

VIRTUAL SOCIALIZATION THROUGH ONLINE GAME: SOCIAL INTERACTION IN ROBLOX

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ABSTRACT

Online games, especially on the Roblox platform, have become an increasingly significant digital interaction environment. This study aims to explore social interactions in the context of online gaming, with a particular focus on the Roblox platform. Roblox was chosen as the research subject due to its growing popularity and the diverse and complex social environment it offers. A qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through direct observation within the game, allowing for firsthand observation of player interaction dynamics. Additionally, a sample of Roblox players was surveyed using a questionnaire containing several questions related to interaction and socialization. The collected data were then analyzed by identifying key themes related to the game's influence on friendship-building, collaboration, and emerging communication norms within the gaming community. As a result, player interactions in the online gaming environment have implications for creating inclusive online communities and designing games that enhance players' social experiences.

Keywords: Social interaction, Online gaming, Roblox

ABSTRAK

Permainan online, terutama di platform Roblox, telah menjadi lingkungan interaksi digital yang semakin signifikan. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi interaksi sosial dalam konteks permainan online, terutama berfokus pada platform Roblox. Roblox dipilih sebagai subjek penelitian karena popularitasnya yang semakin meningkat dan lingkungan sosial yang beragam dan kompleks yang ditawarkan. Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan, dengan data yang dikumpulkan melalui observasi langsung di dalam permainan, sehingga memungkinkan pengamatan langsung terhadap dinamika interaksi pemain, selain itu, sampel para pemain roblox juga diambil melalui kuesioner yang berisi beberapa pertanyaan yang terkait dengan interaksi dan sosialisasi. Kedua data tadi kemudian dianalisis dengan melibatkan identifikasi tema-tema kunci yang terkait dengan pengaruh permainan pada membangun persahabatan, kolaborasi, dan norma-norma komunikasi yang muncul dalam komunitas permainan. Hasilnya adalah interaksi pemain dalam lingkungan game online mempengaruhi implikasi menciptakan komunitas online inklusif dan desain game yang meningkatkan pengalaman sosial pemain.

Kata kunci: Interaksi sosial, Permainan online, Roblox

A. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of science and technology has brought changes to all levels of society. The growing human creativity encourages the acquisition of new findings in technology that can be utilized as a means of improving the welfare of mankind (Edrizal, 2018). The essence of the internet was created to improve human welfare in meeting the need for information. However, along with the changing times, the internet has become something that cannot be separated in human daily life, especially among teenagers. According to an APJII survey, the number of internet users in Indonesia until the second quarter of 2020 rose to 73.7 percent of the population or equivalent to 196.7 million users out of Indonesia's population of 255.9 million users according to data from the Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) (Irawan et al., 2020). The rapid development of technology, currently being used by teenagers. One of its uses is to play online games (Karaca et al., 2020). Today's internet technology is growing, one of the benefits is a means of entertainment, for example to play games.

According to Greg Constikyan (2013), game is a creation where participants called players make provisions to organize their energy sources through the materials in the game to achieve a goal. Games are activities that are conducted according to certain rules so that there are winners and losers. Games are not usually played seriously and are usually played with the aim of relieving stress (Rahman & Tresnawati, 2016). A game is an activity that aims to seek pleasure by following certain rules, so there must be winners and losers. Games can also be defined as physical or mental competition, based on certain rules, for entertainment, recreation, or to win prizes (Erida Fadila et al., 2022). Thus, a game is a competitive activity that is created and designed specifically for the purpose of having certain rules. In short, game is an activity that sets one or more players along with selected conditions so that there are players who win and lose with the aim of having fun, filling leisure time.

Games played using the internet are called online games. Online games are a type of game that allows multiple players to participate, where the devices used by the players are connected via the internet network (Rompas et al., 2023). Online games also have various genres such as action, Role Playing Game (RPG), Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA), or Sport (Putra et al., 2019). Online games are games that are accessed online by multiple players using the internet network. Online games can also be accessed through personal gadgets, such as mobile games. A mobile game is a type of game that is specifically designed and created to run on smartphones and tablet PCs. Many mobile games have been created for various platforms such as Apple iOS, Android, and Windows Phone (Lebho et al., 2020). According to Fadila (2022), Sometimes, online games are presented by internet service providers as an additional feature that we subscribe to using their services. Or even, the online game can be used directly on the system that has been prepared by the game operator. The gaming industry now makes more money than the music and movie

industries combined (Divers, 2023). This success is largely due to human nature, as people enjoy engaging in activities that provide amusement, enjoyment, and fun. Based on data released by Sukirno (2020), via Aline.id, the number of online game players in 2020 was predicted to increase from 23.7 million in 2019 to 28.1 million in 2020. Meanwhile, according to data written by Vika Azkiya Dihni (2022), via databoks, the Philippines ranked first in the world with 96.4% of internet users playing video games, amounting to 964,000,000 people. Indonesia ranked third in the world with 94.5% of internet users playing video games, totaling 263,420,981 people.

Games have become one of the platforms for interaction, in this case social interaction. Social interaction is the main requirement for social activity, where humans need each other to fulfill their needs. In living life, humans must cooperate with others because basically humans cannot fulfill their own needs (Adriansyah & Ananda, 2022). Social interaction is a process in which relationships occur between individuals and other individuals, individuals and groups, or between groups (Narwoko & Suyanto, 2019). More specific, according to Anwar (2016), social interaction can be said to be a relationship that involves individuals with one another, has an influence to influence the individuals involved, thus making reciprocity between them. Nasdian (2015), argues social interaction is a social intensity that directs how people act and interact with each other. Social interaction is the basis for the formation of structured social relationships, known as social structure. In addition, social interaction can also be understood as a social process in which individuals orient themselves towards others and respond to what others say and do. Nowadays, social interaction can be influenced by the development of internet technology (Hakiki, 2019). This interaction involving the internet can also be called virtual socialization. According to Amiretta (2022) Virtual interaction occurs when individuals communicate and relate to other individuals using digital communication technology devices, such as computers or gadgets connected to the internet, without having to meet physically.

As time progresses, virtual socialization is not only found in social media networks, but also experiences massive development within online games. This is due to the ease of accessing online games on various devices. Basically, online games are played by many people across different spaces and times. Therefore, online game players can socialize with their surrounding environment within the game, as there are components within the online gaming world that facilitate socialization and interaction among players. Besides for entertainment purposes, online games have now become a means to build social interactions with other players in the virtual world. Online games, especially on the Roblox platform, have become an increasingly significant digital interaction environment. This study aims to explore social interaction within the context of online gaming, specifically focusing on the Roblox platform. Roblox was first released in 2006 by the Roblox corporation company. According to Istiawan and Widyasari (2023), Roblox is an online gaming platform that offers thousands of different games and is played by players from all over the world. Roblox is a free online game with fascinating 3D visuals that lets users make their own worlds, set up adventures, and explore or play in other people's worlds

(Wardhana, 2021). With millions of players every day, it has developed into one of the biggest online gaming ecosystems (Du et al., 2021; Hardy et al., 2022). In the early 2010s, Roblox became quite popular, and in the mid to late 2010s, its growth accelerated, especially among kids and teenagers. Roblox's popularity increased drastically during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it emerged as a leading medium for social engagement and virtual enjoyment during periods of isolation and limitation. For many people, this made the platform one of the best options for virtual interaction and gaming exploration.

Roblox is an online game platform that let users create relationships with others. Players can interact socially virtually while playing together on Roblox. Interaction, particularly communication, is a crucial factor in the Roblox game because the Roblox game idea encourages players to connect effectively with one another in any mode. Roblox users can communicate with each other via sending messages through the chat column or by turning on the voice feature, which allows players to speak with each other directly. With chat and voice message tools for interaction, Roblox's gameplay experience can be enhanced and even optimized. The virtual social dynamics that result from this communication affect or produce several features, such as the player and the interactions between players or between players. The basis for this case study is these factors, with a particular focus on the effects of virtual social interactions in Roblox games.

While most of previous research on Roblox has focused on its economic systems, monetization possibilities, and virtual marketplace, this study adopts a different approach by examining the socialization aspect of the game. Roblox is more than simply a game platform; it's also a place where users can connect with one another and have online social interactions. Features such as voice messages and chat columns, which promote cooperation and virtual social dynamics among players, are examples of how the game's design actively promotes interaction.

This study examines these interaction instances to see how Roblox players' socializing, collaborating, and friendship-building abilities are impacted by communication and teamwork. This study shows how virtual interactions in Roblox help players form close friendships, develop teamwork, and change how they perceive social interactions in both virtual and real-world settings by reorienting the focus from economic factors to personal and social effects. Furthermore, this study sheds light on whether Roblox interactions are more entertaining or even addictive for gamers than socializing in real life.

In addition to addressing an important gap in the research, this study emphasizes the significance of looking at virtual platforms as venues for meaningful social interactions in an increasingly digital world by addressing the understudied aspect of socialization.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through direct observation within the game, enabling a direct capture of the dynamics of player interactions within it, sample of Roblox players was also taken through a questionnaire which contain several questions related to interaction and socialization. Data analysis

involved identifying key themes related to the influence of gaming on friendship building, cooperation, and emerging communication norms within the gaming community. According to Walidin, Saifullah, and Tabrani (2015), qualitative research is a research method that aims to understand human or social phenomena by creating a complete and complex picture. It is presented in the form of words, reports detailed views of informants, and is conducted in a natural setting. Qualitative research is an exploratory method that aims to find new ideas and insights, and can generate new theories. The focus is on specific and unique understanding, and does not necessarily seek to generalize findings to other contexts (Malik, 2013). This research conducted from March 30th to May 7th 2024. An online questionnaire survey (using Google forms) was used as a platform to question factors related to virtual social interaction in Roblox. The questions asked is relating to playing frequency (i.e., how often someone playing), playing enjoyment, social skills, friendship, teamwork, and compare between online and offline interaction. The questionnaire is targeted at Roblox game users to obtain more specific data. However, the question form does not include details about the players' backgrounds, such as gender, education level, or how long the respondents have been involved with Roblox, making the obtained data more general or overall.

C. RESULTS

Results

From direct observational results, researches identified two forms of interaction that occur within the game. These interaction forms were observed by watching informants during their interactions with others in game.

a. Two-way Interaction

Below are the examples from Roblox of Two-way interaction:



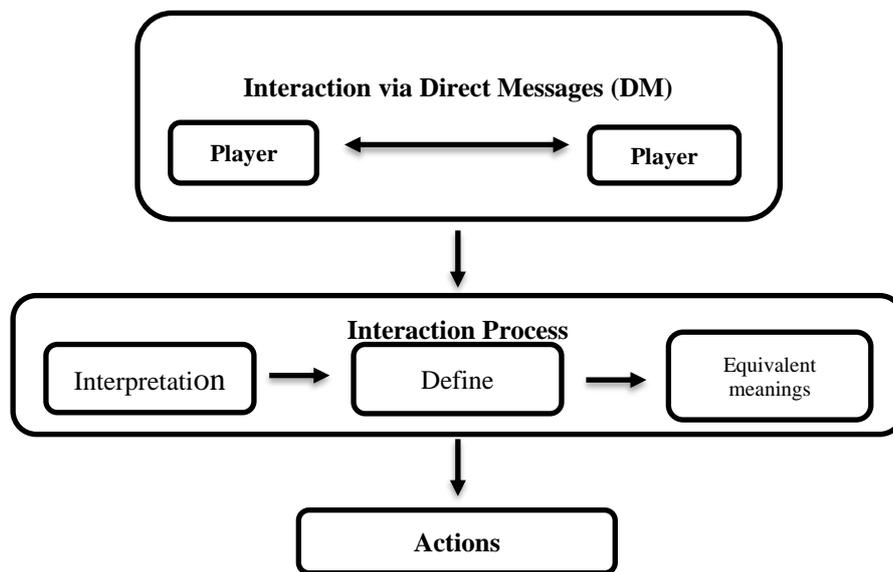
Figure 1. Roblox: a dusty trip



Figure 2. Roblox DM's

Figure 1 shows a conversation between two players in the Roblox game called "a dusty trip." One of them did not carry the transformation gun, a device that changes stuff into food, thus they are unable to reach the farthest point, which is 25,000 meters, at which point the dialog begins. Both of them dead from starvation while traveling without this important tool. This instance emphasizes the value of cooperation and planning in the game by demonstrating how even a minor error can result in failure. The distinctive and imaginative mechanics of "a dusty trip," which make the game both difficult and captivating for players, are also highlighted.

In Figure 2, on the other hand, a player uses Roblox's DM (Direct Message) feature to ask another player about an item called the "Biome Randomizer." Found in the game "Sol's RNG," this item is used to change the biome within the game, and the first player is determining whether the second player has it or not. This interaction illustrates the social aspect of Roblox, where players can communicate directly to share resources and knowledge, as well as how certain tools, like the "Biome Randomizer," can affect gameplay and strategy. Both figures capture the combination of creativity, teamwork, and social interaction that characterizes the Roblox gaming experience.



Source: *Pola Interaksi Antar-Gamers Dalam Game Online*, by Cornelius Ardiantino Setiawan, 2014.

This form of interaction indicates that interpersonal interaction requires a process of interpretation, defining, and performing actions that should be done after the interaction between individuals. The characteristic of this two-way form is the presence of privacy in interaction. The privacy referred to here is the freedom to speak with other players. Interaction patterns in this form involve the use of language. Language use is highly diverse, considering that this interaction is only between two players, so regional languages are often used in this interaction. The use of the Indonesian language in this interaction is employed when communicating with unfamiliar players or players from different regions.

b. Multi-directional Interaction

Below are the examples from Roblox of Multi-directional interaction:



Figure 3. Roblox: Funky Friday

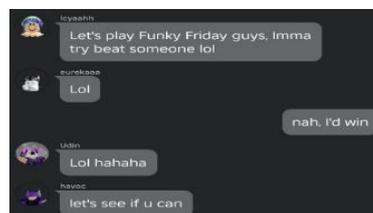
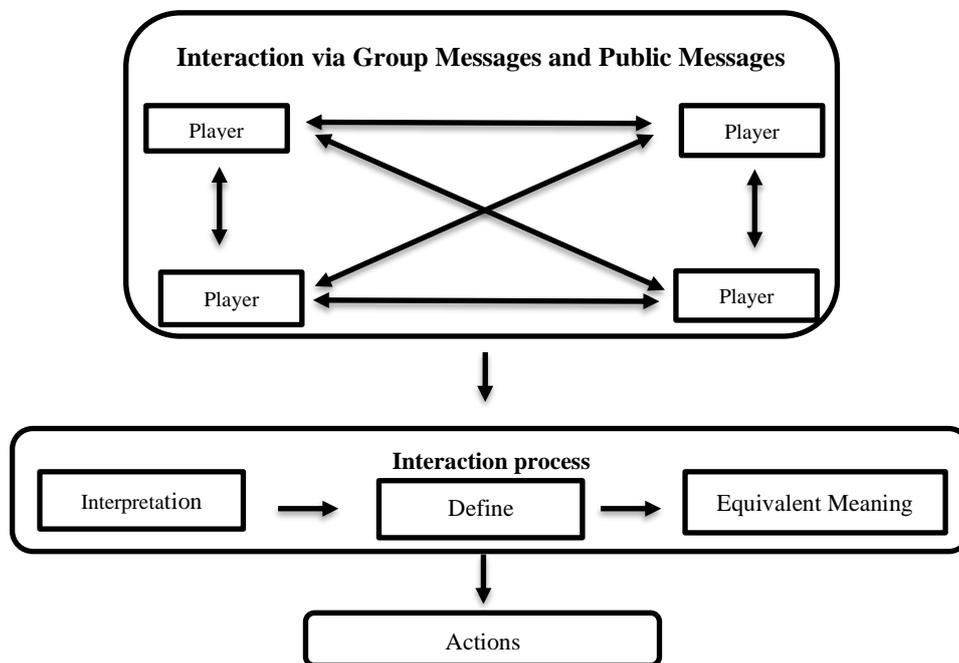


Figure 4. Roblox DM's

Figure 3 shows friends interacting in Roblox's "Funky Friday," a rhythm-based game. A friend explains how he scored the 15-minute song "Omnipresent" perfectly. That friend receives congratulations from the other three friends for their amazing achievement. One even expresses amazement by stating that it is rare for someone to receive a perfect score on a song that is so difficult. Players not only compete but also celebrate one other's victories in this setting, which emphasizes the social aspect of the game and fosters a strong sense of solidarity and group support.

In Figure 4, on the other hand, a player invites friends from a group DM to play "Funky Friday" by using the DM (Direct Message) feature. The group DM operates as a closed system, allowing only newly recruited players to engage in the conversation. Another aspect of Roblox's social characteristics is highlighted by this exchange, which shows how the direct message system promotes communication between groups as well as between individuals. Both figures clearly highlight how "Funky Friday" and Roblox provide chances for both competition and cooperation, fostering closer relationships between players and enhancing the game experiences.



Source: *Pola Interaksi Antar-Gamers Dalam Game Online*, by Comelius Ardiantino Setiawan, 2014.

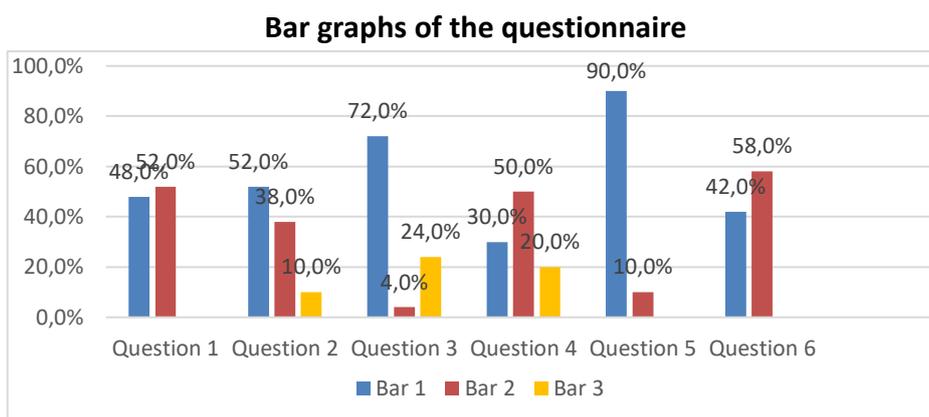
In this form of interaction, gamers not only engage in two-way interactions with other players but can also engage in multi-directional interactions simultaneously with other players. Building relationships within a group is very different from building personal relationships; building relationships within a group requires careful consideration in communication to avoid misunderstandings among gamers.

The characteristic of this interaction form is that a player will receive various responses from other players. An example pattern of interaction within the game is when a player asks how to fight in survival mode, other players B, C, and D respond

to the question by providing tips; B, C, and D appear dominant as they provide a lot of information to player A. Interactions between groups do not represent a player representing a group to interact with another group; players are free to interact with other groups as needed.

Questioner Analysis

Fifty respondents answered the questions provided in the questionnaire. The information regarding gender, age, or other background details was not disclosed. However, one thing is certain: all respondents are online game enthusiasts who, on average, have been actively involved in the online gaming world for quite some time. This was done to ensure that the research results obtained through the questionnaire are free from the influence of players backgrounds and focus on the relevance of the research object.



Based on the graphics above, here are the explanation. Question 1: Frequency Play; Roblox was seen as potentially addictive by some gamers. The results highlighted the potential addictiveness of more than half participant in Roblox as viewed by the players them-selves. The social interaction, competition, and the in-game tasks were some of the triggers to addiction according to these players. About 26 people or 52% answered the question of how often they play Roblox, they answered often because Roblox has thousands of different games that can be played, such as adventure games, role-playing games, puzzle games and others. Meanwhile, around 24 people or 48% answered that they rarely play games because they play Roblox when there is free time in a busy schedule.

Question 2: Players Enjoyment; About 26 people or 52% said playing Roblox was very fun, because by playing Roblox they could express their creativity by creating unique and interesting virtuals. By playing Roblox, players could also interact with other people and make new friends. Meanwhile, around 19 people or 38% said playing Roblox was quite fun, the remaining 5 people or 10% said playing Roblox was not fun, it may be due to some technical issues such as lag, connection problems, or bugs in the game, it may also be that some players do not feel satisfied with the available game features or feel that Roblox does not meet their expectations. In addition, some players find the game's difficulty level or challenges difficult to complete.

Although there are negative aspects, playing games like Roblox is generally a positive experience, and the emotions involved are part of the enjoyment, not a deterrent for players returning (Bopp et al., 2016). Reviews such as Caroux and Pujol (2024), Mekler et al (2014), Segundo Díaz et al (Segundo Díaz et al., 2022), and Schaffer & Fang (2019), have detailed the results of extensive studies showing that enjoyment can be influenced by various game design elements of in-game content (e.g., difficulty, rewards, story), input/output data (e.g., interface, sounds), and multiplayer aspects (e.g., cooperation/competition, co-player nature). There are many hidden gems in Roblox that gamers can find tranquility in. These titles can allow players to travel to whimsical islands with vibrant greenery, visit calm libraries full of soothing stories, and even settle down in cozy apartments in virtual cities. Whatever the premise, these relaxing Roblox games are sure to provide calming and stress-free experiences for all who choose to dive in.

Question 3: Social Skills; With its game creation system genre and massively multiplayer online capabilities, Roblox has become a platform for facilitating virtual interactions through various modes it offers. It also enables players to interact with each other via chat or voice chat to assist in gameplay. Thirty-six people (72%) stated that Roblox helped improve their social interaction skills, like the way to interact with other players, and building cooperative conversation with other players as a stranger.

Meanwhile 12 people (24%) did not notice any improvement at their social skills, mainly caused they do not find the interaction in online games have significant effect to their real-life social skills. The remaining 2 people (4%) out of 50 said that Roblox did not play any role in enhancing their social interaction skills, they didn't feel Roblox useful to help them increase their social skills.

Additionally, cultivating social relationships is sometimes more important than about what the game is about or what the results are. Many participants from the study conducted by Buyukozturk & Shay (2024) report that the most important factor when playing games is togetherness experience, regardless of the platform offline or online. The game itself is just an excuse for that spending time together. Playing certain types of games can result in higher levels of perception social connectedness.

Question 4: Friendship; Seventy percent of participants said they made more than three friends through Roblox, with half of the majority (50%) stating they made quite a few, and 10 people (20%) claiming they made many friends on the platform and the remaining 15 people (30%) made fewer than three friends on Roblox. This indicates that Roblox has become a platform that allows players to build friendships, even though the number of these friendships is less than three.

Meanwhile, when answering questions about the intensity of friendships formed through Roblox, sixteen people (32%), or about one-third of the participants, reported that the friendships formed on Roblox were intense, in the level where they can or tend to interact comfortably, discuss matters, and even share personal thoughts outside the context of the game. Twenty-six people, or more than half of the participants, acknowledged that the friendships formed on Roblox felt comfortable with regular

message exchanges, though not to the extent of sharing personal thoughts as the previous percentage indicated. The remaining 8 participants (16%) did not feel any intensity in the friendships formed on Roblox.

Anyone can play Roblox, regardless of age. First, each player selects and gives an avatar a personality. After that, they can explore Roblox and engage in social interaction by playing games, chatting, or working together on creative projects. The objective of the game is to encourage player interaction and friendship. This is accomplished by exploring the virtual environment and stopping to converse with other users. The nature of a friendship, or the sense of familiarity, trust, and understanding that exists between friends, is one of its most important characteristics (Mesch, 2019).

Question 5: Teamwork; Ninety percent of participants believe that Roblox games can help improve teamwork. Among them, a significant portion (90%) stated that they experienced noticeable improvements in their ability to collaborate with others while playing these games. Specifically, 45 respondents mentioned that their understanding of team dynamics and coordination had greatly improved. They emphasized that Roblox games enhanced their problem-solving skills in a team context, they also became better at managing conflicts and negotiating solutions with team members during gameplay.

On the other hand, 10% of the respondents (5 participants) disagreed with the statement that Roblox games help improve teamwork. These individuals expressed that the casual and often competitive nature of the games did not contribute to significant teamwork skill development. When considering the overall impact of Roblox games on teamwork, 5 participants (10%) felt that the teamwork experiences in the game were directly transferable to real-life scenarios, involving detailed planning and coordination. They acknowledged the presence of teamwork but felt it was less formal and more about casual cooperation rather than structured team activities.

In Roblox, teamwork enables players to achieve shared objectives more successfully. Players must help each other, share responsibilities, and communicate. For example, in "a dusty trip (Figure 1)," players work together to plan their strategy and reach the longest distance without failing. Working as a team not only improves the odds of winning but also imparts useful skills like coordination and communication. The concepts of "reason" and "victory" for the team were primarily understood in terms of rapid gameplay, with an emphasis on outlasting the opposition and solving problems quickly (Riivari et al., 2021).

Question 6: Online Versus Offline Interaction; While it is getting to be progressively clear that there's a continuum between online and offline play, this does not mean that there are no substantial refinements between them. When comparing offline and online play, the only notable distinction arises in terms of social connectedness (Janicsák, 2024). As Boellstorff (2008) proposes, engaging in online activity is subjectively different from offline activity. There are self-evident methodology contrasts. Manipulating an avatar isn't the same as exploring one's physical body through space. In any case, there are covers between online and offline personalities.

In this context, we gave a question whether social interactions in the Roblox world are perceived as more fun than those in the real world. Forty-two percent of participants feel that social interactions in the Roblox world are more enjoyable. Among them, a significant portion (42%) stated that they enjoyed the immersive and interactive nature of Roblox. Specifically, 21 respondents mentioned that the ability to meet a diverse range of people and the creative aspects of virtual interactions made their social experiences on Roblox more enjoyable. They emphasized that Roblox allowed them to engage in unique activities and adventures that are not possible in the real world.

On the other hand, 58% of the respondents (29 participants) disagreed with the statement that social interactions in the Roblox world are more fun than in the real world. These individuals expressed those real-world interactions are more fulfilling due to the value of face-to-face communication and physical presence. When considering the overall quality of social experiences, 29 participants (58%) felt that real-world interactions provided more meaningful connections and richer social cues that virtual environments cannot fully replicate. They acknowledged the fun and engaging aspects of Roblox but felt that it lacked the depth and authenticity of real-life social interactions.

Discussion

The two main types of social interactions that take place on the Roblox platform are identified in this study as two-way interaction and multi-directional interaction patterns. The privacy of two-way interaction is its defining feature. It often occurs via direct messages (DMs), in which players communicate in several types of languages that are both sides may understand. On the other hand, multi-directional interaction allows for simultaneous responses from several individuals and requires deeper communication, including group discussions. These interaction patterns are supported by factors like information requirements and improved communication features.

The findings of this study are aligned with previous studies. Griffiths et al. (2012) shown that MMORPG encourages social interactions based on player demographics, such as age and gender. This was agreed by our research, however we excluded player backgrounds to give a greater understanding of interaction patterns. Unlike MMORPGs, Roblox offers a more dynamic and player-controlled social environment without specific roles and narratives. This distinction could be responsible for the more diverse patterns of interaction seen in Roblox.

This research also provides a new perspective to Hardy et al.'s (2022) study into Roblox's virtual economy and marketing dominance. This study builds on Roblox's reputation as a platform for both enjoyment and the development of social skills, collaboration, and close friendships by focusing on in-game social interactions.

The findings also reflect a study by Kowert et al. (2014) that showed how playing video games online increases social connections and a sense of belonging. This is demonstrated by the study's findings, which show that most participants improved their social skills and formed lasting relationships while playing Roblox. Roblox's imagination and

interactivity often result in special social experiences when compared to social media or other online games.

Critical Analysis

In a time of developing digitization, it is important that this study emphasizes virtual interactions that construct imagination and teamwork. In this case, many respondents admitted that the depth of connections shaped in real life isn't totally replaced by interactions in Roblox. This suggests that real interactions are still essential for creating stronger emotional bonds, indeed in spite of the fact that online games are effective social tools.

Roblox is additionally surprising for its capacity to offer an opportunity for cross-regional and cross-cultural discussion and cultural request. The proficiency of social interactions can be affected by issues like social misunderstandings and the nonappearance of non-verbal clues that happen due to depending too much on communication tools like group chats and direct messages.

Practical Implications

These findings have critical impacts. The research strengthens the value of interactive features that promote cooperation and communication especially for game developers. Platforms like Roblox may be used by educators as an educational tool to help students improve their social abilities, such as collaboration. For example, group-based tasks or the chat column may be improved for agreeable learning tasks.

D. CONCLUSION

The needs of players in the online game Roblox drive them to interact with other players. The forms of interaction that occur in Roblox can be divided into two forms: two-way interaction and multi-way interaction patterns. The characteristic of the first form of interaction is the privacy between two players through direct messages (DMs). Another characteristic of two-way interaction patterns is that players can use regional languages as long as the interlocutor understands that language, not limited to just Bahasa Indonesia. Multi-way interaction forms have characteristics where they involve interaction patterns where conversations from multiple players can give responses to each other. Factors influencing the occurrence of multi-way interaction forms include the need for player information with various optional answers, allowing players to draw conclusions from the various answers obtained from other players. Another factor driving this interaction pattern is player boredom during gameplay, thus utilizing group messages and public messages features or activating voice chat to converse.

In addition to these two forms of interaction, the online game Roblox makes players feel enjoyment, helps improve cooperation, especially within teams, builds new friendships based on data showing a relatively high intensity where players can comfortably chat with each other, and enhances players' social skills by practicing conversations with strangers within Roblox. However, interactions in the online game Roblox still cannot be compared with those in the real world, especially in terms of enjoyment. Although the difference is

small, the average playing intensity still shows a safe limit and does not lead to addiction, maintaining a healthy relationship.

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