



Understanding motivation in internet gaming among Singaporean youth: The role of passion

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the motivation of young people in internet gaming using the dualistic model of passion. Path analysis was used to examine the relationships between the two types of passion: obsessive and harmonious passion, behavioral regulations, and flow. A total of 1074 male secondary school students from Singapore took part in the study. The results of the path analysis showed that external, introjected, and identified regulations positively predicted obsessive passion, while harmonious passion was predicted by identified and intrinsic regulations. Flow in digital gaming was predicted directly by harmonious passion, as well as indirectly through intrinsic regulation. This study supports the proposed dualistic model of passion in explaining young people's motivation in internet gaming.

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1. Introduction

Digital gaming has become immensely popular in recent years. Although players of online games come from all demographic groups and ages, Yee's (2006) online survey of Massively Multi-player Online (MMO) players revealed that a significant proportion of gamers (25% in his sample of over 30,000 gamers) all over the world are young people in their teens. In fact, some of the teenagers are spending more time playing games in cyber cafes than in schools or on school-related activities (Lo, Wang, & Fang, 2005). Clearly, the gaming environments have tremendous appeal and young people are highly motivated to engage in them. It is thus not surprising that a number of papers have been written on gamers' behavior and their motivation (e.g., Bartle, 1996; Ryan, Rigby & Przybylski, 2006; Wan & Chiou, 2006; Wang, Khoo, Liu & Divakaran, 2008; Yee, 2006). Nonetheless, a lot more can be done to help us understand the underlying psychological processes involved in teenage gamers' motivation, especially in terms of their passion and flow experience.

Vallerand and his colleagues (2003) proposed a dualistic model of passion that can help us understand players' motivation in digital gaming. In their conceptual framework, passion is defined as "a strong inclination towards an activity that one finds important, invests time in, and likes" (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 757). One important characteristic of passion is that the activity can be so 'self-

defining' that it becomes part of or internalized into the person's identity. For example, those who are passionate about playing basketball do not merely play the game; they are 'basketballers'. Likewise, those who have a passion for gaming do not just game; they call themselves 'gamers' or the names of their avatars (game characters) in the real world.

According to the dualistic model, there are two types of passion have been identified. Harmonious passion (HP) refers to the pursuit or engagement in an activity by choice and is in harmony with other activities in different domains. The internalization is autonomous or more self-determined. This type of passion is linked to positive outcomes during and after activity engagement. In comparison, obsessive passion (OP) is characterized as an internal pressure that forces a person to engage in his or her passionate activity and leads to conflicts with activities in other life domains. This results in a more controlled internalization of the activity into one's identity. This form of passion is linked to negative outcomes during and after activity engagement.

The processes of internalization stem from the self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Within this theory, Deci and Ryan (1985) outlined the Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) to explain a process of internalization through which individuals satisfy their three psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The need for autonomy is defined as the need to feel ownership over one's behavior. The need for competence refers to the need for being able to produce desired outcomes and experiencing mastery and effectiveness. The need for relatedness is the need to feel connected to others, to be able to care for and be cared for by others. To the extent to which the three psychological needs are being satisfied, a person may internalize an activity into HP or OP.

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In essence, the OIT assumes that as individuals try to rationalize the behavioral outcomes relevant to their need satisfaction, there is a shift from an external to internal locus of causality. The more internalized a behavioral regulation, the more it will be experienced as autonomous (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991).

In SDT, there are at least four types of behavioral regulations, each one reflecting a qualitatively different 'reason' for acting out the behavior in question. They are external, introjected, identified and intrinsic regulations. External regulation refers to behavior that is controlled by external means such as rewards or external authority. Introjected regulation refers to behavior that is internally controlling or self-imposed, such as acting out feelings of guilt avoidance, and is characterized by feelings of 'ought'. Identified regulation refers to behavior that is more self-determined according to one's choice or values. Although identified regulation can be autonomous, it is still considered as a form of extrinsic motivation. It is characterized by feelings of 'want' rather than 'ought'. Finally, intrinsically motivated behavior is behavior that is carried out solely for its own sake or for enjoyment. These four behavioral regulations are typically assessed through the Perceived Locus of Causality scale (Ryan & Connell, 1989).

Vallerand and his colleagues (Vallerand et al., 2003, 2008) proposed that HP results from the autonomous internalization of an activity, in which a person accepts that the activity is important for him or her and not is controlled by external rewards. Engagement in the activity is in full volition and not in conflict with other aspects of the person's life. With this type of passion, the person is free to choose to engage in the activity. There is no conflict between the passionate activity and his or her other life activities. Therefore, positive outcomes and emotion should result from HP. Studies have shown that HP leads to positive affect, concentration, satisfaction, and flow (Rip, Fortin, & Vallerand, 2006; Ryan & Connell, 1989; Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, & Deci, 1996).

In contrast, OP results from controlled internalization. In the internalization of OP, an individual feels compelled to engage in the activity (Vallerand et al., 2008). There is an external force or internal contingency that controls the person. OP leads to negative affect and conflict with other aspects of one's life. In terms of activity engagement, OP would lead to persistence in the activity even in the absence of positive emotions, or in the face of important personal costs such as poor academic results or damaged relationships. Studies have found that OP is related to negative emotions, rigid persistence, self-destructive behavior, and conflict between activities and other life aspects (Mageau, Vallerand, Rousseau, Ratelle, & Provencher, 2005; Ratelle, Vallerand, Mageau, Rousseau, & Provencher, 2004; Seguin-Levesque, Laliberte, Pelletier, Blanchard, & Vallerand, 2003; Vallerand et al., 2003).

The concept of flow or optimal experience has been applied in various domains including digital gaming (Wang et al., 2008). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) defines flow as the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter. It is a psychological state that is characterized by nine dimensions; a balance of challenge and skill, a merging of action and awareness, clear perceived goals, unambiguous feedback, total concentration on the task at hand, a sense of control, a loss of consciousness of self, a speeding up or slowing down of time, and autotelic experience. A state of flow is theorized to occur when these nine dimensions co-occur at high levels. At this state, people are totally unaware of their surroundings but are enjoying the task and having fun while doing the activity. Flow theory emphasises the importance of perceiving both the challenge and skills as balanced before flow can occur (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It occurs when a person perceives the challenge and his skill level are being balanced in an activity, the person enjoys the moment and experiences a sense of control, so there is an effortlessness of action resulting in a powerful intrinsic motivational force.

The links between flow and motivation have been well documented in psychological research. Flow has been closely linked to perceived competence (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 1989; Deci & Ryan, 1985). People with low perceived competence are likely to experience anxiety or boredom, depending on how much they value doing well in the activity. People with high perceived competence and efficacy are likely to report higher intrinsic motivation to perform in an activity (Ryan, 1982; Vallerand & Reid, 1984).

In a recent study, Wang and his colleagues (Wang et al., 2008) used cluster analysis to identify subgroups of young people with distinctive passion profiles on self-determined regulations, flow dispositions, affect and engagement time in gaming. It was found that gamers with high HP/OP profile had higher flow dispositions compared to gamers with average HP/OP and low HP/OP clusters. In addition, they found that the three clusters differed in terms of their behavioral regulations and other outcomes. Specifically, the high HP/OP cluster had more autonomous behavioral regulations, positive affect and engagement time compared to the other two clusters. The cluster analysis method used in the previous study focused on differences at an intra-individual level. That is, people were grouped together based on their responses to a group of variables with homogenous characteristics. It provided profiles of people with similar characteristics but not the relative contribution of each independent variable to a dependent variable. In order to extend the literature, the current study uses a variable-oriented approach which essentially groups variables on common underlying dimensions or factors, using structural equation modeling or path analysis. This approach allows the researchers to examine the relationships between one or more dependent variables and a set of independent variables.

Research in the dualistic model of passion has generally supported the existence of the two types of passion. Although the correlations between the two types of passion are generally moderate to high, results from partial correlations provide support that the two types of passion are associated with different affective experiences and outcomes (Vallerand et al., 2006). No studies have tested the hypothesized relationships between the dualistic model of passion and behavioral regulations. To bridge this empirical gap, this study tested the hypothesized structural model as shown in Fig. 1. According to SDT, external, introjected and identified regulations are all controlled forms of regulation. Hence it was hypothesized that these three types of regulations would lead to OP. However, identified regulation can also be regarded as the most self-determined of the extrinsic regulations. Thus, it was hypothesized that identified regulation, together with intrinsic regulation, would result in HP. In addition, HP and intrinsic regulation would lead to flow.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants and procedures

A total of 1074 male students from six secondary schools in Singapore participated in the survey. There were 622 students from Secondary One and 452 students from Secondary Two. All the students ranged in age from 12 to 14 years. Permission for the study was sought through the principals. Students were told that participation in the survey was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any time. No student refused to take part. Questionnaires were administered in quiet classroom conditions. When completing the questionnaire, participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and were encouraged to ask questions if necessary.

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