

Digital Cycling Club: Gamification of Cycling in post Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The covid-19 pandemic has brought forth an unexpected surge in the popularity of cycling as anxiety toward public transport were coupled with lockdowns and other forms of social restrictions. Citizens of various cities in Europe, North America (Buehler & Pucher, 2021) and Asia (Budi et al, 2021; Fatoni et al, 2021) had adopted cycling as a mean of transportation, physical exercise and recreation during a time which mandated physical distancing (Nikitas et al, 2021). Combined with increasing volume of bicycle trades (Ramdani, 2020; Nikitas et al, 2021), barriers in entering cycling became significantly lower than before. Cycling suddenly became a public interest that was not limited to professional athletes or enthusiasts.

The surge of interest was reflected on multiple aspects. Firstly, on the economic aspect. There was a rise in bicycle sales statistic from 2019 to 2021 in European, North American, and Asian countries (Buehler & Pucher, 2021; Nikitas et al, 2021; Ramdani, 2021; Nguyen & Pojani, 2022). The increasing sales are accommodated by public policies as municipal governments across continents installed various bicycle-friendly facilities to support increasing number of cyclists (Budi et al, 2021; Buehler & Pucher, 2021; Nikita et al, 2021; Nguyen & Pojani, 2022). This extended abstract aims to study the possibility of a third playful digital media dimension through gamification of cycling on online social fitness networks (OSFN).

The aim's rationale is based on the current state of digital society. Uses of digital media have transcended the sphere of media and communication and have become a ubiquitous signifier of contemporary society (Athique, 2013). Everyday activities are gradually translated into the interactivity of digital media, as real and virtual worlds become increasingly intertwined (Lindgren, 2017). This includes cycling. OSFN applications such as Strava record cycling and translate it into biomedical data and behavioral statistic (Rivers, 2019) such as heartbeat rate, generated power, route map, and segments. On communal level, OSFN enable users to develop sense of community with other users through social interactions such as follow, reacting on posts, segment-sharing and joining virtual cycling clubs. Through OSFN, cycling becomes an object. OSFN reify the experience of cycling into a "material artefact" (Barratt, 2017:328) in the form of digital contents which are like social media posts (Barratt, 2017; Rivers, 2019).

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The ubiquity of digital media uses has also brought forth a ludic turn (Raessens, 2006; Zimmerman, 2009; Mayra, 2017) by implementing play epistemology (Huizinga, 1949) into various digital media platforms (Richardsson et al, 2021). Ludification facilitates the paradigm shift of media uses from consumption to playful creation of digital contents. This includes how social media and similar platforms are engaged more playfully by enabling user generated content creation of mod and remix in addition to content-sharing. Besides that, digital media platforms' interface and modes of interaction are increasingly designed to resemble digital game (Dippel & Fizek, 2017; Hjorth & Hinton, 2019).

This is the case of OSFN which provide users with goal-oriented activities and interactive interface designs (Barratt, 2017; Rivers, 2019). Gamification itself is a process where non-gaming procedures adopt structures and contingency of game which transform works or leisure into a playful activity (Brougere, 2021). OSFN enable its users to complete challenges to reach individual achievements or top group leaderboards. The more a cyclist rides their bicycle, the more competent they become within the ludic structures of OSFN. Completing challenges or topping leaderboard reward cyclist with points that on occasion can be traded for real-world rewards such as Strava's Le Col challenges which reward users with prize money and discounts. Despite being outside of contemporary definition of digital games, OSFN fulfill users's intrinsic factors for interacting with digital games which are competency, autonomy, and relatedness (Rigby & Ryan, 2011).

There are two significances of this extended abstract. Firstly, it investigates humans and digital technology during a time of constant restriction of movement and its aftermath. The prolonged physical isolation caused by covid-19 lockdowns has created a situation in which individuals often involuntarily took refuge on digital media environments (Cauberghé et al, 2020). Particularly, social media platforms experienced a significant traffic increase during lockdowns in (Miao et al, 2022). Daily activities such as self-expression and kinship were migrated into social media interactivity and networking which result in an unprecedented height of public interest toward digital media environments (Gonzalez-Padilla & Tortolero-Blanco, 2020; Pennington, 2021). As covid-19 pandemic is transitioning into endemic phase, and physical restrictions have been largely eased in most places, it is important to investigate how the digital mediated life of the pandemic is transitioned back into normalcy and to identify its differences from pre-pandemic human-digital media relationship

Secondly, it ought to investigate formal and experiential boundaries of digital games in accordance to DiGRA 2023 conference's main theme. The conference's mission statement is to explore the limit of materiality and sociotechnical practice margins of digital games. This extended abstract offers an exploration of OSFN's playful turn in capturing the playful experience of cycling communities who are often excluded as gamers within digital game studies scholarship. It is aligned with DiGRA 2023's sub-theme of media as games that study similarities between social networks and digital games. This extended abstract also aims to investigate how the limits and margins of digital game correspond with the contemporary playfulness of culture (Kirkpatrick, 2013; Richardsson et al, 2021).

Digital ethnography is a fruitful approach to investigate this phenomenon. It is a methodological framework that observes humans and digital technology's relationship in a sociotechnical assemblage in which technological developments enable human activities which, in turn, establish a culture around said technology (Pink et al, 2015). In this case, digital ethnography will be practiced to study of cycling as a digital environment. I will invite four Strava users and community members to participate in the research to understand how cycling individually or in group is turned into a playful

activity. This extended abstract is driven by two research questions. One, how are ludic texts of OSFN as digital games? Two, how do cyclists fill their roles as gamers during the gamification process of cycling.

Keywords

keywords, help, identifying, suitable, reviewers, readers

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