

Study finds gaming augments players' social lives

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A study from North Carolina State University finds that online gaming is augmenting, not limiting, the social lives of players. Credit: Nick Taylor

New research finds that online social behavior isn't replacing offline social behavior in the gaming community. Instead, online gaming is expanding players' social lives. The study was done by researchers at North Carolina State University, York University and the University of

Ontario Institute of Technology.

"Gamers aren't the antisocial basement-dwellers we see in pop culture stereotypes, they're highly social people," says Dr. Nick Taylor, an assistant professor of communication at NC State and lead author of a paper on the study. "This won't be a surprise to the gaming community, but it's worth telling everyone else. Loners are the outliers in gaming, not the norm."

Researchers traveled to more than 20 public gaming events in Canada and the United Kingdom, from 2,500-player events held in convention centers to 20-player events held in bars. The researchers observed the behavior of thousands of players, and had 378 players take an in-depth survey, with a focus on players of massively multiplayer online role-playing games such as EVE Online and World of Warcraft.

The researchers were interested in tracking the online and offline behavior of gamers, focusing on how they communicated with each other. They found that gaming was only one aspect of [social behavior](#) at the gaming events.

"We found that gamers were often exhibiting many social behaviors at once: watching games, talking, drinking, and chatting online," Taylor says. "Gaming didn't eliminate social interaction, it supplemented it.

"This was true regardless of which games [players](#) were playing, and whether a player's behavior in the online game was altruistic. For example, a player could be utterly ruthless in the [game](#) and still socialize normally offline."

The researchers also found that gamers didn't distinguish between the time they spent playing games and the time they spent watching other people play games.

"It all fell under the category of gaming, which they view as a social activity," Taylor says.

Taylor notes that this work focused on Western gaming communities, and he's interested in studying the relationship between social behaviors and gaming in other cultures.

More information: The paper, "Public Displays of Play: Studying Online Games in Physical Settings," is published online in the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*: onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcc4.12054/full

Abstract

As research on virtual worlds gains increasing attention in educational, commercial, and military domains, a consideration of how player populations are 'reassembled' through social scientific data is a timely matter for communication scholars. This paper describes a large-scale study of virtual worlds in which participants were recruited at public gaming events, as opposed to through online means, and explores the dynamic relationships between players and contexts of play that this approach makes visible. Challenging conventional approaches to quantitatively driven virtual worlds research, which categorizes players based on their involvement in an online game at a particular point in time, this account demonstrates how players' networked gaming activities are contingent on who they are playing with, where, and when.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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