Chapter 50
Developing a Clearer Understanding of Genre and Mobile Gameplay

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a study that explored the mobile game-genre preferences of 1,950 South Korean students. The findings help create a clearer picture of the mobile gameplayer, revealing that mobile gameplay is more of a situational activity than a social replacement, often played during periods of interruption or idle time and lasting for short intervals. Action, arcade, sports, adventure, puzzle, board, simulation, and strategy were among the most popular genres played. Statistically significant relationships were found between genre and age and gender, with the younger and older students as well as males and females favoring different genres. For example, puzzle games were popular among the older females, whereas action games were preferred by the younger males. Significant relationships were also found between genre and academic grades and level, with differences found for genre preferences between high- and low-performing as well as vocational high school and college students.

INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, the educational value of video games has been met with debate, with inconsistent findings across studies (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2006). An underlying factor has been the studies themselves (Perrotta, Featherstone, Aston, & Houghton, 2013). That is, investigations have (a) varied in their aims, from studying the impact of video games on learning outcomes to types of learning and kinds of games; (b) focused on various domains, such as civics and society, computer science, language, and math (Per-

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rotta et al., 2013); (c) used different theories and frameworks, involving behaviorism, cognitivism, and/or constructivism (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2006); and (d) suffered from methodological flaws and limitations (Perrotta et al., 2013), to include bias, weak assessments, short exposure times, and lack of control groups (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2006). Altogether, these factors have contributed to difficulty in offering thorough, reliable, and tangible evidence for the educational potential of video games (Perrotta et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, interest in the educational value of video games continues to grow (Cogoi, Sangiorgi, & Shahin, 2006). This is in part because these games are seen as more flexible than other media, naturally lending themselves to adaptive learning (del Blanco, Marchiori, Torrente, Martínez-Ortiz, & Fernández-Manjón, 2013), and contributing to active learning in the areas of critical thinking, knowledge construction, collaboration, and information and communication technology use (Ellis, Heppell, Kirriemuir, Krotoski, & McFarlane, 2006). Furthermore, because video games offer instant feedback, it has been proposed that ambient information can foster an immersive state, stimulating game interest (Mitchell & Savill-Smith, 2004) and boosting exploration and experimentation (Kirriemuir, 2002), in turn, supporting authentic learning by letting students practice in a realistic, safe, and risk-free environment (del Blanco et al., 2013). This could help teach decision-making through increasingly difficult challenges adjusted to a student's aptitude (Gentile & Gentile, 2008). Consequently, video games could be used to offer activities that are paced to students' knowledge and skills, providing differentiated instruction (Paraskeva, Mysirlaki, & Papagianni, 2010).

Mobile Games

Mobile-based video games (hereafter "mobile games") are particularly interesting because of their anytime-, anywhere-, and on-any-device characteristics. A considerable body of research has focused on the technical capabilities of emerging mobile devices (e.g., Bell et al., 2006; Cheok, Sreekumar, Lei, & Thang, 2006; Göth, Häss, & Schwabe, 2004; Grant et al., 2007; Licoppe & Inada, 2006; Matyas et al., 2008; Naismith, Lonsdale, Vavoula, & Sharples, 2004; Schmitz, 2014; Owen et al., 2008; Sedano, Laine, Vinni, & Sutinen, 2007). For example, global positioning system (GPS) capabilities have been used to augment reality, obscuring the boundaries between the virtual and the real world by embedding learning in authentic environments, creating a blended experience (de Freitas & Griffiths, 2008; Huizenga, Admiraal, Akkerman, & ten Dam, 2009; Montola, 2011). This allows students to interact with virtual objects in the real world, taking learning out of the traditional classroom setting (Grant et al., 2007; Huizenga et al., 2009; Roschelle & Pea, 2002). (See DaCosta, Seok, & Kinsell, 2015, 2018, for a discussion of mobile games in the context of integrating learning with aspects of the physical world.)

Given the general attraction of mobile devices, there is also research to suggest that these games appeal to a much broader audience, and are played by people of all ages (Grimes, Kantroo, & Grinter, 2010). Additionally, although video games have traditionally been viewed as a male-dominated activity, females are now thought to play mobile games as much as males (Information Solutions Group, 2011, 2013). This trend may be the result of the increased popularity of social media (Information Solutions Group, 2011) or SOCIAL games (e.g., Information Solutions Group, 2011; Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004), because those who play these games are said to use their devices for group purposes (e.g., Information Solutions Group, 2011). Another explanation stems from the belief that mobile games are commonly viewed as an unplanned action, played to kill brief periods of time (Bouça, 2012; Kallio, Mäyrä, & Kaipainen, 2011; Moore & Rutter, 2004) – while waiting (Information Solutions Group, 2013; Kallio et al., 2011) to relax (Kallio et al., 2011), or out of boredom (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004; Moore &

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