

Games & Gaming in the Digital and Social Media Track

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Abstract

The Games & Gaming mini-track is now in its third year in the Digital and Social Media track at HICSS. Games and play are an important part of the human foundation, spanning issues of learning, sociality, wellness, and social capital. More broadly, games and play deeply reflect who we are as a species.

1. Games & Gaming

Games and play are an important facet of humanity as they are for many of our fellow higher species, indicative of how far back they go in our history even beyond our pre-human ancestors. Today our playfulness and gaming have greatly expanded in terms of the objects we use for games and the reach we have to play with others—with computers, smart phones, and the internet, we play with people from around the world. Games are solo, multiplayer, and massively multiplayer. Some games have playtime of a few minutes, others can take hours per session across years of play. Some games are free, others suggest, allow, or require an economic investment beyond the time spent. We play them all.

The digitization of games—today a combination of not just digital devices but of their widely networked nature—allows for greater reach of play into lives and across geography, and for research opportunity. Digital traces provide a broad picture of human behavior, albeit not as deep or all-encompassing as some proponents say, and often digital research is well-informed by more qualitative angles. As such, games and gaming are an important aspect of digital and social media research.

Gaming research spans a wide variety of disciplines, and includes the technological, the economic, and the social and psychological. Foci range from positive hopes for sociality and efficacy to fears of game-inspired violence reminiscent of historical media panics. Given humanity's social bend, social aspects have been a major part of gaming research.

Sociality in games is often looked at within one particular game setting, most often with massively multiplayer online games, which have enjoyed (or suffered from) acronyms such as MMORPG, MMOG, and MMO. These are games where, depending on the era, thousands or millions of people are playing the game. Getting data on millions of players is not always easy, but can be intoxicating if possible. Yet, non-MMO games persist, with both multi-player and single-player games still widely in vogue. Furthermore, single-player games do not put a stop to our innate sociality, although it may seem harder to achieve. People, as hyper-social primates, do not let such limitations stop them from being social.

As internet bandwidth has increased, today's games have moved beyond playing with hundreds of others to playing for many others with popular live-streaming platforms such as Twitch. Gaming is not just entertainment for those directly involved, but can be a more passive entertainment that is engaged with by viewing, much like television.

Gaming has also moved solidly into the realm of performance, with gaming stars and popular teams, and has been re-labeled to mimic already widely accepted entertainment forms: eSports. ESports, like the label email before it, takes something new and repackages it in familiar, easily understood, terms.

Despite these new directions for gaming and games research, game scholars have not ignored older but longstanding issues such as positive reasons for playing and negative issues such as in-game toxicity. Games and real-world issues, like bigotry towards and the oppression of women, do collide, but do not escape notice.

In the Games & Gaming mini-track at HICSS, we focus on the aspects which are primarily social within the digital gaming world. Gaming is not just a reflection of the positive aspects of humanity, but of all facets of who we are.