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E-GAME CULTURE: LEADERSHIP AND IDENTITY IN A VIRTUAL CONSUMER COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

The present work is dedicated to the study of the virtual community of players and the group identification factors. This issue is relevant to the increase in the consumption of video game platforms during the pandemic and the relative spending on it.

A sociocultural approach was addressed on the elements that determine the identification of individuals and the group. It is analyzed from a consumer "tribes" approach, since they present a strong scale of group identification factors.

The methodology is based on a qualitative exploratory study, interviewing specialists in digital, videogames and behavioral issues. And it is expanded with group dynamics with video game users. Finally, it is complemented with the use of digital ethnography techniques to observe their real behavior in virtual forums.

Finally, the study reaches findings on its identity character, which shows the possibility of duplicating the personality. This from a face-to-face introvert behavior towards an extroversion and empowerment in virtual spaces, with people outside their daily physical environment, but with intense digital interaction.

Keywords: E-Games, Nethnography, Virtual Communities, Culture, Identity

INTRODUCTION

The gaming industry is a huge sector that includes not only the development, marketing and monetization of video games, but also the production, distribution and consumption of content generated by video games. Video games are a form of entertainment encompassing PC games, mobile games, and console games looming in a \$ 115.8 billion industry worldwide (El Mostrador. 2021).

Esports is a rapidly growing industry, valued at \$ 905.6 million globally, employing gamers, commentators, analysts, production crew, event organizers, and more. The public was entertained at all times by describing the game to them (Antevenio, 2021).

Most of the commentators are former professional players, with in-depth knowledge of the game and the ability to comment on a play-by-play basis. Analysts require a similar skill set, with a more analytical mind and the ability to analyze an event in the game.

There are also e-sports coaches, dedicated to analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the team and the competitors, which with metrics help them to perform better. These coaches are players with years of experience and their knowledge is based on transforming the team's strategy to win tournaments. Coaches are not limited to sharpening the team's game, but also to their physical and mental training. Electronic sports teams are not treated differently than traditional sports teams (González-Vázquez & Igartua, 2018).

Due to the pandemic, the consumption of video games has increased compared to 2019, thus being one of the few industries on the rise during the quarantine. In Latin America the growth was in such a way that it surpassed industries such as film or music. In turn, it should be noted that a large part of sales are digital.

The age range that predominates in video game consumption is that of young people between 11 and 14 years old, then children between 6 and 10 years old and followed by young people between 15 and 24 years old. It should be noted that video games have now spread to a greater variety of people. Before this sector was dominated almost entirely by men, today the participation of women in this medium of entertainment has increased (Campos & Falcon, 2019).

Furthermore, whereas before gamers were classified as antisocial and lonely, today most users prefer to play with friends (Montás, 2020).

An important factor in the growth of the number of players is the smartphone, since it becomes more portable and comfortable to play in other places than with a console or computer.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For several years, video games have been an essential part of the lives of many people of different ages, genders, races, etc. This "gamer" community has been growing more and more with advances in technology that have allowed it to reach all parts of the world and not only that but develop more types of games for each type of person, all with the aim of entertaining or distract the player from their own realities for a few hours and thus have much more scope. That is why we must learn more about why people play.

E-Game Community

Montes determine that the meaning of gamer is different according to each person, nobody experiences being a gamer in the same way. In addition, it is mentioned, according to his interviews, how people have started in the world of video games, how their "gamer" life differs before and now and the differences in gameplay by gender. It is important to mention this source because the work must have comparative data within the group to be investigated, such as the past and the present (Montes, 2016).

Some of the factors that drive the gamer to play are the feeling of escape and entertainment, fantasy, competition and challenge, and the fact that they activate the socio-emotional (González Vázquez & Igartua, 2018).

First, the escape and entertainment factor is linked to the use of video games to avoid problems in real life through the entertainment and fun they provide. Then, the fantasy factor refers to the fact of playing to explore and meet imaginary worlds and characters, and trying to get into the character and live the experience, believing to be part of this environment. Finally, the competition and challenge factor is related to the presence of a motivation focused on putting the player's skills to the test (Becerra, 2019).

For Muriel, there are types of gamers, such as the "unconditional player" (the player totally dedicated to video games), the "casual player" (who breaks the monolithic figure of the player in front of the unconditional player), the foodie-connoisseur (type gamer who shows himself as an expert and understands the video game as culture) and the individual too involved in the universe of video games does not necessarily consider himself a "gamer" (Muriel, 2018).

Other sources point towards the gamer subculture, although they are scattered in different cities. New games and projects are presented that reach more and more young people. Multiplayer groups are also known to have their own leadership, interaction, and communication characteristics. The player does not play just for fun; he also reads, investigates, learns, engages and informs himself through different sources (Leguía & Willis, 2018).

The gamer subculture is a community in which users interact through video games. In Lima, it is characterized by massively involving young people (Herrero, 2015). The gamer subculture is characterized by having its own language, leaders, tournaments and even its own brand. The traits of the gamer subculture are the immense amount of time they dedicate to video

games, constant practice, the motivation to investigate and inform themselves, which will allow them to stand out more and more.

Consumer Tribalization

The term "village" refers to a community group for a specific space, which is recognized by a physical similarity. The physical space, the race and the commandments force to reproduce the operating system as it is already established; definitely (Ortiz, 2016a).

Tribes are recognized by a cultural identity in terms of thought and symbolic objects. Their relationships go beyond physical space, and this community seeks exchanges generating continuous contagions that range from spreading their beliefs to assimilating new formulas (Ortiz, 2016b).

The rise of the media and the global economy in the 1960s led McLuhan to predict the recomposition of a new village, in this case a global one. The public gathered around a bonfire (of images and sound), assimilating ideas and forming thought as a whole. This process seems to have become more sophisticated, leading to the atomization of global tribes basically due to two major phenomena in the form of public behavior towards media consumption: a) the multiplication of screens, and b) the delay in media consumption. In turn, this leads to changes in consumer behavior, re-tribalizing consumption through: a) shopping experiences, and b) relocation of the purchase.

The formation of a consumer trend is not an individual act, but part of a system, a social fact proper to the influence of various actors, agents and a given context "No designer, company or advertising agency is fully responsible for creating culture popular. Every product, be it a hit album, a car, or a new style of clothing, requires the involvement of many different people. A cultural production system (SPC) is the set of people and organizations responsible for creating and marketing a cultural product "(Solomon, 2007).

Cultural codes are a concept developed by the psychotherapist Clotilde Rapaille (2007). It refers to the values that group consumers and that predetermine their behavior; including their consumer motivations. This author has developed renowned projects for international brands; the results are characterized by requiring a deep interpretation of the underlying perceptions of consumption according to a comparative analysis of cultures.

Veneziani makes a balance and adaptation of these principles to the Argentine fashion market, putting into operation the scope of this method. The biological scheme would determine a need and the cultural scheme would express it within the parameters of a certain culture. Thus, these tensions between both axes are also verified in different cultures. In each of them there are many pairs of paradigms that are opposed to each other (Veneziani, 2014).

The entrance to a certain tribe is an expression of the tension of our biological faculties with the cultural codes that we are acquiring. For Marcela Reynolds (2012), objects do not have properties and effects in themselves, but rather it is the operations of distinction that we carry out that configure the objects with which we interact, so our biological structure is what determines meaning of the objects.

Hence the importance of ethnography, mainly its technique, participant observation, which, through the participation of the researcher in the daily life of the tribes, allows us to understand the codes of their objects. However, this technique is complemented by another technique, which is the interview, which, based on the conversation with the members of the tribe, helps us to complement the understanding of the codes of their objects and the meaning of their practices.

METHODOLOGY

The general objective of the study is to identify the factors that generate group identification from the use of electronic entertainment. Interviews were conducted with specialists (3 experts): Interview with knowledgeable people about the factors that must be identified to achieve efficient marketing plans in the entertainment market: Media Planning Specialist, Technology Manager, Futuristic Economist, Country Company Head of Technology, Educational Psychologist

Similarly, interviews were conducted with 10 video game players from Metropolitan Lima, born between 2000 and 2010, in order to learn more about the factors that make them choose to play video games, see the perspective of the consumer of the entertainment medium more than close.

Finally, virtual observations were made in video game communities, basically those that are organized around online games such as Dota, For the present study, students from the University of Lima participated: Jacquelin Bazán, Mauricio Godeau, Kevin Jiménez, Eduardo Rodríguez.

RESULTS

This research corroborates that more people have joined this wave of video games where 5 factors prevail for which most people have decided to become a gamer. First, the distraction, which takes us away from the concerns of our day to day as in video games and this can be found in the articles found - located in the literature query - where it is stated that the game is a form of escape from the reality and, in turn, is categorized as entertainment. In addition, most of the people interviewed commented that playing video games encourages them when they suffer from depression, anxiety or simply have problems in their life. Another factor is the area with the highest growth in these years, the pandemic.

From the sources interviewed, we found 5 factors that would indicate the preference of people born between 2000 and 2010 for video games over other entertainment media: distraction, pandemic, accessibility, social and trend.

a) Entertainment:

Gamers choose to play video games because it distracts them from their stress or daily routine. Several of the gamers interviewed affirm that it calms their boredom, distracts them from the stress of the class, allows them to calm the need to win and is where they can be as competitive as possible.

Issue	Phrases
Search of Pleasure	"Entertaining implies spending a pleasant moment, abstracting for a moment from the worries of the day to day"
Search of Transcendence	"There is always something to do, such as open world games or those that are so history".

b) Pandemic:

The pandemic has been happening for more than a year, specialists confirm that the pandemic factor has been a great opportunity for the entertainment field and the experiences of the gamers interviewed can confirm it because they affirm that during all this time they have

played many more hours than before the lockout occurred. Both interviewed specialists assure that this occurs because now more than ever we spend much more time in our homes or connected from a cell phone or computer. For their part, the gamers interviewed have increased the intensity and time of connection during pandemic.

On the other hand, another of the gamers interviewed, says that as a result of the pandemic he has played video games for longer than normal, which has brought him consequences

Issue	Phrases
A continue connection	“When I finish my homework or group work at the university, I start to play, since I feel dissatisfied and bored because the classes are virtual (due to the pandemic) and they do not fully fill me with learning”.
Anxiety and claustrophobia	“I feel that I have developed greater anxiety, since I have generated an almost chronic dependence with the videogames ”.

c) Accessibility:

During the interviews, the specialists assure that another of the factors that favor people born between 2000 and 2010 to choose video games over other entertainment media is that they are the most accessible in the field. In addition, they mention multiplatform accessibility; for example, being able to switch from Play Station to computer without losing game progress.

On the other hand, the gamers interviewed maintain that they prefer a platform that can be played with multiplayer mode and through digital channels. In conclusion, this community prefers video games more than other media since it is the most accessible and the most complex when it comes to playing, which more that is only entertaining.

Issue	Phrases
Digital social life	“Electronic devices, thanks to the Internet, allow us to be connected at all times, to be close to people; breaking in a certain way the isolation that caused the pandemic”.
Idea of novelty	"Every day they are updated and seek ways of renewal and innovation."

d) Social:

The social aspect, even more so in the face of the pandemic, is undoubtedly one of the factors that stand out the most. José, one of the gamers, told us that he prefers video games and not watching television.

As is already known, due to the confinement due to Covid-19, no type of meetings can be given, so what consumers of electronic entertainment media are looking for is one that allows them to feel their friends or family, the closest possible.

In addition, it provokes a desire for constant improvement and competitiveness in games with friends, which are why in people of those ages they would prefer to play another medium such as television or radio.

Table 4 SOCIAL	
Issue	Phrases
Tribal ritual	"Because it allows you to get closer to your family and / or friends, it makes me more fun to play because I do it with them."
Personal Loneliness	"I prefer to play because it takes away the anxiety of not being able to see anyone for a long time, the isolation from all my family and loved ones" "I do not like to play alone."

e) Trends:

Entertainment consumers are looking for the latest trends and updates that best serve their role [of entertaining] them. Currently, consumers do not necessarily have to have direct contact with the seller to know the product or service they provide. Today everything is social networks or web pages; through them the latest updates are known. But it all also depends on the type of consumer.

For their part, gamers themselves confirm that they prefer these media as long as they always have updates and are related to reality or the context of reality.

Table 5 TRENDS	
Issue	Phrases
Des Intermediation	"Nowadays the consumer is usually informed through digital means, in which they can obtain all the necessary information to decide the purchase, opting for one device or another. Communication is direct with the consumer".
Self - Broadcasting	"Today's television is very boring, since they broadcast". "Programs and outdated movies. That's why I love playing video games because every day I learn something new or compete with a different opponent".

ANALYSIS

This inhibits us from going out with friends or just having fun outside the home. So, the people who have been interviewed have their eyes on video games, as well as the thousands of people who come out in this research. Third, the accessibility of video games is very wide and grows more and more and we see it reflected with the advance of technology. Now it is possible to play online and with friends in addition to offering more gaming options that increasingly entertain people, according to the interviewees. Fourth, the social aspect is very much included in video games, since it is possible to interact virtually with friends and family, as indicated by our interviewees and specialists. Finally, entertainment is always in constant change and innovation. This is what makes video games trending again and consumers are always exposed to these ads on all sides, surrounded by them, which is why most of the people according to our research and the interviewees are behind video games.

Research was carried out on gamer culture indicates several points to consider with respect to the general objective and the specific objectives of this work. Regarding the interviews carried out with specialists on the subject, and with people from the study group, we allow ourselves to make some comments on the information investigated.

In the first place, the general objective was achieved, since the factors that influence the preference for video games over other types of electronic entertainment were identified. As mentioned above, according to a published article called "Why do adolescents play video games? Proposed scale of reasons for playing video games based on the theory of uses and rewards", the factors that drive the player to play are the feeling of escape and entertainment. On

the other hand, in the interviews carried out with specialists, we can highlight that some of the factors for which there is a greater preference for video games over other types of entertainment are due to personal taste, fashion, price and economic accessibility. Both dimensions are not inconsistent, but complementary, because for the gamer in question to be able to access that escape and entertainment space, these exits have to be accessible to the player, since otherwise, there would be no possibility of playing. In addition to these, there are several factors for the preference of video games and this research highlights the most recurrent for people.

Second, the first specific objective was also corroborated, as we were able to find factors by which the generation born between 2000 and 2010 prefers to play video games over another electronic medium. The factor that resonated the most in our research is the one that maintains that the most influential factor in this objective is that of the Covid-19 pandemic. In other words, it is because of Covid-19 that people of those ages have increased their use of video games as a window to disaster. To corroborate this, we asked many regular customers about their experience with video games during the pandemic. The answers of three of them affirm that it helps them to cope with anxiety. One respondent says it helped with depression. Another mention that video games generate dependency and anxiety. In this way, we can confirm the factors and why these factors influence people born between 2000 and 2010.

Third, in our research we were able to identify certain characteristics of young people born between 2000 and 2010 in Metropolitan Lima, since in several interviews we have carried out, it is possible to identify that some characteristics of some of them are that they share a strong sense of escape and use of video games to avoid their problems. On the other hand, we found that some of them share an anxious behavior, so they decide to opt for video games to relax.

Fourth, thanks to our interviews, we were able to estimate an approximate number of people who say that video game use has increased due to the pandemic. An important aspect to highlight is what anxiety is, how it manifests itself in such a way that its victims incur in playing video games because of it in the current context. During the pandemic, the feeling of loneliness, the excessive memory of negative things from the past as a result of being at home locked up for so long, or, above all, the fear that your life will be exposed with the risk of becoming infected - or even dying due to the virus - they are the ones that generate that discomfort and excessive insecurity that anxiety brings. This causes the person to think too much about negative things (about himself or the environment) when he is afraid of facing himself because he does not know how to be alone without doing anything. That is why some of these people turn to video games, it is a form of "refuge" for them. Video games give them something else to think about, how to spend their free time that the pandemic sometimes gives them. They worry about exceeding themselves, competing; wanting to go to the next level and they leave their reality for some time of the day.

In summary, the consumption of video games has increased because the pandemic prevented going outside and, as a result, people had to stay at home to protect themselves from the virus. During this stay at home, they sought to distract themselves and chose to discover and play more video games alone or with friends online. These people like video games because some of the things they are looking for in them are to compete, the fact of wanting to escape from reality and immerse themselves in a fantasy world where they do not have to deal with the anguish of being constantly threatened by Covid-19 or just wanting to entertain for a while as a short break. In addition, it was concluded that what is behind the acquisition of video games is, mainly, seeking to satisfy certain personal needs; for example, wanting to do something when there is nothing pending, improve mood, try to compete or improve.

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