Impact of Family Support and Perception of Loneliness on Game Addiction Analysis of a Mediation and Moderation

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse the psychological constructs of loneliness and family support on game addiction among children, who are a major risk group for game addiction. The study explores: a) the effect of the secondary-school students’ perception of family support on game addiction; b) the mediation effect of the feeling of loneliness experienced by children in the effect of family support on game addiction; and c) the moderating effect of gender on the mediation model. The study group is composed of 575 students studying in a secondary school in the city of Ankara. For the analysis of the data, the study employed factorial and structure validity analyses, a reliability analysis, a structural equation model, and mediator and moderator variable analyses. The study concluded that although family support had a significant effect on game addiction, a major part of such effect resulted from the individual’s perception of loneliness, which was more evident among the female students.

KEYWORDS

Children, Family Support, Game Addiction, Loneliness, Mediation, Moderation

INTRODUCTION

Given the sales number of digital games, the number of players, and the time spent on digital games in a global sense, it is blatantly clear that digital technologies, particularly digital games, have been seriously occupying the daily lives as well as the agenda. Digital games affect a wide range of areas, as well as education. Especially in recent years, many educational games have been developed with the positive effects of game-based learning (McLaren, Adams, Mayer, & Forlizzi, 2017). Game-based learning uses essential and effective game design features and principles to motivate students to the learning context (Kennedy, & Lee, 2018). It’s seen that game-based learning improved students’ social skills, increased their success, positively affect their loyalty, improved satisfaction and improved learning outcomes (Cardinot, & Fairfield, 2019; York, & deHaan, 2018; Chen, & Sun, 2016; Perrotta, Featherstone, Aston, & Houghton, 2013). In addition to this, game-based learning can improve individuals’ 21st-century skills (Qian, & Clark, 2016). The games provide clear goals, support for active learning by providing feedback, provide the opportunity to practice until mastery and offer both internal and external rewards and these features lead to success (Bösche, & Kattner, 2011).

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Digital games provide opportunities for individuals by serving as a leisure activity, offering fun, competition and social interaction (Kennedy, & Lee, 2018; Sherry, Lucas, Greenberg & Lachlan, 2006), they may have negative impacts on them as well (Bösche, & Kattner, 2011). In the worst case, the mere habit of playing digital games evolves into an addiction. Today, particularly children and adolescents are playing digital games as a major leisure activity (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011), which shows that children and adolescents are the most at-risk group to develop an addiction to digital games. Game addiction is defined as “gaming disorder” by the World Health Organization since 2017 (WHO, 2019). In the context of this research, the concept of game addiction was used. Available research on game addiction regarding the risk group of children and adolescents are many in number (Chiu, Lee, & Huang, 2004; Erboy, 2010; Griffiths & Wood, 2000; Gunuc, 2017; Horzum, Ayas & Çakır Balta, 2008; Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Skoric, Teo, & Neo, 2009). Further, family and children’s perceptions of loneliness are important in game addiction, which is described as problematic behaviour (Peters & Malesky, 2008). Research shows that game addiction affects only a small proportion of people who are involved in digital or video game activities (WHO, 2019). Discussing the relationships in the context of game addiction, family support and perception of loneliness, this study first reviews conceptual definitions and then presents method, findings and conclusion specific to the study.

Digital Game Addiction

Despite the lack of a clear definition on digital game addiction in the literature, addiction generally refers to the loss of control, an uncontrollable urge, accompanied by a preoccupation with use and a desire to continue with the activity even though it creates problems (Griffiths & Hunt, 1998; Skoric, Teo & Neo, 2009). In this regard, game addiction can be considered as the desire to constantly play games among individuals to such an extent that they lose their control. Digital game addiction is defined as the excessive and compulsive use of computer or video games resulting in social and emotional problems (Lemmens, Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). Users fail to control this excessive use, which arises from the addiction, despite all the problems that it causes (Lemmens et al., 2009).

The identification of the reasons of digital game addiction is as important as its consequences. The review on the relevant literature demonstrated that there are available studies exploring the variables related to game addiction, the nature of the relationships between them and the variables with an impact on game addiction. Further, notably, there are numerous studies on the effect of game addiction. The studies revealed a potential relationship between game addiction, and social competence, social interaction, self-esteem, family relationships, academic achievement, depression, anxiety, life satisfaction, aggression and loneliness (Brunborg, Mentzoni & Frøylund, 2014; Chiu, Lee & Huang 2004; Hauge & Gentile, 2003; Hyun, Han, Lee, Kang, Yoo, Chung & Renshaw, 2015; Lemmens, Valkenburg, & Peter 2011). These variables have been separately discussed in most studies; there is a small number of studies on the impact of a mediator or moderator variable (Chou & Ting, 2003; Joe & Chiu 2009). One of the major factors regarding game addiction is the individual’s perception of loneliness. Lemmens, Valkenburg & Peter (2011) expressed that loneliness is both the reason and the result of game addiction. The individuals, who feel alone, tend to be addicted to games and the individuals addicted to games have a growing feeling of loneliness due to their decreasing social interaction. This study examines the relation between game addiction and family support, then attempts to reveal the mediation effect of loneliness by incorporating the factor of loneliness to the research model. Also, it analyses the moderator effect of the variable of gender on the established model. In this regard, the concepts of family support and loneliness are discussed below.

Family Support

As a social entity, every human being needs to be supported, loved and cared about by the people around them (Duyan, Gelbal & Var, 2013). Being a complex concept dealing with relationships and social bonds, social support may also be provided in a tangible (money, financial support) form or an intangible (love, care) form. The concept can be defined as the protection and attention given
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