THE GAMING CULTURE REVOLUTION

Games

Social

Intellectual

Entertainment

LO MIN MING
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About the Author

Lo Min Ming is an undergraduate in Stanford University, looking to pursue a degree and masters in Computer Science. A Lew Kuan Yew Award Winner, an IT Youth Award Winner of year 2004, an Adobe Photoshop Expert, and a WorldSkills 2005 IT Software Gold Medallist, Min Ming has many experiences in the computer and graphics field. He believes that video games combine the best of computing technology and graphics design to bring about the best user experience for the gamer. Having created his own game before, and played many different genres of games, he believes that the emergence of gaming culture we see today is one that we should not miss. He considers gaming as an integral part of our lifestyle; hence it is vital to look carefully into how gaming has affected us in many areas.

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Abstract

Today, gaming is everywhere. We play games, we hear people talking about games, we see gaming advertisements, we see shelves of games in malls, we watch gaming competitions. Gaming has evolved to be more than just about having fun; instead, it is a revolutionary culture on its own that is only part of our lifestyle. The evolution of the online gaming community brings about three main impacts in our life, distinctly: bringing people together, allowing gaming and communication without borders; crosses over to other entertainment needs, trumping our passion in music, movies, shows, and toys; being part of our intellectual development, helping students in their learning, professionals in their skills development, and governments in their knowledge of things.
The Gaming Culture Revolution

3,200,000,000¹ - that’s number of hours XBOX gamers spend playing online. Never mind the counting, that’s 376,000 years. Today, gaming can allow you to find a job and help to simulate war scenarios for US Army. New federal laws related to gaming are being regulated regularly. CNN also reports that Global Gaming League (GGL) is talking with the Chinese government in hopes of bringing competitive video gaming to the Beijing Olympics 2008 as a demonstration sport.

There is no doubt we are witnessing a rebirth of an old culture in a new era. Games go way back into history when there were only sticks and stones. People used to play games to kill time. In today’s era, games are so transformed and revolutionized that it is much more than just killing time; it is now an integral part of our lifestyle.

Whether you are a gamer yourself, or have seen games advertisements, or have friends who are active gamers, or have overheard people sharing gaming experiences, it is inevitable not to be related to gaming in one way or another. While we can sense that gaming is everywhere today, it is critical to understand how gaming has evolved to be more than just about playing the games and have fun; instead, it is a revolutionary culture that is not only part of our lifestyle, but also a platform that crosses to our social, entertainment and intellectual needs.

Before exploring how gaming satisfies our social needs by bringing people together, crosses over to our other entertainment needs and being part of our intellectual development, it is essential to look at the evolution of the online gaming community that forms the core of the gaming culture revolution.

¹ Numbers released by Microsoft, September 2007
The Online Gaming Community

Today, the heart of gaming is the community that is formed with gamers worldwide. This network of connected players lays the foundation of the gaming landscape. Loyd Case writes that “For people who don’t own an Xbox 360, the killer app for the Xbox 360 isn’t any one game. The killer app is Xbox Live.” XBOX Live, launched in 2002, is the premier global online console games and entertainment service from Microsoft that links gamers worldwide together. Three years after its launch, PR Newswire US headline reads “XBOX Live Online Gaming Community Doubles in Just One Year, New Member Added Every 30 Seconds”. As of September 2007, XBOX Live has 7 million\(^2\) members, equating to a new member every 8 seconds. These members count translates to mind-blowing hours that gamers spend online playing games. Looking at the figures (see Chart 1), the hours that are spent on playing games online almost tripled from 1.3 billion hours in 2005 to 3.2 billion hours in 2007. The results reflect the exponential growth of the online gaming community.

![Chart 1: Graph of hours gamers spend playing games online on XBOX Live. (Numbers from Microsoft)](chart1)

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\(^2\) Numbers released by Microsoft, September 2007
The online gaming community continues to spread out of control like wild fire, with the aid of more burning fuel. In 2005, Microsoft and Bell Canada teamed up to deliver the “Ultimate Online Gaming Package” to Canadians, offering subscribers 12 months of XBOX Live Premium Gold Pack for free. Similarly in 2006, Verizon offered gamers free XBOX Live Gold weekend package (Financial News).

Many experts have talked about the gaming online community. Authors of *Dungeons and Dreamers*, Brad King and John Borland, suggest that an online game is a persistent world, where it would not just be as simple as turning on the computer to play; instead, gamers have to rejoin a world that had gone on without them every time (150). Each time players log on, they might spent at least few minutes trying to figure out what had transpired since they were last online. This mirrors our current lifestyle of reading the morning papers to check out what had happened overnight as thousands or even millions of people wandered through the world simultaneously. Mirjam Eladhari echoes the view on persistency in the gaming world, only more specific and in-depth into development of individual identity through sequence of events that occur online. He argued that the online virtual world is about building an individual’s own journey continuously (171-185). This journey brings out the true experience and character of gamers, and is the key catalyst to attracting so many people into the world of online gaming. There is no denial that gaming is moving forward beyond just games, evolving to an online gaming community of connected gamers. This community provides the platform for many exciting services that impact our life in many ways.
Bringing People Together

“XBOX [is] a good platform for online games, which offer new social dynamics that can widen the appeal of games, even bringing geographically separated families together.”

– J Allard, Key Founder of XBOX

With the establishment of the vibrant online gaming community that have millions of gamers spending billions of hours online, XBOX 360 is a platform that offer new social dynamics to fulfill our social needs. The XBOX 360 is essentially one console, used in many countries, creating one community, with different gamers.

This vision of bringing people together is reflected through the series of XBOX 360 advertisements that are made for different countries (see Figure 1). Although it is the same console without localization modifications besides menu language translation, the XBOX 360 still manage to appeal differently to different gamers worldwide – it is an all-in-one multimedia center to the Japanese, a professional gaming platform to the Koreans, a new and exciting box to the Indians, and an immensely fun machine to the Americans. The outcome is bringing gamers worldwide to the same game console.

The advertisements speak a lot about how a single game console attracts gamers worldwide, and part of the reasons is the social communication features that are weaved into the XBOX 360. Right from the beginning, from the initial XBOX hardware design, to the production and the software development, Microsoft has aimed to build a game console that can accommodate everyone, from different countries, with different cultures, gaming preferences, and passions. Mei Mei Bong of XBOX Live department

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3 Quoted from Opening the XBOX
explains in Our Colony video that XBOX Live “brings a lot of different experiences and a lot of different people closer together.” The ultimate vision of XBOX Live is a collective place of unique experiences from different people all over the world.

The end result of the produced XBOX 360 today echoed Microsoft’s initial vision, equipping the game console with social networking features out of the box. The ability for gamers to keep lists of their friends or families, together with the possibility to do text chatting, video conferencing and audio conversation (see Figure 2), social interactions within the gamers’ network can happen easily (see Figure 3). The design of the hardware compliments the software features, allowing plug and play accessories such as thumb keyboards (see Figure 4), webcams, and microphones. This further empowers the game console as a launch pad for social networking. Statistics prove that instant messaging among the community is an important aspect of our gaming experience. It is being recorded that instant messaging exchanges between players from all around the world is an astonishing figure of 2.6 million per day. XBOX 360 is a device that enables communication without borders.

Gamers may use the game console to communicate frequently, but ultimately, most gamers still spend more time on games. Hence, the more important question may be how gaming can bring people together. Many people may see games as simply players filling the screen with scenes of violence and bloodshed, but in King’s and Borland’s words, “the content of these games can often play a secondary

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4 A video that talks about making of XBOX 360
5 Numbers released by Microsoft as of September 2007.
role to their socializing effects.” (7) Gaming does satisfy our social needs more than the content of the games. For example, many games are merely translated, then released to gamers worldwide. These games may be played in different languages by different players, but ultimately, once into the game, the gamers are able to work together immediately to achieve the same goal. A game scenario may be like a group of strangers meeting together to flight monsters to save mankind in a collective effort. As if there is a special bond between gamers worldwide, XBOX Live virtually erases the line between players from every part of the world, allowing gaming without borders.

King and Borland asserts: “One of the most fundamental building blocks of community is some kind of shared language or history.” (253) Indeed, one of the key components of bridging people in our gaming community is erasing the language barrier. The gaming community is like a virtual country, where the citizens of the country speak a unique language different from people elsewhere. Over the years, substantial gaming terms have sprung out of the gaming community. This so called “gaming language” mutually used by players from different countries speaking different language reflects the diversity and creativity of gamers. Terms such as “GG”, “Noob”, “AFK”, “l33t”, “GL”, “HF” are just some of the words that are magically understood by gamers worldwide (see Appendix A). For example, the word “l33t” refers to a person that is very good and professional at his game. “L33t” actually represents “leet”, such that gamers replace the “e” with “3”. The word “leet” evolves from the sound of “elite”, which means people who are superior to others.

Besides “gaming language”, gaming has sparked off intellectual initiatives to research on new in-game languages. Richard Garriott, who works in a Korean company that operates one of the biggest online games in the world, explains that there is a need to invest a universal language for humankind. He has
studied the origins of languages and modern symbolic systems in his quest to create a new language for a new game called Tabula Rasa. His goal, as he mentions: “... to communicate the reality of the world without regard to the gamer’s country... it’s about re-creating those nationalities that everyone feels at home in.” (qtd. in Kind, Borland 255) Today, the game is already released and has received raving reviews. The heart of his game is about mankind discovering the ancient language of Logos⁶, using it to fight the battle against aliens. Combining his studies of characters and strokes in languages, he created a set of language characters (see Figure 5) that are used in the game. Gamers have to actively recognize and understand these Logos (see Appendix B) to play the game.

Combining features of the game consoles, the online community, and the wide range of games, many researchers have affirmed that gaming is a tool that brings people together. Torill Elvira Mortensen claims that players’ delights are embedded in the social rewards of multi-user games and the vital aspects of playing with people “underline the importance of a well-developed and internationally dispersed culture, where Asian, Norse, Celtric and American Indian mingle effortlessly.” (195) In a gaming world, it is a virtual world that allows gamers from everywhere to interact without borders. Another researcher, Mariah, who is working on her sociology paper about gender roles in gaming, did not treat the game as a geographical, “real” place. (qtd. in Mortensen) The non-reality of gaming is an important aspect for her to be able to interact with many other players worldwide to conduct her experiments. Gaming provides a virtual world for gamers to be in, magically allowing players to forget their physical location and mix around freely with other people.

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⁶ According to the game, Logos are magical powers passed down during ancient times and are represented by ancient language.
No matter whether bridging the gap between people worldwide is a byproduct of gaming communities or a goal for some game makers, there is no denial that gaming, as J. Allard puts it, offers new social dynamics that can even bring geographically separated people together.
Crossing Other Entertainment Needs

“Already by this stage a great number of teenagers were more interested in videogames than in pop music.”

– Steven Poole

An article in U.S. News & World Report, titled Joystick Cinema, starts off with the line: “Put down the popcorn and pickup the joystick.” (Terrell) The article details that games are now “pulling even with movies.” (Ibid.) This effect that gaming is taking over our interest in other entertainment areas is the second major impact of gaming culture. It seems that not long ago, movies are movies, shows are shows, music is music, and games are games. People pursued these entertainment needs separately. Today, our entertainment needs are starting to merge into one.

The advertisements of XBOX 360 are testimonials to the convergence of our entertainment needs. In the Japanese commercial, the game console is marketed as one that is packed with many other entertainment features besides just gaming (see Figure 6). These arrays of features are explained by the brains behind the XBOX 360 through Our Colony video. They present the gamers’ experience as “press a button [on the controller] and this whole new world of opportunities opens up that has never been there before... XBOX 360 guide is the thing that you bring up to get into games, to read messages, to download games, to play music, to look at photos, slideshow, the place you go to see what’s coming up and watch thrillers, games, for movies, it is your interactive entertainment launch pad...” [emphasis added] It suddenly seems like playing game is like a tiny ant among a colony that have so many other things. This is both a cause and an effect. The inclusion of such features causes more gamers to cross over to other leisure activities besides gaming. This is also the entertainment landscape today where gaming is becoming the primary entertainment activity, while watching movies and enjoying music are secondary.

Figure 6: People pulling photos, movies, and games down represents XBOX 360 multimedia capabilities, Figure 7: Convergence of entertainment features into the game console. A single device -

7 Quoted in Taylor
becoming the secondary entertainment activities. As the XBOX 360 expands its entertainment features, allowing us to play movies, record shows, download photos and synchronize music (see Figure 7), it is like an ant colony taking over our living room.

How did movie goers become avid gamers? It is actually not difficult to see the appeal in games. Franchises have been a major part of game development, and are part of the key business strategies of game companies. Many games are professional sports, blockbuster movies or cartoons tie-ins. Electronic Arts (EA) “makes large-scale, ongoing professional advertising and PR efforts ... [on] sports sponsorships and endorsements and cross-media tie-ins with major film franchises like Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter.” (Wilson 242) These games have realistic renderings, cinematic effects and detailed landscapes just like in movies, only with the possibility for you to move around and control the surroundings. Then so, as the Joystick Cinema article concludes, “why just see the movie when you can be in the movie?”

As couch potatoes convert to games lovers, game consoles suddenly become the natural place to provide the secondary entertainment needs. During the holiday season last year, Microsoft teamed up with CBS, MTV Networks, Paramount Pictures, Turner Broadcasting, UFC and Warner Bros, offering over 1,000 hours of downloadable TV shows and movies (see Figure 8). This move suggests that “The videogame biz is moving front and center in Hollywood’s digital distribution plans.” (Fritz) In a similar move just 7 months later, Microsoft continues to offer rental service, in addition to the buying
downloads. According to The Evening Standard (London), experts say it could spell the end for DVDs and their high-street suppliers (Prigg). Clever move it seems, to earn money, but this are signs that games are overtaking our lifestyle. It seems that movies and TV shows are now dependent on the gaming platform to get its audience, much like an iceberg, slowly melting and soon, not directly seen from surface anymore.

Moving forward to today, just a week ago, many newspapers’ headlines read how Halo 3 racks in 171 million in sales on the first day of launch. Never heard of it? Rebecca Armstrong explains that it is “the Harry Potter of video games.” Steven McGill, head of gaming and entertainment at Microsoft, boasts that "When Halo 2 launched in 2004 it broke all box office records for any entertainment event ever." (qtd. In Armstrong) For Halo 3, Robert Wright reports that “in terms of numbers, Microsoft isn’t looking to best another game’s performance with Halo 3 but is instead setting its sights on something different: a movie.” The third instalment of Halo surpasses performance of Halo 2 and holds the record for the highest grossing opening day in entertainment history so far (Snow), breaking the previous sales records set by blockbuster’s opening - Spiderman 3 (see Chart 2). Games are inevitably invading the movies entertainment space, and the real sales figures attest to this amazing phenomenon.

![Sales Figures in United States](image)

Chart 2: First day sales of Halo 3 (170 million) surpass three day opening weekend of Spiderman 3 (151 million). Spiderman 3 was the highest sales record ever in the entertainment business until Halo 3.

Source: Numbers (Ward), Chart background image (Steve)
The sales figures are good gauge of people's interest level in movies and games; but how about comparing how gamers anticipate new games to how movie fans anticipate blockbusters? A closer look at the anticipation level of people can determine whether people are more excited for a new great game or a blockbuster. 25th of September 2007 is the day many gamers have been waiting for – the Halo 3 launch day. Hours before the clock strikes mid-night, hundreds and thousands of fans wait in line (see Figure 10) outside the store in New York City, the biggest launch event for the game in US. Taking cues from blockbuster premiere launch events, games launch events are just as exciting, if not more eventful. As the game fans wait in line, there are hourly game related performances, with celebrities, in-game characters, and in-game vehicles appearing every minute (see Appendix C).

Unlike movie premiere events where the celebrities are the main people who are in the limelight (see Figure 9), gamers are really the ones who are truly excited about new game launches. Games are truly built based on a community of gamers, so much so that the first guy in the line was there more than a day earlier (see Figure 11). Looking at the faces of the gamers who got their games first (see Figure 12), we can literally feel their happiness. The expressions of the fans, and the long lines of queues worldwide, are affirmations to the impact of games in our entertainment lifestyle, and that games have overtaken people’s passion in movies. Games seem to reignite our passion in leisure and excitement, giving us something to really look forward to.
If you think games cannot get any more influential in the entertainment scene than this, you may be surprised to hear that Halo influence stretches out into toys, music, books, comics, TV shows, and movies. To attract younger gamers of Halo, action figures and tabletop games are created based on the games’ characters and machines. For the music and games lovers, soundtracks, based on original artists’ music, are released for all three installments of the Halo series. Many gamers will be rejoiced to hear that a Halo movie is also in the discussion, with Peter Jackson, producer of Lord of Rings trilogy, as the executive producer. Halo also inspires various shows and comedies, including “This Spartan Life” talk show that won an award for Best Machinima Series at the 2005 Machinima Film Festival. Past years, movies such as Final Fantasy, Stay Alive, Doom, and many more are signs that games have become the center piece of entertainment opportunities, such that Hollywood is recognizing the fact that they have to pull gamers back to enjoying movies. Similarly, EA are now focusing much of their effort on new games to create new identity and branding among gamers, rather than building on movies or sports franchises. While movie tie-ins games are still critical part of the companies’ strategy, it is not as captivating as before, as games becomes big-franchises of their own, creating unique identities and loyal fans base for new variations to follow.

The Halo influence continues to spread even more shockingly. Perhaps, the testimonial to the influence of a game is when the game characters are sharing the same stardom status as celebrities. Halo is such a game. Master Chief, the main character in Halo series, was immortalized at the Las Vegas wax museum two weeks before the launch of Halo 3. This is the first time in Madame Tussauds’ 250-year history that

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8 Spartan is the characters that is used in Halo, thus the title “This Spartan Life”
9 A filmmaking process that is done within a real-time, 3D virtual environment, often using 3D video-game technologies.
a computer-generated video game hero has been made (see 13), attesting to the fact that not only has Master Chief arrived in Vegas, but he has also "arrived to the celebrity status that Madame Tussauds has become famous for celebrating." (Madame Tussauds)

There are no questions about the celebrity status games have attained, having million of fans worldwide. Halo is the leader of the pack, but many other games such as WarCraft and Final Fantasy also share the same level of popularity and influence in other areas. Beyond just the games entertainment value, games are endorsement and franchises of many other things, much like a star, sparking the creation of movies, shows, music, and toys. Poole may posits that teenagers were already more interested in videogames than in pop music in 1990s, but to date in the 21st century, more than just music, we are witnessing teenagers getting more interested in videogames than movies, television shows, and toys. Then perhaps, to relight teenagers’ interest in pop music, we need games to add some sparks and stardom.
As Part of Our Intellectual Needs

“Games are widely used as educational tools, not just for pilots, soldiers and surgeons, but also in schools and businesses.”

- Tom Standage, Editor at The Economist

What constitutes a story to be on the cover of The Economist? Apparently the editor of The Economist believes that it is crucial to let people know the real impact of video games. In his cover story, Tom Standage dismisses the misconceptions people have about games having bad influences, explaining that gaming is an ideal form of preparation for the workplace of the 21st century, as some forward-thinking firms are already starting to realise. He concludes that games are widely used as education tools, not just for pilots, soldiers and surgeons, but also in schools and businesses.

David McDivitt, a social studies teacher at Oak Hill High School, agrees with Standage. He uses Making History to teach his students, where they are divided into teams, such that each team has to use critical thinking skills to advance the interests of a key European country in the years leading up to WWII. McDivitt explains: “It’s the right thing for right now. We’re teaching kids who have grown up with computers as part of their life. This is the direction we need to go to need kids where they are...” His view mirrored Standage’s claim that gaming is an ideal form of preparation for workplace of the 21st century, in this case, preparation for education. As more people see the benefits, gaming gradually becomes a necessity in our quest for knowledge.

Another teacher, Bill MacKenty, shares his precious moments about a student involved in games. He has a student who always struggled in school, always seated at the back of the class and not involved in class. When the student becomes a mayor in the video game SimCity where he regulates economic growth in
municipality, he becomes a classroom leader, participating in discussions and helping his fellow students. MacKenty is genuinely surprised and delighted to witness the student’s success. In fact, he expresses that “his [the student] experience is one of my most treasured moments as a teacher.” (47) This touching story a teacher amplifies the impact and influence of games in the education space.

To establish the real benefits of games in education, experiments have to be carried out. Many studies have demonstrated that games provide an array of educational benefits tied to how people learn. One of the larger experiments is carried out in 2004 by Italian National Evaluation Institute of the Ministry of Education (INVALSI). The research aims to determine the impact of using logical games as teaching tool has on pupils’ reasoning abilities. More than 71,000 classes and approximately 1,400,000 students were included in the test. The students were administered for language and science, and also for mathematics, including logical reasoning items. The detailed results were compared against school, regional and national level, and were made available in normalized forms as shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum Score</th>
<th>Maximum Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class A (Experimental)</td>
<td>72.80</td>
<td>15.87</td>
<td>32.14</td>
<td>92.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class B</td>
<td>53.57</td>
<td>16.86</td>
<td>35.71</td>
<td>82.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class C</td>
<td>56.55</td>
<td>18.99</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>89.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class D (Experimental)</td>
<td>63.03</td>
<td>21.43</td>
<td>21.43</td>
<td>92.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Class A and D are classes that use some form of computer during the learning process. Class A and D have higher means and maximum scores than the traditional learning methods shown in Class B and C. Data tabulated by INVALSI. (Bottino)

The data shows that the students in the classes that use computers for learning perform better than classes that use traditional method of learning. In a research paper that analyzed INVALSI’s complete set of data concludes that “INVALSI data can be read as a confirmation that well structured and long-term activities based on the use of logical games can have a positive impact on pupils’ reasoning abilities.” (Bottino) This grand experiment affirms that games help students in their education journey in multiple levels, from reasoning abilities to problem solving skills.
Besides students gaining intellectual progression through games, casual gamers also share positive feedback about gaming. A Sims gamer posts in a bulletin board – “I started looking at my life differently, it terms of what needs do I have? ... It really helped me lead a more solid life, since I don’t go to bed without filling all my needs for the day.” (qtd. in Molesworth, Denegri-Knott 265) Online community games have helped individuals make sense of real life, including the relationship between actions and emotion. A game such as The Sims Online, while it does not fully reflect real life, the underlying characters are played by real people. The fact that each character in the games is actually controlled by real people, the actions and motives are from real people. Consequently, gamers are able to explore what consumption means for them and allow them to see the circle of desire at work. (Ibid.) These games allow players to acquire better understanding of the way society works, hence enlarging their intellectual knowledge.

Learning about larger concerns in society and human nature may seem quite abstract and intangible; however, there are other games that help players to gain specific skill set and knowledge. Tiger Woods PGA Tour and other similar sport games allow many gamers to pick up the rules and skills of specific games before even before playing the real sport. Furthermore, it allows new golf players to understand what to look out for in golf, such as wind speed, contour of land, texture of ground and various club types (see Figure 15: Gamers in The Sims Online can interact and chat with each other. Bars at the bottom of the screen show the needs for gamer’s character, including hunger, comfort, hygiene, energy, etc. Character will perform better if the needs are filled. (Sims Online)
Other games may educate gamers on more serious and professional skills. For example, Microsoft Flight Simulator helps many players to understand how planes work and how to fly one. Such games are so sophisticated that it is modelled almost exactly like how things in real life work (see Figure 16). In fact, Flight Simulator not only has player-flyable aircraft from the historical Douglas DC-3 to Boeing 777, it incorporates a sophisticated weather simulation that has the ability to download real-world weather data, a varied air traffic environment including interactive Air Traffic Control, interactive lessons and aircraft checklists where gamers fly their assignments as pilots do in real airlines, together with the simulation of air traffic and air traffic control. With such detailed considerations put into games, it is no wonder pilots use games for their training, as what Standage has attested to. Games effectively bring many things that we always wanted to do or try, but never had the chance to because of time or money or practicality, into our daily life, again expanding our intellectual knowledge.

Games also indirectly influence our intellectual discipline in various ways. Earlier we see the huge success of Halo 3, but
the first installment of Halo is enough to inspire Eric Nylund to write a novel based on the game’s storyline (see Appendix D 13). Such books are in no way inferior to bestselling novels, earning a 4.5 stars average rating in amazon.com from more than 200 readers. If you think this idea is new, it is not. This book that was published in 2001 is not the first book that is written based on game’s storyline. Since then, there have been many such games tie-in novels. Recently, the new Halo book, Contact Harvest, was among the best sellers according to Publisher Weekly (see Table 2). These novels attract gamers to follow up on their favorite games’ storyline, and in the process, improving their language.

Other than on the consumer intellectual level, gaming also deals with larger and more serious issues. Ed Halter, in his book From Sun Tzu to XBOX, discusses various aspects of war and gaming. He outlines that in October 1996, the National Research Council hosted an exploratory conference that hosted people from very different worlds – one side were the military thinkers from various national security departments, the other side were representatives ranging from Disney to video game developers (Halter). The resulting report published by National Research Council predicts that “defense and entertainment [games] could potentially find mutual benefit toward the research and development of specific goals” (qtd. in Halter). The Institute of Creative Technologies (ICT) was later formed by people from Hollywood, gaming industry, academia, and the military, to work towards allowing games to better simulate war and conduct warfare training. Today, the level of realism of games (see
Figure 18) has increased multiple folds, with smoke effects, bumpy grounds, realistic guns, and artificial intelligent soldiers. War games give gamers and soldiers an accurate first person view, with the rifle, ammo, health, and other status in the viewport. It is then not hard to see why national security departments are interested in using games to conduct military trainings.

The Pentagon is not the only government body that makes use of games. Gaming is used inside the White House too. David Rejeski, who worked at White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, was dealing with a number of topics, including climate change. He then learned about a simple game created by the Dutch government that was used by their parliament. He played this game while eating lunch and he concluded: “I discovered more about climate change in a few hours than I ever learned from any briefing or supercomputer output.” (qtd. in Schollmeyer) Rejeski experience continues the trend of games being part of our intellectual needs, just like how games benefit students, consumers, gamers, and the Army. The coherent message is that the interactivity element in games allows people to absorb information in a faster, easier, and more interesting way, thus resulting in quadruple efficiency.

Today, games are being implemented in schools to teach the kids, used to learn about society, played to pick up various skills, applied in the Army, and even utilized by the government. Coupled with positive conclusions from researches, articles, and studies, it looks like games are going to be an essential part of our intellectual life.
Gaming – Now and Beyond

Scott McCloud once said: “It’s easy to see the line between games and life beginning to blur... Games are capable of completely and seamlessly taking people out of their lives.” Indeed, gaming may once be seen as just another option for our leisure needs, but has rapidly grown to be an integral part of our life. We no longer just play games for the fun and excitement, but also to satisfy our social needs. The growing gaming community allows us to communicate with people regardless of their geographical location and language, bringing our friends and families from all over the world together.

We are now witnessing a turn of tide in the entertainment space as game consoles become the center piece of our living room, acting as the launching pad to our other leisure activities, such as watching movies and shows, enjoying music, and viewing photos. Where it used to be developing games based on movies or books to attract fans over to the world of gaming, games have now become our primary entertainment needs, such that movies, shows, books, toys, and music are being produced based on games. Having attained the celebrity status, games are now the ignition spark of our entertainment life.

Recent escalation of gaming as an important part of our intellectual developments marks the next direction in the gaming culture revolution. While we await the decision for video gaming to be included in Beijing Olympics 2008, everyday signifies a step towards greater things to come, as gaming converges with our social, entertainment, and intellectual needs.
Appendix

Appendix A – Gaming Language

A&D - Attack and Defend
AFK - Away From Keyboard.
Aimbot - Cheat software which assists aiming. Effectively snaps the crosshair to your enemy when your gun is pointed in their general direction.
Arse-jam - A fluke, a moment of incredible luck.
ATM - At The Moment.
Avatar - Your character in the game.
BAF - Bring A Friend.
Bot - An AI-controlled contestant in first-person shooters.
Camping - Waiting in a location for a specific event to occur. The word may be applied to many situations; in [FPS] terms, it means sitting in a good vantage point, waiting for a player to enter your field of view.
Cheese - Exploiting an imbalance in the game for personal benefit.
Co-op - Game Type
Clan - A group of players who fight together as a team under a common banner.
CPL - A sarcastic insult. Originates from the acronym for the Cyber athlete Professional League tournaments.
CTF - Capture The Flag. A popular game-type, in which each team must capture the opposing team's flag and return it to their own base.
CU - General - See you. E.g. "CU 18ril!"
DM - Death match. A free-for-all game-type, in which the player with the highest [frag] count wins.
FB - A flash bang grenade.
FFA - Free For All.
FH - Full Health.
Flaming - Performing a scathing personal attack in a forum or chat channel.
Flame war - Ensues when two or more people are [flaming] each other in a forum or chat channel.
Frag - 1. Kill. E.g. "I fragged his ass," "I had like 30 frags." 2. Fragmentation, as in "frag grenade."
G2G - (I've) Got To Go. Generally used if the person isn't coming back - if they are, [BRB] is more common.
GD - God Damn! Usually lower case, used mid-sentence. E.g. "This game's full of gd [n00bs]". Not to be mistaken for a contraction of 'good'.
GG - "Good Game!". Used after an enjoyable or remarkable match. A show of good sportsmanship when coming from the losing team, but rare.
In practice you're more likely to see [ffs], [teams] or players leaving the game.
GGA - Good Game All
Gibs - Wet bodily fragments; the kind you see when you hit someone with a rocket in Quake. E.g. "I gibbed his ass!".
Gimp - Expression used to describe a poorly developed or poorly performing character. Sometimes used as an insult.
GM - Game Moderator, or Games Master. A person employed by the development team to resolve issues, both technical and social, which arise in the game. Many games allow you to petition a GM in-game, if you think that something is unfair.
GMATA - Great Minds Think Alike.
Gratz! - Congratulations!
Griever - A person who deliberately upsets others for his own pleasure.
GTG - Good To Go. A term employed to inform your party that you are ready to proceed.
Hack - A cheat or exploit.
HaXor/h4XXor - Hacker. A player who uses cheats or exploits to get ahead in the game.
HF - Have Fun.
HP - Hit points. The health of a character, [MOB] or [NPC].
HPB - High [Ping] Bastard. Someone with a very slow Internet connection. There are many [HPB]-only servers. See also [Ping]. Contrast with: [LPB].
IIRC - If I Recall Correctly.
Imba - Imbalanced. Can refer to any element in a game that is over/underpowered.
IRL = In real life (not often used, common in some games, aka RL)
KOS - Kill On Sight.
L337 or 1337 - General - Elite - specifically au fait with computers, hacking or games. Pronounced "Leet". E.g. "Me 1337. U [suXXor]".
Lamer/Flama - A player who is lame, i.e. they cheat, they're bad at the game or they're arsing about, not playing the game properly.
LD - Link-Dead. Occurs when you lose your connection to the server. E.g. "Where's Crosius?", "He's LD".
Leeching - Striking a [mob] in combat with another player, to steal a little of the XP reward given upon the mob's death. Much frowned-upon.
LFC - Looking For Clan.
LFG/T - Looking For Group/Team.
LOS - Line Of Sight.
LPB - Low [Ping] Bastard. A player with a fast, stable Internet connection, who enjoys fast and smooth online gaming as a result. Related: [Ping]. Contrast with [HPB].
LvL - Level. Your character's level.
m8 = mate
Med - Medic
Merc - A superior player who plays under the name of an inferior player, in order to boost a clan's score or reputation.
Mish - Mission.
MMOG/MMORPG - A Massively Multiplayer Online (Role-Playing) Game.
MP - Multiplayer, or Magic Points.
MT - Mistell. Used to inform someone that your previous [tell] to them was in error, or meant for somebody else.
MTFBWY - May The Force Be With You
Muppet - A player engaging in disruptive activities whenever there are no enemies to kill in his immediate vicinity.
N1 - Nice one.
Nade - Grenade.
Newbie - A new or inexperienced player. See also [noob/n00b]. There is a distinction: newbie simply means a new player. Noob or n00b imply inferiority through inexperience.
Noob/n00b - Derogatory term for a new player. Origin: [Newbie].
N00b spray - Not aiming your weapon, simply running around and firing off ridiculous numbers of rounds in the hope you'll hit someone.
noobtube - Slang term for the rocket launcher.
NP - No Problem.
NT - General - Nice Try.
OMG! - Oh my God!
OMW - On My Way.
OOR - Out Of Range.
OOS - Out Of Sight.
OSOK = One shot one kill, used more in older games like TFC and HL mods.
Own - To thoroughly dominate a game. E.g. "I owned last night." "They're gonna own us." The [I33t] version is Ownz0r or [pwn].
Ownage - Success in combat generally. E.g. "I need an AK47 for maximum ownage," or simply, "Ownage!"
Ph4t/Phat - An adjective implying excellence.
PITA - Pain in the arse/ass.
PK - Player Killing. A player killing another player.
Player base - The total number of players who play any given game.
PMSL - Pissing myself laughing
Port - Teleport.
PPL - People.
Pwned - A corruption of [owned]. Originated in Warcraft, through a misspelling in the script. When the player lost in a particular mission, the game told the player 'player is pwned'. Now in common usage as a term to describe defeat at the hands of another player or team. E.g. "They pwned us".
Quick-switcher - A player who uses a script to quickly cycle between a zoomed rifle and a pistol or knife.
Raid - To gather together in a very large party and attack an area or [mob] en masse.
Rate hacker - A player who alters his rate settings to - give himself a jerky and staggered appearance, thus making him harder to hit. A perfectly innocent 56K modem user can be accused of this.
Res/ReZ - Resolution / size of screen in pixels. E.g. 1024x768
Respawn - The process of an item, weapon, player, [mob] or [NPC] reappearing in the game after it has been collected or killed.
RoXXor - To rock. E.g. I roXXor! U [susXxor]!".
RP - Role-play.
RT - Roger That.
Sig - Signature; Term used when someone wants a small graphical image.
Spamming - General - To indiscriminately bombard an area with fire.
Spawn - The act of a [mob], [npc] or player character coming into existence in the game-world.
Spawn Camping - In [MMOGs], this refers to the practice of [camping] for a specific [mob] to [spawn]. In [FPS] games such as Counter - Strike, this refers to the practice of a player or team camping at the other teams spawn point, in order to kill them as they spawn.
SuXxor - To suck. E.g. "U suXxor! I [roXXor]!".
Taunt - A combat skill, common to many [MMOGs], which enables a player-character to attract the [aggro] of a [mob].
TDM - Team Death match. A game type where two teams fight. The highest [frag] count wins.
Trolling - Making inflammatory comments or [flaming] in a forum or chat-channel just to get a rise out of people.
TS - Teamspeak
TSK - Three Shot Kill -- Used mostly in Halo/2, sometimes used in LW, TFD, etc.
Uber - Super. May be applied to many situations, but chiefly an item, e.g. "OMG, that sword is uber!", or a person, e.g. "[WTF]! That guy [pwned] me! He's [uber]!".
VGG - Very Good Game. Use sparingly.
w00t! - An expression of victory, success or joy. Originated on Quake servers, an abbreviation of "We [owned] the other team".
WTG - Way to go!

* Selected list of gaming terms. Source: see Gaming Terms
Appendix B – Logos

- A "stickman" indicates a creature or person:
- Two eyes and a curving line above them for the top of the head indicate something about the mind or brain.
- A heart symbol that opens to two curves at the top indicates the or spirit or heart.
- A dot "•" in front or behind a symbol (usually a verb or action) indicates tense: In front means past, behind means future.
- Tilted angle brackets "<>" indicate a question or uncertainty.
- Four squares represent a set of objects, a dot in the center of a square represents the object is there as opposed to being absent.
- An arrow means to move or give.
- A vertical line in the center indicates the present time.
- A diagonal slash through something indicates it is gone or nonexistent.
- A horizontal line at the top indicates a destination, two diagonal lines from it indicate a path.

(Source: see Logos Elements)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power</th>
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<td>Target</td>
<td>Time</td>
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<td>Heal</td>
<td>Trap</td>
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<td>Chaos</td>
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<td>Machine</td>
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<td>Future</td>
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<td>In</td>
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Source: see Logos List
Appendix C – Stills and Photos from Halo 3 Launch Day

Thousands of people queuing up for Halo 3 outside Best Buy in New York City

Halo 3 vehicle arrives minutes before mid night

Master Chief approves the “transaction”

Master Chief takes up the game from the box

Stunt performances on buggies (same vehicles that are used in the game)

Soldiers unloading ammo box from vehicle

The ammo box opens up with games inside

Master Chief passes game to first two customers

*Source: All stills and photos from xbox.com (Halo 3 Launch)
Appendix D - Selected Excerpts from Game Books

**Halo: The Fall of Reach**  
by Eric Nylund | Prologue

The planet's lakes, rivers, and oceans vaporized. By tomorrow, the atmosphere would boil away, too. Fields and forests were glassy smooth and glowing red-hot in patches.

Where there had once been a paradise, only hell remained.

"Make ready to jump clear of the system," the Captain ordered.

The Chief continued to watch, his face grim.

There had been ten years of this -- the vast network of human colonies whittled down to a handful of strongholds by a merciless, implacable enemy. The Chief had killed the enemy on the ground -- shot them, stabbed them, and broken them with his own two hands. On the ground, the Spartans always won.

The problem was, the Spartans couldn't take their fight into space. Every minor victory on the ground turned into a major defeat in orbit.

Soon there would be no more colonies, no human settlements -- and nowhere left to run.

*Source: see Nylund

**The Sundering (Warcraft: War of the Ancients Trilogy, Book 3)**  
by Richard A. Knaak | Chapter One

They could smell the stench in the distance and it was difficult to say which was strongest, the acrid smoke rising from the burning landscape or the incessant, almost sweet odor of the slowly-decaying dead lying sprawled by the hundreds across it.

The night elves had managed to stem the latest assault by the Burning Legion, but had lost more ground again. Lord Desdel Stareye proclaimed it a retrenching maneuver enabling the host to better gauge the Legion's weaknesses, but among Malfurion Stormrage and his friends, the truth was known. Stareye was an aristocrat with no true concept of strategy and he surrounded himself with the like.

With the assassination of Lord Ravencrest, there had been no one willing to stand up to the slim, influential noble. Other than Ravencrest, few night elves truly had experience in warfare and with the dead commander the last of his line, his House could present no one to take his place. Stareye clearly had ambitions, but his ineptitude would see those ambitions crushed along with his people if something did not happen.

*Source: see Nylund

**Warcraft: Rise of the Horde (World of Warcraft)**  
by Christie Golden | Chapter One

My name is Thrall. The word means "slave" in the human tongue, and the story behind the naming is a long one, best left for another time. By the grace of the spirits and the blood of heroes before me that runs in my veins, I have become Warchief of my people, the orcs, and the leader of a group of races known as the Horde. How this came to be, too, is another tale. The one I wish to set to parchment now, before those who lived it pass to dwell with the honorable ancestors, is the story of my father and those who believed in him; and of those who betrayed him and indeed, all our people.

What might have become of us had these events not unfolded, not even the wise shaman Drek'Thar can say. The paths of Fate are many and varied, and no sane being should ever venture down the deceptively pleasant one of "if only." What happened, happened; my people must shoulder both the shame and the glories of our choices.

This is the tale not of the Horde as it exists today, a loose organization of orc, tauren, forsaken, troll, and blood elf, but of the rise of the very first Horde. Its birth, like that of any infant, was marked by blood and pain, and its harsh cries for life meant death to its enemies.

*Source: see Golden
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