

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to argue that streaming technologies enhance trust in gaming environments where players roleplay characters through pseudonyms and false identity. Through methods of researching Grand Theft Auto Five (GTAV) (Rockstar North, 2013) game mechanics, the streaming service Twitch (www.twitch.tv), and focusing on the FiveM (CitizenFX, 2014) server The Family RP (FiveM, 2014) to demonstrate how trust is formed within these communities through the rules and communication methods within them. Further research found that stronger communities were dependent upon a higher level of communication and trust within their server of play. This trust being backed by self-presentation desire to present identity through characters and avatars, commitment to the game, visual/verbal communication, strict server rules that pertain to the ruled (ludus) and unruled (paidia) spaces theory, deludic strategies (cheats) that lead the community to play with the game rules rather than by them. This paper researched the paradigms required within various communities to form the trust needed to maintain positive gaming environments; and concluded that gaming communities with accessible communication resources are stronger, forging a greater sense of community.

Keywords: community, thefamilyrp, roleplay, fivem, trust, identity, streaming, twitch, communication, GTAV, rules.

Throughout this paper I will argue the idea that streaming technologies help to build trust in gaming environments where pseudonyms and false identity are imperative to their existence. Specifically, Grand Theft Auto V (Rockstar North, 2013), through the massively multiplayer online (MMO) roleplay servers linked via FiveM (CitizenFx 2014). I will discuss the mechanics of this roleplay game design, delve into how trust is built between the player/s and those who watch through Twitch (www.twitch.tv), with the aid of voice and visualisation, as well as the trust needed within the environment of play for the gamers character. For clarity, I will relate specifically to the GTAV (Rockstar North, 2013) FiveM (CitizenFx 2014) server, The Family RP (FiveM 2014), and draw from Koivisto's *Supporting Communities in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games by Game Design* (2003).

Roleplay within games is not a new concept. Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) are played with the aid of MMO games, often within the persistent state worlds (PSW) that maintain them. Persistent state worlds (PSW), or persistent worlds (PW), are defined by Techopedia (www.techopedia.com) as, “a virtual gaming environment that continues to change even after a user has logged off. Persistent-state worlds follow their own internal clock, and events continue to unfold while the gamer is logged off, which can impact the gameplay when the gamer returns.” In this case, that world is the virtual city of San Andreas, within the game GTAV (Rockstar North, 2013). This is the virtual reality for players of the FiveM (CitizenFx 2014), The Family RP (FiveM 2014) server. There are several rules and guidelines that users must adhere to play within this whitelisted server. A whitelisted server is much like the

original definition of various other whitelisted services to help in “emails and IP addresses being spam free” (www.webopedia.com) only, in this context, it relates directly to moderators/developers/administrators of a specific server whitelisting gamers to a selected few, to restrict the server from being used inappropriately by trolls or gamers inexperienced in that servers level of role-play expectations, or rules (www.techopedia.com). It is with this strict selection criteria that players, specifically within The Family Rp (FiveM, 2014) server, can be confident in their characters role-play emersion being untarnished by others that do not take their style of play, and their characters development, as serious. This helps to eliminate the players who enter servers where serious roleplay is paramount, but who do not take their own roleplay to the serious level predetermined via that server’s rules. These players ruin the emersion experience for other players and their viewers. Specific game rules solidify the in-game mechanics for the players to co-operate and maintain the servers worldview of play; a shared purpose providing a reason for community (Koivisto, 2003).

Combine these rules with social identity theory and self-presentation already associated with character development and human-like avatars. Social identity theory relates to self-concept-ideas (how one perceives oneself) and images of oneself, while, self-presentation desire involves expressing self-image (Park, Chung, 2011, p. 2). The flexibility to play within various stereotypical areas of “types of living” within the San Andreas mapping system, and the freedom to control characters to form their stories, GTAV (Rockstar North, 2013) provides the platform for social identity theory (Park, Chung, 2011, p. 2).

Park and Chung (2011) suggest that it is this achievement of self-presentation desire in MMORPGs, the guilds and clans (communities/groups) formed, along with the sense of community born from those clans, that generates trust and “a psychological attachment that resembles a sense of belonging and promotes commitments” (p.2). Park and Chung (2011) go on to further detail that “trust of the game spaces and other gamers will bring higher commitments to the games” (p. 3), and furthermore that, “trust has a positive effect on the commitments to an online game community” (p. 4).

These same community trust mechanics mentioned above, and instilled in players within the game, can be formed within communities outside of the game through various streaming services, such as Twitch (www.twitch.tv). Twitch allows others not playing within a specific game to watch play-through through the stream uploaded by gamers who chose to do so. Twitch states on their website, “...you don’t just watch Twitch, you’re part of the show” (www.twitch.tv). The platform allows walls between traditional game playing and game sharing to be knocked down, so that almost any game, at any time, can be viewed through other participant’s gameplay, from anywhere you have an internet connection. Koivisto (2003) states that, “the more often the player can contact other players, the more likely he is to actively contribute to the game's social framework” (p. 2). This same idea could also then apply to the viewers whom watch games being played. Many players within The Family RP (FiveM 2014) use Twitch to showcase their characters roleplay streams. Twitch provides an interactive viewer chat service that allows viewers to subscribe to their favourite gamers channels, receiving customized channel emotes (emoticons) to use within the streamers Twitch chat. Visual

representation of both the in-game character and offline player through webcam, so the viewer can see the in-game character as well as the player. Audio for the streamer to interact with the game, and their viewers separately. And guild/clan-like capabilities with viewers able to subscribe to their favourite gamers channels. Koivisto (2003) agrees that “a good verbal communication system in MMORPG should support using different chat channels” and “ways to send messages to others and see if they are logged in the world” (p. 4) and further found, through player research, that this guild like system of interaction ‘enforces the feeling of belonging and encourages members to help each other’ (p. 7) and, Ba (2001), (as cited in Yao and Chang, 2014) said that ‘it costs less to build trust at the community-level than at the individual level’ (p. 3). Twitch provides the catalyst for this community trust. Mayer et al (1995), (as cited in Yao and Chang, 2014) define that trust is,

...the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party (p. 8).

Streaming allows for face-to-face communication without the need for direct human contact, within a community known stereotypically for its isolation. Stronger than the trust built through visual representations is trust that stems from verbal communications.

Seppala (2017) states in her research article, on whether we gain more from voice communication than visual, that “voice may be a far more reliable predictor than the face, especially if we can devote our complete attention to it” (p. 11). Further studies by Kraus (2017) found “that we are more accurate when we hear someone’s voice than when we look only at their facial expressions, or see their face and hear their voice” (p. 645). Through these stronger verbal connections, within these streaming services where it is mandatory to communicate verbally, that this method helps those players involved to make better judgements towards those they trust on the server of play. Kraus (2017) goes on to state that one of the factors for this understanding may be “that speakers are less likely to be able to alter their tone to disguise their feelings” (p. 645). By focusing on voice alone and just the one whom you are receiving the information or emotion, then your perception of emotion is most accurate (Kraus, 2017, p. 645). This need for verbal technologies and the option for players to be able to communicate verbally with their peers is becoming a strong need to have developers providing options for VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) capabilities within their productions. One of the members of The Family Rp (FiveM 2014) *Timmac* (www.twitch.tv/timmac) called for all games, and their developers to “please, for the love of god, give us a way to communicate” by including VoIP and modification capabilities into their development processes, and touches on the importance of these systems in games for the formation of communities around them (kQuantumK, 2017).

In *The Evolution of Trust* (Case, 2017), a mathematical game of trust and character traits, the creator states, through equations and sequences of interactivity, that

miscommunication is a barrier to trust: “a little bit of it leads to forgiveness, but too much and it leads to widespread distrust!” (<http://ncase.me/trust/>). Case (2017) goes on to set out three categories needed for trust to evolve; repeat interactions, possible win-wins, and low miscommunication. She concludes that in all game theory, what the game is, defines what the players do (Case, 2017). This would have merit when applied to the server The Family RP (FiveM 2014). The trust amongst players is proven in the positive player-to-player interactions within the server and ongoing sense of camaraderie both on and off screen. Many of those gamers affiliated with the server interact with each other off server in other games, streaming individually, playing together, for their viewing communities. It is with the rules, and those whom follow them, laid out by the administration and moderators of The Family RP (FiveM 2014) server, that are imperative to this trusted, successful, and supportive environment. In relation to this theory, Kuchlick (2009) defines the constructs of movement between spaces governed by rules and those not, by stating;

...ruled space affords a different form of movement than unruled space, just like a ruled sheet of paper suggests a different mode of engagement than an unruled one. Although nothing prevents us from writing on unruled paper or drawing on ruled paper, there are clear conventions of use that make certain forms of use appear more natural than others. In the same way, ruled and unruled spaces insinuate, rather than enforce, certain forms of movement (p. 159).

Ruled and unruled spaces, or servers with no predetermined rules, are why some players, within the many available roleplay servers accessible, can have more negative experiences to others. The environments, or communities, governed by more structured and enforced rules shape and predetermine that avenue and mental state of play embodied by those who engage within them. Broken rules and game mechanics may lead one into assuming these physical changes to the original structure of gameplay, specifically within The Family RP (FiveM 2014) server, only add to the discombobulation of trust within the game itself. It could be said, that with every game played the player is accepting some level of direct or indirect roleplay. Direct depending on the game played. The Family RP (FiveM 2014) server could be direct and someone playing Red Dead Redemption (2010) or Mario Kart (1992) would be indirect. Indirect because that player has not made a conscious decision to enact the characters within the game, but rather be led by them as if they were living in a known reality. Kuchlick (2009) theorises gameplay as 'not to be understood as a solipsistic identification with the computer but rather as a chaotomic (an adaptive strategy, both physical and mental, given an environment of continuous flux. ([chaosmosis](#), 2003) (Guattari, 1995, as cited in Kuchlick 2009) motion that draws ordinary life into gamespace and scatters fragments of gamespace into ordinary life' (p. 167). This discombobulation between gaming spaces moves player pseudonym and identity, and character pseudonym and identity closer together. The reality of roleplay becomes less virtual, and those role-playing become more of themselves within their characters, through GTA V's (Rockstar North, 2013) character adaption mechanics.

Role-player's take on the character/s they play as their own persona or one created, assimilated through their own voices and the games mode of play simulation. Caillois (1958/1961) suggests that games can be considered to lie at various points on an axis between *Paidia*, free creativity, and *Ludus* rule-bound complexity. *Paidia* being "a word covering the spontaneous manifestations of the play instinct" (p. 28). And *Ludus* representing "a growing tendency to bind with arbitrary, imperative, and purposely tedious conventions" (Caillois, 1958/1961, p. 13). Together *ludus* "disciplines and enriches" *paidia* through a process that "give[s] the fundamental categories of play their purity and excellence" (Caillois 1958/1961, p. 33). Kuchlick (2009) narrows this further, suggesting the terms *ruled space* and *unruled space*, with each of these spaces being governed by some level of *ruledness* but that all these spaces can overlap. This overlap is apparent within The Family RP (FiveM 2014) server, as rules are defined for the way of play and for the reality of play, to resemble real-world as much as possible. However, these rules can still be blurred by the free will of those playing behind the characters. Kuchlick (2009) refers to deludic strategies (cheats) as going,

beyond representation, but they leave the representational surface of games intact; they are double movements of demystification and remystification (Friedman, 1995 as cited in Kuchlick, 2009). This is what it means to be playing with the rules rather than by the rules, weaving in and out of gamespace... (p. 167).

This fluidity of how game rules within GTAV (Rockstar North, 2013) apply on The Family RP (FiveM,2014) is why the trust and sense of community within flourishes.

In an online article, Paul Suddaby (2013) investigates why some gaming communities are more positive than others and maintains that each “games delivery system is integral in fostering a certain type of community” (p. 14). Suddaby (2013) further discusses League of Legends management system for players online who break the rules or conduct themselves inappropriately within the game “including a strict banning system for those who leave games, a player-driven tribunal for reported players, and even an honor system to give notice to those who are called out by their fellow players” (p. 29). Koivisto (2003) says that “a world inhabited by all types of players (... achievers, explorers, socializers, and killers) in balance is more likely to produce a sense of community” (p. 5). The Family RP (FiveM 2014) have similar attributes for the use of their server; a council that oversees reported users who have broken in-game and/or server rules, and a list of basic rules that include the use of derogatory remarks; including that of race, gender, religion, sexuality, etc. There appears to be one strong solidifier in the fruition of roleplay games becoming successful, along with the communities/guilds/clans that interact and evolve from these roleplay MMORPGs; and that is the idea that Role-playing needs to be carefully framed, negotiated and maintained to happen at all (Mayra, 2017).

In conclusion, gaming communities are stronger depending on the level of communication available (Koivisto 2003), as such those within The Family RP (FiveM 2017) who stream via streaming services such as Twitch (www.twitch.tv) have a greater sense of community. Communities cannot be formed without trust and communication. In streaming communities like The Family RP (FiveM 2017) where players roleplay

characters through manipulated pseudonyms created by the gamer and not enforced via in-game mechanics, trust is needed within the world of play for in-game rules to be followed and adhered to, to maintain upkeep for a positive community.

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