

Abstract

THESIS: SUPER-EFFECTIVE SPACES: A STUDY OF THE WAYS IN WHICH POKÉMON GO'S SOCIAL COMPONENTS REACT AND ADAPT TO SUDDEN CHANGE

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DEGREE: Master of Science

COLLEGE: Sciences and Humanities

DATE: July 2021

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Video games have become an increasingly prominent part of global culture but have been considered to be solitary activities throughout most of their existence. Although many video games have been created with the purpose of bringing people together in digital spaces, we have only just recently seen video games, such as *Pokémon GO*, with the ability to bring people together in not only digital spaces, but physical spaces as well. The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which an inherently social gaming experience such as *Pokémon GO* is affected by the sudden introduction of inherently non-social phenomena, such as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. My research indicates that players who participate within organically created, player-focused, online conversational hubs (“digital third places”) displayed a general attitude which was not only very positive during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, but noticeably more positive during the pandemic than during any previous year, thus showcasing the critical role played by *Pokémon GO*'s social features. It has also been found, however, that all digital spaces are not created equal, as corporately created digital spaces do not appear to foster the correct atmosphere for creating a digital third place in same way which user-generated digital spaces do.