

“What a girl wants”: Female playing patterns in Internet- based games

Feel free to contact:

Daniel Schultheiss

Ilmenau University of
Technology (Germany)

daniel.schultheiss@tu-ilmenau.de

Relevance

While video gaming – especially Internet gaming – has grown in population in recent years, one population of nontraditional gamers that has exploded in recent years is female gamers. In the US forty percent of all gamers are female and female gamers demographically are the fastest growing group of gamers (ESA, 2010). Not surprising is that girls and women are highly motivated to seek out entertainment and that they tend to expect high-quality information and communication technologies.

The current study asks specifically for female gamers' usage behaviors with Internet-based video games. The focus is specifically on these games because of their social nature (Smith & Collock, 1999) and on their relative ease of ownership and operation (Schultheiss, Bowman & Schumann, 2008); unlike other types of video games, Internet games do not require expensive hardware or deep technological knowledge to play, only a modest computer, an Internet connection, and a desire to be entertained. So there is a broad base of people who are able to use them.

Object(s) of investigation

Browser-based games (persistent) are played via a Web browser and thus can be played on any computer with an Internet connection. These games are usually multiplayer, although this is not a requirement. They are mostly free, but many offer 'for-pay' features, such as advertising-free interfaces and more user-friendly game options. Famous examples of long-term browser-based games include Planetarion, Kingdom of Loathing, or Travian.

Client games (persistent) exist in different variations. Most common among them are the MMORPGs (e.g., Silkroad Online, Rappelz.), although MMOs in several other themes have become increasingly popular (e.g., Navy Field). These games are designed as persistent virtual worlds, where gamers can log on and play at any time so long as they have the proprietary client software.

There are literally millions of **casual games** on the Internet. They are typified by simple graphics and controls, and usually have very short-term objectives that can be met in a matter of minutes. These games are not persistent, and can be played online via browsers and offline as downloadable games. Examples of Web sites that contain casual games are slingo.com and realarcade.com.

Method

Survey data of female players (N ~ 1,900) was collected online worldwide, and compared to a random sample of same size of male gamers from a larger data set of respondents (N ~ 10,000). Variables examined include standard socio-demographics (age, origin, occupation, etc.), different types of Internet-based video games (casual, persistent, single-player and multi-player games) as well as comparisons between female and male players.

Sample

- N = 3784
- Origin: mostly EU and USA
- Age: \bar{X} 28.31 (SD = 12.6)
- Gender: 50 % female, 50 % male
- Occupation: 42 % scholars / students, 39 % employed
- Relationship: 49 % in relation / married, 47 % without relation

Results

Results show on the one hand that female players prefer less complex games, mostly browser-based games. 66 per cent of the female participants use persistent browser-based games and 46 per cent use browser-based single-player casual games at least one a week. On the other hand female players use single-player games more frequently compared to the more social multi-player games than male players.

In addition, female players showed significantly higher usage times in both types of browser-based games. Female players pay more money for browser-based game types and they show a higher willingness to pay for client games and casual browser-based games than male players.

The results have implications for the economic impact of the over-looked segment of the video game audience – female players. As advertising is still a pillar in their business models companies could make use of the higher usage time as females could spend more time to view advertisements. The higher expenses and willingness to pay of female players could lead e.g. to gender specific in-game items as the economic potential has not been exhausted when we see a difference of 4 to 14 € between their expenses and their willingness to pay.

Usage time, frequency and expenses

		Browser-based games (persistent)	Client games (persistent)	Casual games (browser-based, single player)
Frequency (at least once a week)	♀	66 %	21 %	46 %
	♂	79 %	28 %	19 %
Usage time (per day during week)	♀	2.86 h**	2.73 h	1.83 h**
	♂	2.50 h**	2.86 h	1.05 h**
Usage time (per day weekends)	♀	3.55 h *	4.08 h	2.57 h**
	♂	3.25 h *	4.54 h	1.37 h**
Money paid	♀	2.76 € *	4.29 €	0.74 € *
	♂	2.01 € *	5.95 €	0.24 € *
Willingness to pay	♀	12.13 €	8.85 € *	14.35 € *
	♂	12.45 €	12.08 € *	15.79 € *

* p < .05; ** p < .01

‘Take-Home Message’ and ‘To be continued...’

As the results especially on the usage behaviors and the economic potential are relatively new our discussion delivers important knowledge in the context of a larger program of research on female Internet gamers. Needless to say that there are limitations that need to be addressed and cleared out in future studies. The biggest is the sample quality. As the sample is self-selected other studies could find contrary results. So one needs a more representative sampling method to strength all results. Another limitation is that the groups of female and male players are very heterogeneous regarding e.g. the age of players. To deliver qualified results regarding different age groups one would need a sample which covers all sub groups in an adequate number.

