




More Than Just Playing: The Pleasure of Online Game Players

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Abstract. Online games are often seen only for their negative impacts in the form of addiction, consumptive behavior, and other accompanying impacts. Regardless of the pros and cons, as an issue of cultural studies, online games have become popular cultural products that are interesting to discuss. This study aims to analyze the pleasure of online game players. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method by collecting in-depth interview data. The results of this study indicate that pleasure in playing online games is related to one another. The concept of play in online games can be interpreted literally as a playground with friends who were previously known in the offline world. In the concept of play, when playing online games virtually, there are also aspects of fun in the form of (1). Performance where he feels pleasure when winning matches (2). Immersion is where players can enjoy and experience a world of imagination for a moment (3). Control, Players have the freedom to use ID names and characters that are very different from the real/offline world. (4). Intertextuality, players can connect other texts outside the game. (5). Narrative has another pleasure, the players can determine their storyline, characters, and the ending of the game.

Keywords: Playing, Online Games, Pleasure.

1 Introduction

Indonesia is one of the largest gaming industry markets in the world. Based on We Are Social's report, as of January 2022 Indonesia became the country with the third largest number of gamers in the world where 94.5% of internet users play online games as mentioned by Dihni [1]. This is due to the distribution of games that are now not only available on consoles, but also on smartphones or tablets. That way, various games can be easily accessed and played by gamers anywhere and anytime. Playing games has even become a routine activity for people across gender and age.

In the book *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, Martin Lister et al refer to it as: Game Play. Gameplay can be seen as a central significance in everyday consumption in the world of new media. In this world, gameplay offers fun and interactive possibilities [2]. We often hear the term online game nowadays. Online games cannot be separated from the internet because if we want to play online games, we must be connected via the internet network. Adams & Rollings in Setiawan [3] explain that online games are accessed by many people where the tools or machines used by game players are

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connected to the internet. According to this explanation, we can understand that using any tool to play games that are connected using the internet online is called online gaming, whether using a computer, cell phone, console, and so on. Online games today have many categories that can be played such as adventure, strategy, simulation, arcade, and Moba. If using a computer, there are tons of game sites that sell games for free or pay such as Steam, Uplay, Origin, etc, as stated in Setiawan [3].

The phenomenon of high online game players, apart from being seen from an economic perspective and its negative impacts (addiction is one of them), cannot be denied that the culture of playing online games is included in the study of popular culture. This research is more directed towards the study of understanding culture (cultural studies). Although the discussion is quite broad, overall cultural studies focus on the meaning of culture as mentioned in Barker [4].

Stuart Hall in Storey explains that the word 'Culture' in cultural studies is defined politically rather than aesthetically. The object of study in cultural studies is not culture defined in a narrow sense, namely as an object of aesthetic sublimity (high art), nor is culture defined equally narrowly as a process of aesthetic, intellectual and spiritual development; but culture is understood as texts and practices of everyday life. While cultural studies cannot (and should not) be reduced to pop culture studies, there is no denying that pop culture studies are central to the cultural studies project as mentioned in Storey [5].

Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary study because it can intersect with issues of gender, social class, domination, race, multiculturalism, economics, and even the politics of a country's government as mentioned by Kellner [6]. Although the discussion is quite broad, overall cultural studies focuses on cultural meaning as mentioned by Barker [4]. Cultural meaning can be seen in cultural products such as movies, music, or even the lifestyle of a particular group or society. These cultural products become popular among the wider community thanks to the contribution of mass media. The culture formed by the media is influenced by the construction of the media. That's why the culture formed is often called media culture. This media culture is then seen by cultural studies as a culture that provides a construction of a way of looking at the world, behavior, and even identity as stated by Kellner [6].

When it comes to the media, it is important to remember that the media is not an independent force. There are several factors that influence the power of the media including economic and political power. Simply put, in showing a certain show, the media pays attention to the audience's interest in the show. If a show is considered profitable, then it is likely that the show will be maintained and continue to be produced. In this case, market demand greatly influences media products.

In addition to market demand, the political system also contributes to the process of media circulation and movement, the political system provides restrictions in the form of regulations related to the broadcasting and publishing industry. This means that media culture is not only the result of interaction between society and the media, but also the formation of a country's economic and political forces. These factors also seem to be the scope of cultural studies in studying culture, as found in the following quote: 'Cultural studies insist that culture must be studied within the social relations and sys-

tems through which culture is produced and consumed, and that thus the study of culture is intimately bound up with the study of society, politics, and economics' as mentioned by Kellner [6].

As for the definition of popular culture, cultural critics and theorists have different views. Some focus on the production aspect of pop culture, some on the marketing and dissemination aspect of pop culture, and some on the consumption aspect of pop culture. Despite the different views on the definition and emphasis in the focus of popular culture studies, almost all writers and scholars agree that popular culture is "the culture of the people" or "the culture of the common people".

The word 'popular', in the sense attached to 'popular culture', does not only mean widespread, mainstream, dominant, or commercially successful, as it is often understood. Rather, popular culture means that "artifacts and styles of human expression develop from the creativity of the average person, and circulate among people according to their interests, preferences, and tastes. Popular culture thus emerges from the people, rather than being imposed on them. In de Certeau: "Popular culture is made by the people, not produced by the culture industry."Popular culture is made by the people at the interface between the products of culture industries and everyday life. Popular culture is made by the people, not imposed upon them; it stems from within, from below, and not from above. Popular culture is the art of making do with what the system provides".

This view sees culture as an active and living process. Therefore, it is believed that popular culture can only develop from within, it cannot be imposed from without or above. Popular culture is not just a consumption practice, it is also an active process of forming and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system as mentioned by Ibrahim [7]. As in the discussion above, cultural studies also include lifestyles and the things that surround them, so researchers are interested in analyzing the meaning of the pleasure relationship of online game players.

2 Methodology

To elaborate the meaning of the audience's pleasure relationship with the media, this research uses the constructivism paradigm. Where this paradigm views the reality of social life is not a natural reality but formed from the results of construction as mentioned by Bungin [8].

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. In this study, qualitative aims to explain a phenomenon that occurs in-depth to solve a problem and find out an event or any ongoing process according to Bungin [8]. The data collection techniques for research are focus group discussion and interviews with respondents. The respondents chosen are Generation Z, which is included as a population of active internet users with large numbers and actively playing online games, namely students of the Communication Studies program at the Islamic University of Indonesia class of 2016, totaling five people.

3 Result

The final research report of Dr. Aphra Kerr, Dr. Pat Brereton, Julian Kucklich, M.A., Dr. Roody Flynn from STeM Dublin City University published in July 2004 entitled *New Media: New Pleasures?* became a big quote in this research report because there are not many studies or concepts in the world of new media that discuss pleasure/pleasure in new media, especially online games [9].

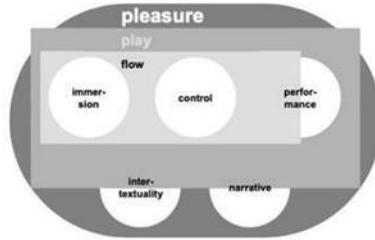


Illustration 1: compound and elementary concepts

Fig. 1. Pleasure in online games. (Source: Aphra Kerr, 2004)

In online games, the concept of Play is the main activity in which there are many activities that accommodate repeated fun. The following are among others:

1. Performance

Playing in online games also requires special skills, including digital literacy skills where it is necessary to understand enough to be able to understand how to play each online game which of course has its own characteristics, understanding of using many symbols in the game, and need high "flying hours" so that he can be said to be an expert in online gaming. The more often someone plays online games, the more his playing skills will increase. And in some online games, evidence of improved playing skills is shown in the increasing number of points and higher rankings, not only at the regional level, but even at the global level.

This performance is even more noticeable when he enters a higher-level match where there are real prizes to be enjoyed (in the form of cash). To get to this position, a player needs to practice continuously to ensure his playing ability is getting better instead of decreasing.

In this phenomenon of playing in online games, it is interesting to find many players who really enjoy the process of playing online games when done with friends who are already known in the real world. They use online gaming media as a medium of conversation with friends or friends who are separated by distance so that they can have intimacy and fun again. The term *mabar* (play together) is used as an illustration that this medium is used as an activity to play together like meeting, discussing, chatting, and doing activities together. When in this *mabar* game, the game participants are more focused on talking with their friends while chatting rather than intending to jointly plan strategies to win the game.

2. Flow/Immersion

The concept of Flow becomes closer if it is associated with how game players consciously spend up to hours and some even spend up to 20 hours a day playing online games. Of course, they do it consciously and consciously follow the game and continue to repeat playing it for hours to come to get the pleasure.

The existence of this flow concept is in line with the concept of immersion where players are not only immersed in the flow of online games for dozens of hours to get high points and rankings but also enjoy entering another world where they can consciously manage and choose their own storyline. For example, *The Witcher* is an adventure game where there are several story choices that will result in different endings. For the players, this becomes fun because they can choose their own character and their own storyline where the freedom of this imagination is not obtained in the real world. Immersion in online games also accommodates a fantasy/imagination of the world that is almost impossible to do in the real world, namely when you can fight using a sword, or when playing in the *GTA* game there is an online version, where we can ride a Lamborghini car with friends around the city. Or when you can board an airplane and do a parachute jump. In this game, gamers can feel the sensation of "real" pleasure for imaginations that are almost impossible to do in the real world.

3. Control

Online game players also have full control over whether they want to pour all the understanding in their head on what strategies are appropriate and fast to win the game or on the contrary, players enjoy every stage of the game and focus on talking with friends and not thinking too much about whether they will win this game or not.

The expression of swearing during the game is a spontaneous reaction when someone feels something annoying. But the choice of swear words or sentences is an example of control in online gaming. Including if we are the ones who get the swearing, we are also in the choice of whether to respond seriously by simply replying to the swearing or not to respond because we consider these things to be a waste of energy.

The virtual world of online gaming should technologically be understood by gamers as another world that is only virtual where all the dynamics of interaction and conversation are simply resolved on the same platform.

4. Intertextuality

The existence of the concept of intertextuality can be said to see the concept of interpretation of the pleasure of online games become more complex, namely, where to find pleasure in seeing other texts. One respondent explained that *GTA* online games are interesting in terms of the story and the characters. In online games it kind of gives a comedic picture of real life abroad, selling drugs, criminals, and getting the view that Americans are like this even though it is a fiction made like a cartoon movie *The Sims*.

In the explanation above, it shows that online game players who already have experience playing several types of games can finally provide an understanding of one online game text over another text in another movie where this becomes a process of connecting texts in the past, namely when he watched the movie *The Sims* with the text he currently consumes, namely *GTA online games*. Although there are differences in the context of the story between *The Sims* movie and *GTA Games*, the player considers that there are story threads that can be connected between the two texts which both raise texts about the comedy of life in the United States.

5. Narrative

Fundamentally, online games are a highly developed platform for generating large amounts of text. The narrative process starts with creating the basic story, what the characters are like, how the storyline goes, and how the game ends.

If in the previous discussion of immersion players in their games can freely imagine the world of their imagination, at this point in the narrative, when players can freely determine their own storyline, it means that the player is also narrating in writing their own storyline. From this description, it can be explained that the pleasure of playing online games is not only about the competition to win matches in games but also how there is a narrative pleasure when players can determine the game storyline and characters according to the wishes of the players.

4 Discussion

Citing the concept of Kerr [9] entitled *New Media: New Pleasures*, the thesis of this research is that playing online games is not just playing, but there are also sides of the playing activity that are interesting to explore, namely performance, immersion, control, intertextuality, & narrative. These findings are supported by Jari Takatalo's paper entitled "Pleasure and Enjoyment in digital games". The results indicated that being competent and in control in the game leads to a pleasurable experience. It was also shown that in addition to being competent and in control, an enjoyable gaming experience requires challenges and elevated arousal. This combination makes enjoyment more intensive and stronger emotion as compared to pleasure [10]. In the chapter book "The New Literacies Sampler" by Gee [11] entitled *Pleasure, Learning, Video Games, and Life: The Projective Stance* questions the deep pleasure human beings take from video games. Mentioning that in the virtual world of online games, players can freely choose virtual characters with virtual characters as well. The freedom of choice is what can be called pleasure where it has control unlike in real life. The research entitled *Flow, Home, and Media Pleasure* written by Lee Harrington [12] from Miami University and Denise Bielby from the University of California, Santa Barbara focuses on television media that has a flow consisting of program segments that are easily arranged by television producers, and this is associated with the pleasure of the audience of the television program. This discussion about the cultural texts of online game pleasure hopes to illustrate the diversity of discussions about popular culture that are not always

talked about only from a frequency, positive impact, negative impact, or economic perspective. But it can also be seen that the pleasure presented by online games can be a new space for discussing many other cultural texts in a virtual space.

5 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the data analysis, it was found that the pleasure of playing online games is interrelated with each other. The concept of Play in online games can be interpreted literally as a playground/play area with friends who have previously known in the real world. Within this concept of Play, there are related concepts of fun, namely (a). Performance is often associated with points and player ranking in the game. Structure in the game where someone makes a rule that he will get a high level. (b). Immersion is interpreted when gamers consciously enter the game world and at the same time get carried away in it. When he consciously enjoys and feels that he can "for a moment" feel in the world of imagination/fantasy for activities that cannot be done in the real world. (c). Control. Technologically, game players seem to be given "freedom" in expressing themselves because they use ID names and characters that are very different from the real world. (d). Intertextuality. when a game player feels the pleasure of playing the game and can connect with other texts outside the game. (e). Narrative, there is pleasure in the narrative process in online games where players can compose and determine their own storyline, game characters, and the ending of the story in the game.

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