CHAPTER II

VALORANT GAMING

This chapter describes *Valorant*, the object of this study, focusing on its gameplay mechanics and reliance on communication. It highlights how the game's collaborative features foster both teamwork and challenges, such as toxic behaviors, making it a key context for studying player interactions and cyberbullying.

2.1.   Valorant Games

Valorant is a team-based tactical first-person shooter (FPS) developed and published by Riot Games, launched in June 2020. The game quickly rose to prominence, becoming one of the most popular online multiplayer games globally, celebrated for its blend of precise gunplay and strategic depth. Valorant's gameplay centers on a 5v5 format where players assume the roles of unique "agents" equipped with special abilities, each contributing to team strategies. Set in a near-future world, the game emphasizes cooperation, tactical planning, and swift decision-making, creating an environment that demands seamless communication among teammates.
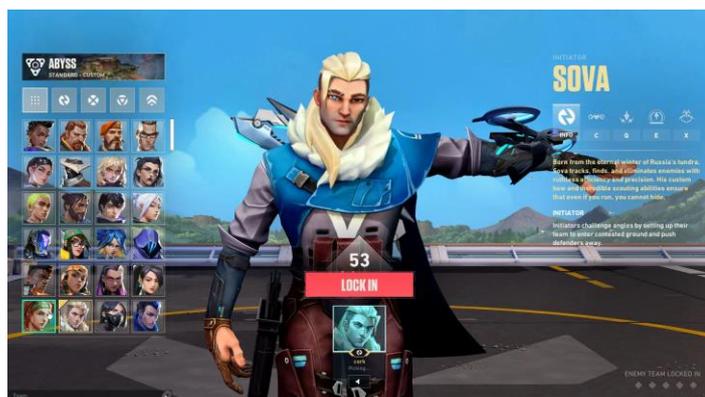

Figure 2.1 Valorant Pre-game Agent Select option

As a competitive shooter, Valorant incorporates elements familiar to fans of the FPS genre, such as weapon accuracy, team coordination, and objective-based gameplay, while introducing innovative features through its agent-based mechanics. The game's ranking system, which categorizes players based on skill and performance, fuels a high-stakes competitive atmosphere. These characteristics have solidified Valorant as a cornerstone of the esports scene and a preferred platform for casual and professional players alike.

2.2. Gameplay Mechanics

In the 5v5 team-based format of Valorant, two teams of five players each battle to accomplish goals across a number of rounds. There are numerous maps in Valorant, each with its own layouts, bomb locations, and chokepoints. In order to make strategic choices regarding engagement, mobility, and posture, players must get familiar with these maps. Attackers and defenders face unique challenges on maps like Bind, Haven, and Split, which force teams to modify their tactics and make snap decisions that affect the result of the game.

Figure 2.2 Valorant Gameplay Mechanics

The phases of gameplay is as follows:

1. Initial Phase is before each round begins, where players have a short period to purchase weapons, shields, and abilities using credits earned from previous rounds based on individual performance and team success.

2. Match Phase is the phase where players engage in combat, trying to either plant/defuse the spike (depending on their role) or eliminate the opposing team. The match game is divided into two phases: the Attack phase and the Defense phase, with teams switching roles after each round.

The team's role determines the main goal:

1. The spike is a bomb that attackers aim to plant at a certain location on the map.

2. Defenders have to stop the attackers from placing the spike or neutralize it if they have already done so.

A large range of firearms, including as rifles, handguns, shotguns, and sniper rifles, are available to players during gameplay. Every weapon has unique characteristics that affect player decisions and tactics, such as accuracy, fire rate, and damage output. A variety of characters (also known as "Agents") are available for brave players to select from; each has unique skills meant to improve gameplay and offer tactical advantages. These skills include mobility enhancements, area denial, vision blocking, and healing. For instance, Sage can revive deceased comrades, whereas Phoenix, an Agent, has healing powers that can replenish health. However, players must purchase abilities every round, so they are not limitless, which adds another level of strategy to the game.

2.3. Social Interactions in Valorant

Two teams compete in a number of rounds that form the foundation of Valorant's gameplay. In order to install a bomb-like device known as the "spike," one side pretends to be the attackers, and the other team defends against this goal. A key component of Valorant's gameplay is its social dynamics. The foundation of

Valorant is teamwork; in order to accomplish the shared objective of planting or defusing the spike or destroying opponents, players must rely on one another. Depending on their Agent's skills and preferred style of play, each player usually takes on a particular role within the squad.

Colleagues must coordinate, communicate, and work together in order to succeed, but this also opens the door for constructive social interactions—including bullying. Especially during competitive bouts, players frequently debate tactics, call-outs, and feedback. The game's interactions can be divided into a number of essential components:
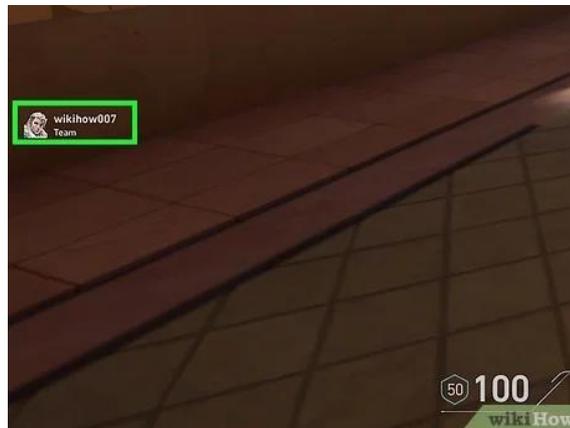

Figure 2.3 Valorant Voice Chat System

2.3.1. Voice Chat in Valorant

Team members must coordinate, communicate, and work together in order to succeed, but this also opens the door for constructive social interactions—including bullying. Especially during competitive bouts, players frequently debate tactics, call-outs, and feedback.
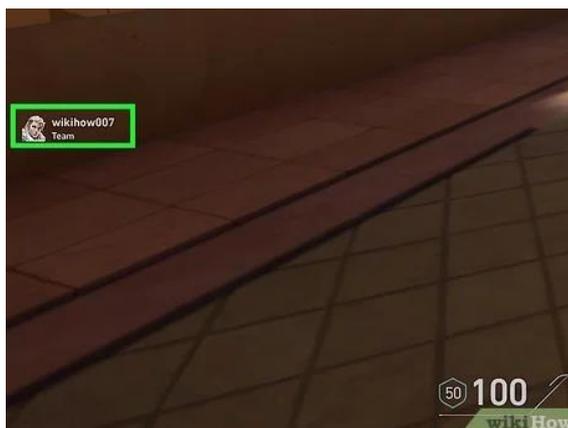
Figure 2.4 Valorant Voice Chat System

2.3.2. Text Chat in Valorant

Text Chat is the feature where players can type messages to their teammates or the entire game lobby. While this can be a useful tool for conveying quick information, it is also a common channel for bullying, with insults, threats, and derogatory comments often appearing in the chat logs, particularly when a player feels frustrated or underperforming.

Figure 2.5 Valorant in-game Chat Box

This team-based dynamic fosters social interaction, as success or failure is dependent on cooperation. Success requires coordination, with teammates relying on each other's abilities, communication, and execution of strategies.

However, interpersonal conflicts can arise when players feel that others are not fulfilling their roles, or if there are disagreements over strategies or decisions. These issues often manifest in toxic behaviour, where players may harass or blame others for perceived mistakes. Within gameplay, the pressure to perform well, combined with the anonymity afforded by online interactions, can lead to instances of verbal abuse, harassment, and cyberbullying. The competitive ranking system further intensifies interactions, as players may express frustration over teammates' perceived inadequacies, escalating tensions within the team dynamic. These unique characteristics make Valorant a compelling case study for examining the types of cyberbullying that occurs in Valorant gameplay.