Who Plays Games Online?
The Relationship Between Gamer Personality and Online Game Use

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ABSTRACT

Online games have become increasingly popular computer applications, raising the question of who plays them. Thus, the present study investigates the relationship between gamer personality and online game use as well as the potential links between online game use and gamer demographic variables. The sample consisted of 1633 Taiwanese online gamers. This study used confirmatory factor analysis to assess measurement reliability and validity. The hypotheses were tested using regression analyses. Analytical results indicated that online game use is positively related to gamer openness and agreeableness but negatively related to gamer conscientiousness and emotional stability. Moreover, being male and having a high income were associated with higher levels of online game use. The results increase the knowledge on the link between personality and online gaming behaviour.

Keywords: Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Extraversion, Gamer, Online Game Use, Openness, Personality

INTRODUCTION

Online gaming has become a globally popular computer activity over the past decade. One particular online game, World of Warcraft, has 11.5 million subscribers. On average, gamers spend 25 hours per week playing online games (Griffiths, Davies, & Chappell, 2004), although some heavy gamers may spend up to 82 hours per week engaging in online game play (Longman, O’Connor, & Obst, 2009). Interestingly, gamers are likely to underestimate their time spent playing games because of their intense fascination with the activity (Tobin & Grondin, 2009). Some gamers sacrifice sleep for extra online gaming time (Griffiths et al., 2004). Consequently, the problems associated with excessive online game play indicate a need for research examining online game use.

DOI: 10.4018/jebr.2012100101
Online games have become a popular current area of research (e.g., Teng, 2010). The gaming literature has addressed gamer characteristics such as demographics, favourite activities in games (Griffiths, Davies, & ChapPELL, 2004), and motives for playing games (Yee, 2006). Few studies, however, have explored the personality traits of online gamers. Teng (2008) identified personality differences between gamers and non-gamers, and Li and Yang (2005) investigated the link between personality and performance in games. However, no studies have examined the relationship between gamer personality and online game use, thereby revealing a knowledge gap in the literature. Research aimed at filling this gap is important because it improves our understanding of how individual personality affects human behaviour in an online gaming context.

The present study investigates the relationship between gamer personality and online game use. This study makes a unique contribution to the literature in several ways. First, Landers and Lounsbury (2006) investigated the link between personality and Internet use. Tosun and Lajunen (2010) then explored how personality impacts Internet relationships. The present study is in line with these works in increasing knowledge about how personality impacts online behaviour. However, because the term “Internet use” encompasses the use of various Internet applications (Landers & Lounsbury, 2006), research on overall Internet use may not be applicable to specific Internet applications; research on specific Internet applications is therefore necessary. This study is novel in that it addresses a new and popular Internet application: online games. Research on the link between personality and online game use may extend the applicability of the findings of Landers and Lounsbury (2006) and Tosun and Lajunen (2010) and encourage future research that continues to apply their findings to specific Internet applications.

Second, Correa, Hinsley, and De Zúñiga (2010) investigated the relationship between personality and social media use. Correa et al.’s (2010) findings increase our understanding of how personality facilitates online social activities. Although it is clear that social activities are favoured by online gamers (Griffiths et al., 2004), research is required to examine whether the findings of Correa et al. (2010) can be applied to the relationship between personality and online game use. Such an argument requires empirical evidence, and the present study goes a step beyond the work of Correa et al. (2010) by investigating how personality and online game use are correlated. Finally, recent gaming studies have focused on online game use. Lo, Wang, and Fang (2005) identified interpersonal relationships as a correlate of online game use. Williams, Yee, and Caplan (2008) further noted that gamer demographics (e.g., gender and age) and physical and mental health are correlates of online game use. Although these studies identified numerous correlates of online game use, the present study is unique in that it proposes and examines personality as a correlate of online game use, thereby determining novel predictors of online game use.

**Online Game Use**

Online game use is defined as the extent to which gamers engage in online game play. Online game use is frequently measured in terms of the hours per week spent playing games (Griffiths et al., 2004). Lo et al. (2005) further showed that reduced quality of interpersonal relationships and higher levels of social anxiety are correlates of online game use. Such findings reveal that online game use may be linked to some underlying and influential psychological sets, which are defined as personality traits. The belief in the influences of such personality traits motivated the present study’s investigation of relationships between gamer personalities and online game use.

Williams et al. (2008) addressed the link between online game use and demographics (such as gender, age, and race), physical and mental health, and motivation. Their findings revealed that females played online games slightly more than males, and adults played online games slightly more than youths. Notably, Williams
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