

**THE EFFECTS OF MMORPG PLAY
ON ONLINE AND OFFLINE SOCIAL
CAPITAL**

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**The Effects of MMORPG Play on Online and Offline
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多人線上角色扮演遊戲對虛擬和真實社會資本的影響

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the impact of massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) play on social capital in both the virtual world and the real world. MMORPG play is conceptualized as a combination of general-play (represented by the time and frequency of game play) and collective-play (represented by the frequency of joint gaming actions and gamers' assessment of the experiences in guilds and groups). Social capital is conceptualized to exist at both individual level and collective level. Individual-level social capital refers to the resource and support provided by bonding and bridging social networks; collective-level social capital refers to people's civic engagement. Since online social capital is based on computer-mediated communication, offline social capital is based on face-to-face communication; this study examines the effects of MMORPG play on online social capital and offline social capital respectively, and explores the relationship between online social capital and offline social capital.

A two-wave online survey was conducted to collect data from 232 MMORPG players. Structural equation modeling was employed to test the hypothesized effects of collective MMORPG play on gamers' online/offline social capital and the effects of online social capital on offline social capital.

The results show that collective-play positively affects gamers' online bonding social capital, online bridging social capital and online civic engagement, which suggests that group-play and guild-play in MMORPGs can broaden gamers' social networks in the virtual world and enhance gamers to engage in online civic activities. The effect of collective-play on offline bonding and bridging social capital is not significant; the effect of online bonding/bridging social capital on offline bonding/bridging social capital is not significant either. These non-significant results

imply that whether people extend their online relationships into real lives depends on many social conditions as well as on the social skills of the individuals. The study finds a significantly positive impact of collective-play on offline civic engagement, which may attribute to the reason that collaboration and community participation in MMORPGs can improve gamers' civic skills, build their self-efficacy in public affairs and therefore encourage them to engage in offline civic activities. The effect of online civic engagement on offline civic engagement is found to be non-significant, inferring that due to the convenience and low cost of online civic participation, those who are active in online communities do not necessarily perform actively in offline communities.

In comparison with collective-play, general-play is found to negatively affect individual-level social capital and collective-level social capital in both the virtual world and the real world. This finding justifies the importance to differentiate collective-play from general-play because it is collective-play that contributes to gamers' social capital.

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