

In Search for Cuteness: Interactive Discovery and Play in Times of Pandemic

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This study presents analysis of young children's information perception and seeking behaviors in the context of popular Nintendo Animal Crossing New Horizon (ACNH) video game. Finding of this study is based on analysis of 15 in-depth qualitative interviews with children aged between 9-12. The interviewer used a semi-structured interview protocol based on a review of research on video gaming and children use of new media (e.g., Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). For background information, the researcher participated in several social media groups dedicated to parents and Animal Crossing New Horizon players. The interview covered three key areas: (1) children's perceptions of the game; (2) children's interactions with their friends while playing the game; and (3) children's game related information seeking. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes and was video-recorded and transcribed.

Following a theoretical sampling procedure, study recruited and interviewed children until sufficient information on the three key areas had been gathered and new data added little or no meaningful information or insights. The interviews were analyzed using a constant comparative method, including viewing the videos and identifying and refining major themes in the transcriptions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Then, axial coding (Charmaz, 2006) was conducted to organize the refined themes into broad groups of themes corresponding to the three aforementioned key areas.

This study found that the ACNH served as an escape from challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Children enjoyed building their virtual world in which they were able to socialize and play with their friends. Study found a common re-occurring thread of "realness" in children's perception and in what they could do with the game generated characters (villagers). There also seemed to be blurred perceptions of the real and non-real, such as the villagers' functionality.

The interviews revealed certain negative behaviors and attitudes resulted from children's internet searches. This study suggests that careful consideration should be given to social media influencers and what tends to engage the audience of young video game players to further understand the implications of these engagements for children and promote safe and healthy online behaviors.

REFERENCES

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