Many games impose restrictions on avatar names to maintain immersion and prevent offensive or inappropriate content. Such restrictions can include filters to block profanity, copyrighted materials, or impersonation of game characters.

Bandura's Social Learning—From Entertainment to Addiction

Literature notes that MMOG players can become addicted to the games and online platforms due to the immersive, distinct, attractive and attentive nature of the virtual world. As argued by Bäcklund et al. (2022), gaming platforms are designed to be engaging and captivating, offering players a sense of autonomy, control, mastery, and relatedness. A combination of virtual and real-world experiences and the enticing nature of MMOGs often provide a cozy environment where players can escape from real-life challenges, stressors and responsibilities, finding solace and comfort within the virtual worlds (Yee, 2006). These experiences virtually metastasize these players from reality to virtuality—the space where they find solace, engagement, and pleasure.

In this vein, Bandura's theory of social learning can help understand the development of addiction within MMOG experiences. As stated by Bandura, our social learning usually follows observations, imitation and modelling of behaviors of our fellow human beings

² LeaderX is the MMOG identity for one of the respondents.

(Bandura, 1971). In the case of MMOGs, players interact with other players, observing their in-game character, spending excessive time playing these games, involving in deeper social and virtual engagements, and prioritizing virtual achievements over real-life responsibilities and challenges. These observations can lead to imitation as well as to cyber or internet addiction.

Players also need validation, appreciation, and reinforcement of their gaming behavior and expertise from peers in MMOGs. Positive feedback from fellow players, such as appreciation, praise for in-game accomplishments, and social acceptance within guilds can also lead to addictive behavior.

Findings and Recommendations

This research delved into online gaming language and analyzed the experiences through the theoretical lenses of three scholars. Some of the findings from this study are appended below:

- a. MMOG players follow a non-linear process of creating identities for the avatars, joining groups, forming specific, exclusive spaces and territories, and interacting with other players.
- b. Identity creation follows certain characteristics, qualities, and aspirations. These identities make future interactions more engaging and communicative.
- c. MMOG players are highly immersed and engaged in the virtual worlds, finding them captivating and immersive due to rich gameplay experiences, social interactions, and a sense of achievement. Tragically, a few of the first MMOG players in history died of fatigue and exhaustion because of excessive non-stop time spent online playing these games.
- d. Players also form social connections within MMOGs, forging friendships and communities with fellow players. While these communities create a sense of belonging, these interactions also create hierarchies and power relationships. Those in leadership roles occupy dominating roles, dictating rules for the guild, gaming strategies, and inclusion and exclusion of certain players.
- e. MMOG addiction is also prevalent among players, characterized by excessive gaming, neglect of real-life responsibilities and challenges, and withdrawal symptoms when these players are unable to play. Such addictive behavior needs special consideration in future research to mitigate its effects.
- f. This research also finds that interdisciplinary theoretical approaches are vital sources of analysis for the rapidly advancing technologies. These modern technologies and platforms rely on the use of language, both in written and spoken forms. Therefore, Bandura's theory of social learning, Goffman's theory of self-presentation, frontstage, backstage concepts, and Gramscian notions of space and hierarchies are robust tools to conduct such analysis.

Some of the recommendations are:

- a. There is a need for enhanced social support for the online players. Game developers can incorporate in-game features to enhance the support networks, ensuring positive entertainment interactions.
- b. To avoid longer and excessive exposures to the gaming arenas. There is a need to limit the time duration for which a player should be allowed to stay in-game.

This function can be performed by the parents/guardians and even the games can have inbuilt time limitations.

- c. Desire to advance to the next level, a sense of achievement, and appreciation from peers can lead to addiction and online fatigue. Developers should build the features to limit the time spent in one sitting by a player.
- d. There is also a need to raise awareness regarding the signs and risks associated with MMOG addiction in developing countries such as Pakistan. Youth is excessively resorting to escapism, spending excessive time playing virtual games. This not only affects their academic and work performance but can also lead to addiction.
- e. Although certain responsible gaming features such as parental control, age ratings, and self-exclusion options are part of some of the games, these are not available across the board. There is a need to incorporate these features to manage gaming habits responsibly and protect vulnerable individuals/groups.

Conclusion

This research adopted a multidisciplinary approach to elucidate the role of linguistics in understanding certain social dimensions of MMOGs. The article focused on identity construction, self-presentation, virtual spaces and addictive behaviors. Through this multidisciplinary discussion, several key findings related to psychology, sociology, gaming studies and power wielded through these virtual interactions emerged.

MMOG players engage in complex processes of identity construction, utilizing avatars to project a specific self-image. Drawing on Goffman's theory, this research found that players strategically manage their avatar names, appearances and behaviors to shape how they are perceived by others, enhancing social interactions, immersion and role-playing experiences.

This research also identified MMOG as a potential platform for addiction characterized by excessive gaming, neglect of real-life responsibilities, and withdrawal symptoms when unable to play. These facts were also found to be reflective of Albert Bandura's conception of social learning, highlighting the role of social reinforcement and various learning mechanisms. Additionally, the formation of in-game support groups, strong social connections, communities and acquaintances are also facilitated by MMOGs. These social bonds also contribute to the sense of belonging among players, enriching the entertainment and gaming experiences while enhancing language learning, distinct communication skills, and long-term engagement.

In summary, this research signposts gaming behaviors such as space/place-formation, social learning through appreciative reinforcement, identity construction and self-presentation image-creation. However, online gaming addiction continues to pose significant challenges to the players and their real-life responsibilities. Overall, the research contributes to an interdisciplinary broader discourse on digital cultures and online gaming.

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