

The Flow Phenomenon to the Loyalty of Game Players in Online Games: Phenomenology Study

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ABSTRACT

The reason why gamers (online game players) play game is because they want to have fun or drive boredom away. However, sometimes they could not control their selves to stop playing games. This study was conducted to see the phenomenon of flow and how it formed a high loyalty to play games. This was a phenomenology study using qualitative method. Furthermore, the instrument used in this study was Development of the Game Addiction for Adults (GAIA). 3 individuals in the age of 20-30 years old who have been playing online games for more than two years were taken as the subjects of the study. The result of this study was all of the subjects experienced flow when they were playing games. They ignore their obligations and games have disrupted their personal lives.

Keywords: *Flow, Loyalty, Gamers, Phenomenology*

The number of game online players was increasing day by day. Gamers are constructed as individuals who are very optic and anti-social because they are isolated from the real life (Cole, 2007). They are physically and mentally disturbed because they have been addicted to the games and have no interest in schools or works. Meanwhile, the most visible physical effect that can be seen is in the eyes. (Silvadha, 2012)

Before they become addicted, most of gamers will experience “Flow” condition. This condition happens when someone truly enjoys his activity, so he can internally be absorbed to what he is doing. If an individual experiences Flow, so abilities and challenges will be balance (Sheehan, 2010).

Flow is a condition that individuals feel time passes so quickly when they are doing something. It can happen when someone truly enjoys doing an activity. Flow derives from internal encouragement to carry out something without any coercion, order or external reward. So, an individual enjoys his activity although he knows that it can be risky for himself (Glassman, W.E, & Marilyn, H. 2009).

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Received: February 3, 2019; Revision Received: March 24, 2019; Accepted: March 31, 2019

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A research conducted by Sheehan, Larry (2010) concerning to the relation between Flow condition and physical activity and play showed that an individual who does a task voluntarily because of internal encouragement without any reward would experience this condition. The willingness of an individual to play games was consciously chosen to participate in physical activity by using technology. Flow condition happened when a game player was happy to play in a certain time. After experiencing Flow for a long time, a loyalty feeling would slowly be triggered within gamers.

In this research, loyalty meant a desire to do an activity over and over again. There was nothing wrong with having a desire to play games. But, the problem was when the loyalty of gamers to play game was too excessive. Many of them ignored their tasks or obligations because of games. Gamers with high loyalty would certainly hinder their daily activities and cause health problems because they were lack of rest. It was hard for gamers to stop playing games, so they had no time for eating or taking a rest.

The way to find out how loyal gamers were to a game could be known by using theories; one of them was by using Flow Theory in a personality perspective. The theory used in this research was according to Flow theory by Csikszentmihalyi (1997). Flow described a subjective experience when skills and success look so easy although it required a lot of physical and mental energy. Subjective experience of flow increased by doing several activities.

There are four aspects of Flow according to Csikszentmihalyi (1997), they are: (1) *Fluency of Performance*. This happened when an individual felt that he could run all activities automatically and smoothly. He could control his actions and fully concentrated to the activity that he was doing; (2) *Absorption by Activity*. An individual could finish all tasks given and felt that the time passed so quickly because he was too immersed during doing his activity; (3) Perception about the importance of assignments. An individual felt that his activity was very important and brought advantages to him; (4) Perception of Conformity between Challenge and Skill. An individual felt that challenge given was in accordance with ability and skill he had.

There were several categories according to gamers' dedication to online games (Boys, 2011), they were: (1) Newbie. This term is usually addressed to beginners. Newbie is usually abbreviated as noob or newb; (2) Casual Gamers. It is used for those who play casual games, or those who rarely play games. Casual games are designed for games who wanted to play easy games in a short session, or more. (3) Core Gamers. This is a term for players who have bigger interest to play games than casual gamers and love to play many kinds of games. Core gamers enjoy the game they play but may not complete every game; (4) Hardcore Gamers. This is the experts of games. Gamers who are called Hardcore tend to increase action, competition, join gaming community, and have complete hardware and software for gaming.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The samples used in this study were 3 individuals aged 20 to 30 years old who had played a certain game for more than two years. This study was conducted during 14 days to observe the behavior of each individual.

Instruments

- 1. The first instrument used in this study was interview guide which was a guided interview.** Hanurawan (2016) explained that a guided interview is done by interviewer according to interview guidelines to discuss specific topics and ask open questions to the participants. It was a qualitative and semi-structured, so both interviewer and interviewee could relax during the interview.
- 2. Development of the Game Addiction Inventory for Adults (GAIA).** This instrument consisted of 31 questions to identify how the subjects felt toward games (Wong U & David C. H, 2013).

Procedure

This was a qualitative research with a phenomenological model because this study was based on a phenomenon. The objective of this research was to know the way gamers interact with online games. Phenomenological research model was an approach of a phenomenon (Hanurawan, 2016).

The study was conducted by two stages. The first stage was screening to choose the subjects by conducting an interview. After finding the subjects, they built a commitment to take part in this research until everything was done. Meanwhile, the second stage was conducting a deeper interview. Each subject was interviewed about when he began to play game, how he felt during play games, and the reason why he played games. Then, they were given behavior sheets in playing games during 14 days. For 14 days, the subjects had to write down how their feeling during playing games, the duration of playing games, and the reasons why they play games on that sheet.

RESULTS

Subject description

There were three subjects in this study, they were male and were senior students in different universities. Those three subjects had been playing online games for more than three years. Here were the details:

Subject 1

AT was 22 years old and had been playing games since he was in high school. Currently, He was in the twelfth semester in a university. AT played more than one game which were Mobile Legend (an adventure and battle game also could be played on cellphone) and Fifa (sport game and played on computer

Subject 2

AD was 25 years old. He began to play games since he was a freshman and his friends mostly were gamers. Currently, he was in the twelfth semester in a university. AD played many kinds of online games such as Mobile Legend, Ludo, Persona 5, NieR: Automata, and Hoizon Zero Dawn. The genres of most of the games that AD played were adventure and fantasy. AD lost his father not long ago. He played games on mobile phone and on PS4.

Subject 3

The initial name of the subject 3 was I. I was 23 years old. He was in the last semester of a university. He was active playing only one game but with deeper intentions. He played Fifa. He even bought Console or additional equipment imported from abroad which was super expensive. I could play game for three days nonstop and ignored his tasks as a university student.

Aspect of fluency of performance

This aspect discussed about the feeling that the actions carried out run automatically and smoothly, the feeling that they could control their actions and fully focused on doing something. Here were the results of the three subjects:

Subject 1

From the interview with subject 1, AT, it was found that he truly enjoyed playing games. He did not realize how time passed so quickly because he was very happy and was too immersed playing games. AT wanted to win and he believed that he had good skill in playing games. He challenged himself to upgrade into the higher level. AT could focus and fully concentrate to play games because he enjoyed so much the game he played.

Subject 2

AD did not really open up telling about himself. He only played a game to forget problems he had or if there were many things he needed to think about. AD did not have a desire to win. He was more interested in simple game and a game that gave him joy. However, when AD played a game, he was too immersed in it, so he was not aware that time passed so quickly.

Subject 3

According to the interview with I, it was known that I had been playing games since he was kid and had understood the game patterns in accordance with its genres. I played popular games because those could challenge him to upgrade his level. In addition, sometimes he was encouraged by his friends to play games.

Aspect of absorption by activity

This aspect discussed about the feeling of gamers in finishing task given so they were completely immersed and were not aware about the time. Here are the results of those three subjects:

Subject 1

AT conveyed that he played more than one games, but he preferred war and soccer game. He asked his friends the way how to improve his skill in playing games. He was not aware that he spent so much time for playing games yet happy because he could make many friends through games. AT was sure that he could win the game he played.

Subject 2

AD only played game when he thought it could be fun. He usually played games together with his friends in order to improve his skill. Sometimes, if he truly wanted an item, he had no doubt to buy Gem (diamond) using his money. Gem is the fastest way to get rare items of a game.

Subject 3

I only played popular and fun games. He had big desire to win over a new game. Moreover, he bought a Console game imported from abroad for 35 million rupiahs in order to be able to play new games. He could spend days to play games only. I often played games together with his friends so he would find it really fun and be immersed to that game.

Aspect of perception regarding to the importance of assignments

This aspect discussed about the important and useful activities carried out by gamers. Here were the results of the three subjects:

Subject 1

AT played games more often than he did his tasks. He ignored his responsibility to finish his assignments yet realized what he did. However, AT thought that playing games was useful for him because it brought joy and fun. By playing games, AT could make many friends who had the same hobby. His friends would come to help him if he had a problem. AT would not get involved in the environment that he thought did not suit him. He had big desire to win. He even tried so hard to win over a bet because he wanted to get benefit from playing games.

Subject 2

AD realized that playing games continuously would surely affect him in doing his school assignments. But, he chose to play game and ignored his tasks although he knew what effects the games could bring if he played games too much. AD considered a game as an entertainment for him when he had problems. Playing games was better than consuming alcohol or drugs. AD preferred fun games that could bring him joy and made him forget the problems he had.

Subject 3

I preferred playing games rather than finishing his school assignments. He could run a business through games by playing it continuously up until to the maximum level, then he sold his account. By doing that, game gave him benefits. I did not really care about school assignments or tasks although he knew that games have made his activity lecture hampered.

Aspects of perception of conformity between challenge and skill

This aspect discussed about the feelings of challenge when they played according to their skills and abilities.

Subject 1

AT felt that the challenge he got from games made him became motivated to increase his level. He only played games with friends who he considered had the same level as his. Furthermore, AT thought that people's point of view about him was very important because when people thought that his level was high, they would start giving him rewards. AT believed that his skill is good and was sure to win the games he played.

Subject 2

AT thought that his skill was quite good to play certain games. He was not so challenged to win over the games, instead of trying to find some fun to make his negative thoughts went away. He was also encouraged by his friends to play, but he would only play if he had willingness to join them.

Subject 3

I had a deeper intensity to play than the other two subjects. He strongly believed that he had very good skill and ability to play games. Furthermore, he challenged himself to play the newest future of games in the next level. He thought when his friends asked him to play games, it was because his pride. When he refused to join them, it would decrease his pride.

The results of this study showed that two subjects, AT and I, were hardcore gamers. Hardcore is categorized as the gamers who tend to improve action, competition, complexity, gaming community, and following the development of software and hardware. The motivation of AT to play game was because he was encouraged by his friends, for instance by betting.

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AT only played games with those who had the same level or higher level than him. Meanwhile, the motivation of I to play game was because of his pride. He always said yes when his friends asked him to join them playing games. That was because he was afraid that his pride would hurt and they considered him as a loser. Subject AD was a Core. It is a gamer who has bigger desire to play more than one game. Core gamer enjoys the game but may not complete every game played. This was in accordance with AD who played many games on his mobile phone, computer, and PS4 for having fun.

Those three subjects conveyed that they did not realize how much time they have spent to play games, especially subject AT and I, they could play games for days nonstop without sleeping and only took a break while waiting for their turn to play. This condition surely affected their health and performance to socialize or do school assignments. However, AD only played games for fun. But, sometimes he also was not aware how much time he has spent for games. He had no intention to win because he played only if he had problems. While AT and I was obsessed to win and improve their level.

The three subjects benefited differently from games. For AT, he could make many friends who had the same hobby through games. For AD, games brought him joy and fun and made him forget his problems. For I, he could run a business through games by selling his account that has reached the maximum level. AT and I needed attention from others. They played games to make friends and got encouragement from their friends. AT and I believed in their skills and abilities. The motivation of AT is to increase level and to get rewards/ recognition from their friends. Meanwhile, I won the games he played to sell his accounts if he got bored. On the other hand, AD thought his skill is good enough to overcome defeat.

DISCUSSION

The result of the study showed that the three subjects who were gamers felt that time passed so quickly when playing games. They had different intensities. Subject 1 and 3 were hardcore gamers while subject 2 was a core gamer. Subject 1 and 3 had more intensity in playing than subject 2.

The motivation of these two subjects was bigger than subject 2 who played games only for having fun because of the encouragement from his friends (internal and external). The use of Flow theory by Csikszentmihalyi (1997) stated that an individual who experienced Flow could easily do something although it is risky or complicated. When playing games, the subjects felt challenged by complicated games because they could measure their skills in playing those games. There were four aspects used in this study, they were aspect of fluency of performance, aspect of absorption by activity, Aspect of Perception Regarding to the Importance of Assignments, and Aspects of Perception of Conformity between Challenge and Skill.

Aspect Fluency of Performance was in accordance with the theme of this study. A gamer felt that time passed so quickly when played games they liked. This happened because they focused and concentrated fully to the games they were playing. In aspect of Absorption by Activity, gamers were confident to finish an “adventure” in a game.

Aspect of perception regarding to the importance of assignments discussed about gamers who thought that playing games was important to them in order to get recognition from their friends. If they could complete the mission of the most difficult game with the best result, they would be praised by their friends. Gamers felt that playing games was challenging.

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This was because gamers succeeded to complete one game level and would continue to the higher level. The higher the level of a game, the more difficult and challenging the gamers would face. Most of gamers felt that their skills were improved if they played games continuously. This condition made them wanted to play games again and again in order to improve their levels. If their levels were improved, they would be satisfied.

On the aspect of fluency of performance, the three subjects felt that time passed so quickly when they play games. They focused to complete complicated games in order to get items or improve to the higher level. Subject 1 and 3 were confident about their skills and abilities, while subject 2 was not as confident as the other two subjects. Losing in playing games was not a big deal for him.

On the aspect of perception of the importance of assignments, the three subjects thought that playing games was more fun than doing school assignments or attending lectures. Meanwhile, on the last aspect which was Perception of Conformity between Challenge and Skill, all subjects were challenged when play games. Subject 2 did not really care about the skills that he had because he played games only for fun. However, subject 1 was very concerned about the skills he had to upgrade his level and to win the bet. Subject 3 was very concerned about his skills because he had intention to sell his accounts; only then games were beneficial for him.

CONCLUSION

The result of this study can be concluded that the loyalty of gamers when they play online games can trigger Flow in gamers. All subjects of this study experience Flow because of their loyalty to online games. If this condition continuously happens, it will affect the performance of the subjects in doing their activities. Moreover, it will also cause the physical health of the subjects such as eye pain because they play games for days nonstop.

Subject 2 has his own motivation to play games because he plays games only for fun and he can forget his sadness of losing his father through games. He does not care about level or the skills he has. Meanwhile, subject 3 had strong motivation to play games. He even buys game equipment and always updates the information about the newest game.

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Acknowledgements

The author(s) profoundly appreciate all the people who have successfully contributed in ensuring this paper in place. Their contributions are acknowledged however their names cannot be mentioned.

Conflict of Interest

The authors carefully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

How to cite this article: U R Umami, Inastasya, Latipun (2019). The Flow Phenomenon to the Loyalty of Game Players in Online Games: Phenomenology Study. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 7(1), 961-968. DIP:18.01.109/20190701, DOI:10.25215/0701.109