Multiple sequential mediation in an extended uses and gratifications model of augmented reality game Pokémon Go

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the mechanism by which uses and gratification (U&G) constructs predict continuance intention to play (ContInt) the augmented reality game Pokémon Go (PG), through multiple serial mediation technique, with enjoyment and flow as mediators. The model also integrates other motivational factors specific to PG, namely, network externality and nostalgia and investigates the process by which they influence ContInt through players’ inherent need-to-collect animated monsters and online community involvement, respectively.
Design/methodology/approach – The model was tested using 362 validated responses from an online survey of PG players in Malaysia. Partial least squares structural equation modeling was used to analyse the data. The predictive relevance of the model was tested via partial least squares-Predict.
Findings – ContInt is influenced through various mechanisms. Enjoyment is the most important mediator, mediating three U&G predictor constructs (achievement, escapism, challenge and social interaction) and the outcome ContInt. Flow did not have any influence on ContInt unless coupled with enjoyment as a serial mediator. Network externality and nostalgia were found to only influence ContInt through mediators, online community involvement and need-to-collect Pokémon Monsters, respectively. Overall, the results show evidence of four indirect-only mediation paths and one complementary partial mediation path.
Originality/value – Provides support for an integrated model incorporating psychological, social and gaming motivational factors. While most other studies focus on direct relationships, we focus on indirect relationships through multiple sequential mediation analysis, following the recent modern mediation analysis guidelines. Contrary to previous findings, flow was not an important factor in predicting ContInt for gaming and nostalgia does not link directly to ContInt.
Keywords Augmented reality, Nostalgia, PLS-SEM, Uses and gratifications, Multiple sequential mediation, Need-to-collect
Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction
Mobile games have grown in popularity and various types of mobile games have been created, ranging from casual and hybrid to augmented reality (AR) games. AR is a technique that displays virtual content superimposed upon real-life objects (Tan et al., 2015), combining the physical world and virtual reality. Pokémon GO (PG), an AR game released by Niantic in 2016, became the most downloaded game app (Gilbert, 2016). PG’s novel use of AR is considered a breakthrough in the gaming world.

Despite its success, shortly after its launch in 2016, the growth of PG appeared to lose its momentum in the USA. However, in Malaysia, the popularity has grown again with the introduction of a new feature called Mewtwo, as well as the “Legendary Pokémon” (Yau, 2018).