Games as Tools for Social Change Communication: A Critical Review

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Abstract

This review paper highlights that the Games have the significant and unique potential to be powerful tools for social change communication, as they allow players to engage with and explore complex social issues in a safe and immersive environment. Games can help players to empathize and understand and with people from different backgrounds, promote problem-solving skills, critical thinking and inspire real-world action. Games can also promote social change by encouraging players to take action in the real world. For example, games like "Foldit" and "EteRNA" use crowdsourcing to help players solve real-world scientific problems. Games like "Habitat the Game" encourage players to take action to protect the environment, while "Half the Sky Movement" promote gender equality and encourages players to get involved in advocacy efforts. Games can promote social change by helping players to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills. Games like "Minecraft" and "Civilization" encourage players to think creatively and strategically to solve complex issues and problems, while games like "That Dragon, Cancer" and "Depression Quest" explore mental health issues and help players develop empathy and understanding for people who are struggling. Through this review article, we have discussed some of the most significant games that have the potential for social change communication. Games can raise awareness, promote action, and Abstract inspire players to make a positive difference in the world by providing a safe and immersive environment for players to explore complex social issues.

Keywords: Games; Social change; Communication; New media

Introduction to games

Games are a form of interactive entertainment that humans have enjoyed for centuries. They are played for various reasons; including socialization, education, entertainment, and therapeutic purposes [1]. Games can take many forms, from physical games like sports and board games to digital games like mobile apps and video games [1]. One of the crucial features of games is that they allow players to engage actively with the content rather than passively consume it. This can lead to a more immersive and engaging experience, as players become invested in the outcome and feel a sense of accomplishment when they succeed. Games have also been found to have several benefits beyond entertainment [1]. For example, they can improve critical thinking and cognitive abilities such as attention, memory, and problem-

solving skills. They can also promote socialization and teamwork. In recent years, digital games have become increasingly popular daily with the rise of mobile apps and online gaming platforms [2, 26]. These games have opened up new possibilities for game design, allowing for more complex and immersive experiences than ever before. They have also become essential to the entertainment industry, with many games grossing billions in revenue [2, 26]. Despite their popularity, games have also been controversial, with some arguing that they promote violence or addiction. However, many researches has shown that when games are designed responsibly, they can be a positive force for entertainment, education, and social change [1, 2]. Overall, games are dynamic and a diverse form of entertainment that has the potential to provide a wide range of benefits to players, whether physical or digital, simple or complex; games are sure

to continue to be an essential part of human culture for years to come [3, 27].

History of Games

The history of games can be traced back thousands of years, with evidence of games being played in ancient civilizations such as India, Egypt, and China. Some of the earliest recorded games include board games and dice games, often used for religious and entertainment purposes. Games were a popular form of entertainment and competition in ancient Greece and Rome [2, 3, 27]. The Olympic Games, first held in 776 BCE, included various sporting events such as wrestling, running, and jumping [2]. During the middle Ages, games became a necessary form of entertainment, with chess and backgammon becoming popular board games. Card games also began to emerge during this time, with the earliest known deck of playing cards dating back to the 9th century [3]. The Industrial Revolution led to the mass production of games, making them more widely available to the general public. This period was also the development of new forms of entertainment, such as mechanical toys and puzzles [4]. The 20th century saw the rise of digital games, beginning with simple games like "Tennis for Two" in the 1950s and leading to the explosion of the video game industry in the 1970s and 80s. Games like "Tetris," "Pac-Man," and "Super Mario Bros." became cultural phenomena, and video games continued to evolve into more complex and immersive experiences [5]. Today, games are played on various platforms, from traditional board and card games to video games, mobile apps, and virtual reality experiences. They are enjoyed by people of all ages and backgrounds and continue to be an essential part of human culture and entertainment.

Objective of the Study

·   To highlight how games promote awareness, understanding, and action around social issues

·   To study how games foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and a sense of community

Games as the Powerful tool

Games have been recognized as the most powerful tools for various applications, including training, education, therapy, and social change communication. Here are some reasons why games are considered powerful tools:

Active Engagement

Games require players to actively engage with the content rather than passively consuming it. This leads to a more engaging and immersive experience, as players become invested in the outcome and feel a sense of accomplishment when they succeed [5].

Experiential Learning

Games provide a controlled and safe environment for players to experiment and learn through trial and error [1, 2]. This can be particularly effective for teaching complex or abstract concepts, as players can see the consequences of their actions in real-time.

Motivation and Reward

Games are designed to be inherently motivating, providing players with clear goals, feedback, and suggestions. Games can keep players engaged and motivated to continue playing by offering rewards for progress and achievement.

Emotional Impact

Games can evoke strong emotions in players, which can be used to create a powerful and memorable experience. By tapping into emotions such as empathy, fear, or joy, games can help players connect with the content on a deeper level [4].

Scalability and Accessibility

Digital games can be easily distributed and accessed by large masses, making them an effective tool for reaching an anonymous audience. They can also be designed to be accessible to people with various abilities and disabilities, ensuring everyone can participate effectively [4]. Games are powerful tools because they offer a unique combination of active engagement, experiential learning, motivation, emotional impact, scalability, and accessibility. These features make games effective for achieving a wide range of goals, from education and training to therapy and social change communication [6].

Games as the Powerful Tools for Social Change

Games can raise awareness about social issues, encourage players to take action, and create a sense of empathy and understanding toward those affected by social problems. Here are some ways in which games can be used as tools for social change:

1. Education Games can be used to educate players about social issues, such as poverty, discrimination, climate change, and human rights. For example, the game "Spent" challenges players to live on a minimum wage salary and make difficult decisions about how to spend their limited funds. This game raises awareness about the challenges faced by people living in poverty and encourages players to take action to address these issues [7].

Many games can be used for educational purposes. Some examples are:

1. Mine craft: a sandbox game that can teach various subjects, including math, science, history, and language arts.

2. Kahoot: is a quiz-based game that assesses and reinforces student learning across all subjects.

3. Civilization: a turn-based strategy game that can be used to teach history and politics.

4. Typing Club: a typing game that can be used to teach keyboarding skills.

5. Code Combat: a coding game that can be used to teach programming concepts.

6. SimCity: is a simulation game that can teach urban planning and economics.

7. Duolingo: a language learning game that can teach a wide range of languages.

8. Brain POP: a series of educational games that cover a wide range of subjects, including science, social studies, English, math, arts & music, and health.

9. Foldit: a puzzle game that can be used to teach biochemistry.

10. Math Playground: a collection of math games that cover a wide range of topics, including addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

2. Advocacy

Games can be used to advocate for social change by allowing players to take on the role of an activist or advocate. For example, the game "Phone Story" challenges players to explore the dark side of smartphone production and raises awareness about issues such as child labor, environmental pollution, and unfair labor practices. Many different types of games can be used for advocacy purposes. Here are some examples:

Educational games: These games are designed to teach players about a particular issue or topic. They can be used to raise awareness about significant social and environmental problems, such as climate change, poverty, and inequality [8].

Simulation games: These games allow players to experience what it's like to be in someone else's shoes. For example, a game might put the player in the position of a refugee, a person living in poverty, or a marginalized community member. By experiencing these situations, players can gain empathy and understanding for others [9]. Puzzle games: These games challenge players to solve complex problems and puzzles. They can be used to raise awareness about issues that require creative solutions, such as environmental sustainability or social justice [9]. Role-playing games: These games allow players to take on different roles and personas. They can be used to explore complex social and political issues, such as the impact of discrimination and prejudice on other groups of people.

Mobile games: These games can be played on smartphones and tablets and are ideal for reaching a large audience. They can raise awareness about important issues like public health, human rights, and the environment. Board games: It can teach players about essential issues, such as social justice and environmental sustainability. They can be played with groups and facilitate meaningful discussions and debates. Overall, games can be a powerful tool for advocacy and education. By creating engaging and interactive experiences, games can help raise awareness about important social and environmental issues and inspire people to take action [10-13].

3. Empathy

Games can be used to create empathy and understanding towards those who are affected by social issues. For example, the game "That Dragon, Cancer" explores the emotional journey of a family coping with their son's cancer diagnosis. The game allows players to experience the family's struggles and emotions and creates empathy toward those affected by cancer. Games can be an effective way to cultivate empathy and understanding [14].

Here are a few examples of games that promote empathy

That Dragon, Cancer: This game is a personal narrative about a family's experience with cancer. It offers players a unique insight into the emotional journey of those affected by this disease.

Papers, Please: This game places players as immigration officers who must decide who to let into a fictional country. Through this experience, players gain an understanding of the complex and often heart-breaking stories of those who seek refuge [15-18].

Never Alone: This puzzle-plat former is based on the stories of the Inupiat, an Alaska Native people. The game is designed to promote empathy and understanding of their culture.

Detroit: Become Human: This game takes place in a future where androids have become sentient and are fighting for their rights. The game's multiple storylines allow players to empathize with characters on both sides of the conflict.

Life is Strange: This episodic game follows a high school student who discovers she can rewind time. The game deals with themes of friendship, love, and loss and allows players to make difficult moral choices. These are just a few examples, but many other games can promote empathy and understanding [19-21].

4. Community-building:

Games can build communities around social issues and encourage players to take action. For example, the game "Foldit" challenges players to solve protein-folding puzzles and contribute to scientific research on diseases such as HIV and cancer. The game encourages players to work together to solve complex problems and positively impact society. Games can be an excellent tool for community-building [1-3].

Here are some examples of games that can help bring people together and strengthen bonds within a community

Icebreaker games: These are games that are specifically designed to help people get to know each other better. Examples include Two Truths and a Lie, Name Game, and Human Bingo.

Team-building games: These games are designed to help people work together more effectively. Examples include Trust Fall, Minefield, and Helium Stick.

Board games: Board games can be an excellent way for people to spend time together and bond over a shared experience. Examples include Monopoly, Scrabble, and Settlers of Catan.

Sports and physical games: Physical games can help build camaraderie and a sense of teamwork. Examples include volleyball, dodgeball, and kickball [22-25].

Video games: Multiplayer video games can help build connections between players who may not have met otherwise. Examples include Fortnite, League of Legends, and Minecraft.

Role-playing games: Role-playing games can be a fun way for people to engage with each other creatively and collaboratively. Examples include Dungeons and Dragons, World of Darkness, and FATE.

Trivia games: Trivia games can be a fun way for people to compete against each other and show off their knowledge. Examples include Jeopardy, Trivial Pursuit, and Quiz Bowl. Remember, the key to using games for community-building is ensuring they

are inclusive, accessible, and enjoyable for everyone in the community [4, 16, 17, 26, 27].

Conclusion

Overall, games have the potential to be powerful tools for social change. They can be used to educate, advocate, create empathy, and build communities around social issues. By harnessing the power of games, we can raise awareness about important social issues, encourage players to take action, and make a positive impact on the world.

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