Is Runeterra a Website, or Is It a Real Community?

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Definitions

A community is “a social, religious, occupational, or other group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists”.¹ In short, a community is a group, brought together by shared interests or common ideology. In social psychology, group is defined as “a collection of people who are perceived to be bonded together in a coherent unit to some degree”.² This analysis is a case study focusing on the League of Legends fan-site entitled Runeterra. The purpose of this article is to identify the elements that define Runeterra as a community and briefly examine the benefits of joining a group, with examples from this specific website.

Runeterra

In April 2010, Brandon “Roku” Davis officially launched Runeterra, a small online gaming community that focuses on League of Legends, a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game developed by Riot Games. It is intended to provide its members with insightful League of Legends analysis and discussions. Runeterra is home to about 200 active users, serving as an online medium for meaningful communication and interaction among its community members. Runeterrans originate from various locations throughout the globe, brought together via the Internet. Since Runeterra is a virtual community, it relies solely on the availability of the Internet, and without internet access, a member is either temporarily disengaged or permanently disassociated.

¹ http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/community
Types of Groups

There are 2 different types of groups, which differ in the way its members are bonded. The first type is labeled *common-identity group* and is defined as a group whose members are linked together via a category as a whole. Examples of common-identity groups include groups that are categorized by nationality (e.g., Canadian), ethnicity (e.g., Korean), or location of schools (e.g., Pacific University students). The second type is called *common-bond groups*, in which individual members are bonded to each other. Examples of common bond groups include teams (e.g., Counter Logic Gaming, SoloMid) work teams (e.g., Runeterra writers), or larger communities such as clgaming.net and solomid.net. Groups differ in entitativity, the extent to which they are perceived as coherent entities. The characteristics of groups high in entitativity are:

1. members interact with one another often
2. the group is of consequence to its members
3. members share common goals and
4. they are similar to one another in important ways.

Runeterra is moderately high in entitativity. Members are constantly interacting via multiple means for communication (e.g., forum, live-chat, Twitter, Steam). The Runeterra community is important to its members because individuals actually make the effort to participate (e.g., communication, contests) and advocate for the group or group members (e.g., watching members’ live stream, aid in live stream advertisement). Runeterrans share a common goal: interest in League of Legends. They are also similar to one another such that they possess an interest in the game and value insightful knowledge and discussion.

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3 Ibid
4 Ibid
5 Ibid
8 [http://twitter.com/#!/Runeterra](http://twitter.com/#!/Runeterra)
9 [http://steamcommunity.com/groups/runeterra](http://steamcommunity.com/groups/runeterra)
Key Components of Group

There are four key components that exist in essentially every group: (1) status, (2) roles, (3) norms, and (4) cohesiveness.  

- **Status**

In many groups, members vary in status, individuals’ position or rank within the group. Within the Runeterra community, members have a level associated with their account. Level is positively correlated with communication activity. Specifically, on the forums when a member reaches a certain number of posts, he or she gains a level. This is an explicit example of status. An implicit example of rank is seniority—how long a member is involved or a part of the community. This is based on the date a member joined the community (i.e., account creation). This metric is somewhat flawed in that it does not account for long time lurkers, who register at a later date.

Status is interdependent with roles. In some cases, people with high rank roles possess higher status. In Runeterra, administrators, writers, and moderators bear higher status because they earned it through their roles. They also stand out from the general audience through their roles.

- **Roles**

Roles are a set of behaviors associated with a specific position that individuals within a group are expected to perform. In some cases, roles are assigned, but at other times, they may be acquired formally or informally. Runeterran writers and streamers generally acquire their roles by contacting Roku or through recruitment (e.g., another writer recruits them, members refer writers). Roles aid to provide members an opportunity to foster a sense of relatedness. When members develop this feeling of belonging, chances of member retention increase.

- **Norms**

Every group has a set of norms, which are rules or expectations within a group about how its members should or should not behave. Runeterra too has these

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11 Ibid, p. 383
12 Ibid, p. 384
13 Ibid, p. 387
norms. They are not explicitly introduced in the forums, but community members abide by these rules. Some of Runeterra’s implicit norms include:

- No trolling  
- No pointless posting 
- Respect 

These are examples of some norms shared within this particular community, but it is not limited to these expectations.

- Cohesion 

The last element of group is cohesiveness, the quality that compel group members to remain in the group.15 A crucial aspect of cohesive groups is solidarity; that is, group members see themselves as homogenous, cooperative with one another, supportive of each other, and work together to achieve the group goals. Runeterrans are homogenous to a degree in that they are all interested in League of Legends. They cooperate with one another to play inhouses 16 and also support each other (e.g., watching other members’ stream, commenting on members’ forum posts). The goal of the website community is to provide insightful League of Legends analysis and discussion. Group members collaborate to achieve this goal by giving constructive criticism and contributing new knowledge.

According to the Social Brain Hypothesis, as the size of a group increases, cohesiveness decreases.17 Since Runeterra is a fairly small community, it is moderately more cohesive than larger communities such as clgaming.net or the forum community on the official League of Legends site. But when the community expands, cohesiveness may slowly decrease.

Cohesiveness may also decrease as a result of a schism - splintering of a group into multiple other groups due to a change in ideology and disagreement among members.18 For example if Runeterra’s goals changed, members who disagree or those who are no longer interested in the new goals for the group will eventually leave the community.

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Benefits of Joining a Group

People are attracted to a myriad of groups for various reasons. One rationale for why individuals seek to belong to groups is to gain self-knowledge. 19 Group membership is vital to our self-concept; we learn what kind of person we are and want to be. Through my experiences as a member of Runeterra, I came to realize that I am passionate about making people happy. I developed an interest in hosting and planning contests as a way to make League of Legend fans happier.

Another benefit of joining a group is the ability for members to help each other achieve both group and individual goals. Within groups, individuals can seek self-enhancement or self-transcendence. Self-enhancement is the boosting of one’s public image. 20 Runeterra allows for its members to engage in self-enhancement through writing, streaming, and contest creation. Members of its community are able to build a resume or increase status and public image through roles. Runeterra also offers its members self-transcendence, realized through helping others. 21 Runeterrans are constantly interacting in the forums or live-chat to help each other improve (e.g., gameplay, knowledge) or simply provide constructive criticism or opinion.

21 Ibid
Conclusion

Runeterra is a website, but it is also an online gaming community, with members who coalesce for insightful League of Legends analysis and discussion. It is a common-bond group that is bonded by League of Legends and the desire for more astute knowledge. The community is moderately high in entitativity and contains the four key components of a group. The benefits of joining Runeterra includes gaining self-knowledge, self-enhancement, and self-transcendence. But most importantly, like most communities, Runeterra administrators and moderators must continually assesses the demands of the community, create a model for change, implement the plans, and evolve accordingly.