

## SUMMARY

# Video Games as a Medium of Communication

## Modes and Dimensions of Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Communication among Gamers

Noting the specific nature of the medium of computer games, Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter emphasize that as a component of the mediated environment of the 21st century, it should become one of the essential elements of research on media and identity in the digital domain<sup>1</sup>.

One important rationale for this approach seems to be that the elements of the differentiated gamer experience are increasingly becoming areas of communication found in computer games: the first of these concerns interpersonal communication, the second intrapersonal. Although eluding attempts at a precise analysis, both types of communication are extremely important in terms of the changes taking place in the postmodern world. Thus far communicative competences (verbal and non-verbal) seemed to be indispensable for establishing good relations with others in real life. Now, however, when we constantly discover new spaces and possibilities in the online world, which constitutes an increasingly significant complement of offline reality, these competences become indispensable not only for conducting a dialogue in the so-called developed language code, but also for perceiving emotions and feelings in oneself and others. This promotes openness, respect for the choices of others and the search for new fields of cooperation.

Of course, the roles taken on and performed by gamers also require other skills related to cognitive, executive or motivational processes, but the area of intra- and interpersonal communication seems to be particularly important, due to the social dimension of unfavourable phenomena occurring in cyberspace – the dangerous crossing of boundaries between fiction and reality – addictions, cyberstalking, cyberbullying, sharenting, internet addiction, video game addiction, or cyber-relationship addiction.

The new challenges that researchers of video game culture face with regard to players' inter- and intrapersonal relationships, including their stimulators and inhibitors, concern many disciplines dealing with this issue, though social sciences and humanities, including pedagogy, should occupy a prominent place here. Thanks to the knowledge about the specifics of communication on the internet, knowledge which facilitates or disturbs the process of communicating with oneself and others when gamers use online or offline games, it becomes possible not only to understand the "language(s) of the web",

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<sup>1</sup> S. Kline, N. Dyer-Witheford, G. de Peuter, *Digital Play: The interaction of Technology, Culture and Marketing*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 2003.

which is increasingly often reflected in messages sent by young people in school or out-of-school reality, but also to undertake educational and preventive actions. They may use the positive aspects of internet communication, connected with the richness of ways and openness of this communication. A critical analysis of linguistic and visual messages may also be conducive to finding answers to questions of how to prevent difficulties, and sometimes even pathologies, in the field of inter- and intrapersonal communication. This might concern the lowered threshold of media sensitivity of senders and receivers, for example.

The interdisciplinary empirical research I conducted was based on theoretical analyses indicating such aspects as cultural transformations connected with the development of new technologies. New technologies and becoming important determinants of how young people function, and these open up a new area of human communication based on tools that allow notetaking, recording and sending the creations of one's own thoughts, which may then undergo rapid transformations under the influence of the sender and the recipient's emotions. Computer gamers have not resisted the digital mode of communication either, as they have received a complementary, valuable tool for recording, editing, and disseminating messages using various means of expression. As I have tried to show both in my theoretical analyses and in my empirical research, the communication between video game players works on the same basis as communication between other users of cyberspace. However, due to the diversity and specificity of games, the discourse conducted by a computer gamer sometimes requires specific communicative competences – verbal and non-verbal. A lack of these competences may interfere with the fulfilment of needs that are important for the gamer: being competent, efficient, creative, transgressive, able to perform activities determined by the game independently, but also together with other members of the group (guild, clan, discussion forum uniting players). What is important is not only the reception and transmission of messages, but also a specific aspect of intrapersonal communication, important for each player, which, thanks to the inter-origination of messages, enables the building of self-reflection and inner-sterility of the individual.

Theoretical analyses allowed me to set the aims and problems of the research, as it seemed significant from the pedagogical point of view to get to know the language of gamers, the unprecedented forms of this language, its specific stylistics, but also the cultural message it carries. The world of electronic media, including video games, develops forms of digital interpersonal messages extremely quickly, integrates them and makes these messages visually, aurally and aesthetically attractive.

Obtaining valuable research answers to the set research problems allowed me to meet the research objectives related to: (1) recognizing the types, ways and factors determining the creation of interpersonal messages by players in virtual space; (2) examining the ways of verbal and non-verbal communication among players of online and/or offline games in the context of their involvement in the process, the consequences of this type of involvement for the players under study and their relationships with others; (3) examining how being an online/offline player and how subjective, social and situational determinants determine communication with the Self was possible thanks to dividing the research into two phases. In the first, qualitative methods were used due to the fact that the phenomenon of gamer communication, especially in the intrapersonal

aspect, is poorly recognized as research and the attempt to analyze it required an in-depth recognition of the communication patterns of online/offline gamers, as well as the identification of factors that may be relevant to this process. At this stage, electronic discourse and interview were used, which created an opportunity for the research participants to present their own descriptions, interpretations and attributions regarding the phenomena being studied.

The aim of this phase was to collect data to describe the phenomenon of video gamer communication, as well as their attitudes, beliefs and emotions related to how they function as gamers who engage in relationships with others, using diverse verbal and non-verbal messages.

On the basis of these data, a preliminary analysis of the players' communicative activity was prepared, both in terms of the various ways in which it is carried out and the context of the activity. The data that were obtained formed the basis for preparing a model for quantitative research, and consequently, for preparing an original questionnaire tool based on the Rensis Likert scale. The items on the questionnaire were taken from such sources as Andrew P. Thomas' Conversational Exchange Analysis (CEA), adapted to the specific nature of the players' communication related, for example, to the different dimensions of the players' conversational activity, as well as Robyn Penman's typologies of hidden and observable acts of communication, and Zbigniew Nęcki's proposals for aspects important to the process of non-verbal communication. The questionnaire used at the second stage of the research made it possible to supplement the findings of the first stage. It should be emphasised, however, that both stages of the research provided a basis for coherent empirical analyses, allowing for a multidimensional look at the issues addressed in the research. Thus, the qualitative and quantitative analyses were not separated in the analyses, as they complement each other, although in social research methodology different approaches are adopted in such cases.

The research consisted of two stages and covered a group of active players from Poland and abroad (Great Britain, USA, Russia, the Netherlands, Germany, Slovakia) in middle and late adolescence (from 14 to 18 years of age) and early adulthood (from 18 to 25 years of age).

The research findings indicate that forging positive relations based on an understanding of the expectations or needs of other players requires dynamic competence in the field of changing the rules of constructing such communication, which will be conducive to interpersonal relations, and also in influencing the perception of oneself in these relations. Thus, the fast pace of transformation in the information society entails a constant need to develop and improve one's own skills, and this is also true among players, which can be seen, for example, in the area of intercultural communication,

Depending on their competences in terms of knowledge of linguistic and cultural codes, each player can also receive and transmit messages within other cultural groups, thus drawing a line between familiarity and alienation in the world of other players. What matters here is the ability to overcome the many technical and physical barriers to social communication, such as the creation of verbal, written, graphic, audio or audiovisual messages.

If gaming is to be satisfying for the huge number of players, then intrapersonal competences are also important in this context, as they would allow us to effectively deal

with “ourselves” by allowing us to listen to other players, understand their needs and overcome conflicts constructively. Unfortunately, these competences are not always a resource characteristic of gamers, regardless of whether they consciously declare belonging to a gaming community, whether they define their identity using the category of gamer/girl gamer, whether they are hardcore or casual players, or whether their gaming “life” is enriched by active or only occasional participation in clans, guilds, and social networks. Unfortunately, experience resulting from playing does not always translate into those areas of skills that are decisive for the proper construction of the Self and for establishing and maintaining satisfactory relations with others.

In order to develop competences in the field of creating positive inter- and intrapersonal relations, pedagogues need a specific pragmatism – experience and practice in undertaking actions enabling effective “learning by playing” – for noticing the possibilities of video games (especially online), but also for noticing the potential hidden in players, their determination, ability to cooperate, playful action character, and for purposes other than “ordinary” gaming in specific, playable cultural texts.

The pedagogical and educational implications resulting from my own empirical research have been informed by the main thesis of this study, which is related to the fact that the understanding and value of the inter- and intrapersonal messages of video game players are conditioned not only by the culture in which they function but also by the subjective features of the player and the situation in which these messages take place. I have attempted to substantiate this claim by means of an in-depth analysis of various aspects of qualitative and quantitative research, which may enrich the current state of knowledge on the specificity of media language and the meaning of verbal and non-verbal communication, both from the point of view of the observer and the video game player – a specific actor, not only a passive participant in the game, but also its creator.

The study concerns only a small fragment of the phenomena related to the process of building intra-personal relations as a result of participation in the environment of information exchange via networks and computer systems, as it focuses on the messages created, sent and received by gamers.