Playing dimensions during the Covid-19 pandemic: A qualitative analysis regarding gaming during lockdown for Romanian players

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Abstract

The study of motives in sociology and new media is often debated in the digital environment. However, little has been written about the motives that encourage gamers to be active in the virtual environment, and even less about the subject of gaming during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the objective of this study is to point out some of the motives (be they social, cultural or economical) why different players have opted for gaming in an environment full of pandemic-induced lockdowns. Thereby, 28 Romanian gamers were selected from Youtube pages of a few streamers, to be interviewed twice: Once during the lockdown and once after the lockdown ended, obtaining a total of 56 interviews. Afterwards, a thematic analysis of the main identified motives was performed, which determined the identification of four main reasons in support of gaming: gaming as communicational environment, gaming as a "pandemic education" platform, gaming as nostalgia and gaming as acquiring new skills, each with its own characteristics. Even though some themes are present in the Covid-19 pandemic as they were in the past, there are new themes, such as gaming as a so-called "pandemic education", where the game appears rather as a civic consciousness. Also, the WHO initiative, #PlayApartTogether, seems to be an important incentive to identify recurring themes regarding gaming during lockdown.

Keywords
Video games; Gaming; Motives; #PlayApartTogether; Streaming;

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Introduction

> Motives are words. Generically, to what do they refer? They do not denote any elements "*in*" individuals. They stand for anticipated situational consequences of questioned conduct (Mills 1940: 905)

The impact of the Covid-19 induced lockdowns in terms of the digital environment and implicitly the behavior of gamers in that period remain too little debated in the literature. The purpose of this study is to expose the main motives why many individuals opt for gaming alternatives both during the lockdown and after its end, given that 2020 brought the video game industry the amount of $ 159 billion, with most being during the lockdown period (Hall, 2020).

Regarding the perspective proposed by C. Wright Mills (1940) in his article "Vocabularies of Motive", the trajectory of this study contains a similar approach: the motives invoked by social actors in their activities tend to follow a cultural, situational pattern, by no means a psychological one. One should clearly note that this perspective has also been illustrated by the World Health Organization (Canales, 2020), by bifurcating its discourse on gaming. If a year ago the WHO brought into question a condition such as "gaming disorder" due to the harmful addiction that gaming can cause and treat with some skepticism the tendency of young people to practice gaming in their peer groups, in the pandemic year 2020 WHO launches the hashtag #PlayApartTogether, which encourages the gamers to spend their time together gaming during lockdown. In this respect, there is also a need to move the sociological framework in the digital environment, as suggested by Lupton (2015), given that the interest in virtual interactions has reached unprecedented values in 2020.

The relevance of some "*Vocabularies of Motives*" in the gaming world during the pandemic is worth discussing, given that they take the motives invoked by players from the sphere of psychological impulses, transposing them in the broader context of the restrictions generated by the Covid-19 pandemic. In this sense, an important argument in this article is that even the situation of movement restrictions influences the establishment of recurring themes in the gaming world. For example, while some of the identified themes appear mainly during the lockdown in Romania, such as "*Gaming as Communicational Environment*" or "*Gaming as Nostalgia*", other themes become visible especially after the lockdown, such as "*Gaming as Pandemic Education*" and "*Gaming as Acquiring New Skills*".

Thus, the structure of this article is as follows: the first section includes a variety of motives and components specific to gaming in the literature review, but also pandemic-related motives, the next section discusses the temporal pressure felt in the digital environment along with well-known concepts in this subject. Next, there is the methodology section where the empirical approach of performing the thematic analysis will be described, and then I will eventually present the main themes discursively identified during the interviewing process.

Why do we game?

The motivations for gaming have been written repeatedly. On the one hand, among the most observed elements on this topic, we find the desire for long-term progress, the possibility to create virtual teams with peer groups, the interest in fair play behavior and so on (Yee, 2006b). On the other hand, the same author identifies certain components that accompany players in their virtual behavior: competition, escapism and the creation of social relationships within the game (Yee, 2006a).

A functionalist approach proves to be a relevant one in such a study, given that some existing motives highlight that the subject of gaming and the valences it implies cannot be exhausted. While most authors measure virtual performance by competing with other registered players, other more recent studies (Obreja, 2019; Hall *et al.*, 2019) measure innovation in the virtual environment through the ability to stimulate creativity as a *"sense of achievement"*. On the other hand, another reason from gaming studies is the need to belong to a community (Zhang & Kaufman, 2015).

However, studies in recent years bring a new perspective on gaming: a high number of hours invested in gaming itself is no longer a sufficient criterion to access performance, but it is necessary for players to devote time to watching streaming platforms, where professional players play the same games (Wong, 2020). In this regard, some studies describe *Twitch*, one of the most popular streaming platforms (Bingham, 2017; Obreja, 2021) as a space of intermediation between different kinds of performers, and the constant interactions between streamers and viewers.

As we might anticipate, some gamers prefer that all their interactions with others should be entirely digital. The fact that this pattern is maintained even at the end of the lockdown partially confirms what other studies call *"bedroom culture"* (Livingstone, 2009; Livingstone & Helsper, 2007), i.e. the constant temptation provided by new media environment to suggest multiple opportunities and satisfactions for young people to consider digital interactions as prevailing over the *"traditional"* ones. Practically there are many studies that warn about the restriction of face-to-face interactions to the detriment of digitally mediated ones (Bynner, 2005; Wyn & Woodman, 2006; Livingstone, 2009). In his flagship research for those who choose to eliminate all physical interactions in favor of digital ones, Wong (2020) develops the concept of *"hidden youth"*, with a pattern worthy to be highlighted: even if the interactions between young people are completely moved to online platforms, only a very small proportion of those interviewed confessed that they really feel alone. Other approaches call such an isolated interaction as an *"anti-social network"* (Vainikka, 2020). This confirms the approach of Giddens (1991) in developing the concept of *"collage effect"*, according to which today's interactions can take place without a physical space to mediate them. For many young people, the frequency of gaming and the ability to network with peer groups is a relevant criterion to identify as a *"gamer"* in relation to others (Stone, 2019). According to Clear (2018), video games become a consistent activity when it comes to obtaining a certain virtual status or prestige, correlating the tendencies of players to spend as much time online with the increasing level

of dopamine, but also with the image of future rewards, which seem to be worth the players' time.

However, the Covid-19 induced lockdown has brought with it a new consequence observed in the literature: more free time than ever before. In this respect, many authors consider that games, in general, contribute to the onset of a state of nostalgia (Cho, 2020), while regarding a state of connectedness of older adults and this nostalgia for games seems to be confirmed even in studies regarding lockdown, in particular (Gammon & Ramshaw, 2021). Nostalgia as a motive for games is a consistent criterion in previous research (Lowenthal, 2015; Juul, 2010; Davis, 1977), so that even economic transactions are made in the spirit of buying games from childhood, through concepts such as *"marketing nostalgia"* (Outhka, 2003). On the other hand, Swalwell (2007) mentions *"nostalgia and amnesia"*, referring to the intention to keep alive the memory of the games played many years ago.

Gaming and digital time pressure

The lockdown itself has brought its own approach to the conduct of individuals in exceptional situations. Based on the fact that people *"contaminate"* each other with certain behaviors in uncertain circumstances, there are studies (Lehman, 2021) that adhere to the theory of contagion to explain the behavior of social actors when the rules are completely different. The intensity of such contagion can be transmitted even in the virtual environment, which is also relevant through the WHO's urge to launch #PlayApartTogether as a stimulus for players to maintain their interactions in the virtual environment. In this respect, there are also methodological problems regarding certain *"symbolic boundaries"* (Michael, 2017) which, transposed in the digital environment visible in the lockdown context, separate players who look forward to resuming face-to-face interactions, compared to those for whom the lockdown did not bring major changes in terms of interactions with others.

The fact that the digital environment would make a fundamental contribution to our lives was discovered way before this lockdown, but it has become increasingly visible since the computer had become an accessory increasingly accessible to individuals everywhere. However, faster access to internet services contributes to the real paradigm shift in our daily lives, when there are studies that show that the space starts to become unimportant, knowing that the prevailing factor is now the temporal one. Concepts such as the *"collage effect"* (Giddens, 1991) seem to appear through the development of media institutions and subsequently the new media ones, so that events per se tend to become more important than the place where they take place. With the spread of new media, we have every reason to believe that Giddens' perspective requires some adjacent adaptations, given that socio-cultural and emotional states, such as empathy, can be generated in a digital environment, as they can also appear within physical realities (Bollmer, 2017; Murray, 2020).

The emergence of the digital environment can be equated with a number of concepts, and these correlations are not difficult to observe in the literature. Thus, the life

of a gamer in general but also during the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular, is guided by concepts such as *"communicational society"* (Lash, 2002), *"social acceleration"* (Rosa, 2003). On the other hand, Scheuerman (2004) states that the analysis of any human experience is emerging in the field of the sociology of speed. It is no secret that what we know to be late modernity is based on an unprecedented *"digital acceleration"*, when it becomes increasingly clear that life will never be the same as before the new media era (Thrift, 1996; Wajcman, 2008). The explanations for such a paradigm shift are not necessarily difficult to offer. Perhaps the most popular introduction to this topic belongs to Latour (2005) who, in the context of the emergence of the digital environment in the new millennium, individuals, as subjects, are forced to redefine their interactions as new objects arise (in this case, Latour was referring to technological entities). A suitable example of the emergence of the digital environment, with particular reference to the MMORPG environment, is highlighted by Coanda and Aupers (2019), who show that communication in the virtual environment between players can be done on several channels, even simultaneously: the global message, to all online players at the time, *"group message"*, to players in a specific target group, *"guild message"*, to players who are members of the same guild, but also whisper message, with particular reference to a certain player through the private chat window.

This section, which contains a multitude of concepts specific to late modernity, is not accidental. Its purpose is to observe the possible interpenetrations between the concepts that aim, on the one hand, the technological advancements in the communication era we are going through and, on the other hand, the reasons invoked by gamers to justify a performance-focused behavior during the lockdown generated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the discourse of such interviewees will invariably be a discourse about unprecedented time pressure, but also about *"technological acceleration"* in the form in which it was brought into discussion by Rosa (2003). Such an approach to increase technological capacity in the digital environment goes beyond many of the features implemented by MMORPG games because, as one interviewee puts in: *"I wish these games made me feel closer to others than they do now"* (During Lockdown Interview, 26 years old, female). It has been known for decades that we are going through a new social reality (Lyotard, 1984), and this reality will have significant digital valences. Thus, the increase of the operating speed entails a proportional energy consumption, this relationship being captured several times by Adam (1994, 1996). Referring particularly to video games, the unprecedented time acceleration does not stop players from recalling events from their gaming past, and this will be seen especially in the theme of *"gaming as nostalgia"* identified in this research.

Methodology

For the present study, 28 Romanian gamers were interviewed in two stages, one taking place during the lockdown in Romania, and the other after the lockdown ended, which determines a final number of 56 interviews. The group of respondents was selected from the online environment, according to the following procedure: first of all, two profiles of

Romanian streamers from Youtube were selected based on their number of viewers. After that, during some live broadcasts, the chat was used to express the interest in selecting some respondents to interview them, and the written message was the following: "*Hello. I am currently conducting research on the topic of gaming during lockdown and I would need some respondents interested in this topic*". The author of this study mentioned his email address in the message, so that those interested in the interview can contact him at that address. The period April 11-28, 2020 was intended for this procedure, during which 29 Romanian gamers expressed their intention to participate in the interview. Prior to the interview itself, the 29 respondents had to complete a short questionnaire made on Google Forms, containing several socio-demographic variables such as: gender, age, but also the games they played. As announced in the questionnaire on the Forms platform, the deadline for completing the questionnaire was April 28, after which the actual interview will begin. Since one of the respondents did not complete the questionnaire even after two reminders, it was excluded from the analysis. In addition, all respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their personal data.

The 28 respondents were between 19 and 51 years old, with a median age of 27. Also, within the group of respondents, 17 people mentioned that they are male and 11 that are female. The actual interviewing process took place online, in two stages, the first being between April 29 and May 5, and the second between June 7 and September 28. The interviews lasted between 23 and 77 minutes, with an average duration of 41 minutes. It is also worth mentioning that the lockdown in Romania lasted two months, between March 16 and May 15. All fifty-six interviews were conducted in Romanian, and all responses suggestive of this study were translated into English. The platforms where the interview took place are *Discord* and *Skype*, depending on the choice of the interviewees, and the interview itself was conducted audio-video. As can be deduced from the title of the article, the research question is as follows:

- *What are the motives towards gaming during and after the pandemic lockdown?*

The interview was a semi-structured one, so please check Table 1 below in order to see the questions used in the interviewing process. Even during a two-stage interviewing process, it is recommended that the questions do not undergo major changes and encourage free reporting from respondents, even if these questions are carefully structured (Minichiello *et al.*, 2008). Since the topic of gaming during lockdown is underrepresented in academia, the method of thematic analysis was used to interpret the interviews obtained, because, as Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight: "*A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set*". Regarding the typologies of thematic analysis identified by the two authors, it can be said that the thematic analysis performed in this study is a latent one, given that "*... a thematic analysis at the latent level goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations- and ideologies*" (Braun & Clarke,

2006). The thematic analysis was performed using *Excel*, by including the interview excerpts and by grouping them using suggestive clusters of words, depending on their frequency, but also depending on their contextual classification. It could be observed that a latent thematic analysis captures exactly the perspective launched by Mills (1940) in the analysis of motives:

> Rather than interpreting actions and language as external manifestations of subjective and deeper lying elements in individuals, the research task is the locating of particular types of actions within typal frames of normative actions and socially *situated clusters of motive*" (own emphasis)

Table 1. Questions used for the 2 stages of interviews

Questions for during lockdown interviews	Questions for after lockdown interviews
- Do you think that the pandemic and the isolation at home influence your career as a gamer? How?	- How does your gamer trajectory look like outside the lockdown, compared to the two-month lockdown period?
- How do you, as a gamer, take advantage of your time spent at home?	- How did you take advantage of gaming when the lockdown no longer exists?
- What attracted you to the games you chose to play during this state of emergency? Why did you choose those and not others?	- What attracted you to the games you chose to play after the end of the emergency? Why did you choose those and not others?
- Do you think that you performed better as a gamer during the pandemic than in normal times? Why?	- Do you think that you had a superior performance as a gamer after the lockdown, compared to the lockdown period? Why?
- From what you know, how did the gamers in your group of friends cope during this lockdown? Do you think they were better or less efficient?	- From what you know, how are the gamers in your peer group doing now, after the lockdown? Do you think they are more efficient or less efficient?
- Do you think that gaming performance is easier on your own or with friends? Could you explain?	- Do you think that gaming performance is easier on your own or with friends? Could you explain?
- How did life as a gamer help you fill your time in isolation? If you weren't a gamer, how would you get over these moments?	- How does life as a gamer help you fill your time in these moments? If you weren't a gamer, how would you spend your time now?

Findings

Among the results obtained, there are certain central themes evoked by the respondents. These topics are as follows: 1. Gaming as communicational environment, 2. Gaming as a so-called *"pandemic education"* platform, 3. Gaming as nostalgia and 4. Gaming as acquiring new skills. Please see Table 2 below to observe the moments of the interviews in which each theme was identified, but also a short description of each topic.

Table 2. Identified themes of the analysis

Theme	Stage(s) of the Interview	Brief Description
1. Gaming as Communicational Environment	- During Lockdown	This theme captures the fact that the impossibility of physical interactions reflects the compensatory need to use digitally mediated interactions. This aspect also confirms some success of the WHO through its initiative, #PlayApartTogether.
2. Gaming as „Pandemic Education"	- Both (During and After the Lockdown)	From a predominantly functionalist perspective, this theme captures the socializing role of gaming during pandemics to convince gamers to take over in future physical interactions the health norms identified in the virtual environment.
3. Gaming as Nostalgia	- During Lockdown	Deeply debated in the literature, the nostalgia of games is a phenomenon with multiple valences subject to debate. The fact that this theme is visible even in this study shows that the excess of available time of gamers outlines the motivation needed to return to certain video games from childhood.
4. Gaming as Acquiring new Skills	- Both (During and After the Lockdown)	For some respondents, the lockdown was an opportunity to exceed their limits in terms of video game skills. This desire to access performance in the virtual environment as a reason for both pre-pandemic and post-pandemic captures how the existence of hierarchies in video games is a visible point of interest.

Gaming as communicational environment

> I have to socialize somehow and I play a lot of multiplayer games: League of Legends, Fortnite, Metin2 and not necessarily to perform, but mainly to talk to other people, to feel what it's like to talk (During lockdown interview, 25 years old, male)

The need to communicate in the online environment represents a relevant pattern in the interviews conducted during the lockdown, and this aspect is not necessarily a surprising one: since face-to-face interactions are no longer possible, communication in the virtual environment appears more rather as a compensatory refuge for traditional interactions that are now restricted. As it was mentioned at the beginning of this article, a functionalist approach proves to be useful in such a theme, given that it identifies several functions of social contexts. As another interviewee explains: *"[Talking with my friends while playing]…*

becomes something therapeutic. You don't even need to talk about the game you're playing, you can talk about whatever you want" (During lockdown interview, 19 years old, male).

> If I feel like crying and can't find my words, all I have to do is put a sad emoticon on the *League of Legends* chat and all the friends I play with realize that something is wrong and I immediately receive an avalanche of messages in private. Under these conditions, do you think I'm longing to go outside again? (During lockdown interview, 26 years old, female)

As can be seen from the above excerpt, including the emotional side of human interactions, initially only physically possible, is now transferred to the online environment. It is the speed of the connection, which determines the instant transmission and reception of messages that make these interactions desirable.

Gaming as "Pandemic Education"

> I played a few MMORPGs and I could feel how *'we're in this together'* if you know what I mean. It seemed to be our duty to spend as much time together as possible, and the games had really brought this state of pandemic to the virtual environment, if I could say so. In *Metin2*, for example, players received free masks for a few weeks, with the recommendation to use them during interactions with other players. As people in the public space were not in a hurry to wear a mask, the *Metin2* players seem to have shown more civic sense. (After lockdown interview, 46 years old)

The socializing role of such a digital approach has a suggestive impact on the lives of players: to convey to them how important individual protection is. Through a virtual *"contamination"*, players seem to have exhaustive access to the free option offered by the game during pandemics, that of customizing their characters with facemasks and first aid kits. As another interviewee mentions: *"Even if that mask doesn't help you in the game, it doesn't give you any bonus ... the fact that you see all the players wearing it makes you wear it too, if you know what I mean".* (During lockdown interview, female, 33 years old)

In the virtual environment, compliance with health protection rules as transmitted by the creators of the game is not a simple indicator of individual protection, but is a proof of the *"civic sense"* of belonging to a virtual community where individual protection becomes mandatory in order to protect the others. Thus, it is worth asking to what extent these protection measures adopted in the virtual environment would later be taken over in face-to-face interactions. An interviewee raises the issue of the dangers that the double standard can generate in terms of compliance with protection measures: *"It is useless to customize your virtual characters with masks and protective kits, as long as you do not wear a mask in physical interactions. This not only makes you stupid, but also ignorant"* (After lockdown interview, female, 27 years old).
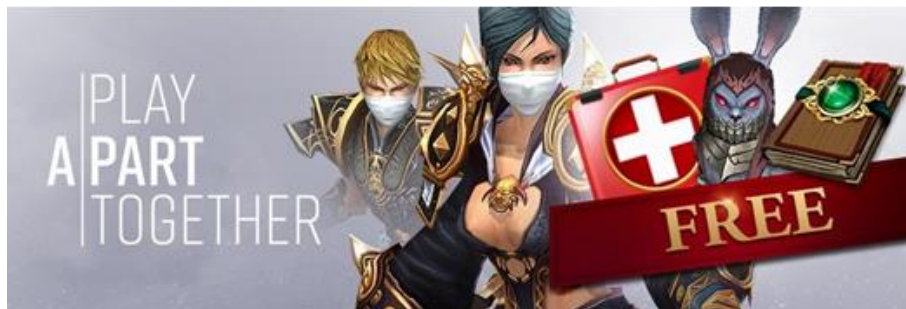
Figure 1 - *Metin2* advises during the lockdown, to encourage wearing the mask even in the virtual environment (Gameforge, 2020).

Gaming as nostalgia

> I decided to play *Metin2* and I certainly wouldn't have started playing it if the lockdown wouldn't have occurred… Furthermore it was a childhood game and I had such a good feeling, because I felt that there are not only disadvantages when you are forced to stay at home, if you know how to spend your time. (During lockdown interview, 21 years old, male)

The excess time available in the context of the pandemic caused some players to spend time in childhood games, games that they would not have played under normal conditions. Thus, the criterion of nostalgia proves to be significant even in the purchase of old games, some of them dating back more than two decades, as one respondent points out: *"I couldn't believe it when I found a DOOM II CD on the Internet, you know … that game that came out in the '90s. In normal times I wouldn't have noticed that this game still exists, but now with this quarantine I actually remembered how young I was when I first played this game. I didn't even have children at that time … (laughs)"* (During Lockdown interview, male, 51 years old).

The theme of gaming as a reason for nostalgia is found only in interviews taken during the lockdown, so we can associate this aspect mainly with the excess time available; time that would have been virtually non-existent in pre-pandemic times.

However, nostalgia during the pandemic does not only appear as a thematic consequence per se. Some players seem to resort to nostalgia rather as a coping mechanism, in order to gain some certainty in an environment full of uncertainties. Thus, nostalgia can even appear as a refuge to overcome certain difficult times, given the fact that *"… these days you do not know what will happen to you tomorrow"* (During lockdown interview, male, 30 years old). Since the very certainty of tomorrow seems to be threatened, nostalgia now appears as a form of escapism from imminent danger. This perspective is highlighted by another interviewee:

> You can no longer feel at ease when any guarantee of tomorrow is now threatened. Now I feel the need to do some things that I have always done well and that I really find myself in … Maybe for some people the pandemic is an opportunity to discover new experiences. For me, the pandemic is already too new and traumatic experience to look for other new experiences. (During lockdown interview, male, 26 years old)

Gaming as acquiring new skills

> Believe me, if I didn't have all this time, you'd realize it didn't burn me to build so many giant buildings around here … If you want, I can show you what four-story block I built in Minecraft … it's a pity I don't have anyone to play with anymore, I would have accommodated them all in my newly built building. (During lockdown interview, male, 46 years old)

This topic deserves particular attention, given the fact that it includes players from almost all socio-demographic categories. Also, another aspect worth mentioning is that of the persistence of the performance pattern even after the lockdown has ended. Such a pattern reinforces concepts such as *"symbolic boundaries",* given that some players interviewed do not necessarily want to resume face-to-face interactions, even if the lockdown no longer exists:

> To me, another lockdown would be desirable, believe me. I know some people were just waiting to go out and socialize, but I'm not one of them. To be honest, the good part is that now I will have a better internet connection, because the whole planet is no longer in the house … You noticed that the net works better now that they are allowed to go out, right? (After lockdown, 27 years old, female)

Acquiring new skills is in line with the frequency of participation in video games, since performance cannot be present without a proper involvement from the gamer itself. However, as it was seen in the previous sections of the article, achieving gaming performance cannot be based only on the actual gaming, but also requires many moments of watching other players playing the same game. This aspect of the *"significant other"* is also mentioned in an interview:

> Even before the beginning of the pandemic, I spent a lot of time in games and, when I wasn't playing, I was watching other people playing, I watched streams on Twitch and Youtube. I also had friends who were streaming and honestly they motivated me to want to play better and better. (After lockdown interview, 23 years old, male)

Discussion

The premise from which this study began was inspired by Mills' (1940) paper on the analysis of motives. Such an approach is welcome in the sociological approach regarding the valences of new media in a pandemic context, especially since the lockdown situation becomes a motive per se, with a wide socio-cultural substratum. In this sense, an implicit argument in this study is that motives invoked by gamers are not the result of intimate or psychological dispositions, but actually reflect broader contexts that can be social, economic or, in this case, medical and socio-economical.

Peer group communication is a hotly debated topic in the social sciences, and the challenges posed by Covid-19 induced lockdowns seem to have redefined the standard forms of interaction. *"Traditional"* forms of communication within youth groups seem to be usually the first to be characterized by social change (Bynner, 2005; Wyn & Woodman,

2006), but the Covid-19 pandemic has shown that redefining communication channels is quite uniform among age cohorts. Previous processes such as *"social acceleration"* (Rosa, 2003), or *"digital acceleration"* (Wajcman, 2008) prove that the frequent use of digital technologies is no longer an aspect that characterizes only economic elites, but describes rather most of society. During the pandemic, the digital environment acquired new values, no longer simply being a technological channel for long-distance communication, but rather an environment for learning and adapting to the new reality generated by lockdown. Maintaining the means of communication between social actors is facilitated by the various channels that game developers make available to players. Either through public messages or through private messages, players have the opportunity to express their thoughts and ideas through means characterized by different levels of intimacy, depending on the recipient to whom the message should reach (Coanda & Aupers, 2019). Such phenomenological aspects highlight the fact that these digital communication channels can reproduce, to a certain extent, the *"traditional"* ways of communication, much more visible in pre-pandemic times. Thus, many game creators follow the WHO recommendations to #PlayApartTogether, socializing them with the new regulations in the pandemic context (Canales, 2020). However, it remains an open topic to what extent the socialization with health regulations, acquired in the virtual environment during lockdown, has contributed in some way to compliance with health rules with the resumption of face-to-face interactions. Some studies evoke the contagion theory (Lehman, 2021) in terms of compliance with health measures, but it is worth analyzing the extent to which players are truly influenced in real life by their virtual activity.

The role of nostalgia in new media has been written repeatedly, so it is worth noting its characteristics when it comes to gaming during the Covid-19 lockdown. It is observed that nostalgia now becomes a form of *nowstalgia*, through which the past is brought back to life through current technological forms of promoting visual content. Thus, nostalgia is invigorated by the fact that it is made public, in the words of Gammon and Ramshaw (2021, p.135)*: "A focus on involvement and immersion during leisure episodes is being replaced by considerations of how best to capture and share them on social media".* Taking refuge in a friendly past for our memories seems to provide an opportunity to overcome the difficulties of the present, being what the authors call *"a cocktail for coping"* (Gammon and Ramshaw, 2021, p.135). Longitudinal research could observe the extent to which nostalgia is only a temporary form of escapism for uncertain situations or could be, in fact, a long-term solution that can define one's virtual activity.

Implications and limitations

Among some merits of this study is a twofold side: on the one hand, this article started on an exploratory field designed to observe the reasons why some players opted for the gaming option during lockdown, but also afterwards. On the other hand, as can be seen, the article largely confirms the results of other previous research - even if it complements them several times - even if such research was not necessarily conducted in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, the theme of gaming as *"pandemic education"* is an

innovation in the field of new media. Although this exhortation was launched by the World Health Organization since the beginning of the pandemic, the way in which this approach impacted the lives of gamers during the lockdown remains underrepresented.

Among the limitations of this study, we can see the need for a quantitative approach, statistically representative among gamers everywhere. Although such an approach is indeed costly and is based on possible statistical data that does not currently exist, I think it would be welcomed to see to what extent such qualitative research as the present research is confirmed. Also, the author of this study is aware that the way the data was collected, more precisely through online interviews on platforms such as *Skype* and *Discord* could have had an impact on how the questions were asked and, implicitly, the answers were given. Since the interviews during the lockdown were taken online for legal reasons, it was considered that keeping this way of interviewing even with the end of the lockdown would be a beneficial approach, in order not to introduce new possible factors that change the quality of the results.

The selection process of interviewees in this study is another limitation, given that all those selected are already familiar, to some extent, with systematic gaming in this area, since they were already watching different Youtube streaming channels. It is also difficult to determine to what extent the interviewees were already *"hardcore viewers" of gaming channels, and to what extent they became such viewers due to the lockdown. It is also difficult to determine to what extent the interviewees were already "hardcore viewers"* of gaming channels, and to what extent they became such viewers due to the lockdown. On the other hand, the very selection of specific streaming channels limits the range of games to a small number, resulting in the games presented in this article.

Conclusion

The video game industry remains a successful one, and this was even more pronounced in 2020, given the social and public health features that accompanied this pandemic. That is why the interest in gaming during lockdown remains visible, and such a topic must be found fundamental in the sociological literature of the study of motives, along with the vast contribution of studies specific to the new media field. Thus, since the main objective of this study was the same to identify the motives used by gamers in support of gaming during pandemics, it can be seen that the themes identified in this study not only confirm some of the previous studies in the field of gaming, but they also call for a critical analysis of the nature of such motives, given that their structural essence lies precisely in the context of this Covid-19 lockdown.

As we have seen, a new emerging topic of game studies during the Covid-19 pandemic, *"pandemic education"* manages to confirm that the socialization of players in the spirit of health rules during the pandemic should be seen as a systemic activity, launched and successfully implemented by the World Health Organization, via #PlayApartTogether. This identified theme once again confirms the awareness that overcoming this period can only be done collectively, not individually.

On the other hand, one of the traditional roles of the computer environment is also confirmed: that of a virtual means of communication between gamers. In addition, gaming as a nostalgia manages to capture aspects observed even in previous research, such as the interest of some categories of players for childhood games, along with nostalgia as a form of marketing for players who prefer to repurchase various games reminiscent of their virtual past. As we have seen, this function of nostalgia has gained fertile ground during the lockdown, precisely due to the surplus of free time intended to recall the virtual past.

This study is also a call for further studies to analyze the behavior of gamers during the lockdown, since this topic remains underrepresented, and such an approach could prove useful in uncertain times such as those from the last two years. There are certainly a wide variety of approaches to why individuals prefer the alternative of gaming during lockdown, and the process of identifying motives as socio-cultural aspects, according to C. Wright Mills, is one of these relevant approaches in the sociological literature.

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