

COMMUNICATION IN ONLINE GAMES ON THE EXAMPLE OF OWN RESEARCH

JAKUB MAJKOWSKI

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wrocław
Ul. Koszarowa 3, 51-168 Wrocław

E-mail address: jakub.majkowski97@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0806-1820>

ABSTRACT

Aim. The aim of the research was to identify the ways in which users of online games communicate. The author of the article attempted to answer the question of whether these interactions differ depending on the age and gender of the players.

Methods. The research was carried out in quantitative orientation on a group of 154 subjects: players who use the Facebook social platform. The research technique was an online survey.

Results and conclusion. The study showed that Internet users most often use text chat. Communication among women is also popular with the help of the preset character animations and sound signals in the game. Men communicated in some ways similar to women: via text chat, character animations and in-game beeps, although they also indicated frequent communication via voice chat. It also turned out to be a myth that women do not like games. The study found that younger gamers spend more time gaming than the older gamers and prefer communication channels such as text chat, character animations and in-game signals.

Cognitive value. I consider the topic discussed in the article current, important and necessary due to the fact that the virtual and real worlds overlap more and more. People make friends not only in direct contact but also via the Internet, e.g., in online gaming communities. The time of the pandemic and the associated home isolation confirmed the above conclusion.

Keywords: network society, new technologies, MMO games, text chat, voice chat, character animations

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

A network society cannot exist without relationships based on communication. We can create them without leaving home, not only via instant messaging apps such as Skype or Messenger but also through the medium of online games.

Online games have become a very popular way of spending time, not only keeping the recipient entertained, but also making it possible to befriend other users (Gee, 2007).

In the gaming environment, as in other virtual environments, there are special ethical codes that cover the behaviour of players in specific situations and the rules of interaction between them (Marciniak & Przybyszewska, 2017). Therefore, online games create opportunities to join virtual communities, and within them, to communicate and establish social relations.

In our society there are social customs that require an individual to use these means of expression adequately, conveying an adequate self-image (...) and show their respect for the tradition (...) when an individual violates this etiquette, the others cooperate in order to rebuild the conventional order. (Goffman, 2006, p. 115)

This rule also applies to online games - as a consequence of gross violation of in-game rules, the perpetrators are forced to leave the game.

The following communities can be distinguished among gaming communities: formal (intentionally organised), informal (created spontaneously), inclusive (it is easy to become a member of a group) and exclusive (it is difficult to become a member of a group), which fit into the general typology of social groups (Podgórski, 2006). The division between inclusive and exclusive groups is correlated, among other factors, with the skill level of a given player. This is related to the rankings created in online games according to which only the best players have the opportunity to join a closed group (Jang & Ryu, 2011).

The motivations that inspire Internet users to engage in activities present in online games are diverse, and one of them is the need to socialise with other players, both in a positive way (willingness to establish and maintain contact) and one perceived as negative (competition) (Skok, 2013). As written by Marciniak & Przybyszewska (2017), the involvement in communities in the virtual world of online games does not differ significantly from the real world groups in terms of communication.

TYPES OF INTERNET COMMUNICATION

According to Schramm's (1983) model of community experiences, communication is a two-sided process and it consists of sharing an individual's experiences and participation in the community. Communication is "a process by which people strive to share meanings through symbolic messages" (Stoner, Freeman, & Gilbert, 1999, p. 614). According to Goban-Klas (2008), communication can assume various forms, and take place at different levels and with the use of diverse means. However, there must always be at least two participants in the interaction: the sender and the recipient, a character system (code) that is known to both, and a message to which they refer.

The apparently simple communication process is in fact extremely complex. Unlike connected computers, the process does not transfer data in digital form from one device to another with a strict communication protocol. Com-

munication between living individuals presupposes a certain social relationship between the sender and the recipient as well as individual interpretation of the sent and received message. Therefore, communication is referred to as contact achieved through the exchange of signs or symbols. This process can take many forms, exist on different levels and be carried out by various means. Common features of the forms of communication include the existence of at least two participants in the process, playing different roles (the sender and the recipient), a specific system of signs (code) that is known to all participants, and the message, which boils down to implementing one of the options provided by the code. Code and message are objective and independent beings, so they are available and understandable to more than one knowing subject, and their existence goes beyond the individual experiences of a specific individual. Even in the event of death of an individual, the code and message may remain in use (Goban-Klas, 2008).

Two types of communication can be distinguished: direct and indirect. Direct communication has always been the main method of communication that allows for the immediate transfer of information between the sender and the recipient "face to face." In contrast, indirect communication, that is, communication that is distant in time and/or space, requires a specific medium. It can be a natural medium such as speech, gestures or facial expressions, or an artificial medium such as written form or telephone contact. However, in both types of communication the goal remains the same. These processes connect the sender, who formulates the message and transmits it through the medium, with the recipient, who interprets the message, for which it is necessary to know a common language (Goban-Klas, 2008).

Internet communication can be synchronous or asynchronous. In the first case, the sender and the recipient are in constant contact and the information is exchanged simultaneously; an example of such communication is chat. In the second case, the exchange takes place at a time interval; an example is an e-mail (Grzenia, 2008).

Grzenia distinguishes (2004) three types of communication on the Internet:

- conversational type, or chat type, describing various Internet chats;
- correspondence type, in other words e-mail, describing the method of communicating via e-mail, discussion or hobby forums;
- hypertext type, relating to texts available on the World Wide Web, such as scientific articles, guides, books, etc.

The features of network communication include dialogue, spontaneity, colloquiality, situationality, multimedia, and hypertext. It is also hierarchical, dynamic, permanent, has an unlimited range and makes it possible to automate the process of formulating a statement. In the types of network communication we can distinguish verbal communication, which is divided into conversational type (text or voice chat) and correspondence type (e-mail), and non-verbal communication, including gestures, animation or sound signals implemented in a game.

THE LANGUAGE OF GAME USERS

The web language is not an unequivocal concept because there are in fact two languages within it: the one used on the Internet and the one that has been re-adapted to the Internet environment (Kopczyńska, 2014). The language itself is the most faithful way to express what humans think and feel, i.e., what is happening in their emotional and cognitive spheres (Panek, 2016).

Panek distinguishes characteristic features of the language used by Internet users. They are: “economy, specialization, styling and creating a kind of slang that emphasises belonging to a given group” (Panek, 2016, p. 5). The economical quality of this language can be seen in the prominent use of abbreviations and omitting punctuation marks. Specialisation concerns the use of technical terminology, while styling is a procedure through which Polish language becomes similar to English. This is achieved, among others, by borrowing words from English, phonetic notation of English phrases and application of the spelling rules of English in Polish. The last feature, slang formation, is implemented through the use of devoicing and deliberate spelling mistakes.

The language used by online players is quite specific due to the fact that games create their own language to some extent (Kopczyńska, 2014). The more complex the game, the more economical the communication between players becomes, minimised in the number of used characters. This is accomplished by word abbreviations and, in the case of Polish, omitting Polish diacritics. Emoticons expressing emotional states are also common. Therefore there is no need to write about one’s joy, dissatisfaction, surprise or anger because it is enough to insert an emote that corresponds to a given emotion. The function of popular emotes is also to warm up the exchange of opinions, which is often difficult due to linguistic or cultural barriers (Grzenia, 2004).

The language in online games is economical, with the aim of conveying as much content as possible in the shortest possible time. During gameplay, time is of great importance, so all activities that may cause a delay in the game, including communication between players, are kept to a minimum. A peculiar feature is negligence of grammar. In order to convey information as swiftly as possible, the players pay little attention to spelling, syntax or inflection errors.

In the case of online games we can talk about the dominance of the English language, which facilitates establishing contacts in an international group of players, which helps develop English language skills (Sandberg & Karlsudd, 2014). Players use English abbreviations (acronyms) and truncations (words); these include, among others: “afk” – away from keyboard (momentarily leaving the computer); “bb” – bye bye; “cap” – capture (when one team takes over an outpost in the game); “kick” (forced disconnection from the game / network); “exp” or “xp” – experience points; “lag” (delay in data transmission, often manifested by a temporary freezing of the screen); “omg” – oh my god. In Polish, the most common abbreviations are welcome phrases – “cze” (*cześć* – hello), “pozdro” (*pozdrawiam* – regards) or announcements of a delay in contact – “zw” (*zaraz wracam* – I’ll be back soon).

It is worth noting that not only is the language of the players economical; even many in-game descriptions are short and concise, containing as much content as possible in the lowest number of characters. As Zuzanna Kopczyńska (2014) explains, developers writing in-game descriptions are aware of the fact that excessive reading of item descriptions from a computer monitor is tiring for the players or even treated as a waste of time.

COMMUNICATION DURING GAMEPLAY – RESEARCH RESULTS

This article focuses on communication between internet users playing online games because it plays an important role in virtual gaming communities, helping to establish social relations (Marciniak & Przybyszewska, 2017). The main research problem is contained in the question: Do the methods of communication in the game vary depending on the age and gender of the players?

Detailed problems derived from the main problem were shaped into the following form:

- Q1: Do younger players spend more time gaming than older players?
- Q2: Do men spend more time gaming than women?
- Q3: Do younger players communicate more often using different communication methods (text chat, voice chat, email, character animation, in-game audio cues) than older players?
- Q4: Is the way of communication between women characterised by less frequent use of linguistic abbreviations compared to men who emphasise the use of linguistic abbreviations in communication?
- Q5: Do younger players use language abbreviations more than older players?

The following research hypotheses were adopted:

- H1: The communication methods in online games do not differ depending on the gender of the players.
- H2: The communication methods in online games vary depending on the age of the players.
- H3: Younger game users spend more time playing than older game users.
- H4: Men play more often than women.
- H5: Younger players communicate more often through various communication channels than older players.
- H6: Men use language abbreviations more often than women.
- H7: Younger players use language abbreviations more often than older players.

The study was conducted on a population of a group of people who regularly play MMO games and it is a closed community. 154 out of 181 people completed the questionnaire, i.e. the vast majority, including 10 women and 144 men, which constitutes 85.1% of the entire group of respondents. A purposeful choice was used, the selection of people to be included in the sample was determined on the basis of knowledge about the studied population, taking into account such vari-

ables as sex and age. This was made possible by the information players include in their user descriptions.

Most of the respondents are men (93.5%) and women are in the minority (6.5%). People aged 18–25 (40.3%) are the largest group, followed by Internet users aged 26–33 (31.2%), and the smallest group are players aged 42–49 (3.9%).

The hypothesis that communication methods in online games do not differ depending on the gender of the players has not been confirmed. The study showed that female gamers most often use text chat. Among women, communication in the form of in-game character animations and sound signals is also very popular. The male players communicated in some ways similar to female players – via text chat, character animations and in-game beeps, although they also indicated frequent communication via voice chat. The gender differences also apply to the number of preferred forms of communication. In the case of women, text chat is the most popular form of communication, whereas among men text chat is also popular, but so are character animations and sound signals.

The popularity of communication via text chat can be explained by the fact that this form allows for anonymity and does not require a microphone, which makes it more convenient and comfortable, for example, for introverts or shy people. Thanks to the use of abbreviations of words, communication via text chat also saves time, which is a feature particularly desirable in games. These results suggest that although there are no significant differences between the two genders here, men are more likely to be additionally willing to communicate via voice chat. This can be explained by the greater boldness of men to use voice contact and the prejudices of women towards this type of communication due to the fear of being ridiculed; for example, if there is one woman and a dozen or so men in one team, she might be less likely to speak out for fear of being rejected, disregarded, ridiculed, etc. This is confirmed by the presence of patriarchal values in computer games. An additional aspect is the anonymity in games, which allows people with sexist views to offend women without suffering consequences. One way out of this uncomfortable, discriminating situation for women may be to appear as a person of the opposite sex, which happens quite often in games (Hussain & Griffith, 2008).

The hypothesis has been confirmed that the methods of communication in online games differ depending on the age of the players. Among the youngest 18–25 age group, the most popular communication channels are text chat, character animations and signals placed in the game, which correlates with the results of research on the youngest players who use instant messaging during the game (Marciniak & Przybyszewska, 2017). On the other hand, people aged 26–33 prefer communication via voice chat, and gamers aged 34–41 – text chat. The group of players aged 42–49 and over 49 also most willingly communicates via text chat. Interestingly, no age group of players has declared the use of e-mail as the most or frequently used form of communication. It can be assumed that with the technological advancement, this form of contact for interaction with other players has become obsolete.

The hypothesis has been confirmed that younger game users spend more time gaming than older game users. The youngest respondents, people aged 18–25, spend the most time playing computer games. They play for 16 hours a week and up. Internet users aged 26–33 play a bit shorter - 10–15 hours a week. The oldest and oldest respondents, i.e., people aged 42–49 and over 49, spend the least time on this form of entertainment. They reported that they spend less than an hour a week gaming online. The results of the study confirm that younger Internet users often use this type of entertainment due to the attractiveness, in their opinion, of games and the possibility of relieving emotional tension in this way (Marciniak & Przybyszewska, 2017).

The hypothesis that men spend more time gaming than women has also been confirmed. The study has found that more than half of female gamers spend 5–9 hours a week gaming online. However, men play more often than women, spending 16 hours or more per week on online games. These results are in line with cultural perceptions of the preferences and participation of women and men in entertainment. Computer games are considered to be the domain of men and are mostly created with the male consumer in mind. In many games, female characters are presented as visually attractive, but are not very intelligent, unlike male characters, whose attributes are strength, wit, and cleverness. The themes of most MMOs refer to patriarchal values, such as domination, revenge, and protection of the weak. The results of the study also correlate with the results of studies published in the scientific journal *Hygeia Public Health*, which show that men spend more time in virtual gaming environments than women (Cudo, Kopiś, & Stróżak, 2016).

The hypothesis was confirmed that younger players communicate more often using different communication methods (text chat, voice chat, e-mail, character animation, in-game audio cues) than older players. Text chat has proven to be the most popular form of communication among gamers in four of the five age ranges: 18–25, 26–33, 34–41 and over 49. On the other hand, people aged 34–41 communicate most frequently through voice chat. The variety of methods of communication is typical of the virtual world, in which “new situations, behaviours and tools enabling contact emerge, and this requires a slow development of different forms of communication than those used before (...)” (Wierzbicka-Olejniczak, 2014, p. 155).

The hypothesis was confirmed that the way women communicate is characterised by less frequent use of linguistic abbreviations, unlike men who emphasise the use of linguistic abbreviations in communication. The study showed that women often, though not very often, use linguistic abbreviations, omitting Polish characters and using cuts. On the other hand, among men, the majority chose the answer “very often.” This phenomenon can be explained by the greater politeness of women who follow the rules of etiquette with more care, while men may not care as much about such rules. Women are ascribed with politeness, delicacy, and emotionality, and men are given decisiveness, as well as frugality in words and gestures. Although the above characteristics assigned to the sexes can be considered stereotypical, sometimes they “seem to contain a grain of truth” (Wojciszke,

2012, p. 18). The reasons can be seen, among others, in the culturally diversified socialization of girls and boys or the different roles played by women and men. It is worth emphasizing, however, that these are only the possibilities and predispositions of gender, and not the necessity to display the characteristics and attitudes ascribed to the sexes.

The hypothesis was confirmed that younger players use linguistic abbreviations more often than the older players. The study showed that in the age groups of players: 18–25 years old, 26–33 years old and 34–41 years old, Polish characters, cuts and acronyms are mostly omitted very often. However, between the ages of 42–49 and over 49, most people never skip them. This phenomenon can be explained by the greater attachment of people in middle adulthood to conventions, which include linguistic correctness and the lack of using abbreviations typical for the younger generation – “in the lives of adults, many conventions and customs are observed, which are often strictly defined” (Skorupka, 2019, p. 115).

SUMMARY

The conducted study endeavoured to discover if the ways of communicating during the game differ depending on the age and gender of the players. Cognitively interesting was also the answer to the question of whether and what language abbreviations are used by gamers. Most of the hypotheses were confirmed, incl. in terms of the time spent on games or the use of various communication channels. It has also been verified that it is a myth that women do not like games (Tarnicka, 2011).

The time of the pandemic (during which the study was conducted) and the associated home isolation confirmed the conclusion that:

people who previously spent two hours a day playing the game now play even more than three hours. (...) The recipient of games has also grown up. (...) There is an increase in the participation of women in gaming, both as players and game creators. (Makarenko, 2021)

It can be assumed that virtual gaming environments will become more and more common and more diverse, and perhaps also include senior groups.

REFERENCES

- Cudo, A., Kopiś, N., & Stróżak, P. (2016). Problematyczne używanie Internetu oraz problematyczne korzystanie z gier komputerowych wśród studentów kierunków społecznych i humanistycznych [Problematic use of the Internet and problematic use of computer games among students of social studies and humanities]. *Hygeia Public Health*, 51(4), 389–397.
- Gee, J. P. (2007). *Good video games and good learning: Collected essays on video games, learning and literacy*. Peter Lang Inc.
- Goban-Klas, T. (2008). Komunikowanie i media [Communicating and media]. In Z. Bauer, E. Chudziński (Eds.), *Dziennikarstwo i świat mediów* [Journalism and the world of media] (pp. 11–37). Universitas.

- Goffman, E. (2006). Zaangażowanie i wyobcowanie [Engagement and alienation]. In E. Goffman (Ed.), *Rytuał interakcyjny* [Interactive ritual] (pp. 114–137). PWN.
- Grzenia, J. (2004). Strona www jako forma dialogowa [Website as a dialogue form]. In M. Kita, J. Grzenia (Eds.), *Dialog a nowe media* [Dialogue and new media] (pp. 22–32). Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.
- Grzenia, J. (2008). *Komunikacja językowa w Internecie* [Language communication on the Internet]. PWN.
- Hussain, Z., Griffiths, M. D. (2008). Gender swapping and socializing in cyberspace: An exploratory study. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 11(1), 47–53.
- Jang, Y., Ryu, S. (2011). Exploring game experiences and game leadership in massively multiplayer online role-playing games. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 4(42), 616–623.
- Kopczyńska, Z. (2014). *Specyfika potrzeb i zachowań informacyjnych graczy gier MMO* [The specification of the information needs and behavior of MMO players]. <http://bbc.uw.edu.pl/dlibra/results?action=SearchAction&QI=709E50BC112CFDB7742856D8CAD7FF85-3>.
- Makarenko, V. (2021). Gry pedzą do przodu, lockdown im nie straszny: Czas na gry dla kobiet i seniorów? [Games are moving forward, not afraid of the lockdown: Time for games for women and seniors?]. *Wyborcza.biz*. <https://wyborcza.biz/biznes/7,177150,26565388,gry-pedza-do-przodu-lockdown-im-nie-straszny-czas-na-gry-dla.html>
- Marciniak, M., Przybyszewska, D. (2017). *Gry sieciowe a rozwój kompetencji społecznych młodzieży: Świat małego dziecka* [Online games and the development of social competences of young people: The world of a small child.] UAM.
- Panek, A. (2016). Język w przestrzeni Internetu [Language in the Internet space]. *Przestrzeń Społeczna*, 1(11), 1–25.
- Podgórski, R. (2006). *Socjologia: wczoraj, dziś, jutro: Kompendium wiedzy socjologicznej* [Sociology: yesterday, today, tomorrow: Compendium of sociological knowledge]. Wydawnictwo Oświatowe Fosze.
- Sandberg, V., Karlsudd, P. (2014). Learning by playing searching after a connection between computer game playing and English skills. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Computing and Information Sciences*, 5(5), 371–376.
- Schramm, W. (1983). The unique perspective of communication: A retrospective view. *Journal of Communication*, 33(3), 6–17.
- Skok, K. (2013). *Paradoks gracza, czyli co motywuje graczy do korzystania z gier online* [The player's paradox, or what motivates players to use online games]. *Homo Ludens*, 1(5), 233–252.
- Skorupka, A. (2019). *Być autentycznym – co to znaczy?* [To be authentic - what does it mean?]. *Idea. Studia nad strukturą i rozwojem pojęć filozoficznych*, 31, 112–122.
- Stoner, J. A. F., Freeman, E. R., & Gilbert, D. R. (1999). *Kierowanie* [Management]. PWE.
- Tarnicka, E. (2011). Gry komputerowe jako forma spędzania czasu wolnego przez młodzież [Computer games as a form of spending free time by young people]. In E. Czarnecki, S. Kowalski, & A. Schulz (Eds.), *Internet – szanse i zagrożenia* [The Internet - opportunities and threats] (pp. 67–78). PWSZ.
- Wierzbicka-Olejniczak, A. (2014). Komunikacja językowa i grzeczność w Internecie [Language communication and politeness on the Internet]. In E. Olejniczak, B. Kudra (Eds.), *Komunikowanie publiczne: Zagadnienia wybrane* [Public communication: Selected issues] (pp. 123–156). Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Wojciszke, B. (2012). *Psychologiczne różnice płci* [Psychological gender differences]. *Wszechświat*, 113(1–3), 13–18.