

# *Social Norms in Virtual Worlds of Computer Games*

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**Abstract**—Immersing in the virtual world of the Internet, information and communication technologies are changing the human being. In spite of the apparent similarity of on-line and off-line, social laws of their existence are different. According to the analysis of games, based on the violation of the accepted laws of the world off-line, their censoring, as well as the cheating, features of formation and violations of social norms in virtual worlds were formulated. Although the creators of the games have priority in the standardization of the virtual world, society as well as players can have impact on it to reduce the realism. The violation of the prescribed rules by a player is regarded as cheating. And it is subjected to sanctions, but the attitude toward it is ambiguous, sometimes positive. Some rules are formed as a result of the interaction between players.

**Keywords**—social norm; videogame; internet; cheat code.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays people are increasingly immersed in the virtual space of the Internet. The activities of people in various spheres of life, from the economy to the entertainment, are increasingly in need of information and communication technologies. The general trend of information concerns all areas of life [1, p. 57 - 58]. Spihunova, Rabosh, Soldatov & Deniskov note that today the solution of any professional task turns into a dialog between human and computer [2]. The Internet space seems to be the logical continuation of the physical world, but it is the different nature of changes and social laws of existence. This is especially noticeable in the area created by the game worlds, in the areas of least dependent on the physical world. The author [3, p. 378] noted that the “virtual structure increasingly separates human from the external environment in favor of autonomously constructed world of meanings and interpretations”. [4] note the changes that are taking place with the personality type in at the post-industrial stage of society development.

The game is becoming an important part of life. Moreover Timermanis, Ivanov, Zamorev & Smaragdina [5] point out that modern man assumed his own life to be a certain role-playing game, in which participation does not require any responsibility and shall deliver only pleasure.

## II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to determine what social norms operate in virtual worlds and how they can be shaped and violated. The study is based on an analysis of popular games with destructive behavior, prohibitions and censoring games at

the country level, methods of intervention in the game structure and other ways of player cheating.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Virtual worlds of computer games are something known as something opposite to real world. Virtual world is not opposite to physical world, and the changing off-line is not only to meet the unsatisfied desires. However, if some wish to grow pink ponies, others want to risk and to have an excitement of prohibited.

An important point is that a purpose and rules of a game either explicitly or implicitly specifies by a demiurge. Social norms of unvirtual reality do not play any role in the construction. On the contrary, a violation of generally accepted social norms can be particularly attractive to players. And the purpose of a game may be the most cunning virtual crime. For example, the popular game series Grand Theft Auto San Andreas offers various missions in criminal groups: murder, theft, hijacking, drug trafficking, etc. The stealth horror Manhunt presents the game of survival, where the player is evaluated on the basis of the entertainments of murders. There is even a Japanese game RapeLay, a simulator of rape.

Deviant behavior implies an infringement of someone's rights, while the virtual behavior, relicating the crimes off-line, for example, an embezzlement and adestruction of virtual objects, does not bring any damage. Due to this difference in virtual and physical world, even popular children games contain destructive activities and embezzlement. For example, in the game Talking Tom Gold Run the protagonist embezzles gold from the robber.

The first legislator of norms is the creator of the game, which determines the laws of game building. Šisler proposes to understand the game code as a social norm determining the behavior of the players [6]. The rules are recognized as one of the main game elements, but very few definitions specify what "rules" are [7]. “Every game has its rules”, says Huizinga in Homo Ludens. But we may go further, and say “Every game is its rules”, for they are what define it. [8]. Von Neumann and Morgenstern [9, p. 49] write: “The rules of the game [. . .] are absolute commands. If they are ever infringed, then the whole transaction by definition ceases to be the game are described by those rules.”

However, if the player was not provided a certain percentage of freedom, the game would become a movie. That

is why a player determines himself acceptable rules of conduct. Here is an intrapersonal moral dilemma or a conflict between real and virtual identities. Whether a player is ready to allow the character, whom he plays, to make asocial unacceptable actions. The relationship between an avatar and a person is a special issue. As noted in [10, p. 220] an avatar is a representation that is neither fact nor fiction, interacting with humans yet on different evolutionary and ontological levels, thus virtually disembodied. Moreover, in [11] it is proposed to examine a player as “a cyborg, but also that of the player-subjectivity as hybrid between the real-world player, her in-game identities and the programming of the machine itself” [11, p. 168].

Although modern player easily overcomes a moral problem of inconsistencies in the network and in the off-line world refusing from games, which are not suitable. Nevertheless, such a problem can occur when, for example, murder is not the game purpose, but only one of the possibilities that facilitate the achievement of objectives.

However, the foregoing does not mean that virtual worlds have autonomous social norms dictated by the demiurge and used by players in a small range of freedom. It is clear that social norms of an off-line world cannot have influence on virtual worlds, but the public sometimes can affect the freedom of demiurge lawmaking. The relationship between social norms of on- and off-line are rather contradictory.

Restrictions (as well as ratings, designed to limit the audience distribution) in the games had arisen only with the increasing realism of virtual worlds. Even the first primitive computer games can be described as games containing violence and destruction, but a serious occasion to think about the game rules became the popularity of realistic first-person shooter Doom in 1993. Nowadays, the determination of whether the game is dangerous to society and should be changed or allowed is based on the subjective opinions. A radical solution to the problem found in Greece, where all electronic games in public places are prohibited.

The first cause of public censure became bloody games, which began to be linked with the murders committed by teenagers. The virtual killing in games as well as theft or hooliganism does not imply damage to people, even if it is multi-player games and real people stand for a character of an opponent. However, scientific debates and press about whether the behavior infringing social norms in the virtual world will influence the behavior of off-line is becoming more and more active since 2000. And the degree of agreement between researchers is very low: only approximately 10-39.5% [12]. The work [13, p. 33] indicates that “the observation of the effect video game violence rather speculative and hypothetical than being built on a solid base of scientific evidence”.

There are studies denying the influence of aggressive passion of the games on the manifestation of cruelty in the real world (e.g., [14]), and even indicating that violent games have a positive social impact for today's youth [15]. Nevertheless, the public pay attention to the virtual world, if a young killer and hijackers explain their actions as a desire to check whether it is easy to steal a taxi or kill a person in real life as in the

GTA. In [16] the author pay attention to the relationship between moral disengagement and communication behavior of on- and off-line. The researchers confirmed that individuals high in moral disengagement might view reprehensible behaviors in a video game as acceptable or justifiable and that this might leak over to the real world [16, p. 6].

It is impossible to impose sanctions for killing in video games. It contradicts the logic of their creation, as there is no way of removing them from the virtual worlds. Censorship in some countries has taken the path of change in video games. Murders became less realistic, for example, the lack of blood, no possibility of taking money from dead people, the replacing of enemies with the monsters or robots, the disappearance of the dead and etc.). And it is impossible to show the bones and blood in China. That is why numerous games with zombies and skeletons, even drawings on cards with a skull, are subjected to changes.

The game is often prohibited or subjected to censorship in the country, whose inhabitants are killed and persecuted in the game. For this reason, South Korea banned one of the parts of a series of Splinter Cell; in the Islamic Republic of Iran banned the game Battlefield 3, where the siege of Tehran by armed forces of the USA is presented; in Russia from Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 one level, where terrorists shot civilians in Moscow airport, was removed.

However, it also happens that the game plot is so asocial, that is why it is censored. For example, the game Twisted Metal: Black, where the game of survival is proposed to murderers and maniacs living in the madhouse with its own history, came out without videoclips and text messages of characters. Therefore, this completely deprives the game plot.

In addition, a similarity of video games with important and “painful” historical events of the country or culture peculiarities can cause the censorship. In Germany, for instance, the Wolfenstein lost the swastika; the soldiers started speaking English; the name of the enemy was changed (the “Mode” instead of “Nazis”); and Hitler was replaced by Staatmeister. Only in 2018 in Germany the Special Commission was created to deal with the question of the use of the Nazi symbolism without censorship if it is “socially justified.” In Japan the quest Megaton was completely removed. There players can blow up the bomb in populous cities. In Russia, the Company of Heroes 2 was removed from sale due to the representation of the Soviet soldiers as well as their own compatriots as ruthless murderers in World War II. In the Arab Emirates Injustice: Gods Among Us is prohibited because of the plural form of the word God. In addition, there the Pokemon was banned because of the indecent use of religious symbols, the propaganda of Zionism, blasphemy, the support of prohibited Darwin theory. There are cases of game accusations because of racism, which may well be the main idea (Ethnic Cleansing), but may be spurious due to the shooting of black zombies (Resident Evil 5).

In the USA, not destructive behavior is often subjected to censorship, but erotic scenes. Young heroines in frank dresses from Japanese games change their attire in America. Also, the Chinese heroines are submitted to special changes.

Censorship focuses on illegal substances and hooligan actions in the games. For example, in Australia *Fallout 3* was denied in the classification due to the presence of a drug, which increases the possibility of a player and is similar to the real analogue. In Denmark EA Sports MMA was banned because of the refusal to take away the advertising of power engineers from ultimate fighting. In Brazil the *Bully* game is prohibited. There the difficult adolescent lives orgiastically in a boarding school. In Australia the game Marc Ecko's *Getting Up* was even banned because the main character is improving in the graffiti on the city streets.

The question of what not to do in the games remains open. The outrage at the prohibition of more "innocent" games seems logical while bloody shooters are allowed everywhere (with a limit on age). Analyzing the banned games, it can be concluded that the elements of games, which are closely in contact with the world of off-line, often are subjected to censorship. That is why hooliganism in the urban landscape or bullying at school attracts more attention than the mass shootings of aliens. New technologies of augmented reality broke down boundaries between virtual and real worlds. It is likely that the development of technologies can make this brink undetectable for people. According to the understanding of pressure on virtual world creators in order to reduce the game realism, it is easier to explain the prohibition, for example, in the Islamic Republic of Iran such games like *Pokemon Go*, *Clash of Clans* (for a limited period), *Travian* (for a limited period), *Grand Theft Auto*, *Battle field*, *Warframe*, and *World of Warcraft* [17]. However, now there is a trend toward a sale permission of some games banned for a long time. In Germany the ban on *Doom* and *Doom2* was lifted with free sale. In Brazil the ban on *Bully* was lifted.

It is clear that changes in rules created by game authors require serious leverage, which are available only to well-organized public company or special commissions of countries. This brings up the question: is it possible to break the rules established by the game creators by ordinary players. The practice shows that the development of the game universe can go not according to the scenario of creators. The designers such as Richard Garriott learned that when launching *Ultima Online*, the game "wasn't his anymore, and it wasn't right for him to try to control its population. Here the players had free will; they had control over their own environment and destiny. The puppets had cut their strings and taken over their world." [18, p. 162]. Players sometimes find opportunities unintended by creators and receive the benefits due to the unaccounted effects. For example, in *Diablo II* the opportunities to deliver the final blow on someone else's battle and o loot the corpse were found.

By definition [19], cheating "is the advantageous distortion of perceived reality. The advantage falls to the cheater because the cheated person misperceives what is assumed to be the real world." Norm violation is possible due to the help of intervention programs and macros modifying the game parameters (cheat codes, trainers, special bots, cheat cartridge, etc.). This often is about an instant acquisition of useful properties and abilities of the character that help achieve game purposes (for example, immortality, the passage through walls, the possession of weapon arsenal). Also, a cheat codes

can change surroundings, for example, weather, current time or gravity force. It is interesting that something is inviolable natural laws for an off-line world and only accepted norms for an on-line world.

It must be stressed that cheat codes (unlike the trainers and Memory editing hardware) are created by the game authors to allow designers or reviewers to test the various game sections without the need to pass the entire game from the beginning. In this way we have the situation, in which demiurges give the law on rule violation to selected people, not to ordinary users. There are the mode so-called "God" implying immortality and other bonuses in some games. At the same time, the game authors remain calm concerning the use of cheat codes in the single-player video game. They sometimes speak ironically about players trying to apply codes from past games, when a comic message appears as a response to the code (for example, the code "divine mode" of *Doom* (IDDQD) does not work in *Doom 3*, but creates a console message "Your memory serves you well" or the effect of the opposite desired (for example, instead of increasing energy a decreasing happens).

Game rule violation is sometimes possible for complications or changes of game plot. For example, you can make dinosaurs "undead" in the *Jurassic Park*. In *GTA San Andreas* players can make all bystanders attack or turn them into elves. There is a cheat code, offering additional technical features: to communicate with other players, to change the detailing level of surrounding, screen resolution, the sensitivity of the mouse. Thus, demiurges sometimes accept the opportunity to use codes by players and create them for the game adaptation under the requirements. In games some modifications are permitted. They change force balance (in strategic games) or a set of weapons and the character possibility and sometimes allow to create your own game levels.

However, the issue of social norms is particularly acute in the case when there is more than one person in the game space. Here, the use of cheat codes leads to the unequivocal victory over players not violating rules, so game authors struggle with it. At many playgrounds you can make purchases using the game currency of real money, which, of course, also stimulates to the imposition of sanctions for rule violations. The sanctions for violation may be different: from resetting or decreasing earned points, blocking access to the table records or possibility preservation to block a player, that is, the highest penalty in the game space. For example, in *Space Rangers* players lost their rank in the General table of achievements and appear in a special list of cheaters; in *Spore* when using cheat codes the award "sharper" is given and an access to other rewards is blocked; in the *Tyrian* the message "Cheaters always prosper" on the bottom of the score screen appears; in *Metal Fatigue* message such players get the message "(player name) is cheating like a slimy rat!") However, the peculiarities of virtual reality allow to create new characters. In fact, it is the destruction of all existing player achievements and bonus points earned in this virtual world. Designers sometimes try to block players forever calculating it on the basis of the Equipment ID or IP addresses, which, of course, are not universal identification means. Special game community are created (E-Sports

Entertainment Association League (ESEA) and Face-It). There banned cheaters are constantly monitored. Legislative implications of deception in the games are introduced in South Korea only.

Players try to struggle with dishonest opponents particularly publishing lists of cheaters on the game forums and appealing to the gaming administration. Game authors allow players to solve particular players to be kicked for cheating (for example, in the patch to the Hatless).

The concept of cheating applies to artificial intelligence in video games implying that it is based on the information, which is not available to an ordinary player (for example, the position of the opponent).

Cheating may be associated not with the interference into the internal game structure, but with the change in the bundle of individual-avatar. In this regard, gaps or changes are created by a substitute player or a creation of multiple characters. The term “boosting” is used. It means that a player gives his account to a skilled practitioner to upgrade the rating or plays against the same account deliberately succumbing. It is interesting than a person can leave artificial intelligence (bots) instead of himself in the game for routine actions to get more necessary goods (for example, fishing, mining, farming).

The attitude toward cheating can be different. M. Consalvo distinguishes 3 types of players: purists, who view cheating as the use of any external source; the moderates, who use walk-throughs and guides the acceptable as aids; and hardcore players, feel that you cannot cheat a game (or its makers), the only other players [20]. As in the study of the [...] it has been found that a number of players understand a rule violation as external programs to change the game itself, but not intentionally to design the game authors. Even more an interesting phenomenon is when a cheat usually becomes a norm if it is used in the game for a long time [21, p. 279]. Also, the study [20] notes that cheating is used by players disappointed at long boring episodes. They wish to take revenge on someone or feel that cheating is too extended and that it would be meaningful to play honestly [20, p. 101].

Limiting willfulness of players with multi-player games, players are forced to agree to the license agreement. In many MMORPG accounts in online-games belong to the designers, so they cannot transfer or sell. But in the user agreement in the World of Tanks, it is said that since the publication of the exclusive rights to intellectual property objects become the property of the company.

The opportunity to earn real money in games caused the cheating associated with foreign account capture, virtual values, etc. It is similar to theft in the off-line world. However, today the state regulation of existence norms in virtual worlds is extremely limited. The legal status of virtual objects has not been yet determined. They can sometimes be regarded as additional services provided by game distributors. There has been a trend of virtual object recognition as a property and a relevant judicial protection in Asian countries only. In China the virtual law as a program part has actively developed to build the industry selling virtual property. In Taiwan in 2011, the classification of virtual objects is fixed as a property in the

legal sense. In South Korea in 2003, the police began to actively consider applications on the virtual crimes, most of which concerned the theft of game objects or accounts.

As the multiplayer virtual worlds involve social interaction of players, the appearance of their behavior norms seems logical. Some game norms can be quite specific. However, the general rules concerning, for example, the exit from the world, are formed. An etiquette violation is usually considered to leave the world before the end of the round or mission. In addition, it is expected the phrase “good game” or “gg” before leaving from losers. And the 9.3 version of the game World of Tanks have even the penalties for premature exit from the battlefield. The rules concern communications that may be similar to a normal virtual communication, for example, the text written in large letters and considered as a cry violates a peaceful communication.

On the other hand, many types of behavior are evaluated ambiguously. For example, camping (i.e., the game from a beneficial gaming position) is sometimes seen as cheating, but in other cases, as a worthy game strategy.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The main source of norms in virtual world is their creator. However, it can be under pressure to reduce realism. It happens when the conduct of Avatar is extremely destructive concerning to the offline world.

The players also interfere in the game structure in accordance with their own desires. Players can violate the rules or the software tools by changing some game settings to facilitate the game passage or to play to professionals or bots for themselves. The attitude toward cheating is ambiguous. In multiplayer games a deception leads to the advantage over honest players. Hence, a variety of sanctions is created to protect the sanctity of the rules established by the demiurge. The source of certain norms serves as the social interaction in game involving some communication rules of and virtual world wishes.

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