

# THE VERNACULAR VIDEO GAME LANGUAGE AS A MEDIUM OF FANDOM STORYTELLING AND CONTENT CREATION

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the alternative applications of vernacular terminology through video game texts and paratexts within fandom communities. The focus is on the use of expressions adopted from the language of video game within online communities that orbit around groups of streamers. The research focuses on their activity within the game live streaming platform Twitch.tv and, in particular, on the cluster of Italian streamers known as *Tomodachi Crew*

Formally established in November 2020, *Tomodachi Crew* proposes a typology of entertainment focused on video games, anime, and manga: The community and the streamers of *Tomodachi Crew* apply terminologies and languages typical of the products of popular culture mentioned above to their activity on Twitch. Specifically, one of the characteristic aspects is the transformation of the English term *lore* into a true creative-narrative tool employed by the community fandom. Derived from *folklore*, the expression indicates the set of knowledge and stories indigenous to a given place, told by those who live in it and handed down from individual to individual. As Majkowski (2016) and Wiik (2019) recall, the vernacular term has become a standard in video game language, indicate the silent narrative, secondary to the explicit diegesis and composed of the set of events and stories told in a non-linear way through objects and

artifacts of various kinds scattered and hidden in the virtual world.

Within the community of *Tomodachi Crew*, the expression is configured as a story composed of creative productions of the fandom that, crossing different media, follows the common thread of the content broadcast live by streamers: It is a multifaceted narrative, what Marie-Laure Ryan (2011) calls “layered narrative.”

In a transmedia perspective of applying languages across media, from content creators to fans, the research method involves the semiotic framing of Twitch consumption phenomena through contributions from academics and critics (Bittani and Gandolfi, 2018; Antonacci, 2018; Woodcock and Johnson, 2019); followed by the semantic analysis of fan-content created by the *Tomodachi Crew* fandom archived within the subreddit – *r/DarioMocciaTwitch*. The analysis examines various types of content (fanarts, fanfiction, videos, and songs) made by fans with the aim of enriching the *lore* of *Tomodachi Crew*. In order to reconstruct the narrative behind their activity on Twitch, the reference framework restricts the study to content created within a given period of time and filtered according to the platform’s own classification indexes.

It is possible to demonstrate that, in the relationship between streamer, fan, and video game, the boundaries between texts and video game paratexts are very blurred and the contextual dimension far exceeds the traditionally textual one. Finally, this study is

an integral part of research the purpose of which is to understand and define the new identity of the “spectator-videogamer”

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Among the different cultures and subcultures that inhabit the spaces of the Web, that of the video game has seen its boundaries enrich and expand to include more and more users year after year, belonging to different age groups, genders and races. In order to be able to connect such a broad and ever-expanding cultural humus, the creation of linguistic slang forms capable of transcending the languages of origin of the users has been achieved, leading to a fast and direct form of communication, based on the video game, on what takes place within the virtual worlds and on the dialogue that stagnates “in the associated network spaces in which the online communities of video gamers live and survive” (Puente, Tosca 2013). In fact, this contribution focuses on the application of video game vernacular language within online communities of video game players and spectators. I will initially focus on the characteristics of vernacular language and its declinations within video game language and then go on to see how these are applied within online communities and in particular in communities closely connected to the Twitch.tv platform. In particular, the research identified the term “lore” as a paradigmatic expression of videogames, decontextualised and applied in new contexts: among these, the Italian case of Tomodachi Crew, a cluster of streamers and a community daily active on Twitch.tv.

Tracing the path taken by video game language from its genesis to its everyday affirmation, it is appropriate to define vernacular language and emphasise its difference and distance from vehicular

developed on Twitch, through the analysis of consumption practices that its characters use.

language.<sup>1</sup> Cheshire and Stein (1997) point out that, in the field of linguistics, vernacular language is defined as a language native to a specific culture or geographical area and spoken within a specific community: Examples of vernacular language are dialectal and slang forms – as well as the slangs characteristic of digital cultures and subcultures.<sup>2</sup> It is thus the common, indigenous spoken language of a given culture, the easiest to communicate with and which characterises the context in which it is used. In contrast to vernacular language, vehicular language is a system of languages used when people who speak different vernacular dialects want to communicate with each other (Coonan 2012): also known as “bridge language” or “lingua franca,” it provides common access to communication between different cultures. In this case, Latin and English, languages used in distant and different historical epochs but with the same objectives, constitute a valid example of a vehicular language.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the development and dissemination of a vehicular language offers an important advantage and convenience to intercultural economic, political and social communication.

Considering the characteristics and definitions of vernacular language and vehicular language, it is possible to outline the definition of videogame language. I will focus first on the vernacular terminological aspects and then on their application within videogame-related online communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Both vernacular and vehicular languages define the properties of video game language.

<sup>2</sup> Cheshire J., Stein, D. (Eds.). (1997). *Taming the Vernacular from Dialect to Written Standard Language*. London, New York: Longman.

<sup>3</sup> Coonan, C. (2012). *La lingua straniera veicolare*. UTET Università: Torino.

Videogame language is a vernacular language, characterised by the strong presence of slang, which makes use of English as a vehicular language, which has always been used within the videogame market and industry: Every product related to this sphere holds the creative potential of new terms and forms of expression of a vernacular nature. In order to better understand how videogame vernacular terms originate, an example of a marketing campaign of PlayStation Italy is given here.

Starting from the summer of 2020, within its Italian Instagram page, the Japanese company launched a communication campaign regarding videogame vernacular language with the aim of educating and informing users about the meaning of some commonly used terms in videogames. Launched with the hashtag #ConLeTueParole, the campaign highlights the origin and meaning of these terms: among the most well-known examples are forms of expression that indicate both activities and practices in video games, such as the definitions of “Craftare” – Italianisation of “crafting,” meaning the act of creating weapons, equipment and other objects of all kinds with the precision of a craftsman, using materials collected in the game area – or “Speedrun” – the art of completing a game or a particular challenge in the shortest possible time, using every secret trick available to race against the clock.<sup>4</sup> The case of PlayStation Italy demonstrates how video game language manifests itself through terms and expressions formulated ad hoc to express concepts in as few words as possible. As illustrated by the examples, these are often the crazes and

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<sup>4</sup> Literally translated as '#WithYourOwnWords', the communication campaign is still running on the page known as '@playstationit'. Within this sample, published on 28 April 2022, is the definition of a “Ghost Car,” i.e. what defines one's best time, against which one can compete in racing games - <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cc5Nh4zMpcr/?hl=en>.

abbreviations of terms of English origin, Italianised to make them commonly understandable.

An even more recent example comes from the video game *Among Us* (Innersloth 2018): A multiplayer survival video game developed and distributed by the American independent software house Innersloth since 15 June 2018, which was only successful in the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic in summer 2020.<sup>5</sup> The rules of the game are quite simple: Players take on the role of a team of astronauts engaged in the maintenance of space bases and spaceships within three different game scenarios; between them, one user plays the role of an impostor, with the aim of sabotaging space equipment and killing astronauts. Whenever a player finds the corpse of one of his companions, he initiates the so-called “emergency meeting,” a time-limited chat window in which players can discuss by texting who the impostor is and possibly execute him. Given the tight timeframe of communication during the “emergency meeting,” users started to converse by shortening their words, giving rise to a widespread term adopted by the web language: “Sus,” short for “suspicious.” The popularity of *Among Us* and the term “sus” are a prime example of the rapid spread of vernacular video game language, a linguistic form that can not only be localised within the conversation between users related to the video game sphere, but also employed in the creation and definition of video game paratexts on multiple digital platforms.<sup>6</sup> One

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<sup>5</sup> Sackett, E., & Amoroso, L. M. (2022). A Little “Edutainment” Goes a Long Way: Leveraging *Among Us*, a Popular Multiplayer Game, to Teach Persuasion Virtually. *Management Teaching Review*.

<sup>6</sup> The term videogame paratexts is used here to refer to all content created from a rib of the videogame industry and disseminated on the Internet: this includes Let's Play, Walkthrough, Machinima, Game Movie, Trailer, Live Streaming, etc.

of these is Twitch.tv, the best known game live streaming platform in Western society.

As described by Taylor (2018), Twitch is the live streaming platform belonging to the Amazon, Inc., group that develops with a focus on the live broadcasting of video games, played by users defined as streamers, both at an amateur, professional and competitive (eSports) level.<sup>7</sup> The use of Twitch is stimulated by continuous interaction practices: viewers interact with streamers through a chat dialogue system.<sup>8</sup> Here, users employ the vernacular language of gaming by referring to events, situations, and contexts taking place within the content created by the live streamer. It is not difficult to find an example of the application of videogame language in chat on Twitch. To demonstrate this, I chose to rely on the automatic content selection algorithm of Twitch, clicking on the first available video game-themed live broadcast on the home page of the platform: It was the live broadcast of the Italian channel Moonryde, belonging to professional gamer Dario Ferracci.<sup>9</sup>

In the live broadcast under review, Moonryde is playing *Call of Duty Warzone* (Activision 2020), a first-person shooter whose central mode is the competitive Battle Royale.<sup>10</sup> Focusing on the Twitch chat, it is

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<sup>7</sup> Taylor, T. L. (2018). *Watch me play: Twitch and the rise of game live streaming*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Woodcock, J. & Johnson R. M. (2019). The Affective Labor and Performance of Live Streaming on Twitch.tv. *Television & New Media*, 20 (8), p. 813–823.

<sup>9</sup> The channel was created in November 2016, to date it has more than half a million followers, has a total of around 23 million views and proposes content on a daily basis, gathering up to ten thousand unique viewers each day. The test was carried out on the morning of 17 May 2022, Italian time, and among the channels suggested by the platform, alongside the one examined were: “Terenas,” “strawberryqt,” “Bstaard,” and “Mastro\_Z.”

<sup>10</sup> Originally conceived by the Japanese author Koushun Takami in his 1999 work, the Battle Royale –

possible to notice in a few interactions a significant presence of vernacular videogame terms and expressions. Given the victory of the streamer in a game that has just finished, most of the terms are used to congratulate and compliment the player, such as “gg” or “ez” – short for “good game” and “easy” respectively. Other expressions are specific to the gameplay of *Call of Duty Warzone*, such as “build,” “cheating,” and “camper,” which indicate a certain type of game behaviour and attitude – they refer respectively to the accessories used on the weapon of the player, the potential use of cheats to gain a competitive advantage, and a possible approach to dealing with other players in *Call of Duty Warzone*.

Bittanti and Gandolfi (2018) recall how the interface of Twitch – particularly the chat – is designed to encourage long-term financial and emotional support from viewers through monetisation and social aggregation practices.<sup>11</sup> It happens that in order to have the message of a user displayed on screen and thus be read by the streamer, users compete through spontaneous financial donation mechanics. It is therefore not surprising to see the establishment of affectionate communities orbiting around individual or groups of streamers. Among these is the Italian case of Tomodachi Crew.<sup>12</sup> Formally established on

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“combat in which more than two combatants participate and in which the last survivor is declared the winner” – is today conceived as a true transmedia narrative genre that, moving from literature and through cinema, is applied to video game competition models, generating internationally successful products such as *Fortnite* (Epic Games 2017) and *Call of Duty Warzone* (Activision 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Bittanti, M. & Gandolfi, E. (Eds). (2018). *Giochi Video. Performance, spettacolo, streaming*. Mimesis: Milano

<sup>12</sup> The name of the group is a combination of a Japanese word (“tomodachi”) and an English one (“crew”). The former is the Japanese translation for “friend,” together they define a kind of “group of friends.” This is not a random but a well-considered choice, referring to the successful comic book work

Twitch in November 2020, the Italian streamer cluster Tomodachi Crew was born out of the success of content creator Dario Moccia. The cluster, consisting of around ten different Italian streamers – known online as “Dario Moccia,” “Il Maseo,” “Davide Masella,” “Dada”, “Mangaka96,” “Venzofthewall,” “Iltizioqualunque,” “Nanni,” “Volpescu,” and “Victorlaszlo88” – does not have a shared channel on Twitch, but orbits around the one of Moccia – named DarioMocciaTwitch. Briefly reviewing the career of the founder of the group, it is worth noting that Dario Moccia is a streamer, content creator, youtuber, comic book author, writer, passionate gamer, and expert on manga and Japanese animation, who has been active on various digital platforms on the Italian scene for about fifteen years. The Twitch channel DarioMocciaTwitch was created in 2016, has 371 thousand followers and an average of about 25 million views of his content, posted on a daily basis, gathering up to eight thousand unique viewers every day. The Tomodachi Crew cluster found its point of origin in the success of the contents of streamer Dario Moccia during 2020, the production of which accelerated following the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, the channel has enjoyed considerable popularity in Italy, thanks to the quality of the content offered, the personality of the author and the ability to forge professional bonds on and off screen.<sup>13</sup> This has led to the rise of new young Italian

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*20th Century Boy* by Naoki Urasawa, which tells the story of a group of friends, a work Dario Moccia is very fond of.

<sup>13</sup> Through the digital measurement platform 'Twitch tracker', it was possible to assess the growth dynamics of the DarioMocciaTwitch channel, the main reference point for the Tomodachi Crew cluster. Between the month of February 2020 (before the outbreak) and May 2022, the number of visits to the channel increased by 349.5%, the amount of hours watched increased by 2032%, with a growth in the number of subscribers of 512% and in views (per content) of 1732%.

streamers who, initially sharing content with the main channel of Moccia, have since built their own audience and community. Everyone of the ten streamers of Tomodachi Crew is active in the production of content on a daily basis: Each individual has his or her own social media channels, elaborating content in line with his or her personality depending on the medium and platform used – this results in greater spontaneity on Twitch, guaranteed by the presence of fewer social filters than on other platforms. Nevertheless, the community of reference of the Italian cluster is active and cohesive on Facebook groups, Telegram chats, and dedicated Subreddits. The content production on Twitch of the channel is daily and well planned in order to create an audiovisual palimpsest easily accessible to viewers.

DarioMocciaTwitch offers varied and heterogeneous content, capable of mixing different genres and categories, with a preponderant focus on video games: Moccia, together with the other members of Tomodachi Crew, plays and shares video game experiences entertaining fans. In particular, proposing a videogame-focused type of entertainment, the community and streamers of Tomodachi Crew apply terminologies and languages typical of videogames to their activity on Twitch: among the most relevant terminological uses by the group, the reinterpretation of the videogame concept of “lore” applied to the online community of Tomodachi Crew fans stands out.

In order to better observe and evaluate the use and reinterpretation made of the term “lore” by the Italian group, it is appropriate to trace the origins of this expression and its meaning within the video game sphere. The term derives from the better known expression folklore, which indicates the body of knowledge and stories indigenous to a

given place, told by those who inhabit it and handed down from individual to individual.<sup>14</sup> These are vernacular traditions that contribute to the definition of a cultural profile, determined by what the individuals of a given group do, know and say. In order to transmit, disseminate and pass on narratives, the folklore of a given cultural group makes use of different media and tools: fairy tales and mythological stories, songs and music as well as visual, literary and proverbial art forms and practices are paradigmatic examples.<sup>15</sup> From the term folklore derives the expression “lore,” commonly conceived to denote the collective story and the sum of all available knowledge about a certain fictional universe.<sup>16</sup> It is thus not just an abbreviation of the original term but a “reinterpretation in a post-modern perspective” (Wiik 2019). From the narrative of the tradition of a given real and existing culture, we move on to the documentation and narration of an imaginary universe, be it literary, musical, or audiovisual. In particular, Cantalops and Sicilia (2016) recall how the term lore has become a standard in the language of videogames, indicating the silent narrative, secondary to the explicit diegesis and composed of the set of events and stories told in a non-linear way through objects and artifacts of various kinds scattered and hidden

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<sup>14</sup> Dorson, R. M. (2013). *Folklore and Fakelore: Essays Toward a Discipline of Folk Studies*, Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press

<sup>15</sup> Folk tales about the Wendingo in North America, songs celebrating English Country life and customs or paintings extolling the Mexican figure of the Alebrije, but also commonly used proverbs such as “A smooth sea never made a skilful mariner” or “Fish must swim thrice” can be considered folkloric content.

<sup>16</sup> Wiik, E. (2019). “More Interaction, More Story, More Lore”: Motivations Related to Game-centric Transmedia. *Proceedings of the 2019 DiGRA International Conference: Game, Play and the Emerging Ludo-Mix*

in the virtual world.<sup>17</sup> In this context, the term lore refers to the backstory of the video game and all the elements that complement the main narrative. These are details that add depth and richness to the narrative universe, expanding its story outside the main plot. The ways in which this secondary narrative is conveyed to the player differ from video game to video game: Take for instance three distinct cases, *Fallout 4* (Bethesda Softworks 2015), *Dark Souls III* (Bandai Namco Entertainment 2016) and *Red Dead Redemption 2* (Rockstar Games 2019).

The three products belong to sagas and brands that are particularly well-known in the videogame context for their narrative depth, guaranteed not only by a superficial and general diegesis, but also by the amount of content accessible during the game experience that contributes to recounting events and situations that make up the lore.<sup>18</sup>

*Fallout 4* is the fourth chapter of a well-known sci-fi-themed role-playing game saga about a dystopian world in which Earth has been destroyed by a nuclear war. What happens in the years following the nuclear fall-out forms the plot of the various products in the saga. *Fallout 4* is set in a post-apocalyptic Boston in the year 2287: More than two hundred years after the nuclear war, the protagonist emerges from an underground bunker, known as Vault 111. The main diegesis involves the search for and rescue of the son of the protagonist, who was kidnapped years earlier; in parallel, the player

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<sup>17</sup> Cantalops, M. & Sicilia, M. (2016). Motivations to read and learn in videogame lore: the case of league of legends. *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Technological Ecosystems for Enhancing Multiculturalism*

<sup>18</sup> The definition of “world building” emerges, i.e. the construction of the virtual world of the video game, transversally composed of all the narratives that make up the game, be they environmental or strictly plot-related. See Coulton, P., Lindley, J. G., Sturdee, M., & Stead, M. (2017). *Design fiction as world building*, Lancaster University: England.

can meet numerous characters, interact with them, engage in romantic relationships and foster conflict between rival gangs. These are forms of secondary narrative present in the products of the saga already prior to *Fallout 4*: In fact, what extends the lore of the game is the possibility to build outposts and camps in which to house survivors of the “Wastelands,” thus giving the player the possibility to initiate a network of new narratives, linked to his behaviour within the game. The deepening of the lore of *Fallout 4* is thus linked to fictional relational mechanics and dynamics within the virtual world.<sup>19</sup> On the contrary, *Dark Souls III* and all the other products of the brand see in the objects the primary source of secondary narratives, able to unite the clues and trace the diegetic path that accumulates each videogame of the saga.

*Dark Souls III* – the fourth installment in the *Souls* series and the last in the *Dark Souls* trilogy – is a fantasy genre video game that combines role-playing game mechanics with a third-person perspective: players have access to various weapons, armour, magic, and consumables that they can use to fight enemies within a dark magical world subjugated by dark power dynamics. With a major focus on game mechanics, in *Dark Souls III* the lore becomes the ultimate form of expression of the narrative component. Every single item collected or interacted with, from weapons to potions, from clothing to powers, tells a story. The player can then choose to stop and read the story associated with the object, enriching the cultural background of the game and catching narrative references that demonstrate the interweaving between the chapters of the saga.

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<sup>19</sup> Tomasz, Z. (2016). Immersive lore-friendliness. Game modifications as intertextual tropes. *Proceedings of 1st International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG*

Finally, *Red Dead Redemption 2* tells the story of a group of outlaws cornered by the forces of law and order at the end of the Wild West era, in the early years of the twentieth century: The player plays the role of Arthur Morgan, one of the outlaws, and experiences the story from his point of view. In addition to the primary diegesis relating to the decline of the gang of the protagonist, the game world of *Red Dead Redemption 2* is rich in details and silent narratives, divided between encounters with non-player characters, side quests, challenges, and objects to collect. These elements are common to many video games, but what makes *Red Dead Redemption 2* stand out is the character of Arthur and his actions: He continually exposes to the player thoughts on the events that have occurred – in a sort of monologue-reflection aloud – and keeps a diary in which he not only notes down further thoughts but also enriches them with drawings that refer to events in the game. In this way, the player has a historical memory that he can consult, in a fully immersive manner, without having to pause the narrative and interaction in *Red Dead Redemption 2*.

The inclusion of the narrative elements and contrivances of the three video games given as examples demonstrates how developers are interested in promoting unique solutions to tell every detail of the virtual world they have conceived. It is no coincidence that delving into the details of the video game lore of a given product leads the player to engage with other users regarding the understanding of narrative dynamics and the structuring of hypotheses and theories related to it. Hence, it follows the continuous creation and diffusion of digital spaces capable of receiving and collecting opinions of the players, initiating a dialogue between them: in addition to dedicated forums and

encyclopaedias, Subreddits dedicated to individual video games stand out.<sup>20</sup>

Every video game has a more or less high level of lore. The writing and implementation of lore is essential to engage players more, offering more than what is superficially promoted: Today, the term is one of the most widely used in videogame contexts and paratexts, within online communities (Wiik 2019). As mentioned above, among the online communities that have been able to reinterpret the concept of lore is the Italian group Tomodachi Crew, which has adopted the term lore by declining it in multiple creative-narrative ways through a videogame-focused type of entertainment. If in a video game the lore manifests itself through artifacts, collectable objects, relationships, and dialogues to be discovered and analysed – whether or not related to the overall diegesis of the game and inserted by its developers – within the Tomodachi Crew community, the expression is configured as a narrative composed of creative productions of the fandom that, crossing different media, follow the thread of the contents broadcast live by streamers on Twitch.

The lore of Tomodachi Crew follows the stories of its protagonists – the streamers – whose lives, composed of events, stories and tales, are observed and heard by a loyal community of viewers and fans, who are able to create content that tells those lives across different media, the dissemination of which is mainly provided within a Reddit channel dedicated to the collection and archiving of Tomodachi Crew lore.<sup>21</sup> In order to better understand this phenomenon, an analysis of

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<sup>20</sup> With reference to the above examples, it is worth mentioning <https://www.reddit.com/r/falloutlore/>, <https://www.reddit.com/r/DarksoulsLore/> and <https://www.reddit.com/r/reddeadredemption/>

<sup>21</sup> Li, Y., Wang, C. & Liu, J. (2020). A Systematic Review of Literature on User Behavior in Video Game Live Streaming. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(9).

some of the content created by the fandom and disseminated within the DarioMocciaTwitch Subreddit follows.<sup>22</sup> The products of the community are articulated according to different formal, aesthetic and content aspects, such that the fans themselves have created a classification into categories: fanart, memes, editing, freebooting and discussion.<sup>23</sup> For the purposes of this research, I chose to perform a semantic analysis of the content produced by the Tomodachi Crew community archived within the relevant Subreddit. Applying the search filters provided by the platform, I concentrated on the content published in the last month, focusing on three different types of content: illustrations, videos and music.<sup>24</sup> In the area of illustrations, two pieces of content were selected from the fanart and meme categories, which highlight the close relationship between the Tomodachi Crew community and the language of video games. The first image is a digital illustration of a caricature character representing the figure of Dario Moccia and the other streamers of the

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<sup>22</sup> Created in March 2020, the subreddit has around twenty thousand registered users, active in the production and sharing of content on a daily basis.

<sup>23</sup> To the first category belong digital illustrations aimed at celebrating the streamers of the Tomodachi Crew, often created with special attention to detail, with the aim of surprising the protagonists of the story the moment they get their hands on it. To the second category belong images and videos with a strong humorous tone that retrace highlights of Twitch live streams. To the third and fourth categories belong only audiovisual contents that aim at celebrating or making fun of the streamer group, with unique creations in the case of 'montage' and integral or non-integral reproductions of Twitch live broadcasts through the technique of freebooting – i.e. the repositioning of a native content of one platform within another. Finally, the last category is dedicated to dialogue between users, who can discuss elements of the lore that are not entirely clear, always in a light tone tending towards irony.

<sup>24</sup> The analysis was carried out with reference to the content shared in May 2022.

Tomodachi Crew.<sup>25</sup> From a content point of view, the image presents clear references to a certain type of imagery and scenario typical of fantasy video games: There is an obvious reference to the board game and video game *Dungeons & Dragons*, recently played in Live Role Play mode by all the members of the group together on Twitch.<sup>26</sup> From a visual point of view, the illustration presents clear references to a certain type of retro video game aesthetics, the one of 8-Bit video games, characterised by a character construction made of clearly visible coloured polygons. This fanart is a paradigmatic example of numerous other similar digital illustrations shared within the Subreddit, in which Moccia and the members of Tomodachi Crew are placed in cult videogame contexts.

The second image analysed is a meme, an ironic illustration whose objective is to point out and highlight a certain type of videogame attitude, paradigmatic of the videogame *Minecraft* (Mojang Studios 2011).<sup>27</sup> The meme makes use of numerous vernacular terms specific to *Minecraft*, aiming to suggest, stimulate and poke fun at the members of the Tomodachi Crew – according to the specific suggestions of the fan who

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<sup>25</sup> Available at:

[https://www.reddit.com/r/DarioMocciaTwitch/comments/sd3zod/san\\_degobbis\\_ha\\_riunito\\_ancora\\_una\\_volta\\_il\\_party/](https://www.reddit.com/r/DarioMocciaTwitch/comments/sd3zod/san_degobbis_ha_riunito_ancora_una_volta_il_party/)

<sup>26</sup> The fantasy board game created by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, first published in January 1974 by Tactical Studies Rules (TSR), is known for its rich lore, passed down over the decades between the publication of the game's various editions. See Vallejo García, J. (2020). *Dungeons & Dragons* as transmedia vehicle of the 20th century literature in pop culture, student work, Universidad de Granada, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Granada: Spain. Accessed 10 June 2022, from:

[https://digibug.ugr.es/bitstream/handle/10481/62797/TFG\\_285\\_VALLEJO%20GARCIA%20JORGE.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://digibug.ugr.es/bitstream/handle/10481/62797/TFG_285_VALLEJO%20GARCIA%20JORGE.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>27</sup> Available at:

[https://www.reddit.com/r/DarioMocciaTwitch/comments/p61dng/cool\\_kidpng/](https://www.reddit.com/r/DarioMocciaTwitch/comments/p61dng/cool_kidpng/)

made the meme.<sup>28</sup> Continuing with the content analysis, leaving the illustrations aside, it is possible to examine a multifaceted and complex content that emphasises the application of the term lore in a specific creative-narrative-economic sphere. This is a video created with the tone and aesthetics of a commercial for collectible action figures from the 1990s.<sup>29</sup> The fictitious collectibles promoted in the video are inspired by the streamers of the Tomodachi Crew, enhancing their physical characteristics with a caricatured tone. Despite being made by a couple of Tomodachi Crew fans, the quality of the video from both a formal and content point of view is excellent, and it constitutes a great example of remediation to the point of generating a certain verisimilitude with a similar initiative promoted by Tomodachi Crew – which we will see shortly.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the last piece of content analysed is a piece of music composed and produced by a fan now well known in the community and who has established himself as the “storyteller” of Tomodachi Crew. The tracks are of the pop-rap genre and the lyrics of these retrace events and narratives previously seen and heard in live streaming on DarioMocciaTwitch. The musical content of Tomodachi Crew's lore has experienced such development and success in a short time that there is an entire album of tracks inspired by

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<sup>28</sup> The terms “slabs” and “spawning” stand out, indicating an object and an action respectively. The term “slabs” refers to the halved size of normal blocks, which allow the player to climb on them without jumping. They are used to create ladders that are longer than real ladders. Slabs are also more resource-efficient, even though they take up more space in a house.

<sup>29</sup> Available at:

[https://www.reddit.com/r/DarioMocciaTwitch/comments/p60ohk/io\\_e\\_nicori\\_abbiamo\\_lavorato\\_a\\_questo\\_progetto\\_da/](https://www.reddit.com/r/DarioMocciaTwitch/comments/p60ohk/io_e_nicori_abbiamo_lavorato_a_questo_progetto_da/)

<sup>30</sup> Bolter, J. D. & Grusin, R. (2000). *Remediation.*

*Competizione tra media vecchi e nuovi media*, Guerini e Associati: Milano

the lore and called “LoreTape.”<sup>31</sup> Going beyond the contents examined so far, the application and declination of the term lore by the Tomodachi Crew and Dario Moccia is particularly evident in a project he has been promoting over the past year. This is the “Carte della Lore,” a set of more than two hundred collectible cards inspired by the streamers and the Tomodachi Crew community, produced by Dario Moccia and currently on sale: The illustrations were created by fans and chosen by Moccia to then be mass-produced and distributed at varying prices.<sup>32</sup> That of the “Carte della Lore” is a true merchandising action that finds its foundations in the vernacular concept of lore.<sup>33</sup>

Content analysis and observation of the “Carte della Lore” phenomenon shows that the illustrations, videos, and songs produced by fans and published on the Subreddit of Tomodachi Crew serve multiple functions, with the aim of reconstructing the main narrative of the Twitch channel and the life of the group of streamers. In particular, the user-implemented Tomodachi Crew lore serves the function of narrative insight, historical

memory, and highlights the difference between texts, paratexts, and videogame contexts. As narrative insight, the content produced by the Tomodachi Crew community establishes itself as a creative-narrative tool capable of collecting, reconstructing, and generating new visual and audiovisual narratives that expand the original narrative – the lore. As historical memory, the production of fandom takes the form of an archive of the Twitch channel of reference – within which content cannot be stored for more than thirty days. Furthermore, the declination of the term lore according to creative-narrative dynamics shows that, in the relationship between streamer, community and videogame, the boundaries between texts and videogame paratexts are very blurred and the contextual dimension far exceeds the traditionally textual one.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, the creative-narrative production of the lore of Tomodachi Crew underlines the presence of a content production loop whereby what is created by the streamer is manipulated by the users and further and again by the streamer. In fact, the existence of the YouTube channel DarioMocciaArchives, in which fandom creation and clips of Twitch live broadcasts are stored, should be noted. These include a playlist of videos in which Moccia and other members of the Tomodachi Crew react to and comment on content produced by fans, in turn producing a new type of content, here called “Reddit with Dario Moccia.”

Finally, the application of vernacular video game language in online communities and in particular the case of the vernacular lore within the Tomodachi Crew community – understood as a creative-narrative tool – attests to the presence of a narrative

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<sup>31</sup> Available at:

<https://open.spotify.com/album/3OY0SR95IgtfMyFP1HgyXp?si=axkwfOw-SoK7W6nEgfj5og>

<sup>32</sup> Literally translated as “Cards of Lore,” the project currently comprises a single set of cards called “First Impact.” A second set of collectible cards, named ‘Flashback’, is scheduled to be released in mid-2022. The initiative was born on the basis of Moccia’s passions, which include collecting playing cards, starting with the well-known *Pokemon Trading Card Game (TCG)*, passing through *Magic* and *YuGiOh!*, and ending with little-known and niche collections, such as the collector cards of *The Lord of the Rings*.

<sup>33</sup> The case of the “Carte della Lore” also underlines the presence of a new form of patronage, in which the streamer, the protagonist of his story, carefully chooses the artists - illustrators and before that fans - who can take care of the narrative, in a marketing model that begins and ends with collecting. See Braber, Helleke. (2021). 2020-01-19 “From maker to patron - and back,” Inaugural lecture Prof.Dr. Helleke van den Braber, Utrecht University.

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<sup>34</sup> Fagerjord, A. (2009). After Convergence: YouTube and Remix Culture, in Hunsinger, J., Lisbeth, K., Allen, M., (A cura di) *International Handbook of Internet Research*, Springer editions, pp. 1-21

articulated on multiple levels, media and platforms: what both Ryan (2005) and Frankenberg (2006) contribute to term 'layered narrative' - founded on vernacular language.<sup>35</sup> The Twitch viewer engages both as an interpreter and as a participant: he applies his knowledge of genres, makes connections and grasps the mutual influences of texts that share assumptions or traditions.<sup>36</sup> In other words, the activity of the Tomodachi Crew fandom can be traced back to what Lawrence Lessig calls remix culture: he argues that culture as a whole can be interpreted as a form of remix:<sup>37</sup> every time we comment on or discuss a film or game with others, we appropriate the creativity of the original author and remix it in our own lives, using it to extend our own ideas or to produce an evaluation. The digital illustrations of Tomodachi Crew, the videos and the songs are the manifestation of a mass consumption of popular culture, produced and consumed within a folkloric context involving the potential of user participation between creators and viewers and collective creativity in a shared community such as Tomodachi Crew.

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