

LBG Design Praxis: A Cultural Analysis

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In this abstract the authors briefly describe their findings in location-based game (LBG) design research, along with their goals for attending the International Conference on Japan Game Studies (ICJGS).

Within the field of LBGs design researchers use the terms location-based, mobile, unique artworks and transmedia storytelling to express the use of technology to the broader social and cultural context of the medium. More commonly the term is used to describe a type of story-narrative that is delivered through multiple channels. The LBG narrative is usually broken into segments of which the audience must find and assemble^[1]. The audience sometimes works as a collective and may play a key role in creating the fiction^[9].

Over the last 5-years, our research lab has used various ethnographic methods to compare the LBG design process to the participant's experience^[3]. This cross-analysis has led to a deeper understanding of how people engage with the cultural phenomena of play, and more importantly - meaning. In the sections that follow we introduce two experimental case studies we plan to present as examples of LBG cross-analysis studies.

In 2010, we analyzed the participant contributions to a new media event concerned with the world's dependency on oil. Like an LBG, the story-narrative of this event was distributed through various channels including: film, magazines, a live performance and online social media contributions. At the live performance 40,000 people watched the ignition of 900-gallons of jet fuel. Curious to understand what people choose to publish to the Internet we analyzed the video documentation of the live performance posted to YouTube. Among the many findings, we learned that 61% of the people choose to use video much like a snap-shot (under 30-seconds) capturing the narrative arch of the story; while others edited the video to create unique artworks (video footage between 3 to 14-minutes in length) extending the ethos (meaning) of the live performance^[4].

Based on these findings, in 2011 we decided to advance our research by collaborating with a theatre company to produce a story-narrative that would utilize our existing LBG platform. The project was completed in March 2012, and in the process, we learned that collaborations between artists, designers and technologists can be difficult, and that technology can be used as the boundary object to support the dialogic process and generate new knowledge^[3]. For example among the many findings, this study revealed that writers are highly skilled at crafting transitions called directives, and if properly interpreted through the system design can propel a participant through the story-narrative with performative action. The implications of this research are important, as it suggests that collaborative authorship and group decision-making is a social practice, both in the design process, as well as in the participant's experience^[3].

Conference Goals

Our goal for the ICJGS conference is to present our design research with the intent to discuss: What are the benefits of understanding the cultural implications of games? How can we work with artists to create richer story-narratives? How does the perception of engagement differ in other disciplines such as computer science, the humanities, and in artistic practice?

References

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