**The Social Significance of Voice Chatting**

We all know the stereotype of the typical gamer who is portrayed as an anti-social fat dude that lives in his mother’s basement. Either you are a little kid or a lonely male adult. Some may argue that this case was true back then. However, with the increasing numbers of gamers of all genders, races, and cultures nowadays. Gaming has become more of an accepted hobby and even a career. What led to that? Well, many things did, but the most important one, in the social aspect at least, is the implementation of chat in online multiplayer games. Back when in-game chat was not as widespread as today, gamers used to discuss their favorite games on forums such as **GameFAQs,** which was launched in 1995 and is still relevant to this day almost three decades later. However, with the rise of the Internet came the rise of multiplayer online games. Game developers first implemented chat boxes into games so players can only type what they want to say as they play or as they wait for a game in a lobby. Later on, with the release ofthe gaming console **Dreamcast***,* in 2000, **SegaNet** released a web browser that integrated voice chat into their games. “Internet services such as **YahooChat!** worked on the Java-compatible web browsers with the ability of voice chat with the microphone” (“Voice chat in online gaming”). With voice chat in their games, players can now communicate, either as friends having casual conversations during their game or to make tactical decisions when playing competitively. Since “the way videogames are both thought of and used, critically and popularly, physically and rhetorically, is gendered.” (Thornham, 127) Voice chat begins to have negative effects, such as serious numbers of harassment towards women. Recently, a famous **Twitch** streamer called Macaiyla was playing *Valorant* live, her team lost, and thus “one of Macaiyla’s teammates wasn’t happy with the result and went on a sexist tirade against the content creator.” (Young) However,the way communication in-game has led players to develop their social abilities and even get out of their comfort zone. For instance, introverted people can now communicate with random people that love the same specific thing they love, all in the comfort of their room, it is a beautiful thing. Voice chatting alone has been the beginning of many friendships and relationships. When game designers noticed the importance of communication in multiplayer games, they opted to figure out new ways to make it more immersive. In 2020, during the lockdowns worldwide due to coronavirus specifically, one game filled the time of every gamer who was looking for ways to experience social interactions while physically staying at home. That game is *VRChat*, a free-to-play **VR** game, released in early access in 2017. Thomas H. Apperley and Justin Clemens discuss avatars “In accordance with the well-known tendency whereby digital media begin to affect already existing conceptions of human social interaction”, she adds “and includes both avatars that are fully customizable down to the minutest detail.” (45) The game was a revolutionary massively-multilayer-online VR game, the first of its kind. It allowed each player to customize his avatar to unbelievable degrees, such as implementing direct custom models into the game, you could look through the eyes of a tiny *SpongeBob*, or a huge green *Hulk*. These are just two of other limitless possibilities. Players could even use trackers on their bodies to simulate their movement in-game. When people realized you could also play it without a VR headset. The player count rose during the pandemic to the point that “on April 13th, VRChat hit its highest usership since its big viral spike back in 2018, reaching just over 16,000 concurrent Steam users.” (Lang) People went out to golf parks, bars, drank their beers, and had virtual birthdays. All in one single game. Hopefully, in the coming years, sexually deprived men can stop their misogyny so females will feel as comfortable as men do when hopping on to the voice chat channels, meanwhile, we should appreciate the way games have the ability to bring us all together.

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