Social Opportunities and Digitalized Communication of Genshin Impact Players

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ABSTRACT

Genshin Impact (GI) became a global trend for online gaming culture in 2020. Many players greatly value it because of what it offers to their community. This study was conducted to understand the social interactions and communicative practices of Ilokano players of Genshin Impact. Guided by the concepts of the ethnomethodology tradition of qualitative communication research, 6 GI players participated in in-depth interviews and virtual immersion to document their narratives and practices on their social interactions and communicative practices. The theorizing evinced that social opportunities are the achievement in playing GI that is comprised of six sub-themes, which include: (1) Virtual Amity; (2) Virtual Emotional Sharing; (3) Introvert Friendly; (4) Cross-Cultural Virtual Encounters; (5) Otaku Community; and (6) Third-place. Meanwhile, digitalized communication emerged as the core category describing the communicative practices of GI players that consists of four sub-themes which include: (1) Discord (Extension of CMC); (2) Meta (Extension of CMC); (3) Genshin Impact Emojis; and (4) Face-to-Face. Hence, this theorizing revealed that playing Genshin Impact provides social opportunities and digitalized communication, improving GI players' social lives.

Keywords- Ethnomethodology, Introvert, Online Game, Qualitative Research.

I. INTRODUCTION

Online-games-based interaction has become prominent, even before the pandemic. One of the most used online games in creating online friendships is cooperative play (co-op), the most common of which is survival games. This allows players to do standard game mechanics such as sharing things, helping each other through deterrents, and helping accomplices recuperate from wounds. This type of digital game also has features that allow gamers to communicate with other players through online texts, audio calls, and video calls. One

example of a co-op game that is also an open-world role-playing game is the new fantasy anime game called Genshin Impact (GI). A role-playing action game (RPG) is a computer game where the gamer controls a fictitious person who embraces a mission in a conjured-up universe. Genshin Impact is an RPG game created and distributed by a Chinese game-developing company called miHoYo. It was delivered through different gaming platforms, including PlayStation, Android, and iOS, in September 2020. The game highlights an anime-style open-world climate and an activity-based fight framework. Lenhart (2015) explained that computer

games do engage with the media, they likewise provide an intense chance for associating adolescents with new and old companions. Developments in the game plan and stages have expanded the chances to associate and mingle while playing. These progressions have empowered teenage gamers to connect both with others face-to-face (83%) an online (75%). These abilities have significantly improved chances of youngsters to associate and invest energy with companions and others while gaming. Kowert et al. (2014) added, internet-based social spaces could lessen social inhibitions, eliminating social snags and considering viable correspondence inside these spaces.

Many studies have explored the impact of online games and their social, emotional, and cognitive benefits on people, especially among youngsters. However, to this date, there are limited studies focusing on the open-world action RPG Genshin Impact. Hence, the study explored the muted voice of gamers as common studies focus on the game itself. This study looked into the fundamental causes of the game becoming an alternative domain for people to communicate. Thus, the study's vital and valuable contribution is understanding the perspectives of a player when playing GI and identifying what is achieved in engaging in this communication phenomenon. Such is a vital contribution to a game community that is fast becoming popular since its introduction. Additionally, the field of communication is continuously evolving with the emergence of various platforms to engage in this human process.

Generally, the study aimed to understand the communication process of Genshin Impact in developing relationships among players. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions: (1) What do Genshin Impact players accomplish in online social interactions with other gamers? and What communicative practices do players adopt when playing Genshin Impact?

II.   METHODOLOGY

Framework of the Study

This qualitative study is inductive and is drawn from the socio-cultural tradition of communication theory. According to Craig (1999), the socio-cultural tradition sees communication as a symbolic process in the reproduction or production of social order. It is all about context, culture, and social practices, such as the practices of Genshin Impact players. Chang'orok (2017) added that this tradition holds that reality is not an objective set of arrangements outside but is constructed through communicating in groups, society, and cultures such as GI players. Furthermore, Goddard and Melville (2004) explained that inductive research starts with observations, and theories are proposed towards the end of the research process as a result of observations.

Moreover, Bernard (2011) indicates that inductive research involves searching for patterns from observation and developing explanations – theories – for those patterns, such as practices. This study focused on the achievement of playing GI and knowledge that would explain the kind of communicative practices that players engaged in. Hence, this theorizing was able to contribute additional knowledge and not test existing communication and social sciences theories.

Design

This study is qualitative research framed under the ethnomethodological communication research tradition. The significant practices of qualitative communication research share a similar reason for understanding the importance behind the activity, but they differ in the way they find meaning. Ethnomethodology is the study of practices formed in and through social interaction. Segumpan and Saludadez (2017) stated that ethnomethodology is thus about practice. Brown (2009) added that ethnomethodology focuses on individuals' techniques to convey their regular exercises. It is used to achieve a sensible record of what is going on in friendly cooperation and give a design to the actual collaboration. The study included the practices of GI players and what was accomplished in such communicative activity.

Participants of the Study

The study participants were six (6) GI players from North Luzon, Philippines. Six (6) participants were identified following the concept of purposive sampling. Alchemer (2021) defined purposive sampling as critical, specific, or abstract inspecting, a type of non-likelihood testing in which analysts depend on the researcher's judgment while picking individuals from the populace to partake in their reviews. However, the primary consideration was tailored based on the set inclusion criteria, which is the primary consideration in any qualitative communication research. Participants were chosen based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) the player must be playing Genshin Impact for at least 6 to 12 months; (b) the player must be from the provinces of North Luzon, Philippines; (c) the player must be proficient in utilizing the communication domain of Genshin Impact; (d) the player must often interact with other Filipino GI players; (e) the player must be at the age of 18 or above; and (f) the player must be willing to participate in the study. As Lindlof and Taylor (2011) stated, a researcher recruits a particular person because they have had experiences vital to the research question, possess specific knowledge, or because of the stories they have to tell.

The participants were given nicknames based on the characters from Genshin Impact in compliance with the research's ethics protocols, ensuring respect for their confidentiality and anonymity. The nicknames are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants` Nicknames

Participant	Address	Nicknames
1	Bacnotan, La Union	Childe
2	Pasuquin, Ilocos Norte	Diluc
3	Tarlac, Philippines	Yanfei
4	Sarrat, Ilocos Norte	Ayato
5	San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte	Zhongli
6	San Vicente Ilocos Sur	Thoma

Data Collection

An institutional review board of a state university in North Philippines approved all procedures conducted in the study. The data collection method for this study was a semi-structured interview conducted on dates that the researcher and the participants agreed on. The interview lasted from 30 minutes to one hour. Doyle (2020) described a semi-structured interview as a meeting where the interviewer only follows a formalized list of questions. Instead, the researcher asked more open-ended questions, allowing for a discussion with the interviewee rather than a straightforward question-and-answer format. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) added that interviews are particularly well suited to understanding the social actor's experience, knowledge, and worldviews. Interviews enable researchers to gather information about things or processes that other means cannot effectively observe. The interview was conducted virtually. It was recorded through audio, video, and photo documentation. In addition, the researcher conducted virtual immersion with the participants in the GI space to make sense of their practices.

Data Analysis

The researcher employed thematic analysis on the interview transcripts and searched for themes that would describe the research questions following the methods of Lindlof and Taylor (2021) in familiarizing the data, distinguishing the codes, and discovering and finalizing the themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) discussed thematic analysis as a strategy for distinguishing, dissecting, and announcing designs (subjects) inside information. Rubin and Rubin (1995) added that it is beneficial when an exploration project intends to find topics and ideas implanted through qualitative information. Meanwhile, the researcher's observations during the virtual immersion were presented to expand the discussion on the practices.

III.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Accomplishments from the Social Interactions of GI Players

The data obtained from the interview for the first research question was analyzed using Lindlof and Taylor's (2021) method of coding, categorizing, and interpreting. The data revealed one core category describing Genshin Impact as an Online Platform for Social Opportunities that is comprised of six sub-themes: (1) Virtual Amity, (2) Virtual Emotional Sharing, (3) Introvert Friendly, (4) Cross-Cultural Virtual Encounters; (5) Otaku Community; and (6) Third-place.

Virtual Amity. As a result of thematic analysis, virtual amity emerged as one achievement in social interactions while playing Genshin Impact. Many have argued if the friends they met on online games are authentic. Many players consider that in-game friends are treated as real friends. It makes no difference what medium they use; the social-emotional connection matters. Three participants shared:

Yanfei: You know, actually sa una I feel nervous pero habang tumatagal I get excited playing with them o may nakakausap ako. Some players join just to help you farm and level-up. So dun palang may na de-develop na friendship. (You know, actually at first, I feel nervous but as time passes by, I get excited playing and conversing with them. Some players join just to help you farm and level-up. So, from that, there is already a friendship being developed).

Thoma: [It is] just the fun part [for] me playing Genshin. I used to play open world games and then I just stumbled upon this game now. It's like one, I mean, one part of my life since I've met a lot of [friends] locally and internationally, and they've been part of my life and I've been friends with them up until now.

Ayato: Content? I feel complete when playing with other players. Like I've been feeling too many emotions, but all my emotions are all from the positive. So, I've been invited to every game where I've been so exhilarated, so thrilled, because I can play with other players. With the same goals as them.

It is evident that through the participants' answers, virtual amity and closeness are being formed through the Genshin Impact platform with the help of game mechanics that allow players to cooperate. In correspondence to Kengly (2021), Genshin Impact's famous elements incorporate Community Mode; players can welcome up to three players to join their reality, permitting four Voyagers to experience together. To this extent, their co-op system has allowed them to form a special bond within the gaming platform.

Virtual Emotional-Sharing. An emotional connection is one of the most important factors in sharing something online. Many factors can cause people to feel helpless and perplexed. Online games are one way that players react to these types of events. Through the data gathered from the participants, they said that virtual emotional sharing exists in the world of Genshin Impact. Three participants discussed:

Childe: Yung mga life advices syempre kunwari yung mga kaibigan kong sawi may isa akong kaibigan na sawi sa love hahaha close na kami ngayon. yung pina-pilot ko yung account nya, close na kami. Talaga na lahat ng problema nya sinasabi nya sa akin. (For example, I give life advices to my friends who are heartbroken. I have this one friend who was heartbroken. After I gave her life advices, we are now close and she even allowed me to pilot her account. She really shares all her problems with me).

Zhongli: Actually, tama nga sila. It is an escape kasi pwede ka mag share ng problema mo doon without the judgment kasi siguro your profile is hidden. (Actually, they are right. It is an escape because you can share your problems there without judgment because your profile is hidden).

The data from the participants described Genshin Impact allows players to create sympathy with their fellow gamers. Childe and Zhongli expressed that the gaming platform has given them a space to seek advice from online individuals regarding emotional and mental struggles. Zhongli also implied that anonymity is a factor in why these players are comfortable sharing their predicaments with other gamers. Games present consolidated types of communication, amusement, and energy, setting off short-term communications and long-term connections. For this reason, that is what they contend, albeit not beforehand unequivocally characterized like this, advanced gaming innovation ought to be viewed as social presence innovation, as it gives a setting and avenue for interfacing with others a way off (e.g., in the internet gaming) and expands and initiates a correspondence in co-found settings (IJsselsteijn et al., 2007).

Introvert-Friendly. Introverts can interact with others by using their online persona in gaming. It allows them to communicate and live out their imaginations. It enables them to disclose an undiscovered side they have always desired to reveal. One theme that emerged from the thematic analysis is Introvert Friendly; virtual games have often been deemed a safe space for unsociable individuals. Some participants shared:

Diluc: I guess it motivated me as long as it increased my confidence to talk to strangers because I usually, even in person, [don't] like to [approach] people. Kasla kayat ko agbalin a friend. I may not seem like it sometimes because I'm shy, but because of Genshin, I kind of got like, kasla mas confident kuma. (I guess it motivated me as long as it increased my confidence to talk to strangers because I usually, even in person, *[don't] like to [approach] people* [to become their friend]. I may not seem like it sometimes because I'm shy, but because of Genshin, I became more confident).

Zhongli: Introvert kasi ako, interacting in the real world nahihirapan talaga ako. Genshin Impact helped me in real life to have the confidence to reach out to people. So yun yung pinaka main achievement ko sa pakiki interact with other players. (I am an introvert so I struggle to interact with others in the real world. Genshin Impact, however, helped me in real life to have the confidence to reach out to people and for me that is my main achievement in playing the game).

Thoma: Yes. I really do believe that since I can train myself talking through voice chat or in just simple chatting since you're also talking to other people like

outside and then they are like new to you and you're learning a lot from them as well.

The third theme showed that Genshin Impact is a safe space for introverts. The data indicated the gaming platform became an advantage for the players in boosting their social skills and confidence in talking with others. Uppal (2017) stated that online games also promote communication and teamwork. Providing people an incentive to work with each other to win at games helps them interact better with others at their workspaces or in their day-to-day lives offline. This is especially helpful for introverts, as it allows them to communicate with other people through a medium that is more tangibly under their control. This unique mode of communication helps promote connection while fostering the skills and confidence needed to interact face-to-face.

Cross-cultural Virtual Encounters. Even if raised in different cultures, people have more in common than they realized in video games like Genshin Impact, which features regions based on different countries from the real world. It brings people together as they connect emotionally with the game, the playable characters, and other players.

The fourth theme presents that the gaming world of Genshin allows Filipino players to meet virtually with gamers from other countries. This is due to the global server that the game offers to its players. Thus, it gives them a space for cross-cultural communication wherein they exchange knowledge and information regarding certain cultures and beliefs. The data from the participants stated that they feel excited from foreign Genshin gamers which gives them another game-playing experience. Gee (2003), in his book *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Literacy and Learning*, justified that 36 video gamified learning principles and described how video games could allow players to understand cultural modes by immersing them in a specific cultural worldview.

Figure 1: Screengrab Cross-cultural conversation in Genshin Impact chat system

One of the virtual immersions was an encounter between one of the participants and a random player from Indonesia. Throughout the conversation, the player from Indonesia talked about two cultural practices from

their country, *Tari Piring*, a traditional Minangkabau plate dance originating from West Sumatra, Indonesia, and *Panjat Pinang*, the Indonesian phrase for climbing slippery poles.

Otaku Community. Genshin Impact is an anime-style open-world game created by a Chinese company. Otaku, which is the Japanese word for *geek*, is a person who enthuses anime-related topics and activities. The majority of individuals started playing Genshin because of their otaku urges. The participants shared Genshin Impact is a virtual sanctuary for people who love anime. Some participants discussed:

Diluc: Speaking of anime because like I've said a while ago, my username in Genshin Impact is based on a character from an anime, specifically [Jujutsu Kaisen], and that guy also seemed to watch anime, so we talked about it. We asked each other who our favorite characters from the anime were. I guess that's also what led to our friendship now because that guy is the first ever random stranger who I've been friends with and. Our friendship still exists to this day.

Thoma: I don't actually. It's blank. My pen name is blank. Actually, it's from an anime called No Game, No Life. Sometimes, I have selected people that I share topics about anime or cosplay.

The data from the participants indicated that anime, cosplay, or any weeb/otaku content was one of the common grounds for developing and strengthening friendships on Genshin. Their experiences implied that most Genshin Impact players are anime enthusiasts. This is because the game aesthetic is similar to anime-based designs and roleplaying games. In an article written by Ye (2020), he mentioned the men behind Genshin Impact had made no secret of focusing on otakus - a Japanese expression for male geeks who are socially off-kilter with restricted heartfelt lives, and who honestly love games or anime highlighting "charming" or "attractive" characters.

Third-place. Virtual spaces like social media or online games are considered third places in the digital era. From the data gathered, the participants revealed that the open world of Genshin Impact is a third-place. The data showed that Zhongli felt a different identity while playing GI. Most of them thought that the game's virtual world was a separate dimension from the real world.

Furthermore, real-life activities are said to be achieved as well in cyberspace. One of the participants said that a feature in the game allows players to play instruments (Figure 2) to entertain other gamers. Moore et al. (2007) discussed, multiplayer games vigorously depend on virtual space to make and keep a feeling of local area among their players. Meanwhile, Oldenburg (1989) portrays the idea that the third places put existence on neutral ground and elevates visitors to a state of social uniformity. Inside these places, a discussion is a basic movement and a significant vehicle

to showcase and express enthusiasm for human character and uniqueness. Third places are underestimated, and most have a position of safety. The personality of a third spot is resolved in particular by its normal customers and is set apart by an energetic state of mind.


Figure 2: Screengrab of Playing the Lyre Instrument on Genshin Impact

The conducted virtual immersions involved the participant with two other GI players playing a lyre instrument, wherein it can be played on PC using either the keyboard or the mouse. Gadgets like the lyre are one of the features in the game that players use to entertain others—making it one of the components of which Genshin Impact is a probable virtual third-place.

Genshin Impact as an Online Platform for Social Opportunities

The first research objective is to determine what is accomplished among players regarding their online social interaction with other gamers. The data from the participants described Genshin Impact as an online platform for social opportunities, which was the grand theme for the first research question. The several sub-themes are connected to Social Opportunities in Online Gaming. Under the idea of social opportunities, four categories were presented: Social Opportunity for Friendships, Esteem Needs, Culture, and Education. According to the data collected from the participants, anime, cosplay, or any other web/otaku content is one of the common hobbies for forming connections.

Furthermore, the game can improve players' personalities, especially the reserved ones. Second, the players felt a renewed sense of belonging when playing GI. Many of them believe that the online environment of the game's content is a separate component from the actual world. Lastly, Genshin Impact players can be influence by other countries` values and practices since the communication domain permits them to interact with players around the globe. Just like Crane (2022) stated, players automatically connect with other people who enjoy playing games online. This allows the opportunity to make new friends, learn from other players, and have a good time. In addition, many online games offer player-run forums and chat rooms where they can discuss strategy, give advice, or chat with other gamers. If players feel lonely or isolated, gaming can be a great way to be a part of a large and supportive community.
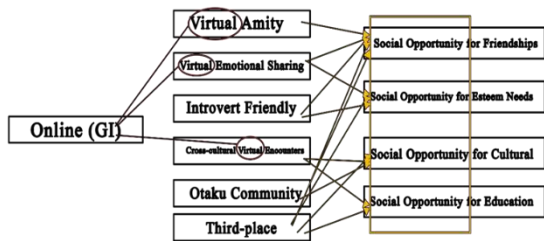
**Figure 3: Conceptual Connections among the Sub-themes in the Accomplishment of Playing GI**

The sub-theme for Virtual Amity was connected to Friendship, as the word Amity is synonymous with Friendship. Virtual Emotional Sharing was connected to Friendships and Esteem Needs as this theme describes players seeking validation in their feelings simultaneously, creating strong connections with other gamers. The Introvert Friendly sub-theme was linked to Friendships and Esteem needs as Genshin Impact was mentioned to be a safe space to develop personality and fellowships among shy individuals. The cross-cultural virtual encounter sub-theme fell under cultural and education as it had been explored through the interview and virtual immersion, and the exchange of knowledge in terms of different cultures from players worldwide is being put into discourse. The otaku community sub-theme was linked to culture and friendship corresponding to players' likeness in anime culture. Lastly, the third place fell under the four categories because, based on the participants, Genshin Impact is a virtual platform capable of developing the four types of social opportunities.

The study discovered that Genshin Impact is a virtual platform whose communication domain could help GI players establish and flourish different social benefits in local and international fellowships. Furthermore, the gaming platform could develop the personality of introverted players. According to Khairunisa (2020), most web-based game players do not play alone; they compete with different players to finish a mission or against a foe. Although individual sentiments like interest, joy, and energy are significant inspirations for joining a web-based first individual shooter game (FPSG), social connection and contest are additionally significant inspirations for partaking in such games.

Communicative Practices of GI Players

Lindlof and Taylor's (2021) procedure of coding, categorizing, and interpreting (2011) was utilized to answer the research objective on the communicative practices of GI players. One core theme emerged describing the communicative practices of GI players as Digitalized Communication. Furthermore, four sub-themes, which include (1) Discord (Extension of CMC), (2) Meta (Extension of CMC), (3) Genshin Impact Emojis, and (4) Face-to-Face emerged as the communicative practices of the participants.

Discord (Extension of CMC). When players enter the virtual Genshin Impact, they often encounter other players with the same interest. From there, they engaged in interesting conversations by chatting while playing Genshin, nonetheless, due to the limited features of the game's chat system. Their chat discourses took place elsewhere. One software they used to extend their computer-mediated communication is Discord. The app is a media site for voice and instant messaging. Communication can be done through voice calls, video calls, text messaging, sharing videos, files in private discussions or as part of groups known as servers.
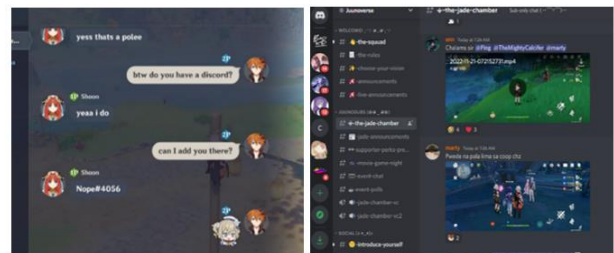
Figure 4. Screengrab of Conversations from Genshin Impact to Discord

The data revealed that conversing on Discord was one communicative practice by GI players. Discord is a free communications app that allows players to communicate with friends, game communities, and developers via voice, video, and text chat (Pearson, 2022). The participants stated that the software is an extension of their computer-mediated communication with people they met on Genshin Impact whom they became close with. They utilize Discord as a way for them to have a more natural conversation with their friends while playing the game. Nonetheless, for random players that they barely know yet, they said that they prefer the in-game chat to communicate with them. Based on Wadley et al. (2005), current MMORPGs normally permit players to pick between an assortment of text talk modes – private, area, group, etc. – as the circumstance requests. These modes can be planned for the distinctive voice transmission similitudes recognized: phone, nearness, and radio. Using voice rather than message as a correspondence medium must present more friendly communication to internet gaming.

Meta (Extension of CMC). Similar to Discord, one of the platforms for players to extend their discussion from Genshin Impact is Meta. This application comprises two prominent platforms, which are Facebook and Messenger. Nonetheless, participants said adding other gamers` social media accounts allow them to discover more personal information than Discord.

Theme two presents that Genshin Impact players also extend their communication through the Meta applications, which include Facebook and Messenger. Meta describes itself as a company that builds technologies that help people connect and find

communities and grow businesses (Ryles, 2022). The participants said adding the players they met on Genshin Impact on Meta strengthened their platonic relationship. Liang and Walther (2015) underscored the source impact of CMC in which communicators can specifically introduce parts of themselves on the web with a message-based CMC at the top of the priority list.

Genshin Impact Emojis. Most GI players are fan with the emoji features of the game. This is because it captures the different expressions of their favorite playable characters in the game. Moreover, Genshin Impact emojis could make the conversation entertaining.

The data indicated that Gesnhin-based emojis are being utilized to lessen the ambiguity of conversation during social interactions. Kengly (2021) emphasized that Genshin Impact offers an assortment of in-game Emotes of various characters that can convey a feeling. A typical Emoticon in Genshin Effect is Paimon's "Boat out!" Players use Emoticon to show they are going away from Center Mode rather than leaving unexpectedly without a word. However not rigorously vital, it imparts to the host that the meeting worked well. Thus, this assists players with building certainty and becoming less vigilant, making them more open to offering their reality to different players. The participants stated that they could decode the message better that was being sent and that they felt and sensed better emotions when conversing with their fellow players because of the emoticons from the game.

Figure 5: Screengrab of players using Genshin Impact Emojis

In the virtual immersion, one of the participants asked for the other player`s discord nickname. The other GI gamer said that her nickname is Nope. However, the participant misunderstood as he thought she had rejected his request. He initially felt disappointed, but when the other player made a clarification, he sent her the shock Barabara emoji and loud Klee emoji to inform her that he was once enlivened.

From Virtual to Face-to-Face. Like any other online game, players usually encounter fellow gamers with whom they become in sync, motivating them to connect with gamers asynchronously. With the bond they formed through the virtual world, the relationship carried on in the real world. A few participants discussed:

Childe: Sa akin siguro sa community ni Max (Genshin Streamer). Gusto ko sila ma meet personally. Kasi diba nagbabardagulan kami. Kasi sa virtual palang masaya na, what if kapag in-person na. (For me probably if they are from Max`s community, I want to meet them personally since, we do a lot of stuff together. It's already fun virtually, what more if we meet-up in real life?).

Diluc: I guess I can make an exemption for this one fellow. We had the same likes and I guess I was interested because she gave me her discord and we talked a lot, I guess. I had this urge to- I wanted to meet her simply because, well, a friend like her is, you know, someone you click with, like you have this feeling that you want to meet her personally.

Zhongli: Face to face. I'm not planning to but I want to meet them para makita kung ano yung totoong personality and appearance nila. (Face to face. I'm not planning to, but I want to meet them so I will know what their real personalities and appearances are).

Theme four indicates that the virtual platform of Genshin has influenced players to meet with their virtual friends face-to-face. The participants said they felt joy, discovered similar interests with their fellow players, and felt motivated to extend their bond personally. The same examination by Cole and Griffiths (2007) also justified this component. They found that 42.8% of members had met with online companions, all things considered, circumstances, again proposing that internet gaming is a social action or works with a social movement. Ghuman & Griffiths (2012) likewise said that the majority of the examination into MMORPGs has shown that the main purposes behind participating in such games are social (i.e., to play and meet other similar individuals.

Digitalized Communication as the Communicative Practices of GI Player

The second research objective explored players' communicative practices when playing Genshin Impact. Based on the data, Digitalized Communication was constructed as the core theme as presented on Figure 6. The study found that GI players' way of exchanging information is text-based from the in-game chat. The gaming platform uses emojis to lessen the misinterpretation of messages. In addition, players intend to extend their conversations outside the game through computer-mediated communication applications like Discord and Facebook. The participants suggested that the conversation needs to be continued elsewhere as the chat feature of Genshin Impact has limited communication protocols.

Nonetheless, the participants considered Genshin Impact a virtual platform capable of discovering relationships that would further grow until personal meet-ups are manifested. In similar studies, Ray (2021) reported, nearly 33% of female and almost 10% of male players had dated somebody they met in a game.
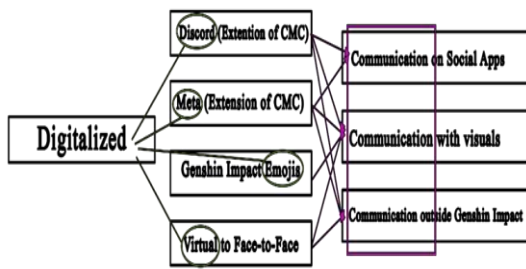
Figure 6: Conceptual Connections among the Sub-themes of the Communicative Practices

Three components were presented under digitalized communication: Communication on Social Apps, Communication with Visuals, and Communication outside Genshin Impact. Liang and Walther (2015) also emphasized the source impact of CMC in which communicators can specifically introduce parts of themselves on the web with a message-based CMC at the top of the priority list. Thus, they can oversee which parts of themselves to present to others to make an excellent impression on the other correspondence accomplice. On the other hand, virtual immersions also influence face-to-face interactions to restate what Cole and Griffiths (2007) said when they discovered that 42.8% of members had met with online companions.

The Discord and Meta (Extensions of CMC) sub-themes were connected to the three categories as they fit the criteria that these applications are social applications with visual communication features. These are outside of Genshin Impact`s communication domain. Genshin Impact emojis sub-theme was linked to the visual category as emojis are considered the opposite of online visual expressions. Lastly, the virtual to face-to-face sub-theme is self-explanatory. It was connected to the communication with visuals and outside the Genshin Impact categories. This grand theme stipulates that Genshin Impact is an effective gaming platform for convenient methods to meet and connect with like-minded people, especially those struggling to connect with others in real life. Furthermore, this explains why Genshin Impact is not just a game but an initial platform for social networking because it nurtures good relationships and a safe space community, which leads to players having ties in both the physical and digital worlds.

IV.   CONCLUSION

The open-world interactive game of Genshin Impact allows gamers to have virtual identities that they would present themselves assertively to other players. With the game's multiplayer feature, communicative ventures create a platform for gamers to be someone they cannot embody in the natural world. The study aimed to highlight previously unheard perspectives of

gamers. Unfortunately, this type of topic is often overlooked by communication researchers. On the contrary, this study explored why the game evolved into an alternative domain for introverted individuals. With the research findings, the study concludes that Genshin Impact is not just a platform for leisure and entertainment but an online portal to share knowledge across cultures and spaces that enhances sociability among people who tend to shrink from social contacts in the real world. The research divulged the gaming platform as an alternative reality for introverted people and a tool for influencing random people from different places to plan vis-à-vis.

There were two primary findings from this first research objective: GI is a virtual platform whose communication domain can assist GI players in establishing various types of connectedness among local and international players. According to the data gathered from the participants, anime, cosplay, or any other web/otaku content is one of the shared interests for developing friendships. The game has the potential to enhance players' personas, particularly those who are reserved. The participants had a different sense of belonging while playing GI. A large percentage presumed that the game's virtual world is an independent component distinct from the real world.

Meanwhile, two primary findings were discovered through this research goal. One is that GI players share information through the use of text-based in-game chat, as well as using emojis provided by the gaming platform to reduce signal misstatement. Furthermore, players intend to keep their conversations outside of the game through apps such as Discord and Facebook due to limited communication systems. Second, the participants viewed Genshin Impact as a virtual platform capable of fostering relationships that will continue to grow until personal meet-ups occur.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provided an understanding of the communicative practices of Genshin Impact players in virtual settings. As the theorizing progressed, a few areas emerged as potential future research areas.

The researcher was restricted from closely watching the participants' answers, making some data explorations insufficient because the interview and immersion were conducted concurrently and virtually. Future researchers must conduct their interviews through face-to-face meet-ups to help them gather and scrutinize information better and manifest research results to a greater degree. Furthermore, the immersion with the participants was only limited to Genshin Impact and its game chat feature; the extension of friendly conversations on other social apps was not further scrutinized. Future researchers related to the study must consider inspecting communicative activities outside the gaming platform. This study explored the experiences of

the Ilokano community in playing Genshin Impact. Future researchers can use the findings to discover the communication practices toward online games among Ilokano players.

Furthermore, it is recommended that future research explore other methodologies in this area, such as quantitative studies, using the study results to look objectively into causal relationships of variables. In addition, other qualitative frameworks should be used to understand the other unmuted voices in the GI community and other real-world data that qualitative studies can potentially discover.

Finally, other emerging online games should be explored in research to understand their potential as an emerging communication platform.

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