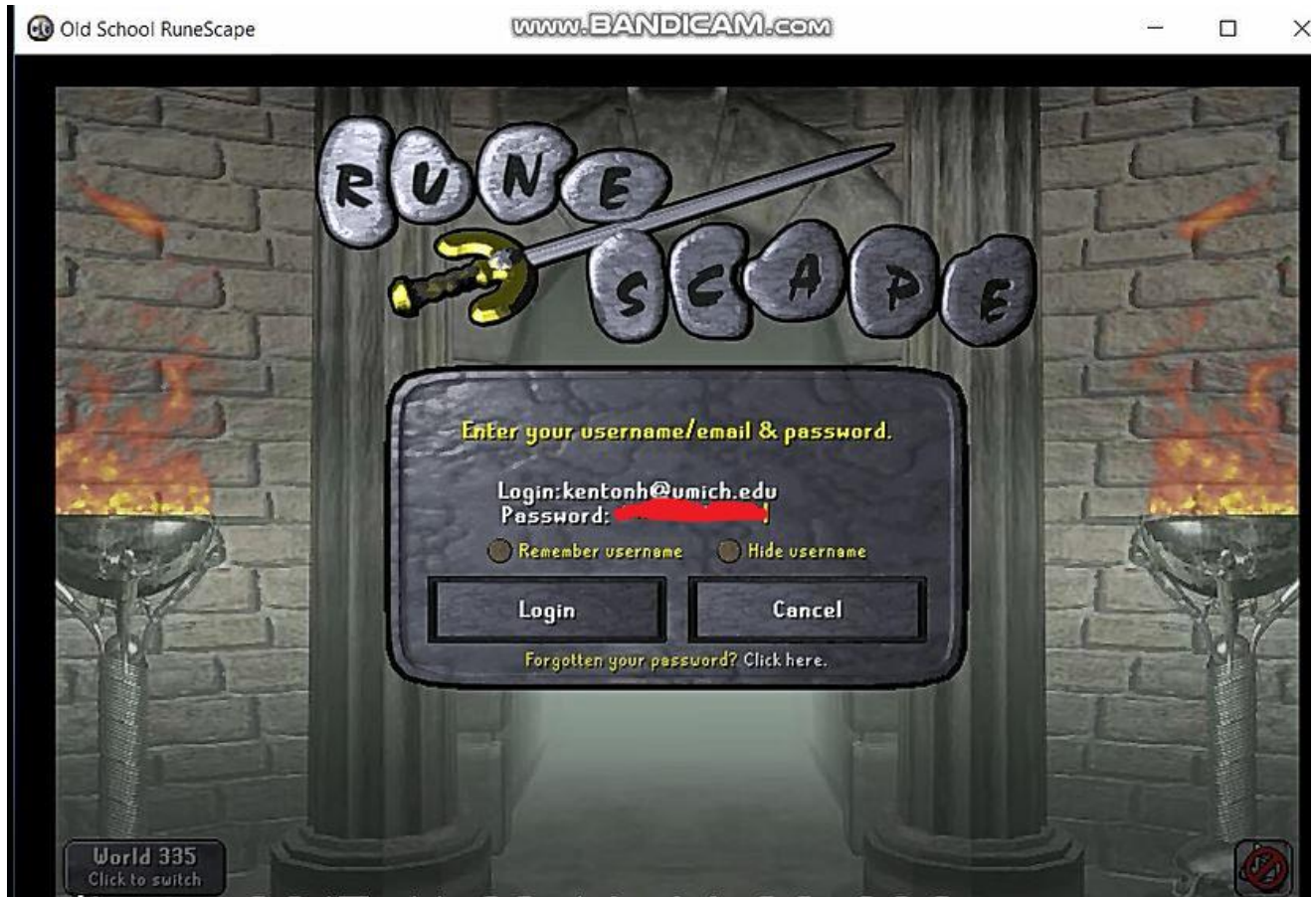


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 3 December 2017
 SI 110 Section 003
 Word Count: 2715



Old School RuneScape As a Social Media Platform



Introduction

Although I am no amateur when it comes to video games, using Old School RuneScape as a social media platform was a challenge that I wanted to pursue when I started this project. Using traditional social media sites like Facebook or Instagram is not enjoyable for me because I do not have enough interesting material to keep posting updates every week. I also found that many of my posts intended only for my close friends ends up reaching the ears of my relatives and family members, which leads to uncomfortable conversations at reunions. By using a video game as a social media site, I can be positive that anything I post on my virtual character will not show up in real life because no one knows my account name or plays a deliberately outdated game. Old School RuneScape is obscure enough that I can play without worrying about meeting someone I know personally, but at the same time has a considerably large to be considered a viable social media platform. Known as a Massive Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game (MMORPG), the gameplay focuses on interactions between hundreds of players and can change depending on the community of the game. I had played MMORPGs before, but I usually would delete my accounts due to the toxicity and general unfairness of player-versus-player (pvp) content. I played an updated version of RuneScape called RuneScape 3, but I could not maintain my account for long because it felt like a copy of Blizzard's World of Warcraft and I did not enjoy the complexity of that game either. Therefore, when I heard that Jagex had created an older version called Old School RuneScape that had simpler mechanics than many other MMORPGs out there, I decided to try it out. My hope was that the amount of trolling and skill disparity between the experts and the beginners would be insignificant and that I would be able to play the game and enjoy interacting with other players at the same time. I also wanted a game that I felt

that I could pick up and learn the mechanics within the time frame of this project.



Goals and Methodology

When I created my account for this semester, I had a few specific goals that I wanted to accomplish. First, I wanted to create a unique username that was both humorous and clever. While I could not use “LumpyOatmeal” due to unavailability, I decided to settle on “ThiccOatmeal” instead, as it retains the theme of my intended username and makes me smile whenever I log in. After I improved my skills, I wanted to fight in a clan war after leveling my character up to see how I compared to the community, as having a team to fight with is more enjoyable than fighting alone. This proved to be a very difficult task because many of the clan war minigames are regarded as “dead content”, meaning there are very few players in game actively participating in them. While I played a few matches with a team of players, I did not get

to participate in an all-out war with many players on both sides like I anticipated. I still engaged in group combat, albeit on a much smaller scale. However, my luck improved when I went into the “Wilderness” to try pvp content, I was able to find many people near my level that I attacked.

I recorded several fights, but I could not eliminate a single target due to my inexperience with the combat system. I had primarily built my account to be purely a mage to counter the warrior class, but I could not counter playstyles that used the archer or mage class and I died as a result. Regarding the social aspect of the game, I could not convince a RuneScape streamer on Twitch to have a shoutout for my assignment, but I had enough in-game conversations with other players to formulate a new perspective on the community within the game. While my initial perceptions on the difficulty of player-vs-player content was correct, I erroneously miscalculated the extent that simply interacting with other players could negatively affect my gameplay.



User (mis)behavior

Civil Discourse: While I enjoyed leveling up and battling other players, I underestimated the amount of trolling that can occur without direct combat between players. “Noobs”, or new players, are unfamiliar with the environment of the game and do not understand the quirks of the online player base. It may be tempting to donate gold to players in return for a joke or to feel like a good Samaritan, but this goes against the design of the game as this promotes a sense of laziness among players. There are several skills in the game such as woodcutting, mining, and fishing designed to help people acquire



gold and stimulate the economy. By falling for this ploy, noobs are not only giving away their gold to someone who does not need it, but are also limiting their own gameplay by preventing them from buying better equipment. There is no excuse for anyone not to work for their own money, but veterans of the game know they can trick newcomers into giving them free stuff.

Chat/Griefing: Arguably the most defining feature that makes this game a social media platform is an in-game chat box. Through an interface located at the bottom of the screen, players can interact with hundreds of other players located near their player simply by typing a text message into the chat box and pressing enter. This method makes it easy to interact with other online gamers and form friendships built on helping each other achieve in-game goals. However, through the same chat box, it is easy to harass players in a process known as “griefing”. In an article titled “Deception in video games: examining varieties of griefing”, Sarah

Camm and Victoria Rubin define griefing as “an act of play intended to cause grief to game players.” Considered a very broad term, griefing often involves using deceptive techniques such as luring, scheming, entrapment, or pretense to harass other players. In Old School RuneScape, “luring” is a popular method in which experienced players “lure” new players to dangerous areas where they are quickly killed by high-level monsters. In my case, when I asked a player where the town of Varrock was in the game, he led me to an area with dark wizards much more powerful than I was at the time. Consequently, I was quickly killed and never made it to my destination that day. This type of behavior can be defined as “power imposition, a player exerts their superiority in the game...by killing weaker characters multiple times or preventing weaker characters from achieving goals- simply because of the offender’s ability to do so” (Rubin and Camm). The other player, known as “TMG”, could have led me to Varrock safely, but instead chose to lead me to a dangerous path because he wanted to see me struggle.

Trading/Scamming: Another feature of Old School RuneScape that is notorious for misbehavior is trading. There are two ways that

players can trade in game: One of the methods is through an in-game market called the Grand



Exchange, where players can sell and buy through a third-party system that verifies the price of the item and ensures that players get the item at the price they set; the other method involves direct trading between players where each player has to initiate a request to the other player's character and is not regulated by any online system, meaning people can give items away for free. Players heavily abuse the second method because it is easy to scam beginners into giving away their items for free by promising to give them back more valuable stuff after the trade. For example, some armor sets have a gold trim, making them more expensive and desirable than the regular version. Wealthy players that can afford expensive armor offer poorer players the option



to “trim their armor for free” if they trade them their current armor set. However, after the trade, the player claiming to trim the armor often logs out or runs away without giving the armor back, leaving the already broke beginner without an armor set.



The reason behind this deception is found in Whitney Phillips article titled “We’re the Reason We Can’t Have Nice Things On the Internet”, where she explains that “people engage in atrocious behavior...because it’s worth their time and energy to do so.” By deceiving the amateur into trading his goods, the scammer receives his prize free of charge and has no incentive to trade it back as the scammer can sell it to someone else for a profit. I was the victim of this scam once and it caused me to lose a lot of progress as I had to buy another armor set.

Social Experience Design

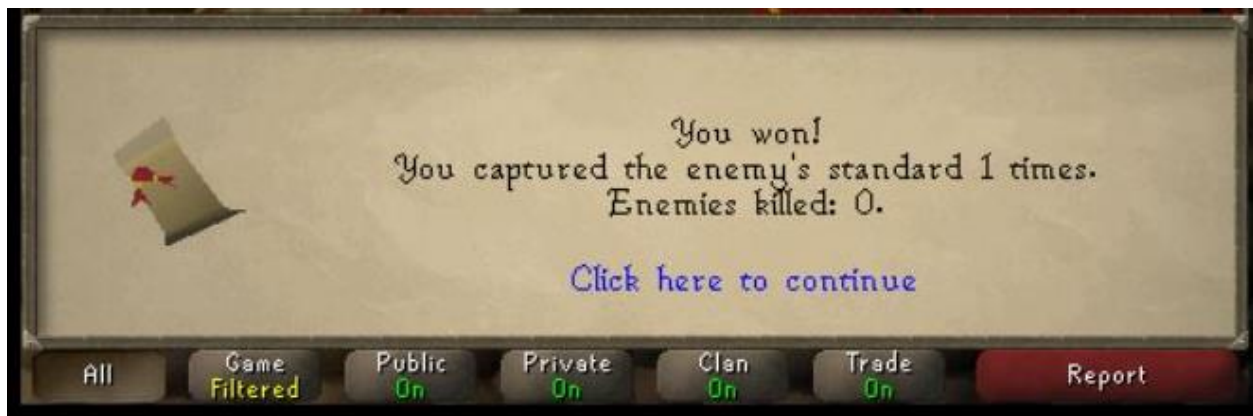
Extrinsic Motivation: One aspect of RuneScape that succeeds in promoting Social User design is its ability to encourage players to stay committed to their characters to unlock in-game content and rewards. As Paul Resnick and Robert E. Kraut point out in their book *Building Successful Online Communities: Evidence-Based Social Design*, “people who are more committed to an organization tend to be more satisfied, are less likely to look for

alternatives, are less likely to leave, and tend to perform better and contribute more.” As players gain more experience and level up their characters, they begin to get access to more powerful equipment previously unavailable to them. As a result, it becomes easier to challenge other



players and go through areas of the game that are dangerous to lower levels. When I first started my account, it was difficult to challenge other players and I only had access to the most basic equipment. As I progressed though, I unlocked better armor and found

myself dying a lot less frequently. When I started fighting in clans, I was able to help capture the objective and wear Rune armor, one of the higher defensive armor sets in the game. Granted, I still struggled in eliminated other players, but I stayed committed to leveling my account higher so that I could compete at an even playing field with other players.



Intrinsic Motivation: In conjunction with getting in-game rewards, Old School Runescape causes players to become emotionally invested in their character as they spend hundreds of hours crafting their appearance and skills. Even though I could not get the username “LumpyOatmeal” because it was already taken, I had grown quite fond of my alternate name “ThiccOatmeal”. As Michelle D. Dickey writes in her article “Game Design and Learning: a conjectural analysis of how massively multiple online role-playing games (MMORPGs) foster intrinsic motivation”, players have several traits, skills and attributes to assign their character to make them unique.



“Because they have great input into the development of their characters, players often feel an emotional proximity to their character” (Dickey). I could have easily started over with a new account and transfer my items, but I had already spent so much time curating my character into an aging wizard with white hair that I did not want to abandon my progress. I felt that my experiences in the game were tied

specifically to my character and I was proud of the progress that I made. I was able to get some of my stats past level 50, which is an achievement worth celebrating as the max level for each skill is 99.

Problems with Social User Experience: Unfortunately, Old School RuneScape is

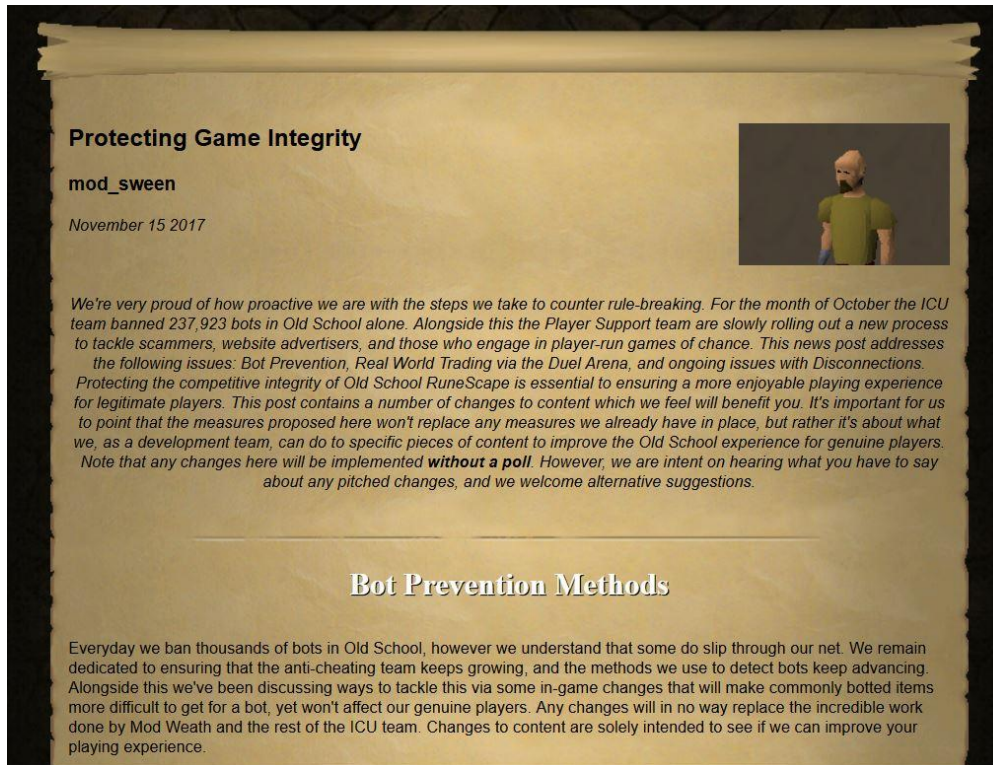
oftentimes a tedious game, and some players try to bypass the substantial amount of time required to become proficient at the game through cheating. An infamous problem that plagues the Old School RuneScape servers is the use of “botting” to level up a character. Bots, computer programs designed to mimic a player’s actions in the game, are illegal and can result in a permanent ban of a user’s account. Although they may look like a normal player, bots are easily identified as the default character avatar of a bald man with green trousers and a khaki shirt. Bots



destroy the integrity of the game by allowing players to gain experience even though they themselves are not playing the game. Bots can be programmed to operate twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week without stopping for breaks,

accumulating in large amounts of gold and experience. This gives them an unfair advantage over actual players who had to train their accounts firsthand and cannot play continuously for large amounts of time. Jagex has acknowledged this problem several times on their website, but there are so many bots being created that it is difficult to ban every single one before more are created. In the month of October alone, Jagex banned over 237,923 bots in Old School RuneScape and have continued to ban thousands more each day. “To be successful, online communities need the people who participate in them to contribute the resources on which the group’s existence is

built” (Resnick and Kraut). As it stands, botting yields better results than an actual gamer and tempts many players to use their own bots extensively, as it allows them to level up faster and



access better armor. If botting is not stopped, it will discourage the players who actively participate in the game from playing, resulting in the death of the

online community. I did not use bots because I wanted to train my account, but it was discouraging knowing that people cheated to be better than me.

Conclusion

Even though I was able to accomplish most of the goals that I had set in the beginning of the project, I did not escape the abuse and helplessness from the established community that I experienced in other MMORPGs as well. Sadly, neither the difficulty of the game nor the anonymity of it produced the desired effect I had predicted. Still, I was able to get produce a considerable amount of content that otherwise would have been difficult for me to replicate on standard social media platforms. Overall, I learned that despite being a simpler game compared to other games in the same genre, there is still a fair amount of toxicity and social design

problems that plague Old School RuneScape. The combat is primitive and slower than games like World of Warcraft, but there is still a considerable amount of skill and strategy involved when fighting other players. Additionally, the social aspect of the game suffers from the ease that experienced players can harass and abuse new players. Griefing techniques such as luring or scamming can ruin a prospective gamer's view of the game and convince them to quit early. Furthermore, it is easy for players to cheat the game by using bots to level up their character or to get more gold. Despite the setbacks I encountered early on, I persevered through the challenges and learned a valuable lesson about the social norms of online gamers. It seems the competitive aspect of gamers prevails over the desire to cooperate, as people are willing to exploit a person's unfamiliarity of the game to fulfill their own goals. Sometimes people are willing to go as far as to cheat to gain a competitive advantage over their peers through botting or computer programs that play the game for them. Ultimately, it seems that regardless of the game, having an anonymous profile online fosters the urge to break the rules without fear of getting caught.

Personal scores for ThiccOatmeal			
Skill	Rank	Level	XP
Overall	692,715	848	2,146,274
Attack	767,860	60	273,755
Defence	607,127	55	177,358
Strength	832,312	60	274,278
Hitpoints	811,744	60	289,081
Ranged	805,541	56	184,048
Prayer	589,606	45	63,134
Magic	850,597	53	148,779
Cooking	569,481	56	193,950
Woodcutting	886,661	47	81,407
Fishing	607,086	54	157,457
Firemaking	499,926	50	103,360
Crafting	722,751	42	45,880
Smithing	676,847	40	39,233
Mining	760,812	41	43,607
Herblore	944,166	3	250
Agility	673,316	40	37,261
Thieving	660,755	32	16,726
Slayer	845,615	23	6,979
Runecraft	470,086	27	9,731
Minigame	Rank	Score	

Search by name

Search

Search by rank

Search

Compare Users

Compare

Friends Hiscores

To view personal hiscores and compare yourself to your friends

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**All screenshots taken from the RuneScape website and in-game footage