

# A Study of the Moderating Effect of Social Distance on the Relationship Between Motivators and Game Engagement

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationships between motivation factors and game engagement and explore the moderating effect of perceived social distance on those relationships. For this, the present study collected data from 228 college students in South Korean through a survey method and used hierarchical multiple regression analyses with three-steps to test the hypotheses. In the results, first, the more fantasy, diversion, or arousal participants pursue in gameplay, the more they are engaged in the game. Second, the positive relationship between arousal and game engagement is stronger for participants in high rather than low in social exclusion. However, social exclusion was found to have no significance in the relationship between other motivators and game engagement. For research contribution, this study is the first one to examine the integral model of motivation factors of engagement in the game platform and to investigate the moderating effect of perceived social distance in gameplay.

## KEYWORDS

Arousal, Diversion, Fantasy, Game Engagement, Social Distance

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The video game (hereafter, games) industry is booming, surpassing the movie industry in terms of both annual sales and global revenues in the entertainment category (Prena, & Sherry, 2018). Games are among the fastest and most exciting type of mass media. While academic research on game content and users has increased significantly over the past quarter-century, there are many research gaps (Seo et al., 2019). Far more research has focused on other entertainment categories, such as consumers' attitudes toward and patronage of cinema, music concerts, and television (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013). Thus, marketing academicians' contributions lag far behind the actual video game industry practices.

Most of these researches of video games focus on the relationship between games and increasing aggression, social isolation, and overuse (Gruesser, Thalemann, & Griffiths, 2007). Recently, however, many researchers have focused on game adjustment or pain relief for education or health interventions by exploiting the new appeal of video games (Sardia, Idria, & Fernández-Alemán, 2017). Gradually, mediation-centered researchers have shown that games can have a positive impact on psychological and physical well-being (Bessiere, Seay, & Kiesler, 2007). Essential research and intensive interventional studies share a different but exploratory approach. The methods and theories used will evaluate the degree to which video games do not have positive, adverse, or emotional effects on a given outcome in a given situation (Katsarov et al., 2019). These well-known and less widely researched mechanisms of these positive and negative connections.

In particular, the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) is a virtual heir to the desktop game that rises in the 20th century with *Dungeon and Dragons* (Harviainen, & Rapp, 2018). Modern MMORPGs are adventures through fantasy worlds and combine advanced graphics, endless achievements, and collaborative and competitive gameplay options (Lee et al., 2018). This game allows players to create a virtual identity and make it high in the online fantasy world (Jin et al., 2017). Outside a realistic social structure, you can play a new role in your choice. MMORPGs also allow players to communicate with other players in a virtual environment through an online identity that enables them to share quests, talk to themselves or characters, and build online relationships and social capital (Trepte, Reinecke, & Juechems, 2012). As this game becomes popular and expanding in functionality, more gamers are testing their skills in MMORPGs (Harviainen, & Rapp, 2018).

Despite the increasing importance of practicality, there is a lack of quantitative research on the motivators that influence the participation of MMORPGs participants. This article explores people's motivations to participate in MMORPGs. For this, the paper is structured as follows. The next section presents the theoretical framework and background for the hypotheses. This study adopts the lens of psychological motivation in engagement in MMORPGs (Lindenberg, 2001). Also, theories on the development of the social exclusion as well as the relationship between the self and objects of consumption suggest that the sharing of an object will be associated with

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