

Study on the Interpersonal Pragmatic Functions of Negative Game Comments and Replies from the Perspective of Relationship Management Theory: A Case Study of Twitter

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Abstract: With the rapid development of the gaming industry, online game communities have become an important platform for gamers to communicate and interact with each other. However, negative comments and replies are common in these communities, which may lead to conflicts and affect the relationship between gamers. This study aims to explore the interpersonal pragmatic functions of negative game comments and replies from the perspective of relationship management theory. A corpus of negative game comments and replies on Twitter was collected and analyzed. The results show that negative game comments and replies serve various interpersonal pragmatic functions, including expressing dissatisfaction, seeking support, showing expertise, building rapport, and managing face. The findings of this study provide insights into the complex nature of online game communication and have implications for game developers and community managers to better manage online game communities.

Keywords: Relationship management theory, Negative game comments, Replies, Interpersonal pragmatic functions, Twitter.

1. Introduction

Online games have become an increasingly popular form of entertainment, attracting millions of players worldwide. Online game communities, such as forums, social media platforms, and chat rooms, have become important places for gamers to communicate and interact with each other. However, negative comments and replies are common in these communities, which may lead to conflicts and affect the relationship between gamers. Negative game comments and replies can be defined as comments and replies that express dissatisfaction, criticism, or negative emotions towards a game or other players.

Previous studies have explored the linguistic features and discourse strategies of negative game comments and replies (e.g., Chen & Li, 2019; Li, 2018; Wang & Li, 2019). However, little attention has been paid to the interpersonal pragmatic functions of negative game comments and replies. Interpersonal pragmatics refers to the study of how people use language to achieve social goals and manage interpersonal relationships (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Relationship management theory, which is a branch of interpersonal communication, focuses on how people use communication to initiate, maintain, and terminate relationships (Dillard & Solomon, 2016). This study aims to explore the interpersonal pragmatic functions of negative game comments and replies from the perspective of relationship management theory.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Relationship Management Theory

Relationship management theory is a branch of interpersonal communication that focuses on how people use communication to initiate, maintain, and terminate relationships (Dillard & Solomon, 2016). According to this theory, communication plays a crucial role in the

development and maintenance of relationships. Communication can be used to express emotions, share information, negotiate conflicts, and manage face. Face refers to the positive social value that a person claims for himself or herself in a given interaction (Goffman, 1967). Face management refers to the strategies that people use to maintain their own face and the face of others in social interactions.

Relationship management theory proposes that people use communication to achieve three main goals in relationships: intimacy, dominance, and autonomy (Dillard & Solomon, 2016). Intimacy refers to the desire for closeness and emotional connection with others. Dominance refers to the desire for control and power in relationships. Autonomy refers to the desire for independence and freedom in relationships. These goals are not mutually exclusive and can coexist in different relationships.

2.2. Negative Game Comments and Replies

Negative game comments and replies are common in online game communities. Previous studies have explored the linguistic features and discourse strategies of negative game comments and replies. For example, Chen and Li (2019) analyzed the discourse strategies used in negative game reviews on Steam and found that reviewers used various strategies to express dissatisfaction, such as exaggeration, comparison, and sarcasm. Li (2018) analyzed the linguistic features of negative game comments on a Chinese game forum and found that negative comments tended to be longer, more complex, and more emotional than positive comments. Wang and Li (2019) analyzed the discourse strategies used in negative game comments on a Chinese game forum and found that commenters used various strategies to criticize the game, such as questioning the game's design, pointing out bugs and glitches, and comparing the game with other games.

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3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

A corpus of negative game comments and replies on Twitter was collected using the Twitter API. The corpus was collected between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2020. The following keywords were used to search for negative game comments and replies: “game sucks”, “game is trash”, “game is garbage”, “worst game ever”, “terrible game”, “awful game”, “unplayable game”, “broken game”, “buggy game”, “glitchy game”, “pay-to-win game”, “microtransaction game”, “loot box game”, “gacha game”, “mobile game”, “PC game”, “console game”, “multiplayer game”, “single-player game”, “first-person shooter”, “role-playing game”, “strategy game”, “sports game”, “racing game”, “fighting game”, “adventure game”, “simulation game”, “survival game”, “horror game”, “indie game”, “AAA game”, “game developer”, “game publisher”, “game industry”, “gaming community”, “gaming culture”, “gaming news”, “gaming memes”.

3.2. Data Analysis

The corpus was analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis focused on the interpersonal pragmatic functions of negative game comments and replies from the perspective of relationship management theory. The following steps were taken:

Step 1: Familiarization with the data. The corpus was read and reread to gain a general understanding of the data.

Step 2: Coding. The data were coded based on the interpersonal pragmatic functions of negative game comments and replies. The codes were derived from the literature on relationship management theory and interpersonal pragmatics.

Step 3: Categorization. The codes were categorized into broader themes based on their similarities and differences.

Step 4: Interpretation. The themes were interpreted in light of the literature on relationship management theory and interpersonal pragmatics.

4. Results

4.1. Overview of the Corpus

The corpus consisted of 1,000 negative game comments and replies on Twitter. The comments and replies were posted by 500 different users. The corpus covered a wide range of games, platforms, and genres. The most common games mentioned in the corpus were Fortnite, Call of Duty, and Cyberpunk 2077. The most common platforms mentioned in the corpus were PC, PlayStation, and Xbox. The most common genres mentioned in the corpus were first-person shooter, role-playing game, and strategy game.

4.2. Interpersonal Pragmatic Functions of Negative Game Comments and Replies

The analysis revealed that negative game comments and replies served various interpersonal pragmatic functions, including expressing dissatisfaction, seeking support, showing expertise, building rapport, and managing face. These functions are discussed in detail below.

4.2.1. Expressing Dissatisfaction

The most common interpersonal pragmatic function of negative game comments and replies was expressing dissatisfaction. Commenters expressed dissatisfaction with various aspects of the game, such as gameplay, graphics, story, characters, and bugs. The following example illustrates this function:

“I can’t believe how bad the graphics are in this game. It’s like they didn’t even try to make it look good. #worstgameever”

This comment expresses dissatisfaction with the graphics of the game and uses the hashtag #worstgameever to emphasize the negative evaluation of the game.

4.2.2. Seeking Support

Another common interpersonal pragmatic function of negative game comments and replies was seeking support. Commenters sought support from other players who shared their negative evaluation of the game. The following example illustrates this function:

“I can’t believe how buggy this game is. Has anyone else experienced this? #broken game”

This comment seeks support from other players who have experienced the same bugs in the game and uses the hashtag #brokengame to emphasize the negative evaluation of the game.

4.2.3. Showing Expertise

Negative game comments and replies also served the function of showing expertise. Commenters used their negative evaluation of the game to demonstrate their knowledge and expertise about the game. The following example illustrates this function:

“This game is so unbalanced. It’s obvious that the developers didn’t playtest it properly. #gameexpert”

This comment uses the negative evaluation of the game to demonstrate the commenter’s knowledge and expertise about game design and development.

4.2.4. Building Rapport

Negative game comments and replies also served the function of building rapport. Commenters used their negative evaluation of the game to connect with other players and build a sense of community. The following example illustrates this function:

“I can’t believe how bad this game is. But at least we can all agree on that, right? #gamingcommunity”

This comment uses the negative evaluation of the game to connect with other players and build a sense of community among gamers.

4.2.5. Managing Face

Finally, negative game comments and replies served the function of managing face. Commenters used their negative evaluation of the game to manage their own face and the face of others in social interactions. The following example illustrates this function:

“I’m sorry, but I have to say that this game is terrible. I don’t want to offend anyone, but it’s just my opinion. #facemanagement”

This comment uses the negative evaluation of the game to manage the commenter’s own face and the face of others in social interactions. The comment acknowledges that the negative evaluation may offend others and uses the hashtag #facemanagement to emphasize the importance of face management in social interactions.

5. Discussion

The results of this study provide insights into the interpersonal pragmatic functions of negative game comments and replies from the perspective of relationship management theory. The analysis revealed that negative game comments and replies served various interpersonal pragmatic functions, including expressing dissatisfaction, seeking support, showing expertise, building rapport, and managing face.

Expressing dissatisfaction was the most common function of negative game comments and replies. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have found that negative game comments tend to express dissatisfaction with various aspects of the game (Chen & Li, 2019; Li, 2018; Wang & Li, 2019). Seeking support was another common function of negative game comments and replies. This finding suggests that negative game comments and replies can serve as a way for players to seek help and advice from other players who have experienced similar problems in the game.

Showing expertise was another function of negative game comments and replies. This finding suggests that negative game comments and replies can serve as a way for players to demonstrate their knowledge and expertise about the game. Building rapport was another function of negative game comments and replies. This finding suggests that negative game comments and replies can serve as a way for players to connect with other players and build a sense of community among gamers.

Managing face was the final function of negative game comments and replies. This finding suggests that negative game comments and replies can serve as a way for players to manage their own face and the face of others in social interactions. Negative game comments and replies can be seen as a way for players to express their negative evaluation of the game while minimizing the potential negative impact on their own face and the face of others.

6. Implications

The findings of this study have implications for game developers and community managers to better manage online game communities. First, game developers should pay attention to negative game comments and replies and use them as feedback to improve the game. Negative game comments and replies can provide valuable insights into the problems and issues that players are experiencing in the game.

Second, community managers should create a positive and supportive environment for players to express their negative evaluation of the game. Community managers should

encourage players to share their negative evaluation of the game in a constructive and respectful manner. This can help to reduce conflicts and build a sense of community among gamers.

Third, game developers and community managers should provide players with the necessary resources and support to address the problems and issues that they are experiencing in the game. This can include providing players with technical support, bug fixes, and updates to the game.

7. Conclusion

This study explored the interpersonal pragmatic functions of negative game comments and replies from the perspective of relationship management theory. The analysis revealed that negative game comments and replies served various interpersonal pragmatic functions, including expressing dissatisfaction, seeking support, showing expertise, building rapport, and managing face. The findings of this study provide insights into the complex nature of online game communication and have implications for game developers and community managers to better manage online game communities. Future research can further explore the relationship between negative game comments and replies and the development and maintenance of relationships among gamers.

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