

Gamers' Motivations and Problematic Gaming: An Exploratory Study of Gamers in World of Warcraft

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the factors that contribute to problematic gaming among players of Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMOs for short), in particular, the game World of Warcraft. It examines motivations based on the Self Determination Theory (SDT) and motivations based on Yee's player orientations. A total of 128 gamers participated in the online survey. Results showed that achievement and immersion player orientations are correlated with extrinsic motivation in terms of external, introjected and identified regulations, as well as intrinsic motivation. Social orientation is only correlated with identified regulation and intrinsic motivation. Problematic gaming is also correlated with all types of extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation, as well as with achievement and immersion player orientations but not with social player orientation. Achievement orientation and introjected regulation both positively predicted problematic gaming, while identified regulation negatively predicted it.

Keywords: *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations, Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMOs), Player Orientations, Problematic Gaming, Self Determination Theory*

INTRODUCTION

Video games have surpassed movies as the fastest growing form of human recreation (Yi, 2004) and are the world's largest entertainment medium. With the availability of personal computers and the introduction of the internet in our homes, computer games have become easily accessible. This new form of entertainment is quickly growing into an important form

of youth culture, one that is readily available at an affordable price to the general public. As computer technology advances, games have evolved from pixelated 2D to that of realistic 3D human-like figures in landscapes that simulate the real world. With higher quality graphics, increased gaming speed, complexity and opportunities for peer to peer interaction, computer games are now much more lifelike, entertaining and as well as captivating, thus encouraging more gamers to spend a lot of time on this activity.

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In January 2009, Singapore's household broadband penetration rate reached 102%, as reported by the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (Infocomm Development Authority, 2009). Correspondingly, concerns about excessive and problematic gaming are also increasing. There are empirical studies that children and adolescents who play video games excessively, especially Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing games (MMOs) can suffer from dysfunctional symptoms related to problematic gaming (Griffiths, 2000; Tejeiro Salguero, & Bersabé Morán, 2002). These problematic symptoms include preoccupation with playing the game for extensive hours each day, low tolerance of anything that obstructs their gaming time, loss of control, withdrawal symptoms when not able to play the game, and disruptions in schooling, family, and other social relationships (Griffiths & Dancaster, 1995; Griffiths & Hunt, 1998; Johansson & Gotestam, 2004). While there are many media reports and anecdotal records on the negative effects related to excessive online gaming in Singapore, the motivation of gamers and how this relates to problematic symptoms have not been fully explored.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Need to Study MMOs

In the United States, Gentile (2009) found that 88% of youths between ages 8 to 18 played MMOs at least three or four times a week. The prevalence of problematic gaming in the United States is found to be 8.5%. A similar study conducted in Singapore found that 8.7% of gamers between the ages of 9 to 17 can be considered "pathological." In comparison, this rate is 9.9% for Spanish teenagers, 10.2% for those in South Korea and 14% in China (Choo, Gentile, Sim, Li, Khoo, & Liau, 2010). The problem of excessive gaming is not confined to youth or young adults. There are many case studies of negative consequences of gaming which include failing academic grades, break-up of marriages, and loss of jobs, mainly due to gamers' inability to

pull themselves away from their games (e.g., Griffiths & Wood, 2000; Sattar & Ramaswamy, 2004). The numbers of affected gamers are high enough for the government in China to impose a daily 3-hour restriction on time spent playing any type of computer games in 2007 to discourage prolonged gaming in an attempt to control the number of gamers falling into the patterns of problematic gaming (Block, 2008).

In order to understand problematic gaming and to improve on strategies in helping individuals with this issue, there is a need to first understand the nature of MMOs, how such games motivate gamers and contribute to problematic gaming behaviors. MMOs host millions of players in their rich virtual 3D worlds, where players are often required to band together in order to accomplish the game's objectives. One very popular example is *World of Warcraft*, which to date, has 12 million players worldwide (Blizzard Entertainment, 2010). To advance in the game, players are required to fight monsters, build networks and participate in the in-game economy to reap monetary rewards within game. Exchange of information, trading of game items or goods, and the sharing of gaming experiences are all part of the daily routine for players within a MMO game world. All these activities necessitate collaboration among players, and most importantly, the reward of being socialized into a community of gamers and acquiring a reputation within it. Players group together to form communities, commonly known as "clans" or "guilds", as a result of which they develop their sense of social identity and sense of belonging within the game (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, & Moore, 2006). Gamers who join and participate in social community groups in the game spend more time in the game than others. Gamers who are in larger guilds are also more inclined to grouping and play 70 minutes more per week as compared to gamers who do not have a guild (Ducheneaut et al., 2006). Guilds are often cited as a source of addiction because of the obligations they create, resulting in more time spent grouping with other gamers (Ducheneaut et al., 2006, 2007; Williams, Ducheneaut, Xiong,

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