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Gameplays Versus Playstyles: The Social Construction of Transmediated Communities Among Filipino Children Gamers in Minecraft and Roblox

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Abstract The children of today's generation are considered as digital natives, which means that they have the capacity to navigate technological terrains to the best of their abilities and create online communities in new storyworlds. Minecraft and Roblox, two sandbox open-world mobile games, are manifestations of such ability to create worlds, survive in difficult gaming situations, face opponents in combat, and interact with players within a community. Even more so, such transmedia engagements allow the child participants, as evidenced in this study, to transact with players and the app itself to introduce new playstyle strategies that complement or subvert the gameplays originally set by developers. This study aims to explore how child users navigate through various transmedia storyworlds to socially construct shared meanings of their engagements. By proposing a novel "techno-immersion" as a method of data construction, the researcher joined four child participant-characters in their journey as they traverse from one gaming storyworld to another. Several transactions emerge in such a transmedia engagement, including player-to-player negotiation of playstyle; diverging playstyle away from prescribed gameplay; harnessing the gameplay rules to achieve personal goals in engagement; player-to-player and player-to-media negotiations to create new gameplay; and interaction as means of negotiation. It was also found that child users of mobile games are empowered in harnessing the rules of the game to their personal gaming goals and freeing from the binds that limit them from their engagements, towards becoming fully realized child characters in their transmedia storyworlds.

Keywords: Filipino child; minecraft; mobile games; online communities; Roblox; social construction of technology; transmedia.

1. Introduction

Around June 2020, schools started circulating surveys as to how students plan to continue the coming school year. With the pandemic still not showing any sign that it will turn to a more favorable rate and the curve will be flattened even up to the time of writing this

article, schools are at a loss as to how the school year will unfold. Mitzi, an incoming Grade 7 student was quick to choose the online option for remote learning. Her tool was a smartphone: a handy 6-inch phone that used to be her company as she played games and made videos. Through the quick grazing of her fingertips into her handy gadget, she can not only seek entertainment but also navigate for educational purposes: from attending preliminary online classes and meet-and-greet to answering online drills.

This radical change in students today has been pointed out by Prensky (2003). The current generation of learners are said to have grown into a technologically inclined world. They are already surrounded with computers, video games, cellphones, and other technological tools the moment they are born. Prensky (2003) suggested the regard for students as “digital natives” because they have become native speakers of such a digital language. Children find themselves as online citizens of the virtual realm the moment they were born because of their early exposure, and they become accustomed to this cultural world. Because of this, their means of social construction might no longer be happening only in the physical spaces but also, and more importantly, online. It is thus important to understand their digital worlds more deeply.

This also meant that digital natives become part of online communities within a networked environment. Lara et al. (2018) proposed that community organization is the first step towards empowerment, made possible by transformative education. For digital natives, engagements happen online towards community building and interaction that extends social groups, sub-cultures, and transnational cultures. This study explores the online interactions and communities that children belong to in open-world gaming apps like Minecraft and Roblox. These apps were chosen because of its affordances of world building, character creation, and development of game-specific engagements. At the same time, these apps are also able to create online communities within the app (multiplayer gaming options) and into other online spaces, such as social media groups, video streaming threads, and forums.

This is further emphasized with the fact that children take a participative role in their media engagements and are thus no longer considered passive audiences who do not proactively engage in the modalities that technology offer for them (Ito et al., 2008). In the processes of production and consumption, the children’s acts of subversion are a manifestation that they are curious in attempting to understand the various worlds that

they belong to (Rogers & Marshall, 2012). Children are active media users who can use these advancements not only in play but also in speaking, listening, and reading with awareness and literacy. The adults around the children help in building positive character, thus contributing to guided values in various online and material communities (Rosyada & Retnomurti, 2017). New forms of media and technology can be away for these positive characters to be realized.

The role and effects of technology to children are always a subject of debate. This brings us back to the early regard for technology. Television was seen as a source of violence and high-risk behavior among child and adolescent viewers. Video games and the Internet were also seen as having negative consequences in on the child's physical, psychological, and social well-being. This brings about issues of protection for child users. Digital environments have welcomed various users to an array of contents, leading to the digital realm as a source of anxiety that threatens the child's right for protection and security (Livingstone & Third, 2017).

Meanwhile, digital technologies were seen as vital but not central in children's lives, since online activities accessed through technology are merely supplemental to "offline" interests and endeavors of the children (Chaudron, 2015). Despite being digital natives, their lives do not necessarily revolve around technology. Children can manipulate new technologies because of their innate familiarity but will eventually ask for help in navigating these devices, which motivates real-life interactions. Instead of solitary engagement, more recent games offer opportunities for social interaction. The environment can be natural, artificial, or social (Brotosusilo & Soedrajad, 2020), but for the case of digital-native children, the technological environment serves as an intersection. Technology can also be a space where children can experience what Bryn (2011) considers primary socialization with family and friends, as well as secondary socialization through learning norms within the digital space and applying them in media and nonmedia engagements. After all, children build relationships with their peers, family, and society (Rogers & Marshall, 2012), and it is enhanced through technology.

Livingstone and Third (2017) proposed a balance between resistance to and fascination towards technology by accessing it with caution that is centered on the rights of the child. This paper subscribes to a similar stance, for the researcher personally believes that children are empowered media users who have the agency to manipulate

technological affordances to suit personal and societal functions without being consumed by technology altogether. This need to accommodate technology has been further enhanced in the advent of digital learning during the pandemic. Through the integration of technology into the experiences of teachers and students through remote modalities of learning, education has become inclusive given that there are instructional approaches that provided support to the conventional face-to-face setup, and this has made learning more engaging and beneficial to students (Fosu, 2019; Huang et al., 2019). However, the challenges to accessibility, commitment from teachers and students, and obstacles on offline modalities (Divayana et al., 2020) should also be acknowledged.

Media have become transmedia in nature, which means that new values and meanings are created in this emerging media landscape and that this leads to “a more participatory model of culture” (Jenkins et al., 2013). The works of Jenkins (2003) and Long (2007) would solidify the notion of transmediality, where the depth of experience becomes more sustained when consumers are introduced to an experience where they read a text across the media, performing a participative role in the shaping of the narratives. The transmedia consumers are driven to ask more questions just as they are to finish a narrative in one media platform. They are pointed into the direction of consumption using a different platform for them to fill in the stories and explore new worlds further (Long, 2007). The idea of participation resonates the discussion of Ito et al. (2008), who proposes that the cultural life is formed by social groups who participate in shaping such culture. In essence, a process of social construction happens towards a network of creation and creativity, particularly in the case of children for this paper.

However, due to the capitalist-centric content that media disseminate, children learn to become consumers even at an early age. On one hand, children are self-aware and can negotiate their engagements without necessarily becoming mere consumers of paid media content; on the other hand, the pitfalls of consumerism are not easy to resist. Still, children are ready for the transmedia experience as they can make sense of the content that they see across media forms to create a storyworld. While such storyworlds promote commercialism, free labor of content generated by fans themselves, and proliferation of ideologies that only maintain the capitalist status quo, children can consume transmedia content and play more effectively, particularly towards literacy, through “resourcefulness, sociality, mobility, accessibility, and replay ability” (Alper & Herr-Stephenson, 2013).

In addition, children consider man-made technology as somehow a part of nature because of how it has become part of our everyday life and surroundings, which calls for finding ways to create avenues towards the use of technology in harmony with nature and society at large. This power is echoed in the study of community empowerment. More than community involvement, participation, and engagement, there is acknowledgment that power can be bestowed to some or shared with others (Reed et al., 2018). Looking at the transmedia phenomenon as an avenue for community engagement thus allows children to become proactive in this negotiation of power with the media forms, content creators, and app developers. After all, one could not exist without the other.

Transmedia research in the case of children becomes an urgent undertaking because of how much of the content are consumed by children, such as games. Gaming allows users to actively take part in the storyworld. While novels and films have irreversible narratives, games introduce to the child a world where death is natural albeit frustrating because the game restarts whenever the character controlled by the player dies, bringing back the character in the last saved location, i.e., checkpoint (Switzky, 2016; Veugen, 2016). Games are thus either a virtual environment where children can shape and explore decision making without significant risk, or a simplification of “moral choices into cartoonish distinctions between good and evil” (Switzky, 2016). This level of control has shifted the child from a passive audience to one who controls not only the world but his/her participation in it.

The dynamics of gaming has changed over the years. Jin and Schneider (2016) saw that digital games led to establishment of friendships through engagements, the shift from hobby to career and economy, and the shaping of a youth culture centered on games and the popular cultural references that solidify their generation. Furthermore, this made gaming companies and content creators take a more active role in harnessing the powers of the industry to service their own messages of propaganda, consumerism, and even policy making (Jin & Schneider, 2016). Thus, the transactions occurring within the context of a digital game have shifted from one that assumes an entertainment function to one that fosters community building, establishing relationships, and restructuring of the producer/consumer roles.

In the Philippines, 74% of school children have access to the Internet, which they use to connect with friends and networks, play online games, use Wikipedia, and chat with

people, as well as comment on blogs of other people (United Nations Children’s Fund Philippines and Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication, 2011). Such data might have already increased even more due to Internet connections being more accessible in prepaid and postpaid options, as well as the needed shift to online modalities during the pandemic. In a previous study, the researcher explored children’s use of computer for online gaming and how they negotiate discouragement and distraction with opponents towards defeat, where it was evident that the role of profanity in such a discourse is essential (Sayuno, 2012). If children can facilitate language building and meaning making in Internet interactions, then they can also transact with each other and with the content creators to make strategies and playstyle favorable to them towards empowered transmedia engagements.

Thus, “the changing affordances of digital textualities—of interactivity and participation, of remix and remediation—” call for critical research from various points of view: production, audience, and historicity (Scolari & Ibrus, 2014; Telles, 2014; Uboñgen & Timoteo, 2014). There should be more research on transmedia for/by children, which this paper hopes to accomplish. This study aims to explore children’s navigation within their transmedia engagements. Specifically, the social construction in the case of Minecraft and Roblox was investigated. Four children were observed as they played in these two sandbox games in two separate observation sessions. Play is seen as a dispersed practice, but this can be transformative and combinatory because it is through play and playfulness that allows children to modify, reshape, transform, and rethink their engagement across and within media forms (Hjorth & Richardson, 2014). The goal in this study is to map the transmedia engagements of the child participants and characterize the transactions that surfaced in their agentic use of Minecraft and Roblox.

Bijker (1995) proposed a new perspective in understanding the then-rising technology: the society has the capacity to construct technology. As technological products serve a different purpose for each demographic, it finds a more specific set of consumers, i.e., relevant social group, whose buying capacity can determine the success of the product and serve as basis for the stabilization or closure of the production. Relevant social groups are important in understanding the development of technology because they are carriers of the process, given that technological development is a social process and not an autonomous occurrence.

A technological frame is also expected, which is the shared cognitive framing of a product and how it is interpreted by the users. According to [Bijker \(1995\)](#), this can comprise goals, problems, rules of thumb, theoretical considerations, procedures for testing, and artifacts that inform the problem solving, strategy formation, and design activities of the producing group. A technological frame in understanding the social construction of technology serves as basis in looking at the various functions that relevant social groups may have on an innovation. This variation is called interpretative flexibility.

Power is also a consideration in understanding how an innovation is constructed within a society. This can be considered as the sociotechnological layer of the social construction process, since there are nontechnological and instead political or economic considerations that drastically affect the technological artifact ([Bijker, 1995](#)). It is in this notion of power that the transactional nature of technology is evident. In the case of this study, the child participants perform transactions in various levels to determine the role that technology will have in their lives.

What links the idea of social construction to the case of digital/transmedia engagements among children through games such as Roblox and Minecraft is the sociotechnical innovations proposed by [Ito et al. \(2008\)](#), which are mass-media and peer-to-peer ecologies. According to [Ito et al. \(2008\)](#), mass-media ecologies develop a media mix where various platforms and experiences are integrated into one holistic experience. Meanwhile, this media mix affects and interacts with peer-to-peer ecologies, characterized by the environment where means of production, consumption, and exchange are facilitated through what she calls “hypersociality.”

The intertwining of media mix and hypersociality leads to a bursting network of cultural production. Thus, this study believes that children interact and undergo a networking of transactions in the transmedia world in order to socially construct new meanings to their experiences, and the child users are at the center of such transaction through various media and nonmedia ecologies. Social construction of technology happens not only as the children use the gaming apps but also as they transact with peers and the media form itself to create a storyworld where the children are the central characters.

2. Methods

To map and characterize the transmedia engagements of the child participants and determine how they facilitate, transact, and negotiate meanings in the digital space, dialogical narrative analysis was employed. According to Frank (2010), there has to be an investigation of the outcomes that stories produce more than merely characterizing the nature of stories, since stories are not only the content but also the actors who contribute in shaping social life and human thinking. What makes dialogical narrative analysis relevant as a methodology in studying lives is its emphasis on the relational nature of narrative creation. This methodology also considers the tendency of participants to express stories informed by and as a product of their own “circumstances of being.”

This makes the methodology even more appropriate to the nature of the study because it looks into the in-betweens, including the transactions that children may make as they consume transmedia content. In the sections that follow, narratives of the children’s engagements are retold based on the sessions with them. The kind of writing also resonates the qualitative approach to inquiry and the manner by which dialogical narrative analysis is reported. Initially, the narratives are written in the first-person point of view of the researcher, but due to journal guidelines, the narratives were reported in the third person in the final document. Hopefully, this does not disregard the personal journeys of the researcher with the child participants, especially in a qualitative study where narratives and storytelling are central.

The article also borrowed the strategic use of an artifact from narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) to jumpstart the data construction. Transmedia texts were used as the artifacts that can stir the storytelling of the child participants. How the transmedia forms work was understood through the help of the children’s explanation of the rules and navigations of the transmedia form, as well as the storytelling of their own experiences in transmedia use. The researcher also acted as a participant who also needs to understand the transmedia engagements deeply. Interestingly, the form of inquiry also involved what the researcher would like to call “techno-immersion.” Here, more than allowing children to share what they do within the games that they play, the researcher also learned more by immersing into the worlds that they create.

In a dialogical narrative analysis sense, aside from observations and informal interviews with the child participants and their parents, the stories and worlds that they

were able to create by becoming a character in their world were also considered. This was done by playing their games, creating avatars, and joining in multiplayer games with them so can be able to interact as a participant within the transmedia engagements of the children. Interviewing the children while they were playing or watching them play, their eyes locked on their screens, were not enough. The researcher had to be a citizen of the worlds that they create. The researcher has become the research instrument (Piantanida & Garman, 1999), where sensemaking of the children's transmedia engagements was done through the researcher's experiences within the storyworlds.

Given the novel "techno-immersion" as method, the researcher embarked a community engagement that exceeds the bounds of the material world. The narrative building was extended into the context of technology. Instead of gathering chants, tales, and stories from cultural masters, narratives, journeys, and characterizations from the children's transmedia storyworlds were gathered. Aside from interacting with the child respondents with proper permissions from their parents and without pushing them beyond their usual transmedia engagements, more importantly, the researcher became a community member within their virtual worlds. In the proposed "techno-immersion," the researcher has to be in that world and become a citizen as well to observe the communities that they participate in and help improve.

As part of a grander dissertation work, this study elicits the help of eight grade-school children in the Philippines. The children would engage in up to eight apps across two to three observed sessions, and the research-participant's task was to immerse into their storyworlds by journeying with them from one app to another. The data construction stage happened in 2019 in Cavite, Philippines, across weekends depending on the availability of the children without intervening with their school activities. Given that this paper focuses on Minecraft and Roblox, four children became qualified for the purposes of this study.

3. Results and discussion

Four children, namely, Thea, Dax, Sean, and Mitzi (Grades 1, 2, 5, and 6, respectively), were found to be using Minecraft and various games within the Roblox app during the two separate techno-immersions, scheduled based on the times they were allowed to play games by their guardians. In Minecraft, the child player is given the opportunity to choose

between two modes: In Survival Mode, the avatar must maintain health and explore a vast empty space by mining for materials to be used to build houses and create tools. In Creative Mode, all materials are readily available to the child, which means that the player can focus on building and decorating. Meanwhile, Roblox is an app that contains a variety of user-created minigames. Child players who do not have access to premium versions of the app can play these games freely. With Internet connection, they can interact with other players worldwide. Both Minecraft and Roblox also offer the opportunity to decorate houses and dress their avatars up (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Rooms in Minecraft (left) and Meep City from Roblox (right) from Mitzi's engagements.

It was made sure that the child participants' journeys were followed as they unfolded. I experienced having to jump from one game to the next, one storyworld to another, depending on the child participants' patience or interest, as well as uncontrollable issues like slow Internet connection and lagging device.

3.1. Mapping transmedia engagements

Initially, the plan was to map the transmedia engagements following the central characters that the child participants consume in the games that they play. However, this would result to a fragmented mapping because not the same characters would appear within each app and game. Instead, the child was positioned at the center of the engagement and their

journey as the central character was mapped. A reframing of the transmedia engagement to consider the children as the main characters and their world as a storyworld clarifies how children interpret and distribute meanings across seemingly unrelated media and nonmedia forms. This results to the mapping of the four children’s engagements shown in Figures 2–4:

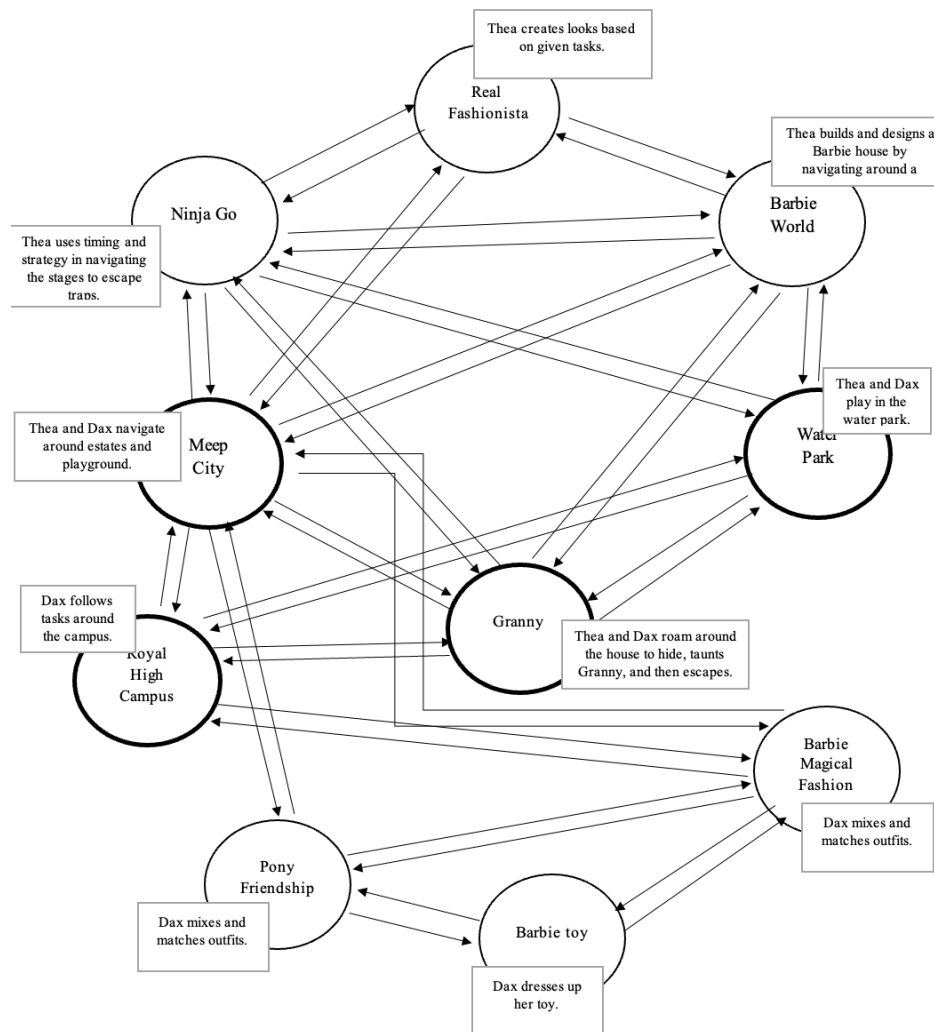


Figure 2. Dax and Thea’s Transmedia Map (Roblox games are in bold shapes)

In Figure 2, the transmedia engagements of Dax and Thea intersect as they played the same games together, such as Roblox games Water Park, Granny, and a short session of Meep City before Thea’s app crashes. In Water Park, players can navigate a vast resort-like world full of long unwinding slides, swimming pools, and stalls for a quick lemonade fix. In Water Park, being in the same Water Park game needed to be ensured, since

searching for the game in Roblox would show many results. Dax and Thea, along with the researcher, needed to enter at the same time in order to spawn on the top of the slide together. Dax then instructed the others to follow her by jumping into the slide, where a quick movement on screen would take them down the pool. As Dax moved to a nearby set of poolside chair, Thea shouted at the researcher while they were playing, asking where the researcher was. They roamed around the water park for some minutes, repeating the process of sliding to the pool, sitting on chairs, and drinking lemonade.

The relaxed Water Park game is the total opposite of the Granny game in Roblox. The goal of the game is to search for the exit of the house of the character Granny, while avoiding the titular character. Whenever Granny reaches for the players, she would hit the players repetitively with a bat and the avatar would shatter into pieces, after which the avatar will respawn at the area where one can select portals where one would go to start the search: living room, bedroom, kitchen, basement, and others. Dax, Thea, and the researcher followed the same dynamics: Dax told them where to go, Thea asked the researcher where he was, and the researcher did their bidding as he tried to learn the ropes of the game. They also taught him hiding spots that are otherwise unnoticeable: a block-like cabinet where one can go in and become invisible, or the top of a furnace in the basement where avatars can fit if they use another character to jump over. Sometimes, instead of hiding from Granny, Dax and Thea went near her and ran hastily when Granny started hitting them. The adrenaline rush gave them a good laugh, and if they ever got caught, they just followed each other after they respawned.

After a while, Dax asked the others to play Meep City instead. This Roblox game is a simulation of city life, where one can design their own home. While the purpose is the same as that in Minecraft's Creative Mode, Meep City has a more realistic options than the block-style furniture in Minecraft. Here, players have a variety of furniture, wallpaper, and appliances to choose from even in the free option. Premium items are of course more appealing to the child, but this would cost Robux, which can be purchased through actual credit and debit cards or cellphone load. Instead of building and decorating my own house, the researcher followed Dax and Thea around in the park and into their houses. As they are showing him around, Thea's phone acted up, after which she decided to watch YouTube videos instead. Dax opted to play Royal High Campus, a Roblox game where she plays the role of a high school student with schedules to follow, from attending classes

and doing homework to interacting with friends and updating her fashion. The experience is familiar to Dax's real life in a private school, but of course, the tasks in Royal High Campus that are needed to be accomplished for her to progress in the game is more like Western high schools. This is because the games in Roblox are mostly created by online players who can afford to access the game creation option using Robux, presumably people from developing countries such as the United States, where the app is created and is a hit.

What is interesting in the transmedia mapping of Dax and Thea is how the interaction between two participants in the media forms creates the sharing of meanings, which they would use in their separate engagements. For instance, their playstyle in escaping Granny readied Thea in escaping the traps in Ninja Go, a mini game that can be accessed through Facebook Messenger. How they navigated Granny's house in finding hiding places or looking for Granny to taunt her also became their style in controlling their characters in Water Park and Meep City. These skills were also applied in other apps, such as High Campus for Dax and Ninja Go for Thea. Meanwhile, Thea and Dax applied the design aspects of Meep City into their respective design-related games, such as Barbie World and Real Fashionista for Thea and Barbie Magical Fashion and Pony Friendship for Dax.

Player Unknown's Battle Ground (PUBG) Mobile, a multiplayer *Battle-Royale*-style online game, was probably Sean's favorite game. However, because his phone was on the low-end side and would sometimes lag, he resorted to Roblox games, which demanded lower bandwidth and screen quality in frame rate per second (see Figure 3). He also enjoyed playing multiplayer games when he gets to play it with his big brother or cousins. However, because his brother was a few years ahead of him and would have his own set of playmates, Sean ended up playing with computer bots or with other child players online. When he encountered Filipino players, he opened the mic option to communicate with them.

Sean's games involved not only controlling avatars who explore the world but also getting involved in combat. His Minecraft engagement was in Survival mode, where he had to maintain health by avoiding attacks from wild animals and creatures and ensuring that he does not fall from high places. He also explored creating new tools, arms, and substances by combing what he was able to mine around him. All he had to do was to access his crafting table and combine certain items. He combined eight wooden blocks to

create a chest to keep the items that he mined and crafted, three wooden blocks and two sticks to make a wooden axe, and so on.

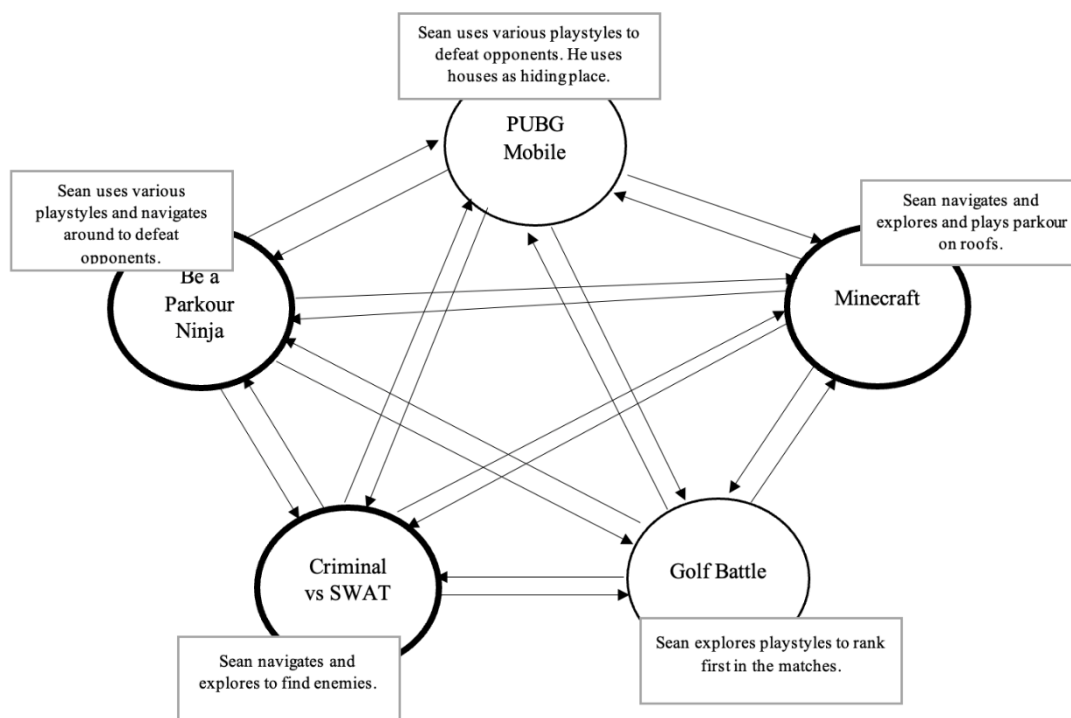


Figure 3. Sean's Transmedia Map (Minecraft games are in bold shapes)

Sean spent more time playing *Be a Parkour Ninja* and *Criminal vs SWAT*. *Be a Parkour Ninja* is a Roblox game where the avatar uses ninja tools and jumps over obstacles to defeat opponents. Sean first explained how the game is played to the researcher, and the latter took the time to observe him while playing. As he respawned, he moved rapidly into the field, waving his samurai frantically as he did. When he saw an opponent, he used his *kunai*, an unlimited set of daggers to attack long range. Players usually preferred to attack in close combat. Sean explored various strategies in defeating the many opponents spawning in the field. Sometimes, he used the samurai. He hid in the bushes and suddenly attacked when opponents were nearby. When opponents discovered his strategy, they attacked the bushes right away and Sean was forced to explore another technique. This was reminiscent of the child's flexibility in navigating within his/her storyworld. As the story progress, the child adjusts to achieve gameplay (app-driven) and playstyle (player-driven) goals.

Criminal vs SWAT is a Roblox game in the similar fashion as the old personal-computer game *Counterstrike* aside from the difference in animation. Sean applied what

he learned in *Be a Parkour Ninja* into how he controlled his avatar in *Criminal vs SWAT*. However, he also had to make some adjustments because he had a different set of weapons here in the form of guns and bombs. How he used the gun scope to shoot an opponent and hid in corners to wait for them to come would also be evident in how he played *PUBG Mobile*. Of course, it would be difficult to really determine which among the apps was the source of his skills. It can be thus assumed that it is an amalgamation of repetitive engagements in these games. Sean carried a portion of himself as he jumped across these different storyworlds and assumed various roles: a survivor, a parkour ninja, a criminal, a SWAT team member, a squad member whose goal was to remain the last squad standing.

Sean's application of playstyles across the games was able to link such engagements into one narrative that reflects Sean's nature as a character. While the games that he played had different gameplays, he could apply a recurring playstyle of navigating across the play area to find and defeat enemies. Even if he was playing different games and facing various opponents, may it be computer-generated or other real-life players, Sean played as himself, as can be noticed in his hiding on secret spots, gunning enemies in long range, and being able to adjust effective playstyles. For instance, how he jumped strategically as he faced an opponent in close range in *Be a Parkour Ninja* and *Criminal vs SWAT* was also an evident strategy in *PUBG Mobile*, where combat was more serious and realistic in terms of functions and animation.

As shown in Figure 4, Mitzi played *Minecraft* as well through her mobile phone and her brother's PlayStation 4 console. However, she preferred the Creative Mode. This allowed her to access all materials to create buildings and design the interior and exterior. She also downloaded ready-made worlds as her starting point, improving the visuals as she played. As the researcher joined her in her *Minecraft* engagement, she gave him a tour of her house, which had rooms assigned for herself, her brother, and cousins, and even her little sister who died as a baby. When her cousin came to play with her, she went to another world where they created a game of their own. The mechanics were simple: Mitzi first used her gadget without her cousin looking. She navigated into the world and looked for a good hiding place for a block-shaped button. Afterwards, she gave her gadget to her cousin, whose task was to find the location of the hidden button. When the button was found, they shifted roles.

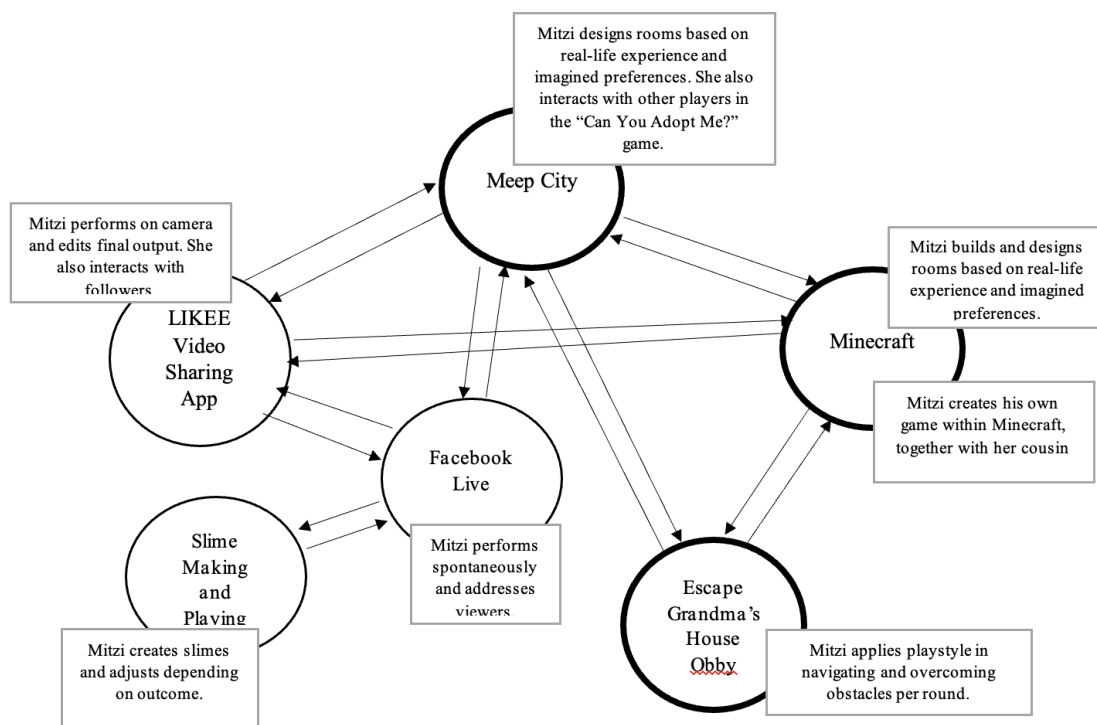


Figure 4. Mitzi's Transmedia Map (Minecraft and Roblox games are in bold shapes)

Meanwhile, she also played a Granny game in Roblox, but the setup was different from those of Dax and Thea's. In Escape Grandma's House Obby, Mitzi and the researcher found themselves in a maze within the house, with each room being a stage of the game. Across the hall of the room, there were various challenges, such as balancing across a beam, jumping from one chair to the next to avoid the lava-flooded floor, and others. Whenever the researcher failed to pass through the stage, he respawned to the last checkpoint. Mitzi was of course an expert to the point that he had to pass his gadget to her so that she could help him surpass the level. The many rooms ultimately led outside, which meant that they finally escaped Grandma's house. In the garden, they were free to roam around, run fast, and jump high.

Mitzi also gave the researcher a tour in Meep City. She showed him her house, which was full of decorations in every room, most of which in shades of pink. She had three rooms with many beds of different designs, wallpapers, and posters; a full kitchen complete with utensils where avatars can eat and cook by clicking a button; and even an entertainment-slash-living room with a television set, sofa, and a stage where the avatars can dance using an option available in one side of the screen. Mitzi also roamed around

the park, which was the game's common area. She went to a small tower that made the avatars become younger upon entering. Then, they looked around the park for avatars who were pushing around baby strollers. Upon being in proximity with one, Mitzi typed "Can You Adopt Me?" in the chat box, which appeared as a speech bubble. The player responded affirmatively, which allowed Mitzi to jump into the stroller. The player took her home and gave her a room. The researcher followed her into her new home, which became their playhouse for a while before looking for new adoptive parents.

Mitzi's engagements were a combination of gaming and video apps; despite the difference, she was able to link her narratives across these forms. Mitzi's design and interactions in Meep City also became apparent in her LIKEE videos and Facebook Live broadcasts. Her real-life preferences in terms of colors and design were also evident in these apps, as well as in Minecraft. Meanwhile, Mitzi's ability to interact in Meep City's "Can You Adopt Me?" game and in replying to comments from followers in LIKEE, e.g., saying "thank you" to the person who agreed to adopt her and to the positive comments to her videos, were helpful in Mitzi's spontaneous interactions to the viewers in Facebook Live. In fact, she communicated with viewers in English. The slimes that she played in the Facebook Live broadcast were made from scratch; she also taught the researcher how to make and adjust slimes to achieve consistency, something that she also talked about in her broadcasts.

In the transmedia engagements of the four child participants, it was evident that the nature of the children becomes fluid as they navigate in various media platforms. The children carry their nature as a child and adjust accordingly depending on the goals that the gameplay provides for them, as well as their personal goals in engagement. It is the children who sojourn into the various worlds. It is their stories that unravel in every game played and every playstyle performed.

3.2. The Social Construction of Transmediated Communities

Minecraft and Roblox were central in the engagements that the child participants had in this study. As observed in their engagements, it was their experience with these apps that allowed them to push through other storyworlds while maintaining the skills that they gained as they engage with communities from within and without. Sandbox games have an open-world nature. This means that the child player, through an avatar, can freely

explore the gaming world while performing goals. The child player has freedom of navigation, and at the same time, the progress of the game depends on the kind of pacing that the child wants. It can also be said that it is because of this open-world nature of the games that the child participants are also able to open worlds beyond the apps. The child participants can learn about design, building and crafting, combatting, and even interacting due to the options that Minecraft and Roblox offer to the child players. This kind of world allowed them to transcend not only their skills but also their characters into other subworlds in the form of other apps.

Such engagement within the digital space is helpful, given that digital literacy and infrastructure, which children have access to in their transmedia use, can help in fostering a sense of belongingness within various online and offline communities among children. Several transactions emerge in such a transmediated community. These include the following: 1) player-to-player negotiation of playstyle; 2) diverging playstyle away from prescribed gameplay; 3) harnessing the gameplay rules to achieve personal goals in engagement; 4) player-to-player and player-to-media negotiations to create new gameplay; and 5) interaction as means of negotiation.

It is through a player's interaction with playmates that they can negotiate how they will go about their playstyle. This can come in the form of playmates in real life, sitting beside a child as they both play the game in their respective gadgets, as in the case of Dax and Thea. It was right away evident that Dax, the older of the two, has more power in terms of how they would play, where they would go, what they would do, and what game they would play next. Thea followed instructions from Dax, but at the same time, she insisted her own actions by not following what Dax says. For example, in *Granny*, Dax said that they should hide in a certain location. Instead, Thea started taunting *Granny*. Sometimes, Dax told Thea to follow her, and a negotiation ensued. Thea either followed her or continued her own quest, which led to Dax calling her out or going towards her direction. It is through this constant negotiation that the players can shape how they would go about in the game and into other games. Meanwhile, Mitzi's negotiation happened as she typed in the chat speech bubble option in *Meep City* to request to be adopted. Those who were willing to adopt her also welcomed them to their lives and homes within the game.

Players also negotiate with the game itself by adjusting playstyles and diverging from the gameplay. Here, I define playstyle based on various correspondences with gamers as key experts during my analysis. Playstyle refers to how the child player navigates and strategizes in the game. Meanwhile, gameplay refers to the dynamics of the game set by the app developers. For example, in the *Granny* game in Roblox, the gameplay is to escape the house while avoiding Granny's attack. Dax and Thea diverged from this gameplay by gallivanting freely around the house instead of looking for an exit. They even taunted Granny instead of escaping her altogether because their focus was to enjoy the game instead of merely achieving the goals set by the app's gameplay.

Meanwhile, Sean instead harnessed the affordances provided by the gameplay to forward his goals in the game. An example of this was the respawning mechanism in Roblox and Minecraft. In *Be a Parkour Ninja*, Sean was able to try various strategies to win a combat and thus garner as many kills as possible due to the ability to respawn. When Sean's avatar respawned, it returned to one end of the playing field and was able to attack other players from behind exactly from where he last died. Also, when he hid in the bushes and the other players found him, he adjusted his playstyle to attack the same players from afar.

Mitzi was able to participate in the creation of an entirely new gameplay based on player-to-player and player-to-media negotiations. In the "Can You Adopt Me?" game within Meep City, the gameplay did not necessarily provide a rule that a player can only jump onto a player's stroller upon the latter's approval. The game already actually allows them to jump on these strollers. Instead, the players were able to reach a mutual agreement that one can only jump onto the stroller by first asking the question, "can you adopt me?" The player being asked had to explicitly agree by saying "yes" through a speech bubble. Creating such rules that all players agreed upon allowed them to create a gameplay of their own, providing a new layer of engagement for Meep City. Even more so, this was shaped through interactions and not by establishing predetermined rules in the game. The same happened in Mitzi's "hidden button" game in Minecraft. Minecraft allowed them to access complex user-uploaded worlds, and it was through interaction with her cousin that allowed them to create a game and enjoy Minecraft beyond its predetermined gameplay.

All these are possible because the child participants communicated with various parties of the game, may it be with players sitting beside them in real life, players they

meet in the online space, and indirectly with the app developers who track their progress and access in the apps. Through communication, meanings are negotiated and socially constructed. These negotiations, along with external interventions such as those of parents, are essential in achieving a sense of balance between achieving efficiency in technological use and enjoyment in engagements, a needed consideration in addressing issues in the digital society (Haraoka, 2018).

This means that Dax, Thea, Sean, and Mitzi are members of a relevant social group that Minecraft and Roblox cater. They are users who constantly adjust their playstyles through repetitive engagements. The process starts with the creators of Minecraft and Roblox offering various options for the children to use, such as Survival and Creative Modes, possibility of designing worlds, and interaction through creation of games and chat options. How the games are shaped is based on how the players would respond to the gameplay that the apps initially set. In this study, it was found that the transactions that the child participants have with other players in the game, the characters present in the game in the form of opponents, and the media form itself inform how the functions of Roblox and Minecraft are in the lives of the children.

This is considered by the apps to further service the child users, which would also lead to profit generation through ads or premium subscription. Because the child players are digital natives who know digital literacy well, they already have a convenient technological frame that is further amplified by their interactions and meaning making. They are more well-adjusted in a digital society where information in the cyberspace and physical space are integrated (Sá et al., 2021). When the reality and the virtuality of engagements are blurred (Levin & Mamlok, 2021), children are first to adjust in terms of technological framing.

For example, how Dax and Thea play Roblox is reflective of how they approach problems in their engagements. They see the task in the Granny game as mere entertainment, such that they resort to taunting instead of totally avoiding the villain of the game. Their aimless journey in Water Park and Meep City provides the shared mindset that these worlds are their way of experiencing real-life engagements in a transmediated world. Meanwhile, Sean sees the gameplay as an opportunity to achieve missions and win the game, while Mitzi also has a more interaction-oriented mindset to the point that she was able to participate in a user-created goal in the form of “Can You Adopt Me?” within

a rather open world that is Meep City. This is accommodated by the app because they provide service based on the goals of the child participants.

The presence of a tower that turns avatars into a child version is a product of negotiation between users who seek goals and the game creators and app developers who make this possible. Apps would also attempt to address many issues that players raise, as well as problems that they observe from the developer standpoint. For instance, Roblox has a development forum site where they explain updates in the app to ensure that the issues of players are addressed. A sample post is their discussion on the improvement of game search ranking at website Roblox Devforum. Just like many players worldwide, Dax, Thea, and the researcher had trouble in ensuring that they entered the same world. Roblox developers improved this by ensuring that the ranking appearing when you search a keyword are more refined and consistent based on percentage approval and number of players (Roblox Devforum, 2020). That way, players would be able to join games together and visit their favorite games efficiently.

4. Conclusion

The transactions in the child's transmedia engagement where the child takes the role of a central character and the center of their community, jumping from one storyworld to another, reflect the power differentials between players and the media platform and its developers. How the meanings from transmedia engagements are socially constructed is based on the transactions that key participants have and the power that they have. On one hand, the app developer has the power to control the mechanics of the app and the gameplay possible within such a storyworld. On the other hand, the players as the relevant social group who determines the rise or fall of an app are the users to which the app developers cater. How the children use the app, navigate the game, and diverge from the gameplays matter in how the app developers would further improve the app. Furthermore, the child users' ways and playstyles, as evident in the child participants' transmedia engagements, are both bound by the gameplay and free from the very binds that limit them. This is because the child users have the agency to put their personal goals in gaming at the forefront of their engagements. They find ways to work around what is provided for them by learning from various transmedia engagements and performing transactions with players and the apps themselves. This leads to the social construction of their gaming

experience as one that puts them at the center of the community building and one that helps them better define their engagement as entertaining, meaningful, and enjoyable to them as child players.

Specifically, the study mapped the transmedia engagements of the children, which shows that the children carry part of themselves, both as members of the relevant social group and as child characters of their storyworlds, as they go from one app to another. This is further highlighted in their use of Minecraft and Roblox as online communities. As community members of these virtual spaces, the child characters are complex for they are representations of their avatars in these worlds, the fully realized child characters who have already journeyed from one app or world to another, and the children who are gamers and thus negotiate their playstyles vis-à-vis the expected gameplays set by the app developers. This allows for the social construction of transmediated communities, a product of various characters and various worlds that make up a whole storyworld. The sense of community is reflected in many kinds of negotiations where social cues and meanings, gratifications, and currencies are exchanged.

Thus, what this study proposes is the idea that child users of new media forms are empowered because they have their own special ways of navigating in this virtual world that they are so familiar with and where they belong. In rethinking the role of technology to the identity and community building among children, many challenges still surface, such as the debate on the negative effects of technology use, the access that is bound by class and social status, and the repercussions of over-dependence to technology that might affect the children's growth and development. However, we must trust that children can make sense of the technological spaces well. As adults, we remain to not only support them but also trust that they have everything under control. We must trust the children in our lives that their engagements, if well-supported by adults through providing backup and opportunities to balance virtual and real-life engagements, are valid and meaningful. We should become supporting characters who help them develop as holistic protagonists in their transmedia storyworlds, and in the process, they contribute to the development and meaning making processes taking place in the communities where they belong, both within the confinements of the deep screen of gadgets and in the physical world. In the case of the digital-native child, transmediated communities should also be acknowledged

as vital spaces for engagements, where the possibilities for creativity, agency, and learning are endless.

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Short Biography

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