

## Games & Gaming in the Digital and Social Media Track

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### Abstract

*Now in its fifth year, the Games & Gaming minitrack offers a space in the Digital and Social Media track at HICSS to examine social interactions that are mediated via digital games. Not just spaces of leisure, games are an important part of the human experience and the research presented in this minitrack demonstrates how they often mirror larger social issues. Games and play deeply reflect who we are as human beings, and the research here continues to explore many issues of interest to a wide scholarly audience.*

### 1. Games & Gaming

At the time of publishing we will be about one year into the global coronavirus pandemic. Video conferencing “virtual” holiday dinners and happy hours have replaced social gatherings that would have previously been face-to-face. In-person and/or offline gaming, such as tabletop games or sitting around a living room with a group of friends playing a console game are not good ideas at the moment. However, when shelter-in-place mandates prevent us gathering with others outside of our household bubble, networked digital games still provide a way we can still play and be social, even in the age of physical distancing.

As we look to new ways to help pass the time we spend indoors, we are re-discovering previously beloved games. One game that has recently reemerged and garnered some attention as a playful respite from Zoom-fatigue is *Among Us*, a team-based murder and mayhem mystery set on a spaceship. We look forward to the papers focused on *Among Us* that are currently in progress, and expect to see the game well-represented in next year's Games & Gaming program. Other games have adapted somewhat to the pandemic: *Pokémon GO* has added masks that players can make their avatars wear, much like we should wear masks when we venture outside our bubble. As a geolocation-based

game, players must venture out into the world to capture monsters and collaborate with others to attack player-controlled gyms—while now maintaining six feet distance from others. To allow for easier social distancing when crossing paths with players outside of their quarantine bubble, Niantic Inc. (the game's developer) has increased the distance that players can stand away from gyms and accomplish this task.

In recent decades, our playfulness and gaming have greatly expanded in terms of the objects we use for games and the reach we have to play with others—with computers, smart phones, and the internet, we play with people from around the world, perhaps partially in the real world or perhaps with purely digital objects. Games are solo, multiplayer, and massively multiplayer. Some games have playtime of a few minutes, others can take hours per session across years of play. Some games are free, others suggest, allow, or require an economic investment beyond the time spent. Some are played privately, while others are streamed to thousands of viewers around the world.

Digital devices and global connectedness allow for greater reach of play across lives, across geography, and for research opportunities. Digital traces can be analyzed with big data approaches, traditional statistics, or qualitative methods. Data about games from outside the game space, such as postings to game-related Reddit boards, can be scraped and analyzed. Data shows the good humans can achieve, such as coordinating with strangers, but also the bad, such as online harassment. As such, games and gaming are an important aspect of digital and social media research.

Our lineup of papers this year cover a range of topics and use a range of approaches. Sadly, as with every other conference at the moment, presentations will be done remotely: socializing with a coffee will have to be carried out over Zoom.

Research favorite *Pokémon GO* returns to HICSS once more, exploring why we love this game so much. Another player favorite, *Fortnite*, makes its debut with us, exploring how the technology builds

what players interpret as a spatial, social, and material (albeit digital) world.

Other research this year looks at team communication, but instead of over time between friends we have a study of team communication in a one-off encounter. Continuing with situations where there is a lack of interaction, one paper studies players who leave games and why.

We have research on game jams, where games are created over a few days by a few dedicated individuals, although we may have to wait until game jams can be face-to-face again.

Streaming, a topic of much interest for its social aspects, also returns to HICSS, with research on streaming trends and also how women in Southeast Asia control their presentation in a global medium where they are distinctly in the minority, both numerically and in terms of power and perception.

Despite the pandemic, people continue to play, and with digital technologies players continue to be social in a multitude of ways.