

---

## Editorial

---

### Shanton Chang and Heejin Lee

Department of Information Systems,  
The University of Melbourne,  
Parkville, 3010 Victoria, Australia  
E-mail: shanton.chang@unimelb.edu.au  
E-mail: heejin@unimelb.edu.au

### Jai B. Kim

School of Business,  
Sungkyunkwan University, Korea  
E-mail: dreamier17@yahoo.com.au

**Biographical notes:** Dr. Shanton Chang teaches Change Management and Social Impacts of Information Systems at the University of Melbourne. He completed his PhD at Monash University. His current primary areas of research include the social aspects of broadband technology adoption and appropriation, inter-cultural management and the relationship between culture and technology.

Dr. Heejin Lee is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Information Systems at the University of Melbourne. He earned his doctorate from the London School of Economics. His research interests include: broadband and mobile internet, time/space and IT and IT/IS in developing countries. He has published several papers on broadband and temporal aspects of IT in leading international journals. He has also edited special issues on 'Broadband Internet and Electronic Commerce' for the *Journal of Information Technology*, and 'Time and Information Technology' for *The Information Society*.

Professor Jai B. Kim is Associate Professor of International Business, School of Business, Sungkyunkwan University. Professor Kim was educated at Seoul National University (Business), Cambridge University (Economics) and Manchester Business School where he earned his PhD. Prior to joining Sungkyunkwan university, Kim was on the Faculty at City University Business School and University of London. His research interests lie in the competitive dynamics of online and mobile games in East Asia and Europe.

---

Online games have recently emerged as a phenomenally popular pastime around the world. These games have created unprecedented communication opportunities, mainly amongst young people across the world (Draenos, 2000; Gorriz and Medina, 2000). The variety of online games range from free online interactive games and Multi-User Dungeons (MUD) to console games, to online versions of traditional computer games (Kim and Chung 2002). Telecommunication companies have also begun to view online games as a crucial application that will attract consumers to upgrade away from dial-up. Indeed the story of broadband adoption and penetration in Korea has been populated by the importance of online games (Lee et al., 2003; Choudrie and Lee, 2004).

Currently, despite the development of a healthy online game industry around the world, there is little academic research on the wide-ranging number of issues that are associated with online games. The issues of online games are both social and technical. Social issues include the communication and interactions between players, online communities and communication across cultures. Technical issues include the availability of high bandwidth, complex networking requirements and provision of voice communication.

This special issue investigates some of these issues. The papers included in this special issue, all in common, assess the barriers to the more widespread adoption of online games. While they indicate ways for the online game industry to move forward, they highlight the need for theoretical development in the field.

Voiskounsky, Mitina and Avetisova begin by looking at the continued popularity of MUDs after more than 25 years, and in the light of competition from their more technologically and aesthetically superior counterparts. Building on the existing research concerned with human behaviour in playing MUDs (Bartle, 2003), they investigate the patterns of group online role-playing in Russia. Their research shows that the social interactions between players, notably role-playing, that MUDs facilitate, may have a key role in ensuring the continued popularity of MUDs.

Baek then goes on to explore user preferences for online games. The paper discusses the characteristics of online games (e.g., human-and-human interactions and degrees of freedom in creating characters) that may increase the commercial viability of such games by relating those characteristics to the user's willingness to pay (Manninen, 2002). The most influential attribute in Baek's study is human-and-human interactions. This finding is in line with the current observation that rich interaction (conversation between and among online game players) in the virtual space leads to obsession with the game. Rich interaction allows complicated and intuitive possibilities that offer flexible manners of communication and action to the gamers.

Wadley, Gibbs and Hew look at the online console games sector by examining the use of voice communication. They argue that while voice communication is crucial in console games for the formation of online communities (Dave, 1998; Gibbs et al., 2004), there is less understanding of how voice channels can be configured successfully so that it becomes a promotion of, rather than a barrier to, online community formation. They argue that the current implementation of voice in online console games (X Box Live) is socially opaque, in the sense that it does not adequately infer socially relevant information that would assist social interaction. One implication is the need to design for more socially translucent computer-mediated communication by attending to issues of visibility and accountability of players (Erickson and Kellogg, 2000).

In the fourth paper, Armitage and Branch examine some of the potential barriers to successful distribution of online first-person shooter games by discussing the difficulties associated with latency and jitter (Henderson, 2001; Henderson and Bhatti, 2001; Sheldon et al., 2002). First person shooter games have very stringent infrastructure requirements as well as highly sophisticated and rapidly changing requirements. These games also require tight tolerance on delay as well as high bandwidths. Game distributors thus make decisions concerned with bandwidth purchase, server locations and support regimes, among others. The main findings of this paper include the importance of latency, more specifically the tolerance level of latency to gamers. Jitter, however, is not found to be a main concern to game distributors as long as latency is managed.

The last paper by Kim, Oh and Lee examines the personal experiences of players which make them repeat their playing games. This paper explores how the characteristics of online games affect the individual flow experience. Three antecedents to flow (skills, challenges and focused attention) have positive influence on the flow experience. While interaction, whether it is human or machine, is found to influence the antecedents of the flow experience, technical characteristics like system performance are shown to have little effect. From these findings, they argue that the social characteristics of online games are more crucial to attract online game players than technological ones.

These paper, combined together, provide a historical account, though partial, of how online games have developed over the years, and present a current understanding of both social and technical challenges for the online game industry. The papers also remind readers of a need for increased research, conceptual and empirical, in the field that enables us to gain a greater understanding of online games, both as an art and as a science.

## References

- Bartle, R. (2003) *Not Yet You Fools! Game + Girl = Advance* [http://www.gamegirladvance.com/archives/2003/07/28/not\\_yet\\_you\\_fools.html](http://www.gamegirladvance.com/archives/2003/07/28/not_yet_you_fools.html) <Last accessed 09/12/2003>.
- Choudrie, J. and Lee, H. (2004). 'Broadband development in South Korea: institutional and cultural factors', *European Journal of Information Systems*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp.103–114.
- Dave, T. (1998) *The Attack of the Autistic Peripherals ACM SIGGRAPH Computer Graphics*, Vol. 32, pp.58–59.
- Draenos, S. (2000) *Gamers Log On, Up-side*, October, pp.181–190.
- Erickson, T. and Kellogg, W.A. (2000) 'Social translucence: an approach to designing systems that support social processes', *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp.59–83.
- Gibbs, M., Hew, K. and Wadley, G. (2004) 'Social translucence of the Xbox live voice channel', in Rauterberg, M. (Ed.): *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Entertainment Computing*, Springer-Verlag The Netherlands.
- Gorriz, M. and Medina, C. (2000) 'Engaging girls with computer through software games', *Communications of the ACM*, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp.42–49.
- Henderson, T. (2001) 'Latency and user behaviour on a multiplayer games server', *Proceedings of NGC 2001*, London, November, UK, pp.1–13.
- Henderson, T. and Bhatti, S. (2001) 'Modelling user behaviour in networked games', *Proceedings of ACM Multimedia 2001*, Ottawa, October, Canada, pp.212–220.
- Kim, J. and Chung, J. (2002) 'Foreign market entry strategies of Korean online game developers', paper presented at the *1st Computer Games Conference*, Manchester, UK.

- Lee, H., O’Keefe, R. and Yun, K. (2003) ‘The growth of broadband and electronic commerce in South Korea: contributing factors’, *The Information Society*, Vol. 19, pp.81–93.
- Manninen, T. (2002) ‘Contextual virtual interaction as part of ubiquitous game design and development’, *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*, Vol. 6, pp.390–406.
- Sheldon, N., Girard, E., Borg, S., Claypool, M. and Agu, E. (2002) ‘The effect of latency on user performance in Warcraft III’, *Proceedings of the Second ACM Workshop on Network and System Support for Games (NetGames2003)*, April 2002.