Let’s Move!
The Social and Health Contributions From Pokémon GO

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article was to analyze how players of Pokémon GO could adopt a healthier and active lifestyle meanwhile or after using the game, observing how active they could become in their daily routines. The methodology involved a qualitative analysis involving a sample with players who were invited to complete an online questionnaire to answer specific questions about lifestyle and healthy choices. This study involved 125 players (84 males and 41 females) in the city of Pelotas (South of Brazil) that have played for at least six months the game. As results, it was possible to observe that users have changed many habits, specifically regarding physical activity gains, as going more often to practice different sports than only running, walking or cycling, and many of players were getting into an active living practicing exercises with friends and family, out of the game. Also, many players commented that meeting new users was a good way to socialize and making groups to walk or run together, getting an extra motivation for other activities out of the game. We conclude that Pokémon GO is one of the first mobile-based gameplay that can be used to promote a healthier lifestyle with a new way of interaction, changing sedentary lifestyles with a big potential to be used in Health Education.

KEYWORDS

Active Living, Gameplays, Health, Mobiles, Pokémon Go, Social Interaction

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays gameplay have become very popular among children, adolescents and even adults in many places in the world. Video games and computer games have always been a success regarding screen time spent everywhere among people from different ages. Recently, mobiles have been used mostly for communication throughout social medias and apps, and games on mobiles haven’t been that successful during the past years, due a small screen size design and lack of attractiveness for entertainment, making people more attracted to gameplay designed for computers and video games.

In the history of digital games, rarely it was possible to associate them to positive contributions for practices of sports and physical activities. Some studies show that electronic games could be potentially important to attract players and contribute for sports and other physical activities based...
on movements (Baranowski et al., 2008). An idea poorly developed for the massive use of mobiles, but recently very well adopted for video games, as the exergames or active video games.

Finco and Maas (2014) define exergames as a type of video games that include any type of physical exercise in the game routines. On these games, it is possible to include also physical activities involving a capture system of movements of activities such as dance and sports. Exergaming or exergames practices are the act of use of this type of video games to work out and move the full body to burn out calories. The term exergame has been used in academia as well as in the industry in slightly different ways (Oh & Yang, 2010), but usually it is agreed that these are active video games that combine body movement with gaming skills (Fries, 2011). Intensity measure in the practice will vary, depending on the game, as well as the caloric expenditure during the interaction, due the time and quantity of movements done during the session. Some of the most popular exergames are Wii Fit, Dance Dance Revolution and EA Sports Active.

Mainly, games offered for mobiles were designed for fun and short time, not involving many tasks and skills as the exergames that involve balance, jumps, kicks or punches. Mobile games have been considered “sedentary games” for not allowing people to move and interact that much with other people. Since July 2016, a location-based augmented reality game named Pokémon GO came with a different proposal: making people walking, running or cycling through different urban places, encouraging users to be more active and interacting with other users. In the game, players use a mobile device to locate, capture, battle and train virtual creatures that appear on the screen as if they were in the same real-world location as the player.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) states that the idea of attractiveness in a game is dependent on how the player’s skill is combined with the challenges and the narrative of the game and also supported by the flow theory, also called the psychology of optimal experience. During the flow experience, our level of focus maximizes our performance and sense of pleasure.

In the last few years researchers started to investigate how such games could contribute to the practice of physical activities and exercises, to the training of users to participate in a vast range of sports and other movement based activities (Hayes & Silberman, 2007).

Schoepf et al. (2016) state that health and fitness applications (apps) have gained popularity in interventions to improve diet, physical activity and sedentary behaviors but their efficacy is unclear, particularly for different lifestyle behaviors, as well as for specific population groups including children and adults.

Wong (2017) concludes that players who used to be sedentary benefited from playing Pokémon GO, as the game can be used as a starting point for sedentary people to begin an active lifestyle, where they can move out from their couches. The impact of Pokémon GO on physical activity can provide insights to public health workers in using novel strategies in health promotion.

Majgaard and Larsen (2017) developed a research for the sharing of experiences on Facebook with a constituted community during practices during play sessions of Pokémon GO, where it was possible to observe the mixture of physical and virtual communities associated with Pokémon GO where both produced a pervasive learning community regarding physical activities and health outcomes.

The aim of this study was to analyze how players of Pokémon GO could adopt a healthier lifestyle meanwhile or after using the game in their daily routines.

HEALTH CONCEPTS: ACTIVE LIVING AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

In this sense, the concept of active lifestyle is related to the search for the improvement of health and physical fitness through the integration of physical activities in day-to-day life (Gobster, 2005). The concept brought new perspectives to the relationship between physical activity and health. As for healthy lifestyle, it is a somewhat broader concept, encompassing intrapersonal and interpersonal factors, community factors and public policies McLeroy et al (1988). While early definitions of healthy lifestyle emphasized nutrition, physical activity and substance abuse, more recent definitions started
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