Games & Gaming
in the Digital and Social Media Track, HICSS 55

Kelly Bergstrom
York University
kmb@yorku.ca

Kishonna Gray
University of Kentucky
unicorn@uky.edu

Nathaniel Poor
Underwood Institute
natpoor@gmail.com

Abstract

For the sixth year, the Games & Gaming minitrack offers a space in the Digital and Social Media track at HICSS to examine social interactions that are mediated via digital games. Games continue to be an important part of the human experience, and in light of the ongoing pandemic, mediated gaming over platforms such as Zoom or Twitch have become vital social outlets. The research presented in our mini-track demonstrates how games often mirror larger social issues, including toxicity, politics, and identity. Games and play deeply reflect who we are as both individuals and as a society, and the research here continues to explore many issues of interest to a wide scholarly audience.

1. Games & Gaming

For a second year now, we will hold HICSS remotely due to the global coronavirus pandemic, travel restrictions, and general unknowns around new variants. Holding classes, meetings, and *Dungeons & Dragons* sessions over Zoom continues to be the norm, and the same is true for conferences. Despite the continued rollout of vaccines, we are disappointed yet understand that there are too many unknowns for us to safely gather in-person with you on the Island of Maui. While we are asked to social distance, this does not mean we cannot be social; we can still play together, mediated via our digital and social networks.

This year we had a record response to our call for papers: twenty papers were submitted for review. In the opening remarks for last year's virtual conference we predicted papers about *Pokémon GO* or *Among Us* [1], neither of which are reflected in in the final eight papers accepted for publication. Certainly this last year has been full of the unexpected, for better and worse.

Online streaming and specifically Twitch continue to be a topic of interest in our track, as it is an active and diverse space with a variety of norms, audiences, and streamers and the topics or games they cover, as well as its financial models (as Twitch is owned by Amazon).

We have three papers that examine different aspects of streaming. One investigates the impact of the pandemic on streaming practices on Twitch over time, considering how streamers choose their game setting and non-gaming content. Another studies how microstreamers, that is, streamers with extremely small audiences, generate authenticity through a variety of methods. The third looks at the emergence of political messages in apolitical streams, and how different actors engage with such messages.

Three papers take a wider view to understand the sociality of gaming. One looks at online communities as a source of innovation using *Crusader Kings 3* as its focus. Another studies "dark participation" in games, that is, trolling and other toxic behavior, and reporting tools needed to curtail it. The third breaks new ground for our mini-track and is our first paper to examine music; specifically this paper examines social media reactions to songs and music in single player games.

Lastly we have two papers that focus on important larger social issues. The first studies how game-mediated contact between people with different identities can improve relations between those people and reduce stereotypes, especially of immigrants. The other, our Best Paper Award nominee, looks at the discourses around mental health as seen through video games, and also tackles the related issue of developer crunch and burnout.

Despite the continued challenges stemming from the pandemic, people continue to play as they always have albeit with a greater amount of internet-based mediation, and through our many digital technologies players continue to be social in a multitude of ways.

2. References

[1] Gray, K, N. Poor, and K. Bergstrom. "Introduction to the Minitrack on Games and Gaming." *Proceedings of the 54th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences.* (2021), 2812-2813.

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