Face-Threatening Acts in Online Gaming: A Case Study of Free Fire Players

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Abstract:

With the rapid changes in technology, the interests of people specially children and youngsters get shifted or changed. Generally, when we want to enjoy our leisure time: one way is to play games. But with the passage of time, the term 'playing game' has been shifted from 'physical games' to 'online games. Now a days, Free Fire which is an online mobile battle royale game, has emerged as a premier platform for online gaming, attracting a vast and diverse players. This study helps to identify the face-threatening acts within Free Fire, by examining 2 cases with the aim to illuminate the complexities of online gaming sociality, and which language they are using while playing the game and how they became habitual of using that language in their homes. The findings highlight the need for game developers to eradicate such sort of impolite speech acts which is sabotaging the identity of youth. Multiple suggestions are given in the study to eradicate the face threatening elements from Free Fire and how the same game can play a positive role for people. Moreover, this study contributes to understanding online gaming cultures, social interactions and psychological factors influencing player behavior, informing evidence-based interventions for safer and more respectful gaming communities.

Keywords: face-threatening acts, Free Fire, gaming communities, Online gaming, player behavior, social interactions.

Introduction:

Online gaming has been evolving and the way of interacting people, socializing, and experiencing entertainment also gets changed with the time. Having millions of players across the globe, online gaming communities have become prominent hubs of social activity, fostering connections and friendship among players. However, beneath the surface of teamwork, strategy, and competition lies a complex web of social interactions, where conflicts, insults, sabotage and abusive language can occur.

Free Fire, a mobile battle royale game, has emerged as a premier platform for online gaming, attracting a vast and diverse player base. Its fast-paced gameplay, real-time communication features and competitive environment create an ecosystem ripe for social interaction that will be both positive and negative depending on the nature or age of the player. While online gaming offers numerous benefits, including social support, stress relief and cognitive development, the prevalence of face-threatening acts may undermine these advantages. People of different age use abusive language while playing such games and in the long run they will be habitual to use such blunt words in their real life that will obviously sabotage their own identity.

This study helps to identify the face-threatening acts within Free Fire, examining the nuances of player interactions, their language usage and social effects on the player's character. By investigating the real free fire gaming situation, the researchers try to study 2 cases. The

purpose is to highlight the social complexities of online gaming. Through this research, we seek to contribute meaningfully to the growing body of research on online gaming cultures and social interactions.

Furthermore, the findings will provide the detailed analyses that how the Online game 'Free fire' is having negative impact our young generation. Moreover, the study will also provide valuable suggestions for game developers to eradicate such face threatening elements from Free fire and make this game a more positive one. Additionally, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological and social factors influencing player behavior, informing the development of evidence-based interventions aimed at promoting healthy online gaming communities. By shedding light on the intricate dynamics of online gaming, this study aims to foster a safer, more respectful, and inclusive environment for players worldwide which will help them to develop a positive attitude in their personality.

Problem of the Statement:
The prevalence of face-threatening acts includes conflicts, insults, sabotage, abusive language and trash talks in online gaming communities, particularly in Free Fire, poses threats that are creating a toxic environment for online gamers. This negatively impacts players, especially children and youngsters, and hinders the development of healthy online gaming communities.

Significance of the Study:
This study on face-threatening acts in online gaming communities, specifically in Free Fire, significantly contributes to understanding the complex dynamics of online social interactions. Alarmingly, exposure to conflicts, insults, sabotage and abusive language in-game often perpetuates similar behavior at home. This research explores how Free Fire affects children, where toxic interactions in Free Fire are common, with players often engaging in direct chats with strangers, exposing them to inappropriate language. Findings will inform game developers to eradicate these sorts of negative elements. It will also highlight few steps to develop such environment where people enjoy their leisure time. By addressing this critical issue, this study aims to promote healthy online gaming environments, support parents and ultimately safeguard children's emotional and psychological well-being.

Research Objectives:
In view of the parameter, the research objectives of this study are as follows
- To investigate the prevalence of face-threatening acts (conflicts, insults, sabotage, and abusive language) in Free Fire online gaming communities.
- To examine the impact of face-threatening acts on children's behavior in their real life.

Research Questions:
This study will focus on the following research questions
- What is the prevalence of face-threatening acts (conflicts, insults, sabotage, and abusive language) in Free Fire online gaming communities?
- How do face-threatening acts affect children's behavior in their real life?

Delimitations:
This study is having certain delimitations. This study delimits its scope to investigating face-threatening acts in Free Fire online gaming communities, specifically examining the 2 cases from which one is 13 years old and second player is 24 years old. Methodologically, it employs qualitative approach through examining 2 cases of players, firstly their attitude

within the game and after the game: how they are behaving and which sort of language and vocabulary they are using in their homes. For this, a questionnaire having 2 close ended and 3 open ended questions were given to their mothers to examine their behavior after playing game. The responses involve honest participants and only 2 cases are included in this research. Furthermore, for future research directions, the researcher may explore assessing addiction and gaming disorder.

Literature Review:
The rise in technology has changed the thinking and perception of the world. The same thing is happening in the gaming sector where online gaming has undergone significant transformations and the way of interaction, socializing, and experiencing entertainment also gets changed. Now a days, these sort of online games specifically Free Fire is directly affecting the character of our children as well as youth. Basically, with the revolution of online gaming, this threat is always there as parents cannot fully pay attention all the time that what is their child doing or which game he is playing that is affecting his language. There were few studies in the past, which shows that the online gaming is always being a threat to our children.

Andrea Balog (2020) having research title *Politeness and Insult in Computer Games – From a Pragmatic Point of View* explores that online communication is rude, abusive and involves more insults and offensive personal remarks than offline or physical games due to its quasi-anonymity and the lack or weakness of sanctions. The paper examines "taunts", which is a set of inbuilt commands that trigger "mocking" remarks in the multiple-participant online arena game League of Legends (LoL).

(Cook et al., 2021) in their study highlights Online gaming often involves trolling, a rite of passage for players. Trollers use insulting words, abuse or "trash talk" to annoy or generally they abuse others to gain any sort of advantage while playing. But sometimes these trash talks are purposeless.

Problematic online gaming has emerged as a significant concern globally, including Pakistan (Khan & Muqtadir, 2014). Anowra Khan and Rabia Muqtadir have defined game addiction as "a loss of control over gaming, leading to significant harm" (Van Rooij, 2011, p. 1). Demetrovics et al. (2012) introduced the term "problematic gaming," characterized by excessive gaming interfering with daily life functioning. Online gaming popularity in Pakistan mirrors global trends. Gaming zones operate 24/7, attracting numerous gamers (Khan & Muqtadir, 2014).

Online gaming can have negative effects. Yee (2012) found 18% of players faced problems like financial, health, relationship or work issues. Other research (Ryan et al., 2006) suggests excessive gaming leads to: Increased violence, Poor mental and physical health, Lower grades and weaker personal and family relations.

The aforementioned studies provide the brief overview of how online gaming is affecting the life of the people. Generally, the mentioned studies are either quantitative or mix method and there is particularly no case study in this area so the study has its significance as it provide valuable insight and real life cases.

Research Methodology:
Research Design
This study employs a Mix method approach research design, having case study technique. 2 players of different ages (one is 13 years old and another is 24 years old) have been analyzed regarding their language like what sort of vocabulary and words they are using while playing the game and which language they are using at their homes after playing.

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Participants

The study involves 2 players, who are habitual of playing free fire.

- In the initial stage, the researchers analyze their use of language and different 'trash talk' while playing the game.
- Later on, after playing the questionnaire having 2 close ended and 3 open ended questions, was given to their mothers to analyze the use of language by the players at their home.

Ethical Considerations

There was an informed consent obtained from participants. Anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured and data will be stored securely.

Theoretical Framework:

This investigation depends on Brown and Levinson's Face Threatening Act Theory (1987): Face-Threatening Acts refer to behaviors that threaten an individual's social identity or self-image. In online gaming, face-threatening acts may cause conflicts, insults, sabotage, abusive language and trash talks. Generally that will affect the social identity of the person. He/she unintentionally uses such words in real life which he/she was using while playing online game.

Research Method:

The procedure which is followed in our research is a case study in which we have analyzed the language of 2 players who are of different age group (one is 13 years old and another is 24 years old). The basic purpose of taking different age group is to analyze how much the age really affects the social identity of the person. After analyzing in game behavior and language, the questionnaires are given to the participants' mothers so that they honestly review their child's behavior before and after playing the game and how Free Fire is really affecting their personality. The close ended questions responses are analyzed through graphs and charts where as for open ended questions; the pattern of thematic analysis is being followed. The questions are aligned by our objective and researchers try to analyze the whole case according to the theoretical framework.

Analysis:

As a human when we are communicating or interacting with one another with the effort to save our face. According to Brown and Levinson theory of 'Politeness' but if we are not able to do so then it will be considered as a 'face threatening act'. Basically, it refers to behaviors that threaten an individual's social identity or self-image. There are two types of Face Threatening Acts i.e. positive and negative. In Free-fire both positive and negative face threatening elements are included as it risks the social identity of an individual intentionally as well as unintentionally.

Obviously when the players of Free-fire use trash talks or abusive vocabulary, their social identity or self image is at risk. In this research, two (02) players have been analyzed, who used to play Free-fire regularly.

Case Study:

First Stage:

In the first stage of this case study we analyze the language or vocabulary of 2 players while playing Free-fire. The first case is of the boy, who is about 13 years old. He used to play Free-fire daily. Initially, when we gathered knowledge about him, his mother told that he used to play this game more often like whenever he got time and that was affecting his attitude within home. After that his mother reduced his gaming/screen time strictly to one hour daily but that is still affecting his social identity. To analyze this claim, we have

analyzed him while he was playing the game. It was observed that the boy tried to use short forms and few words instead of using whole sentences. From analysis, following vocabulary has been found that was used by the boy while playing. Further,

S.no	Gaming Vocabulary	Meaning
1.	Noob	A beginner or unskilled player.
2.	Carry	When one player leads the team to victory by outperforming others.
3.	Safe Zone	The area on the map where players must stay to avoid damage as the zone shrinks.
4.	Loot	Items collected on the map, like weapons, armor, and supplies.
5.	Ammo	Ammunition for weapons.
6.	Grenade	An explosive throw able weapon.
7.	Kill	Defeating an enemy player.
8.	I'm dead	Announcement of one's character being eliminated.
9.	Squad	A game mode for teams of up to four players.
10.	OP	(Overpowered) Refers to a character, weapon, or player who is unusually strong.
11.	Knocked	When a player is downed but not fully eliminated; they can still be revived.
12.	AFK	(Away From Keyboard) When a player is inactive during the game.
13.	Frag	Short for a kill or elimination.
14.	GG	(Good Game) A sportsmanlike way to end the game, showing respect.
15.	Third Party	When a third group interrupts a fight between two other teams.
16.	Knock	To down an enemy player, meaning they are injured but can still be revived by teammates.
17.	Burst Fire	A firing mode where the weapon shoots a few bullets at once with each trigger pull.
18.	Pro Player	An experienced or highly skilled player, often part of the competitive gaming scene.
19.	Melee	Close-combat attacks using weapons like knives, bats, or fists, without guns or ranged weapons.

For the second case, the girl of about 24 years was selected. As she is an adult, so the aim was to analyze the effects of Face threatening Acts in Free fire in adults like which sort of vocabulary she is using while playing the game. From analysis following vocabulary has been found that was used by the girl while playing.

S.no	Gaming Vocabulary	Meaning
1.	Safe Zone	The area on the map where players must stay to avoid damage as the zone shrinks.
2.	Loot	Items collected on the map, like weapons, armor, and supplies.
3.	Ammo	Ammunition for weapons.
4.	Kill	Defeating an enemy player.
5.	I'm dead	Announcement of one's character being eliminated.

6.	Squad	A game mode for teams of up to four players.
7.	OP	(Overpowered) Refers to a character, weapon, or player who is unusually strong.
8.	AFK	(Away From Keyboard) When a player is inactive during the game.
9.	Frag	Short for a kill or elimination.
10.	GG	(Good Game) A sportsmanlike way to end the game, showing respect.
11.	Burst Fire	A firing mode where the weapon shoots a few bullets at once with each trigger pull.
12.	Pro Player	An experienced or highly skilled player, often part of the competitive gaming scene.
13.	Duo	A game mode for two-player teams.
14.	Deathmatch	A game mode where players or teams compete to get the most kills.
15.	ADS	(Aim Down Sights) Focusing by looking down the weapon's sights for improved accuracy.

These were the words which were repeatedly spoken by the players while playing games. It was also witnessed that sometimes both the players used the same words in Urdu language like 'mar gaya', 'mar diya', 'ja na', 'bas kar' and a lot more that is just because of the frustrations they are facing while playing the game. Additionally, it was also observed that when they were playing the game, the players were really unaware of their surroundings even if someone called them.

2nd Stage:
Now in the second stage, after analyzing the players' behavior and language while playing the game, their behavior and language within their home was being analyzed by asking 3 open ended and 2 close ended questions from their mothers.

Firstly, there were 2 close ended questions. These are;

1. did they observe any changes in their child's language or communication style after playing Free Fire? (Results shown in figure 1.1), and
2. second question was about the type of vocabulary or language their child used after playing Free Fire (results shown in figure 1.2).
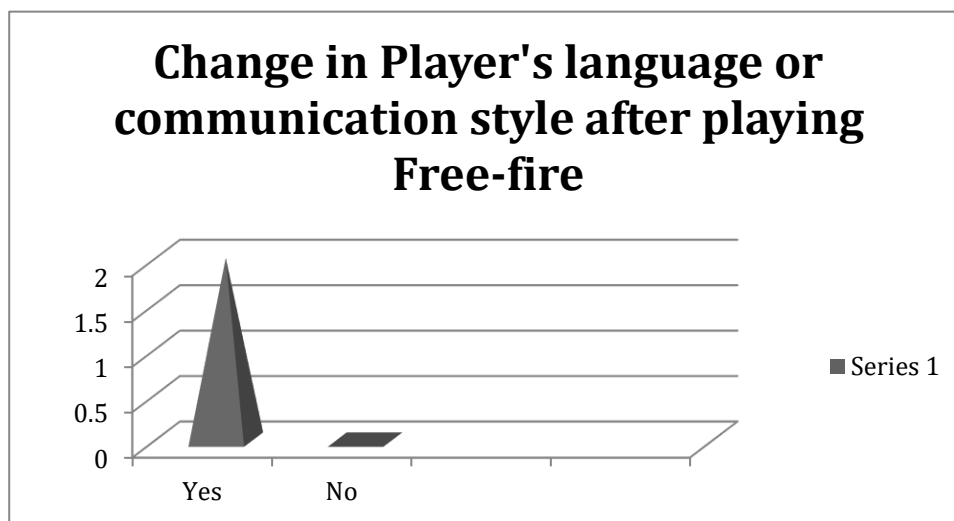

Change in Player's language or communication style after playing Free-fire

Figure 1.1

Type of Language or Vocabulary the players are using after playing, within their homes
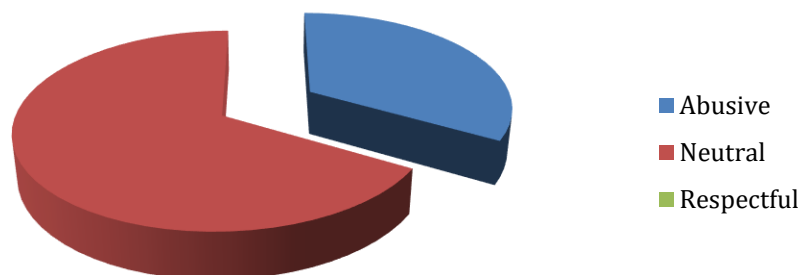
- Abusive
- Neutral
- Respectful

Figure. 1.2

After that, 3 open ended questions were asked. First question was about what sort of changes they observed in their child after playing the game. For which one mother replied that she had observed drastic change where her child, who is boy frequently uses such word which he was using while playing like 'Bas Kar', she said she had not taught her child these words. In fact, she said she always use 'Bas Karen' which seems to be more polite while speaking. So it seemed to her that change is because of that game. Now the second mother replied that she had observed few changes in her child as she is a girl and an adult who seemed to remain quiet most of the time. She became isolated from others and became hesitant to engage with people. Regarding her conversation, she likely used to avoid more comprehensive words and sentences. Infact, she uses acronyms like in the game she uses. Now, for another open ended question which was about the impact of Free-fire on their child's social interactions, they replied and highlighted some of the key negative impacts which includes social isolation, limited vocabulary, decreased empathy, aggressive behavior and addiction to that game. It is also worth mentioning here that as their parents are very much concerned about their child social identity so they have already reduced their children gaming time. Secondly, at this stage their children are not really much addicted but their parents afraid that if this could not be controlled than there is possibility that their children can be addicted to this game as they don't really like the social gathering and to socialize.

Lastly, for the last question which was about the measures they think game developers should take steps to minimize the negativity in Free fire. For which they said the game developers should try to introduce penalties for abusive language or behavior or ban the player for using any sort of trash words. They should try to create a reward system for positive behavior that will help them in socialization and vocabulary increasing process. Moreover, they should also try to offer customizable chat filters to block unwanted messages and limited voice chat to teammates or designated friends.

Discussion:

The findings derived from the current research thus shed light on the linguistic and social-induced problems in Free Fire gaming and being analysed from the FTA theory of Brown Levinson as according to this theory, communication can either jeopardize or support an individual's face, which means a person's preferred public persona. In this discussion both

beneficent as well as malevolent FTAs are talked about regarding gaming behaviors with reference to social aspects.

Impact of Gaming Language and FTAs
Positive FTAs (Threat to Autonomy and Independence):
The anonymity of many players leads to a violation of their "negative face" which means they are compelled to act despite imposition. The patterns of communication which are cool in the game Free Fire are commands, for example 'go there,' 'stop it,' 'revive me.' Through these commands, the boss sets up the working environment that pays no attention to individual discretion. A 13-year-old boy often spoke in such phrases as those used in gaming, hence showing how norms in gaming make players to learn to speak in such commanding ways to everyone.

Negative FTAs (Threat to Social Connection):
Another type is also affected "positive face" (the desire for approval and inclusion). Profanity, slang and terms such as 'shitter', 'loser', or even 'your done' or 'you're dead' are most common. Such terms although affirming togetherness among players, proved to be exclusionary to persons in other larger interpersonal interactions. The absence of meaning full social communication during gameplay together with overuse of acronyms and limited language increased during gaming as pointed out by her mother and due to this, it was realized that the 24 year old female was experiencing a decline in empathy.

Behavioral Consequences of Gaming Language
There is usually use of language in the context of the gaming environment and this language most times is aggressive or contemptuous since gaming is a form of competition. Both participants showed evidence of this:

- **13-Year-Old Boy:**
It also showed that lavishing a boy with video game-related material causes him to lose politeness and Formality with his household since he was even overheard using childish words like 'OP' or 'knocked.' His mother remembered specifically the phrases he used such as "Bas kar" which, according to her is impolite compared to what she uses, "Bas karen" which is indicative of how gaming language overwrites other familiar language registers.

- **24-Year-Old female:**
While showing less gross aggressive behaviour, she used severe game-related abbreviations and short expressions pointing to the reduction of her referential communication abilities. This is a clear indication of how the game has affected her social identity since she is now introverted, and reluctant to attend social functions.

Mitigating the Risks of FTAs in Gaming
To address the negative impacts identified, game developers and stakeholders could implement strategies aimed at reducing FTAs:

Penalty Systems for Abusive Language:
Introducing penalties for trash talk or abusive behavior, such as temporary bans or loss of rewards, can discourage negative communication habits.

Rewards for Positive Behavior:
Gamifying positive interactions by rewarding sportsmanship, collaborative play, and polite communication can encourage healthier social exchanges within the game.

Customizable Chat Filters:

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Allowing players to filter unwanted language in chat or limit voice communication to trusted teammates could minimize exposure to offensive terms.

Parental Control and Education:
Parents, like those in the case studies, have already implemented reduced screen time as a strategy. However, guiding children on appropriate language use and monitoring gaming behavior can further mitigate risks.

Broader Implications
The analysis aligns with the broader concern that immersive and competitive digital environments like *Free Fire* can erode traditional social norms and communication etiquette. As observed in both cases, these effects are particularly pronounced in adolescents who are in formative developmental stages but are not entirely absent in adults. By understanding these dynamics through FTA theory, stakeholders can create interventions to preserve the players' social identity and foster healthier gaming environments in this particular game 'Free-Fire'.

Recommendation and Conclusion:
This work focuses on how people's social relations, identity, and behavior are transformed by F2F or face-threatening acts, particularly during video games like Free Fire. The present research shows that obscene language and competitive pressure are highly damaging to vocabulary, behavior, and social relations.

Due to these reasons, the guidelines of the study seeks to avoid such hazards as the result of maintaining a good gaming atmosphere while encouraging polite conversation and avoiding face threatening acts. I believe, that by implementing these measures, both stakeholders and parents will be able to work in partnership with the game developers to ensure that sites like Free Fire should promote rope courtesy, healthy engagement of the individuals.

In conclusion, this research helps to uncover the fine distinctions of online gaming sociality, as well as the objective and subjective risks of online gaming, leading collectively to academic and practical implications for safe and sustainable online gaming sociality and responsible gaming practices concerning players' social identity.

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