Exploring player behavior and motivations to continue playing Pokémon GO

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify the determinants of players’ continuance intentions to play Pokémon GO (PG) and ultimately make in-app purchases, mainly from the perspectives of psychological, social and gaming motivational factors.

Design/methodology/approach – The research model was empirically assessed based on 362 validated responses from current players of PG in Malaysia. Analysis was carried out using the partial least squares path modeling method.

Findings – The results indicated that enjoyment, network externalities, community involvement and the need-to-collect significantly influence players’ continuance intention. Furthermore, the findings reveal that flow and nostalgia have indirect effects on players’ continuance intention, which in turn significantly influences their purchase intention.

Originality/value – This study provides empirical support for an integrated model for understanding the antecedents of the players’ behavioral intentions that incorporates psychological, social and gaming motivational factors in the context of an augmented reality mobile game.

Keywords Behavioural theories, Virtual purchases, Technology adoption, Augmented reality

1. Introduction

The advent of various mobile gaming technologies and rapid improvements in mobile broadband networks has opened up new opportunities and possibilities for the thriving mobile games industry. One of the most recent developments has been the growing popularity of augmented reality (AR) mobile games. AR is defined as a technique that displays virtual content superimposed upon real-life objects (Tan et al., 2015). AR technology allows virtual objects to be superimposed upon or composited with the real world (Azuma, 1997). AR is used in a wide array of applications in a number of fields, including education, medical procedures, manufacturing, marketing, entertainment and tourism (Kim and Hyun, 2016; Ko et al., 2013).

Pokémon GO (PG) offers a new gaming experience for players by using a smartphone’s Global Positioning System to enable a location-based AR environment where the players must physically move in order to progress in the game (Niantic, 2016). The interactive AR features and physical activity elements make PG different from other mobile games and turned it into a global craze. In fact, it was ranked as the most downloaded game app in the Apple App and Google Play stores in 2016 (Hollister, 2017). The game recorded 21 million daily active users in the USA, beating the previous record holder, Candy Crush Saga (Himanshu, 2016). PG is further