

Chapter 15

Factors That Explain Adolescent and Young Adult Mobile Game Play, Part 1: A Quantitative Examination of the Characteristics Describing the Casual Player

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ABSTRACT

The first of two chapters, a study is presented that quantitatively examined the adolescent and young adult “casual” video game player. A total of 1,950 South Korean students self-reported their game play on mobile phones by answering a 92-item questionnaire designed to capture data on technology ownership; preference for game genre and titles; where and how often games were played; what factors influence game selection, what game features were the most desirable, the rationale behind playing games, and psychophysical changes experienced as a result of playing; as well as, spending habits with regard to game purchases. The findings supported many of the claims made about the casual player, revealing, for example, that mobile games are predominately played for short periods of time, in between activities, and as a means to combat boredom. Adding credence to the idea that mobile game play can be viewed as a casual activity. Results also revealed potentially positive benefits, to include improved mood and feelings of well-being along with better mental attention and focus.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite what has been a worldwide recession, the sales of video games have been, well, staggering. If truth be told, these games could be easily viewed as one of the fastest growing forms of entertainment (Chatfield, 2010) to rival that of even the movie industry. There have been many reasons cited for this unparalleled growth, to include the blurring between player and game controller with the entrance of motion control technology (e.g., *Kinect*[®], *Move*[®], *Wii*[®]), as well as the continued success of massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs), which can comprise worlds inhabited by millions of players (Seok & DaCosta, 2014). A common theme found among many of the reasons named has been technological innovation, as advancements in the game industry have played a significant role in the rising popularity of these games (Information Solutions Group, 2011). Among these, are the ground-breaking improvements seen in mobile computing. Titles such as *Temple Run*[®], *Plants vs. Zombies*[®], and *Cut the Rope*[®] have witnessed overwhelming success, resulting in cross-platform releases. In some instances, games played on mobile devices (e.g., phones, tablets), hereafter “mobile games”, have become a pop-culture phenomenon (e.g., *Angry Birds*[®]). This unequaled growth has opened new opportunities for research, to include the role mobile games may play in learning (Rogers & Price, 2006).

Mobile games are of particular interest because they are often portrayed as *different* from video games played on traditional gaming platforms (e.g., dedicated game console, handheld game device, personal computer [PC]). While exceptions exist, games played on mobile devices are typically viewed as falling into the genre of problem-solving or puzzle, ranging from tile-matching (e.g., *Bejeweled*[®], *Candy Crush Saga*[®]) to physics-based (e.g., *The Incredible Machine*[®], *World of Goo*[®]) game mechanics. This is a departure from what have been traditional (and popular) game titles and genres known for their MMOG (e.g., *Lord of the Rings Online*[®], *Star Wars: The Old Republic*[®]) characteristics and mature content (e.g., *Assassin's Creed: Unity*[®], *The Last of Us*[®]).

It has been proposed that the reasons why people play mobile games are also different from those of traditional video games. While the rationale for playing these games has been well debated, and factors such as challenge, flow, and immersion have been widely investigated (e.g., Nacke & Lindley, 2010), mobile game play is generally viewed as an unplanned activity. That is, unlike their traditional game player counterparts who are often portrayed as “hardcore” gamers, mobile game players are commonly depicted as “casual” participants, playing games in order to kill brief periods of time (Bouça, 2012; Kallio, Mäyrä, & Kaipainen, 2011; Moore & Rutter, 2004); to fill time while waiting (Information Solutions Group, 2013; Kallio, Mäyrä, & Kaipainen, 2011); as a way to relax (Kallio, Mäyrä, & Kaipainen, 2011); or simply as a result of boredom (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004; Moore & Rutter, 2004). Juul (2010) does a good job of summarizing the sentiments contrasting these attitudes toward video game play by defining the stereotypical casual player as having “a preference for positive and pleasant fictions,” playing “few video games,” showing a willingness to commit to “small amounts of time and resources toward playing video games,” as well as disliking “difficult games” (p. 29). This is in comparison to the stereotypically hardcore player, which he defines as preferring “emotionally negative fictions,” playing “a large number of video games,” investing “large amounts of time and resources toward playing video games,” and enjoying “difficult games” (p. 29).

Mobile game play is also portrayed as being the predominant pastime of young people, who already use mobile devices (Paavilainen, 2003), or what could be described as young players among those most

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