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Chapter 7

Macro, Micro and Meta Persuasive Play to Change Society

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Introduction:

This chapter examines persuasive games through the dominant arguments made about the value of such designed play. Beyond the who, what, and where there is the why. Why do researchers and practitioners want to persuade people through games? Why are games the right or potentially wrong medium for delivering persuasive messages? Why has public discourse come to need games as a vehicle for communicating and argumentation? Why has the design of such play grown in an increasingly media-rich environment that is seemingly adrift, unable to decant the real from its opposite?

These questions are not the mere product of diegetic examination. Instead, they are drawn from the daily operations of directing a game studio at the apex of the increasingly complicated political theater of Washington, DC, its interplay with democracy and the dissemination of information. These questions are informed by contracted work and practiced research in purpose-driven games. This work is done for a varied list of professional clients that include multiple Smithsonian Museums, the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), Education Testing Services (ETS), the US National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH), several radio, television and news organizations. They also include work to improve journalism through game design (Grace and Farley, 2016) and projects for public and private media organizations.

In 2013 the American University Game Lab was founded with the mission to research, teach and practice persuasive play. There are now several definitions of persuasive play and persuasive games. Bogost's definition is the prevailing and most commonly used (Persuasive Games 2007). I prefer a marketing inspired definition of persuasive play as games and other engagement strategies designed to change player's interests, activities or opinions. This definition converts the lifestyle segmentation used by demographers and marketing research (Plummer 1974) toward games. It also carries a longer running tradition of assessment and efficacy analysis informed by more than 30 years of demographic and psychographic research. In the array of demographer tools, for instance, are methods for understanding the current state of people's interests, activities and opinions (Demby 2011). Assessing the efficacy of any persuasive play engagement can proceed from gauging the pre-persuasive play and post-persuasive play state of those three attributes. Admittedly, these definitions are pragmatic, lacking the academic inspiration of Bogost's seminal work.

I propose that there are three broad categories of persuasive play worthy not only of research but as foci for industrial practice. These are, macro-persuasion, micro-persuasions and meta-persuasion. Macro-persuasions are the efforts across gaming made about games and their relationship to society.

Micro-persuasions, are the games themselves that aim to employ persuasive play. Meta-persuasions are the efforts, whether playful or nefarious, which act upon non-play systems as thought they were systems. Meta-persuasions are the least obvious of the three, originating in part as the byproduct of macro and micro persuasions, in part by the absence of critical examination and most obviously as the application of playful thinking to non-playful contexts. If purposeful games, persuasive games, or the mucmuch-debatedrious games are applications of games in non-game contexts, meta persuasions are their compliment. Meta persuasions is the application of play in non-play contexts. Meta persuasions work against big data, by producing big bad data (aka poorly constructed or fake data. They work against the democratic function of real news, by producing fake news, or they play devil's advocate where no such advocate is needed.

The characteristics of persuasive gaming preface each of these efforts. There is for example, procedural rhetoric in macro, meta-persuasive levels and micro-persuasive games. The results of these persuasions do yield a by-product, the unintended persuasion. Through a combination of case study report and position setting, this chapter outlines the proof, character, and exemplars of each of these persuasions.

This chapter focuses on macro-persuasion as a case study in how large-scale efforts to change the interests, activities and opinions of game players and non-players has been executed over the past decade. These efforts directly effect all of the persuasions. Macro-persuasions demonstrate a kind of application of persuasive play design in non-game contexts. They are not an application of gamification, but instead a chorus of efforts designed to elevate the status and efficacy of games in general society.

The goal of the chapter is to help others in the persuasive games space examine these practices to refine their own work, develop appropriate strategies for combating the unintended results of such work, and provide a topographic view of how such strategies might be applied elsewhere.

The Macro-Persuasion

There are several ways to frame persuasive games. At the macro level, persuasive games can be framed as a whole. This whole is compriseisef the creative product of games, the practice of playing games, and the communities which orbit games. In this frame, games are a quantifiable, distinct and discrete set. To make sense of this, games must be viewed as an artifact. Viewing games as artifact requires framing games distinctly from one or more of the following lenses:

Games are the artifact of game design and development
- Or games are a cultural artifact of leisure
- Or games are the creative artifact of contemporary expression
- Or games are the artifact with which players interact

Games as artifact is supported by these or any of the other ways in which games can be described as a product, not of a commercial system, but of humanity. Being an artifact of humanity or humanness focuses its value and the claims to its value.

The macro-persuasions are centered on making claims about games in general. Often such macro-persuasions contain arguments made for the inherent value or lack of value for games. This includes organizations that aim to legitimize the cultural capital and significance of games, game makers and their players. In the past decade, a chorus has grown to persuade the world that games are more than "mere" entertainment. They typically champion the value of games as cultural artifact (Greenfield, 1994), as a means to support and form community (Squire 2011), foster citizen participation (De Lange 2015), express creatively (Jenkins, 2005) or practice desired skills (Gee 2004).

This is not a new persuasive aim, but it's one that persists and for which scale has grown. The hallmarks of this effort include everything from the Games for Change festival (http://www.gamesforchange.org/), the many serious games conferences and the myriad of conventions, conferences, events and convenings that aim to argue for the value of the medium. They include the Institute of Play Inc. (https://www.instituteofplay.org/), the Institute for Play (http://www.nifplay.org/), the higher Education Video Game Alliance (HEVGA) and others. These organizations and their efforts have proliferated in the years since the original Persuasive Games book (Bogost 2010) was written.

The effect of these organization's efforts is arguably less impactful than the effect of their mere existence. Regardless of how many awards are given, how many papers are published or how many people convene to support the organizational efforts, the ability to hoist the banner of ten-year-old organizations and large conference attendance is clearly significant. It is capable of obscuring the relatively limited identifiable successes within persuasive play.

The mere fact that the Games for Change festival, for example, has maintained audiences of at least 300 for more than a decade clearly emphasizes significant and persistent support for games of this type. The support of major private foundations, industry partners, and the public only further enhance the claims of potential for such games. In the grand scheme of the macro-persuasion, it means little that serious games, for example, continues to lack definition or widespread adoption. It is instead such a rhetoric rich environment, that much of the evidence is built more on the idea than the reality. A theme that has overshadowed a variety of major convenings yet never damped spirits or enthusiasm. Like game players, we are not sure whether what we are doing is working, but we are working to do it all the same. Similar to learning how a game works, some action is often better than no action. Of course, the evidence of the more than the 140 research studies published on such work demonstrates positive behavior change and outcomes (Boyle et al, 2016), so there are grounds for being so optimistic.

Increasing the Cultural Capital of Games

Whether or not games have risen from the often-disposable world of popular culture to the more elite space of cultural contribution is arguable. We know for example that games have some cultural capital by being recognized at museums (Grace, 2017) and other respected institutions that offer the markers of cultural worth. What is perhaps more important is to understand how this increase in reputation has occurred and at what costs.

In 2007 there were few game art exhibits of international note. In 2017 there were 22 large scale events offering games as culturally valuable, not merely as industrial product of historical novelty. The growth can be attributed to past success and an increased appetite for it. The rise in favor of geek culture (King et al, 2003), the continued value for the technical fields (aka STEM in the contemporary parlance for science, technology education and mathematics), a prolonged period of emerging adulthood increasingly extending beyond adolescence (Arnett 2002), are all plausible explanations for what seems to be a perceived increase in value for games at culturally respected artifacts.

Likewise, the rise of the gamer as identity seems to indicate a status change, if not a fundamental argument in itself. Players have migrated toward player identities. Where once someone may have been an avid Space Invaders player, being a Minecraft (Duncan 2011) player or first-person shooter player comes with community (Xu et al 2011). Beyond the support of the Internet, player communities come with identify, affinity spaces, and privileges (Corneliussen, 2008). That these communities are privately managed, sometimes to the financial benefit of game makers, is less important than the reality that such communities exist. The Game Developer's Conference, the largest convening of its kind, for example, has supported a community management summit for years, in which I've admittedly spoken.

Macro persuasive procedural rhetoric is evidenced in the ways in which these groups aim to gain the culture capital they seek. Most macro-persuasive play aims to mimic predecessors. The argument for games being an important and substantial industry once had a benchmark - more revenue than the movie industry (the reportedly outgoing dominant popular media industry). Yet, once that benchmark was passed (Nath 2016), games had to stand on their own establishing new standards and benchmarks if its own (Entertainment Software Association, 2015). The scale of the often-researched World of War Craft community, for example, offers the benefits of size and its weight. At its height World of Warcraft communities authored 297,496 pages of content (wow wiki 2017), have been linked to positive social support (Longman et al. 22006) but also shouldered the weight of a variety of game related disasters including child neglect.

Macro persuasions don't only come from federal, private or public organizations. They also come from abhorrent self-organized communities rallied around a few mantras. In the case of Gamer Gate (Parkin, 2014), and its wide spread attacks, the macro-persuasion centered around some version of preserving games for gamers. The language off purity for games and real gamers sounds eerily similar to nativist and racist groups, and clearly anti-feminist (Chess and Shaw 2015). From the perspective of supporters of Gamer Gate, games were a piece of their identity that needed to be protected, preserved and defended from those who were seemingly attacking it (Salter 2017).

Their strategies for winning this perceived culture war was a translation of that which they witnessed from the outside as threatening. They produced pseudo-intellectual videos, outlining the errors in research provided by those they felt were attacking them, despite their own history of abuse (Salter 2017). They initiated investigations online, engaging in a somewhat television drama inspired connecting of disparate dots. Other times their efforts wove intricate plots of espionage, funding, and conspiracy befitting of some of the most interesting games ever produced. They had even rallied to participate in the academic processes of the organization at the center of much of their angst, the Digital Games Research Association. Their community had planned to submit papers to their DiGRA annual conference, to review papers or to even create their own such conference.

The strategies for these individuals were primarily borrowed strategies. Strategies that bolstered the rhetoric of collusion in games or an oppressed group of gamers who are having social justice games heft upon them unwillingly. In some ways, they followed Cialdini's weapons of influence (1987), employing what a relativity unfunded group could.

From both ends of these persuasive game strategies, the persuasion comes from a few common mechanics. First, align games with something culturally valued. Second, mimic the characteristics of the signifiers for those culturally valued elements. Third, produce the evidence, through numbers and explanation, to as wide an audience as possible, building consensus first among those who already support your message.

These three steps can serve as a kind of playbook for effectively persuading society of the value of any enterprise. Although rather fundamental, it's a common strategy. It is, for example, why the logos and promotional elements of rising sports comminutes like the World Quidditch and e-Sport's Major League Gaming, look so eerily similar to Major League baseball, the Olympics or other well regarded culturally valued elements. True to the playbook, these formerly rising communities finish their rise with images and statistics to affirm their cultural value (i.e. if many people do it, it must be valuable). It is the same logic that affirms the value of certain games conferenced and of e-sports.

If a person wants to employ macro-persuasions, the simplest strategy is to find analogy to a respected cultural element, mimic that element, and then produce the evidence have a wide audience.

The work of Games, Culture and the Rhetoric of Production

An important question to ask is whether or not games themselves have made the cultural rise. Or is it the labor to make them that is really the element of rise. Unity, the makers of the software platform on which many game developers make their games has seen far more financial success than the individual developers who subscribe to its services. The work of making games has continued to be attractive, despite the relatively low probability of it yielding either cultural or financial capital. Even for those games that are extremely valued, games rarely undergo the kinds of preservation efforts employed for other popular media (e.g books and film). If the macro persuasions have worked successfully, and games have increase their cultural notoriety, why are there not more substantial efforts to preserve games?

While we argue that the work of making games is important, we rarely stop to ask about their preservation. That's in part because games have been and continue to be a disposable consumable, despite their rise toward artifact. We make games, to feed our need to play. By analogy, the best games exist more like fine dining experiences than high art. This is exceptionally evident in the ways we preserve games. To riff off of Bogost's Games for Change Keynote on serious cheesecake (Games for Change, 2013), these games are treated like a decedent desert we offer in two forms. We either crystalize the game in its form, demonstrating it and isolating it from the larger space (like artificial food under glass and left in a window for display), or we offer it as buffet to be consumed until players have gorged

themselves full. Game jams, for example produce lots and lots of games, but their value is volume not quality.

Game jams are the bulk value version of game manufacture, lots of content with emphasis on volume for cost. Producing thousands of games in a single weekend, offers the illusion of value. Admittedly, game jam products are almost the inverse of bulk food. With bulk food, there is the occasional mistake. With game jams, there is the occasional success. That is of course, completely fine, as the aim of a jam is not good product, it's good production. Jams are valued for their labor and their community, not for their process or the quality of their product.

The trick is, that each of these efforts exists as a macro persuasion. They each make distinct claims about games and their value to the society in which they exist. For several of these efforts that have blossomed in the last decade, there are simplified arguments to be witnessed in their practice. These are as follows:

Game Jams:
Game Jams emphasize their value is in the practice of making games. They often demonstrate how accessible game making is and focus less on the final products. Much like the DIY community, the idea is not that each is well-crafted, simply that it is self-crafted. They argue that gamescan be personal, an expression of self or that game making is an achievement. They emphasize game value through origin over result.

Games as Craft
The community of game makers who champion games as craft are similar in spirit to game jamming, but smaller in scale. They champion games as personal expression, as medium for revolt, or hand-hewn mass communication. This is most resonant in the zine work by Anna Anthropy and the workshops for Punk Arcade, but it also is expressed in commercial communities like Game Jolt or in tiny code contests.

Games in Galleries:
The value of games is in part that they are hand-hewn works in the material of the modern – code. These coded art works are worthy of sharing space with the historical works that we have all come to respect as a society.

Games in Culturally Respected Forms
Translating, portion or otherwise offer ludic experiences or elements of the game community to make the claim that they do belong there. These include the symphonic restyling of game soundtracks or theatrical performances informed by or based on games.

This list is not exhaustive, but hints at the wider rhetorical efforts to legitimize digital play. They each stand as a base for their respective arguments about games. These efforts are neither unified nor concerted. There are, for example, few organizations that align all such macro-persuasion for a single mission. Instead, what is happening is that these efforts form a chorus. A chorus that resounds with heraldry of the value of games. If one feels the needs to defend game playing or making, these provide the evidence that such work is not superfluous.

Which raises an important question about the social context under which such a defense must be made. Why is it that so many people feel the need to defend games? Game playing has existed for a long time, yet now the chorus and efforts seem to continue to rise.

Is it perhaps that these macro-persuasions are the sociological precedent for legitimate cultural inclusion. Do all such popular efforts need their arguments made though before they become accepted? And why, in a world where hyper-productivity is championed, do we feel the distinct and persistent need to defend play? Why must play be valuable if it is the opposite of the much-touted work? Why must play have purpose, and why must the organizations that support such play work to defend that purpose? Lastly, why does it seem evident that we have been much more effective at making the macro-persuasive arguments around the value of games and play than we have been at actually employing persuasive play?

Games as Industrial Product

On the other side of these efforts is the reality that the most substantial efforts in game-making have come from an industry that sees games very much as product, not artifact. They are more than commodity, because if they were mere commodity they would lack the import to which we seek to elevate them. This is of course the great tension between the academic games research community and some professional game makers. Cultural artifacts are not commoditized. They are not counted in units sold, they are not localized, consumed, discarded or recycled. Culturally valued artifacts are not to be marketed, to be packaged, shipped and sold in the Western view. Yet, games are all these things and more. For some, games are no different than consumer packaged goods. Ideas come in one end, and out comes a pile of games.

Professional game makers are not the only community to perceive games as such. There are consumers of games who view them as such. There are people seeking persuasive play who also see them as such. If the assumptions of an intellectual property focused on an ideology or technocracy are peeled from the polish of games, there are large communities who would argue games are nothing more than product. In the most extreme, games could be viewed as less than product, and instead by-product. They are the by-product of excess creative energy or the superfluous precipitate of idle time. These arguments are largely ignorant of the sociology and psychology of games, but they persist.

In the end, it doesn't matter if the macro-persuasion is for or against games as artifact or product. The mere existence of the macro-persuasion, indicates its value. Just as there may be games designed to argue for non-violent resolution, there are also games that argue for violence. Macro-persuasions for or against games as product or artifact, merely evidence that the persuasions persist.

At times the argument goes so far as to hoist a banner that reads - games matter, in absolute defense of a medium and culture that seemingly argues against those that oppress it. In reality games are no more oppressed than film and books, with the history of book burning perhaps trumping the relatively mere censorship of games. Yet, for game academics in particular, what's particularly relevant is the need to make the macro persuasion in the pursuit of academic recognition, of funding and research support.

Games matter, is baked into every political effort to do something more than mere entertainment with games. The macro-persuasion, then is a cultural and political message that necessitate the construction of communities and institutions that support the value of play. These take the form of large-scale exhibitions, in aspirations to garner international respect and legitimacy, and in political organizations to support games. As with any large entity the macro-persuasion is comprised of small micro persuasive game efforts, including the individual game makers and their efforts which populate these festivals, exhibits, and conferences.

Making macro-persuasions for the value of product is much harder than the value of artifact. So, we persist, with games as artifact. Yet, of all the modern digital interactive media efforts, games have been most successful in successfully completing these efforts in macro-persuasion. In ten year's time games have completed a macro-persuasive cycle that affirms their cultural value, if not for the individual game, for the community of game-makers and the volume of games.

Micro-Persuasions

At a smaller scale are the ever-growing collection of games that aim to persuade. These efforts include advergames, political games, games for change, advocacy games, editorial games and more. In their sum, these games support the macro-persuasive rhetoric. They, simply by their creation, argue in support of the claim that games can be of more than entertainment value. Their claims are evident in their own introductions and their own reasons for being. They argue that it's valuable to experience Native Alaskan culture (Never Alone), that having a game about Fanta soda (Coca Cola 2013), or that associating the Burger King brand with a suite of mini-Xbox games persuades customers that the franchise is simultaneous hip and whimsical(King Games 2006).

It is apt to call these games the micro-persuasions, in part because most of them are noticeably smaller in their aspirations, budgets, and play length than their non-persuasive counterparts. For those who are unaware of the persuasive game domain, one of the first questions following any such presentation about them is - why don't these games look like the ones on major consoles?

Of course, these games don't, in part, because the amount of effort and money committed to them, is significantly smaller than their profit-making equivalents on game consoles and in stores. When a newspaper or private foundation invests in games, they lay down far less money than the world's leading game-makers.

It is these micro-persuasions that have been at the heart of Bogost's original work and generally the notion most at the fore of many people's imaginings for the intersection of game design and persuasion. It is not uncommon to follow the basic line of thinking that lots of people play games and spend lots of timing playing them, therefore it would be great if someone could harness the power of such entertainment. This is the thinking that drives many into their first foray into micro-persuasive games. The arguments include meeting the audience where they are already engaged (Panic et al. 2013) creating more engaging experiences (Kors et al. 2015), telling better stories (Murray 2017) or otherwise extending the power of games toward a specific purpose (Kahne et al 2009).

Micro persuasions are the most documented and most apparent of the persuasive game design efforts. Readers are encouraged to review the published findings of others who have outlined the last 10 years of persuasive play, specifically (Grace, 2012), (Humari et al, 2014) and note the prevalence of games research in persuasive and purposeful play (Cater et al 2014).

There are thousands of efforts to persuade through play. The literature demonstrating their success or failure is far-less bountiful. In part, much like macro-persuasions, the value is in the making. Educators, for example, know that every first-year English major who is required to make a poem won't become Shakespeare. All the same, the work of trying to fit a verse into iambic pentameter or to trying to convey meaning in sonnet is beneficial. It is the process that carries the education not the final product or artifact. So to, is the effort in persuasive play. While every persuasive game is not going to move the needle for efficacy, making them substantiates the third rule of macro-persuasions – proliferation.

As practitioners there is a dilemma. It may be evident that practicing such design and implementation is productive, but so too is learning to draw, cook or many other creative endeavors. The core questions should instead be, what is unique to practicing making persuasive games that is productive. Does such work encourage critical thinking of systems designs and meaning? Does it inspire more formal thinking about meaning in traditional entertainment? A yes to any of these questions engenders a sense of the value of such work and provides those who do it a reason to continue doing it.

Meta-Persuasions, Disinformation and Projected Fiction as Play

Although much less of a distinct industry, than perhaps a large-scale outcome of the socio-technical and socio-political contemporary - there are variety of small games being played every day with an aim at persuasion. These games include the "fake news" profiteers, the internet trolls, and the champions of a variety of conspiracy theories. Of all the efforts in the persuasive games world, it is these individuals who have perhaps demonstrated the most efficacy in persuasive play. They have arguably elected national leaders, toppled viable candidates, and confused nearly every major population with arguments that at times even defy logic (Allcot, 2017). This is a combination of make believe, emulation and fabrication.

This game is a game being played among the technological space which had been created to preserve thought (Leiner et al 2009) and later evolved to become a force which effected democracy (Weare 2002), sometimes negatively. With purveyors of fake news, for example, the Internet functions as a playground. A playground in which not everyone understands the games that are being played or who is playing. Voluntary participation has persistently been essential to the definition of games. Games are played willingly, or they are not games. How then does fake news fit such a paradigm? In part, because much of our unwitting support of fake news is contextualized within a game context. Fake news is shared via social media, which provides all the feedback system of a conventional game. Players are encouraged to satisfice, to seek points in form of likes, and to worry less about being right than being recognized. Fake News and rumor is nothing new, but the scale at which it which it can be disseminated not only increased, the motivations for proliferating it expanded. Social media provides the ludic environment in which all players, whether producer or proliferator, are rewarded for their efforts. It is a successful gamification of sorts, but one less explicitly designed than resultant.

The results are clearly alarming. There are politicians who believe the number of supporters they have in social media, but are unable to tell the difference between a bot and a personal account. There are full time employs, working in conditions similar to the gold farms of the last decade (Heeks, 2009), who are working to produce profitable disinformation at the service of others (Bakir 2017) or themselves (Sydell, 2016).

Each of these games is being played without the explicit consent of those being played with, but it is also lacking any referee or explicit mandate of opposition. As life goes, one can play a game and one can be played with. As the ludic space of social media slips seamlessly into everyday experience, players seem to have lost our ability to identify when we are being played with. Social media images project a life that may not exist, of success when there is none (Hogan, 2010), another of the more mundane fake news efforts. Yet, those who engaged in projecting an idealized self in social media, are at a smaller scale, producing fake news. They, like the small armies of disinformation workers, are playing a game of lies with an audience that does not know it is being played with. How can one who is playing their own game of projected self be critical of better played and larger scale games?

Meta persuasive procedural rhetoric is evidenced in the ways in which these groups achieve objective. The meta games are played with the same toys, blogs, websites, forums and threads. These players operate with the elements of the game, but they employ them differently. They wreak the most havoc not when they make their own games but when they operate within contexts differently. By playing games within games, they wreck half-constructed forms of gamification. By analogy, they are like children playing tag through the middle of a hopscotch game. The disruption is apparent, the reason is not.

The Internet's fluidity, and anonymity only expand the shadow of such play, making it seem larger and grander than it is. But these players are not master designers or players. They may have played tag through your hopscotch, but now they are playing cards in the middle of someone else's shuffleboard.

One admitted fundamental weakness in understanding meta persuasive play in this frame is the tension of employed players. As we have come to accept play as voluntary from at least the time of Huizinga forward, the ambiguity of professional play persists. Purveyors of fake news for example, do not typically view their work as consequential (Sydell 2016). The fictions they created, are just that – fictions. Profitable fictions, in the way scriptwriters profit from their fiction and animators present worlds that don't really exist. By this framing, fake news production is not a diabolic effort to dismantle democracy, it is a playful way to pay bills.

Historically, such play has precedent in the creative play of Big Games (Lantz 2006) and in the art work of everyone from Situationists (Debord 1957) to ludic happenings in the 1960's (Berghaus 1993). The disquieting truth is that fake news bloggers have created more stir at their laptops than 1960's artists on the street. The tools just seem more effective now.

More importantly, what these efforts demonstrate is a tendency toward persuasive play in non-game contexts. The games these individuals play have plagued and complicated the daily operations of

legitimate news organizations (Waldrop 2017). It is this efficacy, however detrimental, that demonstrate a persuasive play can work. As case studies, they provide evidence that such play works best when it employs the normal elements of operation. In short, playing within the rules of play, but subverting them. In the vernacular, they game the system, and in so doing demonstrate an alternate way to play. From this perspective, they are similar to micro-persuasion efforts like Critical Gameplay (CriticalGameplay.com) and the work of Molle Industria (MolleIndustria.org). Except, as mentioned, the games of fake news and social media projections are not always apparent to those who are watching them being played.

Conclusion

To return to the larger questions provided in the chapter introduction, the why for persuasive play becomes apparent. Why do researchers and practitioners want to persuade people through games? Likely because games permeate society at multiple levels, demonstrating themselves in everything from political discourse, to information manipulation to the allocation of resources in pursuit of knowledge. Games work at the macro-level of large-scale systems and institutions, the micro-level of individual play experiences, and the meta levels between. Admittedly, at each level there are by-products that don't always work toward pro-social ends.

Why are games the right medium for delivering persuasive messages? It's likely they are not the right or wrong medium, because they are less a medium, than a practice with which contemporary society continues to reengage. Games are played, practiced, tweaked and redesigned as part of continued labor to attempt to explain and understand. Adopting the view of games as medium focuses on the product or artifact of games, which ignores the greater part of persuasive play. Doing so obscures the macro-persuasions, the games within society that propel the medium to something more than medium. It also misses the meta-persuasions, which employ ludic solutions to obtain purpose. Whether that purpose is more likes in social media or adjusting political views its results are shown in changes in interests, activities and opinions. The preponderance of selfies at the aim of fame on social media, for example, clearly demonstrate an activity change which outshines any such effort of a micro-persuasive game. The national entrenchment, or nativist sentiments occurring across the world, could also likely be the product of a serious of opinion altering meta-persuasions.

Why has public discourse come to need games as a vehicle for communicating and argumentation? Years ago, the obvious claim was the opportunity for games to explain complex systems, to afford simulation for deep investigations of inquiry-based learning, or simply to meet the experiential demands of changing demographic. Yet, the reality is that depth of engagement is losing toward, the shallow experience of social media headlines and easy to share infographics. Instead, what persuasive play at all levels demonstrates, is that humans operate in game contexts far more often than they themselves may realize. The need for games is not new, but instead more easily identified because of this research in games. Psychology or cell biology have always existed, but our understanding and analysis of them have only occurred relatively recently in human history.

It then, is more likely that there is no need to gamify because the games have always existed. Therefore,

persuasive play is less about finding ways to create new persuasive games, but instead in examining, identifying and playing appropriately the games which already exist. This is the secrete to the success of the great fake news author and the projector of social media myth.

Perhaps what's most important is not demonstrating that persuasive play can or can't work. Instead, we may need to examine or accept the desire to make it work. Perhaps we are seeking something to fill a greater hole. More likely, the persistence of these macro, micro and meta persuasions signal an evolution, revolution or apocalypse of media consumption and production habits. Perhaps in another 25 years we will find that we are incapable of understanding argument without the machinations of play, or that arguments presented without play are too simple and antiquated. Much like the death of classical oration, conventional argumentation without the interactive depth of play may seem archaic, clunky and lacking contemporary nuance. A simple argument may become just that – too simple to be taken seriously.

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