

Digital Ethnography for r/Rainbow6

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I have spent the last two weeks observing and researching a subreddit known as r/Rainbow6. Reddit is a website that contains thousands of user-created discussion forums known as “subreddits”. Within these subreddits, users can start “threads”, which contain an initial post that can be in writing, or in the form of a photo or video, as well as comments on the post that more often than not become a full-blown discussion regarding the initial post. One of the subreddits that has been created is r/Rainbow6, which is a discussion page that revolves around Tom Clancy’s *Rainbow Six* franchise, focusing specifically on the most recent most popular game by far, *Rainbow Six: Siege*. *Rainbow Six: Siege* (more commonly known as simply “Siege”) is a first person shooter game where the defending team must protect a bomb from the attacking team whose aim is to either defuse the bomb or kill every member of the defending team. The game is based upon characters from all of the world’s highest level special military operations units, such as the S.A.S and the Navy Seals. I have personally been a member of this subreddit for almost a year now, and despite not regularly posting or commenting in the group, I often use it as a source of information or fun content from the game and its community of players. The subreddit is particularly interesting to me due to the fact that there is so much activity still today on a forum regarding a game that has been released for almost four years at the time of writing this ethnography.

The reddit community in question has over 730,000 members at the time of writing, with over 4,300 members online at this very moment, which is rather astonishing to me considering how rapidly the video game community moves from one game to the next for the most part (r/Rainbow6). The posts and discussions in the community are based around the same three things for the most part; members displaying their cosplay costumes of “Siege” characters,

players posting short clips of their gameplays or new items that have entered the game and people posting complaints or suggested improvements that could be made to the game. The main purpose of players posting their suggestions about the game to this particular forum is that there is a Ubisoft mediator account in the group. Ubisoft is the company that makes and distributes the game itself, and so if a game suggestion gains enough traction within the community with enough upvotes and comments, there is a good chance that Ubisoft will see the post and respond with either what they are doing to fix the issue or why they are choosing not to. This is one of the main reasons that I can see members returning to the community time and time again; because they could have a genuine impact on the way the game is created and edited by the developers. This kind of community-focused approach that Ubisoft has taken seems to be very popular amongst players, as I have noticed many compliments towards Ubisoft and “siege” for the way that they are constantly tweaking and evolving the game to further meet the wants and needs of their fanbase. This is a large factor in why so many players still refer to the reddit community and why so many people still play the game so long after its initial release.

Whilst most of the community is very respectful of other players and members of the group, there is an underlying layer of toxicity amongst the group. This is brought about mainly by teamkilling, players being kicked from parties and ranked games being thrown all for one’s own amusement, all within the game. Toxic behavior by players in the game sparks multiple conversations, most of which revolve around what Ubisoft can do in order to squash any attempts at toxicity that players may attempt. Christopher Paul says when discussing toxicity: “certain aspects of game design and production are a base from which these problems arise in the first place” (2018). Thankfully, most of the toxicity that arises within the community is met with

harsh criticism from other members, and therefore goes largely unnoticed by most community members. A lot of the negative attitude within the group seems to come about for the same reason as any other online community; it is anonymous. This means that members, if they so wish, can say whatever they want to one another without any real backlash or consequences. It is rather surprising to me that the group is so largely positive in the way that they communicate and discuss the game given the reputation that gaming communities have for foul language and general negativity.

The most interesting thing about this group to me is the constant activity and buzz that the community seems to create given the stagnancy of the subject upon which it is based. Douglas Gentile's research study on pathological gaming showed that many gamers spend up to 24 hours per week playing video games, and that it is usually the same game being played repeatedly (2009). Using this research, it is not difficult to see how many players might get addicted or simply latched on to "Siege" as their primary game of choice, especially considering how often the game is updated with new characters, weapons and customisation options. The ranked system in "Siege" allows players to face off against other ranked gamers, meaning you can either rank up or down depending on how well you play. The constant battle to stay on as high a rank as possible certainly seems to drive gamers to continue playing the game, and subsequently visit the subreddit in order to gain new knowledge about the game or simply discuss one's own experiences within the game alongside like minded players who are experiencing similar struggles.

Many of the posts on the Rainbow6 subreddit are short video clips of gameplay, where the player either experiences a short period of high level play that they wish to show off to the

community, or something extraordinary occurred in the game that they feel they must share with the other members of the group. The sheer volume of short video clips or screenshots of the game compared to the number of simple, written posts creates an almost Instagram-like experience when scrolling through the page. This appears to be part of the reason that people keep returning to the page time and time again; because it is so easy and effortless to watch clip after clip of interesting play styles and moments from the game that the player may have never experienced themselves. In a way, the group acts as an amplified version of what the game offers, as it gives members the opportunity to watch a large number of moments that are so unlikely to happen in a regular online game. When I look at the group in this way, it is easy to see why so many members gravitate back towards the group on such a regular basis, they do it for the same reason that I have been a member of the community for so long; because it is fun. So much of what gaming is supposed to be about is fun, however there are very few places where players can meet online and simply watch an archive of insane videos all retrieved from their favorite game, and it seems that this is what the “Siege” subreddit has become for so many players.

Karen Sternheimer’s article on videogames and violence states that “games have come to represent a variety of social anxieties: about youth violence, new computer technology, and the apparent decline in the ability of adults to control what young people do and know” (2007). This is a concern that many parents and developers seem to have when it comes to video games, their communities and the accessibility of these platforms to younger audiences. Rainbow Six: Siege is a very violent and extremely realistic game, however one of the things that I noticed when researching the r/Rainbow6 community is how many young people seem to be involved and

active in the subreddit. Many of the posts and comments in the forum mention the fact that the poster has only just gotten into the game due to the fact that they were not allowed to play until now due to their parents' supervision. However it seems that most of these children are still not of the age where they should be playing a game of this caliber in terms of violence and realism, as they are still in their early teens. This conclusion is echoed whenever I play the game myself, and notice that many of the voices I hear from my teammates are clearly not from men, but rather boys who must not be older than 13 or so. This is a slightly worrying thing to notice about the community, and it can often be seen that members of the subreddit advise the younger players to wait a few years before buying the game due to its adult nature. This is also something that was unexpected, as it seems the older community members take an almost guardian like approach to convincing the younger members to hold back, as it will benefit them in the long run, to say the least, this is very encouraging to see as a member of the community myself.

As part of the research process for my Digital Ethnography on the r/Rainbow6 community, I decided to interview a member of the subreddit. My interviewee has been a member of the group for over 2 years now and has played the game for slightly longer than that. When I asked him what his favorite part of being a member was, he replied by telling me that it is the comedic aspects of the group, and the generally fun and lighthearted atmosphere of many of the forum's posts. As I scroll through the endless posts on the site, I too notice the sheer volume of posts and comments that are genuinely hilarious, it is certainly a nice change of pace from the complaining and toxicity that can also be found throughout the forum. This is not the first time that I have noticed a correlation between comedy and "Siege", when I play the game itself, I often find myself hunched over with laughter at something one of my teammates said in a

remark, or something that happened in the game that had wonderful comedic timing. The subject of my interview agreed with me that there is certainly a hope of fun whenever the game is played or the community is visited, I suppose this is the entire point of video games in the first place, otherwise they would quite simply be a way to waste time. Without fun and laughter, video games, and therefore r/Rainbow6, would be utterly useless to society, and no one would bother playing them. For this reason I believe the comedic aspect of both the game and the subreddit is the most important thing that can be taken away from the community, because as long as it is fun to visit, it will continue to be visited. It is as simple as that.

When asked whether *Rainbow Six: Siege* was his favorite game, the subject of my interview replied in the positive, and when asked why, he said that it is entirely due to the constant updates and tweaks that are made to the game on a monthly basis. He stated that the constant injection of new characters, gadgets and maps in the game by Ubisoft assure that there is always some aspect of the game that can be mastered every month. This sentiment is shared by game reviewer Morgan Park, who similarly said: “There’s a lot that keeps me coming back to *Siege* after over 1,000 hours, thanks to a near-constant drip of new tweaks and additions” (2019). The “Siege” community, more specifically the r/Rainbow6 subreddit, is a big part of why the game undergoes constant tweaking and revamping. As discussed earlier, there is an official Ubisoft account that moderates the group, community members are well aware of this, and so they use the subreddit as a means of sharing their own personal ideas about how the game might benefit from a few new features. The game itself is based around many operators, or characters, who all have different skills and weapons, new operators are released regularly by Ubisoft in order to add new and exciting dimensions to the gameplay. Because of this, players and

r/Rainbow6 members often post their own suggestions on exactly what new operators should be added during the next update, complete with diagrams and in-depth descriptions of how the character's weapons and gadgets would function in the game. The attractive thing about "Siege" is that, unlike many other games, when "Siege" fans speak, Ubisoft listens, something else that was picked up on by Park: "even folks who don't play the game can appreciate how it carved a new path for the sustainability of AAA games, and for the possibilities of cooperation between developers and fan communities." (2019). The existence of a possibility that fans could impact the game that they love so much by posting in this community is one of the many reasons so many players are still so active on the forum today.

The final aspect of the r/Rainbow6 community that is essential to discuss is the involvement of community members who do not play "Siege" at all, but browse and contribute to the forum nonetheless. These members of the group are people who watch the game and enjoy everything about the game, but do not actually play it themselves, and there can be a few reasons for this. Pete Hines, senior vice president of marketing and communications at video game publisher Bethesda said that "Some folks would like to be into gaming but don't have \$400 or \$500 to spend on a console and then another \$60 to spend on a game" (Liao, 2019). By streaming other players playing "Siege", gamers gain access to the experience of a game that may otherwise be unavailable to them, whether that be because of hardware, age or cost restrictions. There is a heavy interaction between the players and enthusiasts of the game that can be seen on the r/Rainbow6 forum. The community members from each group discuss everything from game tactics to who they each think are the greatest "Siege" players at the moment. The reddit page acts as a middle man, where those who are interested in the game can dip their toes

into what the community is like, and whether or not they enjoy the interaction with the players as much as they enjoy experiencing the game. Occasionally, professional streamers of *Rainbow Six: Siege* will enter the forum to do a question and answer session with their fans, which as one can expect draws large online crowds of fans and players alike. Interactions like this further display the love that “Siege” has for its fans and indeed how these feelings are reciprocated, whether the fans play the game themselves or simply enjoy the idea of it.

After completing my observations and research on the r/Rainbow6 subreddit community, I began to think about the constants and inconsistencies in the interactions between group members and sometimes with visitors to the community. What I ultimately uncovered from my findings is that there are not really any constants within the community. It seems that the subreddit is so vast and has such a high number of members and daily visitors that one can expect nothing when opening the site. Members could be men or women, young or old, they may play the game or they may not, they could be the funniest, nicest people ever, or insignificant and toxic to the community. This pure variety that can be found throughout the forum is one of the things that makes it so fascinating to study and enjoyable to be a part of. As a member of the group, I can say that there is no other specified online community that I have ever experienced that has had more character and variation than r/Rainbow6. This surprised me even further due to the fact that the subreddit is such a specified group by nature; it focuses on one game, and that is it, however the topics of conversation and variations of media on the site are endless. The evolution of the “Siege” based subreddit echoes the game itself in many ways, as it is ever changing, growing and evolving, and you never know quite what to expect when stepping foot past the electronic boundary into the open-armed community of players, moderators, cosplayers

and enthusiasts. In fact, the only thing that every member of the r/Rainbow6 subreddit community has in common is exactly that; the r/Rainbow6 subreddit community. This is something you can feel when you enter the page, you can tell that the members enjoy being there, because it is the best place they can find to discuss anything and everything about their favorite game from their favorite franchise, with the added bonus of being listened to and replied to by like minded player and maybe the creators of the game themselves.

To Conclude, my research into the online community of *Rainbow Six: Siege* players, fans and developers has shown me the sheer amount and variation of content and conversation that can all arise from the same, incredibly specific source. While group members can indeed be toxic, harsh or complaintfull, the overwhelming feel of the community is one of fun, lighthearted and constructive conversation revolving around a game that has amassed a following of loyal fans by listening to them. r/Rainbow6 certainly sees itself as the mecca of “Siege” fandom and discussion, and after observing and researching the group for an extended period of time, that is a sentiment that I can agree with entirely.

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