Cross-Cultural Communication in Gaming: Taking the Kingdom Come Deliverance as an Example

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Abstract. Video games have transformed from a niche pastime into a global cultural phenomenon, giving rise to worldwide gaming communities. This paper explores the dynamics of cross-cultural communication in digital game communities, using Kingdom Come: Deliverance as a case study. As a historically rich single-player role-playing game, Kingdom Come presents a unique setting—15th-century Bohemia—that evokes varied reactions among players from different cultural backgrounds. The paper reviews how cultural diversity shapes gameplay interpretation, community dialogue, and moral frameworks within game engagement. It highlights both friction and understanding that arise in these global interactions. Drawing on literature in cultural studies and game theory, the paper shows how games serve not only as entertainment but also as arenas for negotiating identity, tradition, and worldview. The discussion also addresses community-created content and how global fanbases interact across linguistic and ideological borders. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that video games, even those without real-time multiplayer features, act as platforms for intercultural exchange and critical reflection.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication, video games, historical simulation, player interpretation, gaming community

1. Introduction

Video games have transformed from a niche pastime into a global cultural phenomenon, giving rise to worldwide gaming communities. Early gaming communities often formed around local, "offline" experiences – for example, tabletop role-playing groups or arcade gatherings – each developing their own subcultures and norms. As one study illustrates, the creation of early computer RPGs like Ultima was a "cultural feat" in that it translated the rules, customs, and conventions of the tabletop Dungeons & Dragons community into a new digital medium. These early communities, while smaller and locally bound, set the stage for today's expansive player networks. Over time, the spread of the internet and digital platforms enabled these once-disparate groups to merge into a truly global gaming community. Today's gamer demographic is remarkably diverse: the average player is in their mid-30s and nearly 40% of players are female, and gaming is rarely a solitary activity – most players engage socially either face-to-face or online. In short, video games are "already becoming a pervasive medium, one as interwoven with culture as writing and images," no longer a subculture of adolescents but part of everyday life across ages and nations.

This ubiquity has led to increasingly culturally diverse player interactions. Modern game communities consist of players from a multitude of cultural backgrounds, each bringing distinct values and perspectives. As a result, digital games have become important sites for cultural exchange and dialogue. According to Glynn and Huge, contemporary digital games serve as spaces where players "grapple with complex cultural histories, existential meanings, and narratives," thereby positioning gaming as a vital domain for cultural discourse in modern society [1].

In effect, gaming communities function as microcosms of globalization. Players from different regions converge in virtual environments or forums, encountering each other's norms, languages, and viewpoints. These interactions may take collaborative forms—such as co-operative gameplay or the sharing of fan creations—but they can also give rise to cultural frictions and misunderstandings.

The act of play itself is not culturally neutral. As Porter observes, throughout history, play has often been used to instruct and inculcate specific beliefs and behaviors [2]. This suggests that games actively shape and reflect worldviews, thereby contributing to culture-building.

To examine these dynamics, this review adopts an integrative literature review approach. As Torraco explains, an integrative review "reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives are generated." [3]. By reviewing prior studies and relevant works, this paper aims to explore how global gaming communities have evolved and how cross-cultural communication unfolds within them.

2. Cross-cultural communication in digital spaces

Cross-cultural communication refers to the exchange of information and meaning across people from different cultural backgrounds. In the context of gaming, such communication increasingly occurs within digital spaces. Online multiplayer games, forums, and social media groups associated with games all serve as platforms where culturally diverse players interact. Even single-player or "offline" games give rise to fan communities that discuss and interpret the game's content, thereby creating opportunities for intercultural dialogue. Digital games themselves often act as a form of cultural communication: they embed narratives, symbols, and values that players from various cultures must interpret. As one anthology on religion and gaming notes, popular games frequently rely on culturally or historically significant content to drive narrative and gameplay, "utilizing these modes as unique forms of cultural communication". In other words, games carry cultural messages – whether intentionally or unintentionally – that resonate differently with audiences around the world.

Several theoretical concepts help explain how cross-cultural communication operates in game environments. One is Likarish's notion of "cultural feedback," which describes a cycle where content from one culture is appropriated and reinterpreted by game developers in another culture, then fed back into the original culture in a altered form. This can result in discordant interpretations: what started as a cultural element in one society may be transformed through a game and later recognized by the originating culture in a distorted way. Such feedback loops underscore that meaning in games is not static – it is co-created by developers and players across cultural lines. Another relevant idea is Gitelman's concept of cultural protocols (as applied to gaming by Laegran & Svendsen), referring to the informal rules of social behavior that emerge around any new media technology. In global games, players must learn not only the game's explicit rules but also these cultural protocols of interaction – for instance, norms of sportsmanship, communication style (text chat vs. voice, slang, etc.), or expectations of teamwork can vary between an American guild and a Korean guild in an online game. Cross-cultural communication in gaming, therefore, involves navigating both the in-game cultural content and the social etiquette born of different player cultures.

Notably, digital gaming has blurred traditional geographic and cultural boundaries, enabling direct communication between players who might never meet otherwise. Furthermore, to some extent, online gaming transcends geographical and cultural barriers, allowing people from all corners of the world to interact and collaborate in real time. Even for those games that without real-time interaction, offline game, community forums and fan discussions can serve as meeting grounds for international audiences. In this case, scholars have observed that these gaming spaces can facilitate a form of intercultural exchange that is distinct from other media. Therefore, players will not only consume a game's content but can also share personal interpretations, mods, fan art, and strategies, effectively through their cultural perspective to others.

The Role of Historical and Cultural Context in Kingdom Come: Deliverance

One vivid example of how a game's context influences cross-cultural interpretation is Kingdom Come: Deliverance [4]. This single-player RPG is set in 15th-century Bohemia (medieval Czech lands) and is renowned for its commitment to historical accuracy. The developers painstakingly recreated the landscape, social conditions, and even the music and language of the period. This historical and cultural context profoundly shapes how players from different cultures engage with and interpret the game. For Czech and other Central European players, Kingdom Come: Deliverance can carry an extra layer of meaning – it portrays a chapter of their regional history, potentially invoking a sense of pride or personal connection. Indeed, elements of the game's design explicitly emphasize its Bohemian heritage. For example, the soundtrack features liturgical chants delivered in a Czech pronunciation of Church Latin (rather than the classical Latin more familiar to Western Europeans), a choice made as a marker of the game's "'Czechness'" and geographic authenticity [5]. International players who are not from this culture may simply perceive such elements as adding exotic medieval flavor, whereas Czech players recognize them as authentic representations of their heritage. In this way, the same content can evoke different responses: one group sees faithful historicity where another just sees atmospheric unfamiliarity. As a game music scholar observed, Kingdom Come's use of regional language and musical style has a dual effect – it increases a sense of medieval "otherness" for outsiders while enhancing historical fidelity for locals [5].

The game's devotion to accuracy, however, has also sparked cross-cultural controversy and dialogue. Shortly after its release, Kingdom Come: Deliverance became a flashpoint in debates about representation and diversity in historical games. Some Western critics accused the game of "whitewashing" history because its 15th-century Bohemian setting does not depict any people of color [6]. These critics argued that the absence of non-white characters might reflect a bias or exclusion, given that many other medieval games include a more multicultural cast. On the other hand, the developers and many fans – including Czech players – defended the historical realism of the portrayal. They pointed out that medieval Bohemia was indeed ethnically homogeneous (comprised mainly of Czechs and Germans, with other European minorities) and that "it simply was not an area where people of color lived" in that period [6]. This clash of interpretations reveals how cultural background can affect one's expectations of a game's content: players from societies where diversity and inclusion are contemporary priorities sometimes expect even historical games to reflect modern multicultural values, whereas players closer to the game's setting may prioritize fidelity to local history. The Kingdom Come controversy led to vibrant community discussions on forums and social media, effectively becoming an intercultural dialogue about history, identity, and game design. Some players from Eastern Europe felt that foreign critics were imposing their cultural lens on a Czech story, while some Western players felt the game's popularity meant it should be more globally inclusive. The game thus served as a cultural text that different groups read in very different ways – a phenomenon only heightened by its historical context. It illustrates that in cross-cultural

gaming communication, the context (here, a specific time and place in history) can be just as significant as the content, because context frames what players see as normal, appropriate, or meaningful.

Moreover, Kingdom Come: Deliverance demonstrates how historically grounded content can educate or challenge players from other cultures. Many players outside of Europe were unfamiliar with 15th-century Bohemia before playing the game. Through its narrative and codex entries, the game introduces them to the political and religious complexities of that era, effectively becoming a conduit for cultural learning. At the same time, these players interpret the material through their own cultural reference points. For instance, players from countries with no feudal past might view the game's feudal lord-serf relationships with more curiosity or moral critique than European players who learned medieval history in school. A study in game historiography suggests that cultural background influences whether players perceive a historical game as an authentic simulation or as a springboard for imaginative engagement [7]. In Kingdom Come, European audiences often laud its accuracy and detail – seeing it almost as an interactive documentary – while some non-European players focus on the universal themes of the hero's journey or compare the oppression in the story to colonization narratives in their own history. In summary, the game's rootedness in a specific historical-cultural context leads to a rich diversity of interpretations. Players must negotiate between the game's culture (medieval Bohemia) and their own culture's understanding of topics like religion, warfare, or social hierarchy. This negotiation is a core aspect of cross-cultural communication in gaming: the game provides a common ground (a shared story world), but each player's cultural lens colors what the experience means to them.

3. Cultural diversity and interpretation of gameplay

Players do not enter a game as blank slates – they bring with them their cultural identities, values, and experiences, all of which shape how they interpret gameplay. Research in game studies and anthropology consistently shows that cultural diversity leads to diverse interpretations of the same game content. What one player finds morally acceptable, entertaining, or meaningful in a game might be viewed very differently by a player from another cultural context. As Consalvo argues, players bring their own "gaming capital" and cultural frameworks into virtual worlds, which in turn shape their play styles and perceptions [8]. In practical terms, this means that everything from narrative themes to game mechanics can take on different significance depending on the player. For example, a game mechanic that rewards individual achievement might resonate positively in cultures that value individualism, but players from more collectivist cultures might interpret the same mechanic as less engaging or even at odds with their play preferences [8]. In story-driven games, a plot decision (say, a character choosing duty over family) could be applauded as heroic in one cultural setting and criticized as cold or impious in another, reflecting differing cultural norms around family loyalty.

Scholars Campbell and Grieve observe that video games often contain religious or cultural symbols whose interpretation "may have larger cultural implications, frequently unforeseen by both game designers and players". In their compilation Playing with Religion in Digital Games, they highlight cases where gameplay elements acquire unintended meanings across cultures. One contributor, Šisler, studied how Arab players reacted to stereotypical portrayals in Western games, finding that certain depictions reinforced feelings of cultural "othering". For another example, there was once a game that incorporated the element of "haunted magic circle", which blending religious elements into horror games. This approach was regarded as quite innovative by some players, but others thought it had serious flaws. They felt that it made the sacred story content too mundane and

uninteresting. These examples demonstrate that games have the potential to become a venue for cultural controversy: in other words, something that seems merely an illusion or fiction to one group might actually touch upon very real cultural sensitivities for another group.

Furthermore, the cultural differences among players bring about a wide variety of gaming experiences. In the same moral dilemma within the same game, two players may make completely opposite choices because their cultural backgrounds emphasize different values. For instance, players from a culture that values peace may strive to seek peaceful solutions in the game, while players from a culture that values warrior spirit may be more inclined to choose combat. Neither of these approaches is "correct" or "wrong"; instead, each demonstrates how the game can serve as a form of personal and cultural expression. As a scholar has pointed out, games belong to a "cultural construction domain", where games and beliefs blend together. Players project their understanding of the world onto the virtual characters and storylines in the games. On the surface, they are playing the games, but in reality, they are engaging in cultural activities. This explains why the same game can trigger different discussions in different parts of the world: players interpret the information conveyed by the game based on their local cultural exchanges.

In addition, during the gameplay, the cultural diversity of the players can also influence the way they communicate within the game. In multiplayer gaming environments, research has shown that there are different communication methods: players from certain cultural backgrounds may prefer direct verbal coordination, while others rely on context or non-verbal cues. These differences could lead to misinterpretations. Over time, players often adapt and develop a shared in-group culture within the game that blends elements from everyone, but not without occasional friction. For single-player games with global audiences, the discussion around the game (on forums, streams, etc.) becomes the site of cross-cultural interpretation. As players share their gameplay stories and reactions, they often reveal as much about their own cultural perspective as they do about the game. For instance, one player might frame Kingdom Come's emphasis on saving often and eating to survive as a fun challenge reflecting "medieval realism," while another complains that these features are "tedious" – potentially reflecting different cultural attitudes towards convenience and challenge in entertainment media. By comparing these interpretations, we see how cultural diversity enriches the overall understanding of a game: it surfaces multiple layers of meaning that a single-perspective analysis would miss. Game developers have begun to acknowledge this phenomenon, sometimes incorporating more customizable experiences to cater to different tastes, or engaging with international communities to understand their reactions. All told, examining gameplay interpretation across cultures highlights the deep interplay between game design, player culture, and meaning-making in the gaming experience.

4. Community interactions and cross-cultural dialogue

Beyond the game software itself, the community platforms surrounding a game are where cross-cultural dialogue often flourishes. In the case of Kingdom Come: Deliverance, a robust online community emerged on forums (such as Reddit and Steam discussions), fan websites, and social media groups dedicated to the game. These community spaces serve as melting pots for players from different countries and cultures to interact, thereby extending the single-player experience into a social realm. Notably, although Kingdom Come is an offline RPG (i.e. not a networked multiplayer game), its community is very much online and global. Players gather to share gameplay tips, discuss historical details, create mods, and debate the game's themes and controversies. In doing so, engage in intercultural communication and discuss medieval Bohemian history. These illustrate how gaming communities can foster cultural exchange and mutual learning. One could liken the game's forums

to a modern-day coffeehouse or salon, where ideas and viewpoints meet. As Heidi Campbell notes, digital game communities allow people to "enact and affirm their distinctive identities for global audiences", meaning players use these platforms to represent their culture or viewpoint within a worldwide conversation. For example, some Kingdom Come players explicitly position themselves as history buffs or as representatives of their nationality when contributing to discussions, thereby teaching others about their culture's take on the game's content.

Intercultural dialogue in gaming communities is not always smooth; it comes with challenges such as language barriers, differing communication etiquettes, and occasional cultural conflicts. However, the process of navigating these challenges can be highly constructive. When misunderstandings occur – say, over a joke that doesn't translate well or an assumption about historical knowledge – community members often step in to clarify and explain. In doing so, they are practicing intercultural communication skills: clarifying terminology, asking questions about each other's perspectives, and finding common ground in the shared love of the game. Scholars have observed that online game communities can cultivate empathy and understanding by exposing players to viewpoints they might not encounter in their local environment [8]. In the Kingdom Come community, one can find instances of players changing their stances after hearing others' perspectives. For instance, a non-Czech player who initially criticized the game's lack of fantasy elements might gain appreciation for its realism after Czech fans explain the significance of their history being represented authentically. Conversely, Czech players concerned about foreign criticism of their history might become more aware of inclusivity discussions in gaming after engaging with international fans. Through such exchanges, the community does more than discuss the game – it becomes a venue for cultural dialogue. This reflects a broader trend noted in game studies: online communities "allow for significant cross-cultural communication as players discuss different playstyles, narrative interpretations, and strategies". Even when players are not in the same game session, these discussions bridge cultural divides by enabling people to share how they experience the game. Each forum post or fan comment is an opportunity for cross-cultural learning, whether it's explaining a proverb that appears in the game's Czech dialogue or comparing how morality is handled in Eastern European storytelling versus American RPGs.

Moreover, community interactions often lead to collaborative cultural production, such as fan translations, mods, or wikis, which further enhance cross-cultural understanding. In the Kingdom Come community, fans from various countries contributed to translating in-game texts and subtitling videos, ensuring the game's rich historical lore is accessible across languages. Others created mods – for instance, adding fan-made quests or adjusting difficulty – that sometimes infuse the game with new cultural elements (like a mod that adds folklore-based content). These fan-driven projects require coordination and exchange of knowledge across cultures and can cement friendships and respect among participants. They demonstrate the positive potential of gaming communities to operate as what sociologist Henry calls "affinity spaces" – spaces where diverse people learn from each other around a shared passion [9]. The affinity in this case is love for Kingdom Come: Deliverance and its detailed world, and the learning happens as players swap historical facts, game tactics, and personal interpretations. It is also worth noting that not all dialogue is harmonious; gaming communities sometimes deal with toxic behavior or cultural insensitivity. Yet, this too has prompted meta-discussions within communities about the importance of respect and inclusivity. Initiatives to moderate forums and encourage respectful debate are essentially efforts to improve cross-cultural communication by setting norms that value diversity. For example, moderators on the Kingdom Come Reddit explicitly ask members to be mindful of cultural differences and to avoid

slurs or derogatory language, thereby actively cultivating an environment where intercultural dialogue can thrive.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Kingdom Come: Deliverance and its community powerfully illustrates how a game can spark ongoing cross-cultural dialogue outside its immediate gameplay. The forums and fan spaces become an extension of the game's medieval world – not in setting, but in function, as a place where people gather. Here, however, it is the modern global village gathering, using the game as a springboard to discuss broader cultural topics. Through sharing knowledge, debating interpretations, and collaboratively creating content, players engage in a meaningful exchange that can break down preconceptions. As one study on religious gaming communities observed, gamers and game designers often "read religion (or culture) into the gaming context" to make sense of their participation – by analogy, Kingdom Come's community members often read each other's cultures into discussions to make sense of the game's content. This blending of perspectives is exactly what cross-cultural communication is about: learning to see a shared experience (here, a video game) through the eyes of others. The result is not just a deeper appreciation of the game itself, but also a microcosm of how intercultural understanding can be built, one conversation at a time, in the digital age.

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