

Repeated Pleasures: Motivations for Replaying Story-driven Games

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INTRODUCTION

Anecdotally, it is common for people to revisit video games that they have played before. However, relatively little is known about how video games might affect their audience differently upon the second, third, or n th play-through. As part of a larger study on replaying experiences, we collected self-report data (valid $n = 344$) about psychological traits and preferences related to replay motivations. In this abstract, we discuss repeated media experiences and describe our current research into this area.

REPEATED MEDIA AND GAMING EXPERIENCES

While selective exposure is one of the oldest and most well-established areas of communication research, the phenomenon of *repeated* media selection has received relatively little attention from scholars. In general, people tend to show a preference for novelty when asked to choose between possible activities, and this bias seems to reflect underestimation of expected enjoyment (O'Brien, 2019). However, in early work, Tannenbaum (1985) was surprised to discover that watching repeats of the same television episode was both common and highly enjoyable. Now, 40 years later, the selection of repeated media experiences in the face of novel options remains poorly understood (Shackelford et al., in press).

With video games, specifically, there is some research on “replayability,” but most examines how design choices relate to players’ replay intentions or anticipated enjoyment. Among the studies that focus more on player experience than design, Roth et al. (2012) investigated “replay value” by measuring players’ feelings after two exposures to a conversation-based game and found that the second exposure saw increases in experiential variables like presence and flow. However, their study did

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not examine selectivity (i.e., preferences or intentions) directly. In contrast, Jin (2011) found that self-reported replay intentions were predicted by the experience of flow. Similarly, Gamito and Martinho (2021) found that drawing attention to the consequences of players' in-game choices increased positive affect and replaying. Altogether, the limited literature suggests that gameplay influences players' replay intentions, but questions remain about the underlying mechanisms.

To this end, less is known about how player characteristics influence replay intentions. It is well established that players have different underlying motivations when it comes to selecting games (De Grove et al., 2016). Further, players have individual psychological differences that influence both selection (Potard et al., 2020), and how they experience ludic and narrative components during gameplay (Seger & Potts, 2012). Recent work found that the narrative features of video games promote mental engagement with the game asynchronously after gameplay (Yoshimura & Chauveau, 2025). Others theorized that this asynchronous narrative engagement contributes to interest in re-consuming the same or similar content (Ulusoy et al., 2022). Given that narrative engagement is strongly determined by audience traits (Green & Appel, 2024), we propose that such traits may influence replay behavior. In the present study, we focused on two known determinants of narrative engagement: trait transportability (i.e., the propensity to become immersed and highly engaged with narratives) and imaginative engagement (i.e., the propensity to apply imagination and inference while processing narratives). To begin to understand replaying, we propose to examine the associations (or lack thereof) among individual differences, motivations, and general replay preferences.

RQ: To what extent are gaming motivations, trait transportability, trait imaginative engagement, and gaming experience and skill level associated with the intention to replay games?

THE CURRENT STUDY

As part of a larger study investigating replaying, we included measures of general gaming motivations and psychological traits. These measures were presented via questionnaire during the first stage of an online longitudinal experiment (i.e., before the manipulation). The sample (valid $n = 344$) was gathered via the student subject pool at a large European university.

Replay Experience

General replay intentions were defined as the likelihood that participants would choose a game that they have played before compared to something novel. This was measured using a single item ("When you want to play a game, how likely is it that you will choose a game that you have played before?") on a 5-point scale anchored by 1 ("not at all likely") to 5 ("extremely likely"). To explore replaying further, we asked three open-ended questions: (1) about which games participants replayed, (2) whether participants made different decisions in subsequent play-throughs, and (3) which factors influenced their decision to replay games. These open-ended questions will be analyzed inductively to explore participants' experiences with replaying games.

Gaming Motivations

We adopted the digital games motivation scale (De Grove et al., 2016), which measured habit, entertainment, agency, escapism, narrative, pastime, performance, and social motivations. In addition, competition motivations were measured using three items from the scale by Kahn et al. (2015), while eudaimonia, nostalgia, game mechanic, and aesthetic motivations were measured with six items used by Possler et al. (2024).

Transportability and Imaginative Engagement

Transportability, defined as the tendency to be transported by narratives, was measured using the scale by Dal Cin et al. (2004). This scale is commonly used and has been applied to video games (Christy & Fox, 2016).

The concept of transportation is well-known among researchers. However, less well-known is transportation's counterpart, performance (the extent to which the reader adds to the story through their own imagination or inferences; Gerrig, 1993). Because interactivity demands decision-making and a higher degree of self-involvement, we expected that inferential and imaginative activities are especially consequential to gameplay effects (Green & Jenkins, 2014). In this study, we use the construct of imaginative engagement, which has been proposed to reflect individual differences in the propensity for performance. Imaginative engagement, defined as the tendency to engage with a story by adding to what is presented via imagination or inference, was measured with the scale by Black et al. (2021).

Gaming Experience and Skill

General gaming experience was measured with two questions ("I like playing video games"; "I would consider myself to be a gamer"; Martey et al., 2014). In addition, participants estimated how many days and hours they spent playing games in an average week. The video game skill scale was used to measure participants' self-assessment of their familiarity/interest with video games (Bracken & Skalski, 2006).

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