



## Full length article

## How passion and impulsivity influence a player's choice of videogame, intensity of playing and time spent playing

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 18 May 2016

Received in revised form

9 September 2016

Accepted 16 September 2016

## Keywords:

Harmonious passion

Obsessive passion

Functional impulsivity

Dysfunctional impulsivity

Videogames

MMORPG

## ABSTRACT

Videogames have received much attention in addiction research due to their popularity and frequent use. However, few studies have addressed the effect of passion and impulsivity in gamers. Therefore, the aim of the current study was to examine the influence of passion and impulsivity on the intensity of play, playing time, and choice of Massive Multiplayer Online Role Play Game (MMORPG) vs. non-MMORPG. A sample of 630 university students (40.7% Colombian, 59.3% Spanish) responded to a questionnaire on gaming habits, the Passion scale and the Inventory of Impulsivity. Results showed that men preferred sports and MMORPG games and women played more simulation and strategy games and mini-games. The predictor variables for Intensity of Play were: playing MMORPG games, harmonious and obsessive passion and dysfunctional impulsivity. The predictor variables for Hours of Play were: age, harmonious passion and dysfunctional impulsivity. Age, both passions, and functional impulsivity predicted preference for MMORPGs. Impulsivity and passion help explain how players engage with videogames. Dysfunctional impulsivity is related to higher hours and intensity of play and functional impulsivity is a defining feature of MMORPG players. The presence of both passions was related to a higher intensity of play, however only harmonious passion was positively associated with playing for a longer time. These results suggest that the different types of passion and impulsivity have distinct influences on the manner of game play and the experience of that play.

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In 2014 there were an estimated 1.78 billion videogame players around the world regularly spending hours playing videogames in genres such as action, sport, simulation, adventure, strategy, puzzles, mini-games and/or role play (AEVI, 2015; Baniqued et al., 2013; Connolly, Boyle, MacArthur, Hainey, & Boyle, 2012; ESA, 2015; Fuster, 2015). Among these, Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) have generated a serious concern about their problematic use (Beranuy, Carbonell, & Griffiths, 2012; Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Smahel, Blinka, & Ledabyl, 2008) which has led to the inclusion of Internet Gaming Disorder in the section of conditions for further study in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Petry et al., 2014).

In MMORPG gamers a higher prevalence of problematic use has been identified, more so than among players of other types of

videogames (Collins, Freeman, & Chamarro-Premuzic, 2012; Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Li, Liao, & Khoo, 2013; Mentzoni et al., 2011) and the growing popularity of MMORPGs has focused researchers' attention on describing and better understanding the gamer profile. College students and workers prefer MMORPGs (Yee, 2006b), and men play more than women and are more likely to exhibit excessive play (Greenberg, Sherry, Lachlan, Lucas, & Holmstrom, 2008; Griffiths, Davies, & Chappell, 2004).

Although it was considered that an excessive player is one who plays over 5 h daily (Griffiths et al., 2004), this is not the only indicator of problematic use; identification with avatars, loss of control, gender, and consequences on everyday life are also relevant factors (King, Haagsma, Delfabbro, Gradisar, & Griffiths, 2013; Ko, Yen, Chen, Chen, & Yen, 2005; Smahel et al., 2008). For some players the motivation to play is entertainment, for others it is profit, and for still others it is fulfillment of needs unmet in other aspects of daily life. The present day spectrum of videogamers - from professional players in multiplayer videogame competitions (eSports) to casual mobile phone players - highlights the wide

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variety of gamer profiles in the videogame world (Juul, 2009). Learning what kind of player profile is drawn to which kinds of games and gaming styles can shed light on where and when problematic attachment to videogame play is likely to develop.

Style of play is an important aspect of understanding video-gaming behavior (Feldman, Monteserin, & Amandi, 2014). Players with intensive gaming styles have different skills and behaviors than novices and casual gamers because they are likely to possess greater gaming-related knowledge and experience, and therefore know the roles and rules of the game better and develop more game-relevant abilities. Intensive gamers are also more likely to report feeling that videogame play is an important part of their identity (Adams, 2002; McCreery, Schrader, & Krach, 2011; Zhong, 2011). However, not all people who play videogames consider themselves “gamers” (Duggan, 2015), and this distinction is important in understanding the role that games play in a player's life. For example, unlike intensive gamers, novice players are motivated primarily by the desire for diversion, relaxation and entertainment, and are less likely to identify with the game on a deeper level. Understanding the motivations behind videogame play and the sociopsychological characteristics behind the motivations is important for predicting and studying problematic use.

The study on videogames has revealed that passion and impulsivity are important factors in gaming behavior. Vallerand et al. (2003) designed the Dual Model of Passion, defining passion as a strong inclination toward an activity that is liked, is important to the individual and in which time is invested. The model identifies two types of passion - harmonious and obsessive - each associated with different outcomes and experiences (Vallerand et al., 2003, 2007). Harmonious passion is caused by the free acceptance of an activity which is in harmony with other aspects of the person's life. Obsessive passion is an uncontrollable urge to engage in the activity with a rigid persistence that creates intra- and interpersonal conflicts (Vallerand & Verner-Filion, 2013; Vallerand et al., 2007). Harmonious passion contributes to raising the game performance and enjoyment of the game (Przybylski, Weinstein, Ryan, & Rigby, 2009) while obsessive passion favors a disordered pattern of play, more tension after playing and less enjoyment, along with negative affect (Lafrenière, Vallerand, Donahue, & Lavigne, 2009), and the difficulty to regulate time spent playing (Fuster, Chamarro, Carbonell, & Vallerand, 2014).

In the attempt to understand the player profile, impulsivity has also been studied in relation to videogame play (Choi et al., 2014; Collins et al., 2012; Metcalf & Pammmer, 2014). The general theories of impulsivity have to do with the tendency to act without forethought and the negative consequences of that behavior (Eysenck, 1993). Studies suggest that impulsivity influences risky behaviors, such as pathological gambling, in that players cannot resist the impulse to gamble despite negative consequences for themselves and their families (Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002; Maccallum, Blaszczynski, Ladouceur, & Nower, 2007). In video-game research, it is suggested that MMORPG players have low dysfunctional impulsivity (Collins et al., 2012), in contrast to the action game players who have higher dysfunctional impulsivity (Metcalf & Pammmer, 2014). However, more research is needed to support and elaborate on these conclusions.

To Dickman (1990, 2000) the consequences of impulsivity are not always negative. The author proposes a multidimensional model of impulsivity based on the relationship between functional impulsivity, dysfunctional impulsivity, and cognitive functioning. The way the two types of impulsivity interact in the context of making quick decisions determines their consequences and the individual's response to them (Maccallum et al., 2007). Dickman (1990) describes functional impulsives as individuals who are willing to take risks, make quick decisions, and have the traits of

enthusiasm, adventurousness, and higher activity. They are prone to making errors due to faster processing times, however, they can take advantage of this processing style and performance accuracy is often higher overall because their sheer output of responses is much greater (due to faster reactions). In contrast, dysfunctional impulsives are characterized by less conscientiousness and more disorderliness than functional impulsives, and while they have the similar tendency to make quick decisions and errors in the processing of information, Dickman (1990) suggests that this is the case because they are unable to carry out effective slow and methodical processing under stress.

Considering the arguments above, the specific objectives of this study were twofold:

1. The first objective was to analyze whether it is possible to predict the intensity of play and hours of play according to passion and impulsivity, controlling for age, gender, and type of game. According to Fuster et al. (2014) it is expected that both harmonious and obsessive passion will predict intensity and hours of game play. According to Metcalf and Pammmer (2014) dysfunctional impulsivity will also be a predictor of the two measures.
2. The second objective was to predict the preference for MMORPG vs. non-MMORPG gaming according to passion and impulsivity, controlling for age, gender, the intensity of play and time spent playing. According to Fuster et al. (Fuster et al., 2014), it is expected that both harmonious and obsessive passion and functional impulsivity will predict MMORPG use. According to Collins et al. (2012) functional impulsivity will be a predictor of MMORPG use.

## 1. Method

### 1.1. Participants

The study participants were 630 students from the Universidad de Ibagué and the Universidad de Tolima in Colombia (47.6%) and the Universitat Ramon Llull in Spain (52.2%). Of these, 82.6% were men and their average age was 19.53 years (SD = 2.43, range 16–31) (Table 1). All participants were active gamers over the past six months. Participants did not receive any remuneration or academic incentives for their participation. Students participated voluntarily and signed an informed consent. The confidentiality and anonymity of responses was guaranteed. Students answered

**Table 1**  
Socio-demographic variables and playing habits.

Variables	Gender					
	Male		Female		n	%
	n	%	n	%		
Country of origin						
Colombia	212	40.7	88	80.7	300	47.6
Spain	309	59.3	21	19.3	330	52.2
Hours of play						
1–2	123	23.6	11	10.1	134	21.3
2–5	232	44.5	55	50.5	287	45.6
>5	166	31.9	43	39.4	207	33.2
Genre of game						
Sport	179	34.4	16	14.7	195	30.9
Action	123	24	27	24.8	150	23.8
Simulation	43	8.3	23	21.1	66	10.4
Strategy	41	7.9	11	10.1	52	8.2
MMORPG	119	22.8	13	11.9	132	20.9
Mini-games	16	3.1	19	17.4	35	5.5

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