

Why do we love Role-Playing Game -- Human's original need of presence

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ABSTRACT

Why do we love Role-Playing Game? Why do we need the feeling of presence? In this article, we try to give the answer of these questions through the factors that determine the level of presence, to explain the original human natural that determine people's enthusiasm about develop the technology of presence, and to find the reason of the prevalence of Role-Playing Game.

1. INTRODUCTION

Presence, defined by Lombard and Ditton, is the illusion of the media users that a mediated experience is not mediated [Lombard & Ditton: The Concept of Presence]. During the long term of human history, people never stop trying to develop more advance technology and method to create higher level of presence, it is human nature to motivate such activity, and this also cause the prevalence of Role-Playing Game.

2. How can we feel presence?

Presence, defined by Lombard and Ditton, is the illusion of the media users that a mediated experience is not mediated[Lombard & Ditton: The Concept of Presence]. However, the level of the feeling of presence is not simply decided by the advance of the media technology. Since the level of presence is defined according to the reflection of user's own experience, the feeling of 'being there' or immersion is not intrinsically bound to any specific type of technology. Exactly, it is a complex product of the human mind that effected by media.

There are a lot of elements help to determine the final level of the feeling of presence. Among them, three parameters are in the highest flight—the senses related to the media, the narration content of the media, and the user's own experience of mind.

2.1 The senses related to the media

The senses are the portals to the mind [Bionica: Cyborg's Dilemma]. Worked as a communication interface, only through these senses can users get the input signals from the mediated environment. For instance, consider human nerve system as a

super complex processor, the senses are the interface between the processor and out environment. Only through them can people get the input signals from outside, just like the computer get information from mouse and keyboard and other input device. The senses are the communication channels for us human beings.

It has been proved that human beings can get to a psychological state or subjective perception in which even though part or all of an individual's current experience is generated by and/or filtered through human-made technology, part or all of the individual's perception fails to accurately acknowledge the role of the technology in the experience [Spatial Presence Theory: State of the Art and Challenges Ahead]. When human nerve system got information from the human-made environment through different kinds of senses, it process these information the same way as it does with the physical information obtained from the real world. It is hard for nerve system to figure out the difference between the physical information and the artificial ones. Such character of human mind enables people to get the feeling of immersion through a mediated virtual world.

In addition, the higher degree human senses are connected to media, the higher people get engagement to the virtual environment. The degree of sensory engagement is determined by the number of sensory channels that are involved by mediated input. It is generally believed that the greater the number of human senses involved in mediated input, the higher degree of presence the user can get. For example, when we watch a mute movie, we only get the input through our visual sense. Then after the development of sound film, we get the input through both our visual and aural senses. And according to most people's feeling, they can be more engagement with adding the sound of the movie.

2.2 The narration content of the media

Admittedly, with the same content of media, the more senses that are involved, the higher level of presence people will feel.

But what happens about different content? According to the daily experience, different narration content can cause totally different level of presence. What's more, more effective content can help to cover the lack of involved senses variety. That is to say, in a way, the content itself is more important than the mediation technology. It is decided by the complex construction of human mind and brain. The nerve system is not a simply stimulus-response machine, it is much more complex than that. The unique memory and emotion system makes human mind more related to the narration content than the simply varieties of input. For instance, printing materials—like novels—may be the simplest media method. It is only related to a low level of visual sense with low reality. However, maybe everyone can tell a lot of experiences related to high immersion with a great book. A great narration content of media can combined perfectly with human experience and illusion, thus create a highly engagement in the mind.

2.3 The user's own experience

Since the level of engagement is a production of people's own feeling, people's responses to media do not appear to be a linear product of the extent of sensory information that the medium provides. Instead, they are very much shaped by people's previous experiences with and expectations towards media. If the sensory information can remind some special memory or response of the user, then a highly engagement can be created.

Otherwise, the user will not feel engagement because the lack of resonance. So that is why totally the same content can called different level of presence. For example, when people go to the theatre to see Harry Potter, the kids may be quite excited since they feel that they are in the amazing magic world together with Harry Potter, while their parents may feel it boring and impossible. Different experience and knowledge decided what kind of content can arouse people's feeling of immersion.

3. Human nature that cause the need for presence.

3.1 Why do we need presence

Why do we need presence? It is obvious that the technology related to presence can be quite useful. Like the studies of person perception [(Ekman, 1982; Feshbach & Cohen, 1988; Kleck & Mendolia, 1990; Provine, 1989)], how people estimated time to collision in auto accidents [(Hoffmann & Mortimer, 1994; McLeod & Ross, 1983)], the causes and effects of motion sickness [(Alexander & Barrett, 1975; Parker, 1964,

1971)], and the treatment of phobias [(McNally, 1987)].

However, the application of presence is not the original motivation for our development of presence. A lot of inventions and works of human beings can make clear that, during the long period of human history, people keeps trying hard to create different kinds of virtual environment. Even these have no relationship with application.

It is human nature to create presence all the ways. Through the development of the content and technology of presence, human's original reason of need for presence can be found step by step.

3.2 The 4 steps of creation of presence

3.2.1 Step 1: copy the real world

The first step of human nature is trying hard to copy the nature and society. When looking at human's early attempt about creating presence, the original intention is to recreate and represent reality. For example, like the painting, writing and sculpting. The more similar with the real things, the greater these works are.

3.2.2 Step 2: recreate the real world

With the development of human's ability, only represent is not enough. Or, from the other side, people never considered it to be enough, only because they do not have enough ability to go further at first. So later, the society went to the second step – trying to recreate the world. Then it came the invention of those modern technology and arts such as photography, cinema, and television.

During the invention of these methods, people began to create a new virtual world. In this period, people still try to recreate the real world, the virtual world have to follow the basic principle of the real one, their main aim is to make the virtual world the same as real world.

3.2.3 Step 3: create a virtual world

Then comes the third step – try to create a totally virtual world, a world that created by human need and imagines.

Take the development of movie for example. At first, camera was invented only for record the real things happened in the world. With the development of human society and high technology, more and more things are added into the movie. We

tried to create a totally virtual world through all methods of the latest high technology, computer effect, psychology theory, etc.

Then let's look at the virtual world we created – traveling on Mars, or even outer space outside of the Milky Way galaxy; exploring the past world, pyramid, anywhere in any period of human history; creating different creations, from dinosaur to artificial intelligence... Some of them can be real in the future, some of them are totally impossible to happen.

3.2.4 Step 4: control a virtual world

Here comes the final desire of human beings – control the world. Economics suppose that the main human nature is selfish. Then what is the consequence of this human nature – the desire to control the world. Since it is impossible at present to let human beings overcome the great power of nature, and it is impossible for an individual to control the world, people trying hard to create a presence that is under individual control.

That is why we need an interactive world, and that's why we need to create virtual environment. In such environment, we create everything. We decide everything.

3.3 What is the deep need of human beings?

All in all, the original reason of human needs about presence can be divided into two main reasons: 1. the human curiosity; 2. the human's desire of control.

According to the theories of biology, the most basic reasons for the behavior of any kind of species is to survive and reproduce its own gene as many as possible. Even though the human beings are the most advanced creature, their behaviors are still originally motivated by the basic need of survival and reproduce.

Berlyne (1960) believes that curiosity is a motivational prerequisite for exploratory behavior. And only through endless exploration can human beings keep the advance over other species and the environment. And that kind of curiosity motivated people to try to explore different kinds of environment. However, not every kind of environment is possible for human beings to come through. Presence, especially virtual environment, provides such opportunity for human beings to explore those hard reached environment. It is the desire in our deep heart to get transportation and experience of some distant place, a past experience, the experience of

another people, or even the experience of some imaging environment. [Frank Biocca: The Cyborg's Dilemma: Progressive Embodiment in Virtual Environments]

Another human desire – or the desire of every creator – is the ability to control the world. It is obvious that the more power and rights one has, the better it can protect itself and its offspring. Although it may impossible under most situations, presence can give people such illusion of power.

4. Why do we love Role-Playing Game?

Video and computer game is one of the most advanced and popular technology of presence.

In *The Medium of the Video Game*, Mark Wolf identifies forty-two different categories: Abstract, Adaptation, Adventure, Artificial life, Board Games, Capturing, Card Games, Catching, Chase, Collecting, Combat, Demo, Diagnostic, Dodging, Driving, Educational, Escape, Fighting, Flying, Gambling, Interactive Movie, Management Simulation, Maze, Obstacle Course, Pencil-and-Paper Games, Pinball, Platform, Programming Games, Puzzle, Quiz, Racing, Role-Playing, Rhythm and Dance, Shoot 'Em Up, Simulation, Sports, Strategy, Table-Top Games, Target, Text Adventure, Training Simulation, and Utility.

Between these large amount categories of games, one of them is extremely popular – Role-Playing Game. A role-playing game is a game in which players assume the roles of characters and act out fantastical adventures, the final status of the role and the result of the adventures are mostly resulted from the player's decision.

Those games are quite popular because game players can get a high level of presence from them. At first glance, such feeling of immersion may be quite incredible. *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Final Fantasy*, *World of Warcraft*, *Diablo*..., the scenario of these games is full of wizard, witch, dragon, monster, and a lot of other strange creatures. From the common sense, almost all the adults and a lot of kids can tell that the appearance of these things is totally impossible. However, they can still get a high level of presence from it, then, how could it happen?

According to the factors that produce presence and the human nature that motivate people to pursue presence, the reasons for the popularity of Role-Playing Game can be found.

4.1 factors produce presence in Role-Playing Game (why we want to play role-playing game)

People get the feeling of engagement from three combined factors: the signals input to senses; the narration content of the information, and people's own experience that called reflection from the input information.

According to such factors that decide the final effect of presence, the level of reality is not the sole and most important factor that effect presence.

The narration content of the information is quite an important factor for immersion into the game. For a role-playing game, it has much more narration parts than most other game. During the game, designers usually provide each character specific background and characteristics. All the adventures of the character have some specific meaning, like saving the world, destroying the monster, etc. All these narration parts of such game make people feel meaningful while play the game, and arouse some specific reflection from people's special part of experience. Thus produce a higher level of presence. Some other game, like shooting and fighting ones, the scenario is quite simple. Usually the more people you beat or kill, the higher score you get. The lack of narration parts makes the player feel less immersion.

4.2 human's need about presence in Role-Playing Game (why we love role-playing game)

Generally, two kinds of human nature decide their need for presence: human curiosity and human's desire of control. And these two elements decide the popular situation of role-playing game.

It is human nature to curious about new kinds of environment and experiences. Such role-playing game usually creates an integrated virtual world, including a lot of interesting scenes and plots, which often intrigue human's curiosity of exploring it.

What's more, in role-playing game, the interaction between the player and the virtual game world has been extended to the most possible level. The players can create the specific characters of the roles. They can decide the direction of the development of

the world, etc. In a word, for role-playing games, "they may simulate events in nature or events in society, but this is not why they are played. They are played because they create their own reality, which participants find enforcing" (Brickman, 1978. p.25). Such property of role-playing game provides the great power of controlling the virtual world to the player, thus highly satisfied their desire.

5. Discussion

Game is an advanced technology to create presence. However, it is still not the apex of presence. Although player can control the experience of the character, the limitation of computer and other technology decides that the variety of all the plots and the results is still limited. It is still impossible that all the situations happen according to the player's own character and random elements. This definitely confined the level of presence in Role-Playing Game.

In the future, people still consider most virtual environment online as game and entertainment. With the development of technology and the theory of presence, the virtual environment will be more and more important, and it will have more communication with physical environment.

6. Reference

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