**In- and Out-of-Character: The Digital Literacy Practices and Emergent Information Worlds of Active Role-Players in a New Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game**

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**Introduction & Problem Statement**

- Digital literacy or 21st Century Skills, the skills needed to find, evaluate, manage, and use information, media, and technology effectively, efficiently, and ethically, are crucial for success in the 21st Century (Eee, 2009; Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2011).

- Martin (2011, 2012) argues that information literacy is imperative for success in MMORPGs given the amount of information and research needed to advance in the game.

- However, the information behaviors and digital literacy practices in digital online games are understudied in LIS and limited to certain games and theoretical perspectives.

- The Theory of Information Worlds (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010) may provide a scalable analytical framework to understand the social context(s) of information behaviors and digital literacy practices of role-players as they live out their in- and out-of-character stories.

**Research Questions**

1. What characterizes the information worlds of active role-players in MMORPGs?
2. To what extent do MMORPG players develop digital literacy skills?
3. How does the theory of information worlds help explain the use of digital literacy skills in MMORPGs?

**Preliminary Discussion & Implications**

- Role-playing is an information rich activity heavily regulated by social norms, information values, and distinct information behaviors.

- The social norms promote and encourage players to explore different social types in their characters via alternative genders, races, personalities, and professions.

- The boundaries that impact role-players are both real and virtual.

- Digital literacy practices are prevalent, but as Martin & Steinkuehler (2010) found, they are often a collaborative effort.

- The level of coding similarity between information value, behavior, and digital literacy practices highlights the importance of sources and types for seeking, evaluating, and using information.

- Focusing on differences in information value systems across multiple contexts may help users understand their biases and how to better assess information and media across different contexts and from different perspectives.

**Key Findings**

**RQ1: The Information Worlds of Role-Players**

- Social Types
  - Out-of-Character: Variety of themes, motivations for, and levels to role-playing
  - In-Character: Gender, race, faction, and other traits have a major impact on perceptions of characters

- Social Norms
  - Character: "no perfect people" allowed and "be someone else!"
  - Information: "lore is law, more or less" and "no meta-gaming"
  - Community: "keep in-character and out-of-character separate," "respect for others," and "role-playing is not consent"

- Normative Information Behaviors
  - While out-of-character, players use in-game chat channels and addons, as well as external sites and wikis, VOIP services to use, manage, and exchange information.
  - While in-character, players use symbols and specific channels for role-playing as well as game features and addons to facilitate role-playing activities.

**RQ2: The Digital Literacy Practices of Role-Players**

- Information literacy practices evident in the research done to create rich characters and detailed stories.

**Limitations**

- The results are not generalizable, but may be transferable to similar contexts as they both confirm and expand on previous findings.

- In-game data collection was limited to 6 months; however, additional data was collected from a variety of community sources and artifacts and member-checking and inter-coder reliability testing will help ensure accuracy and authenticity of the findings.

**Future Directions**

- Explore the connection between information value systems and digital literacy practices as a means of addressing transfer issues associated with digital literacy instruction.

- Leverage games and role-playing for developing digital literacy skills as well as other skills, such as leadership, networking, and empathy, and gaining new perspectives and addressing social justice issues.

- Continue development of Theory of Information Worlds codebook and hybrid ethnographic approach, applying both in new contexts with different research questions.