

# ***Formation Mechanisms of Players' Intention to Play Online Games from the Perspective of the Theory of Planned Behavior***

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**Abstract.** Online games have become an important form of digital entertainment and mediated social interaction. Their appeal extends beyond competition and leisure because contemporary games also provide social connection, identity expression, emotional regulation, and participatory experiences. This paper reviews the formation of players' intention to play online games through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), with particular attention to attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. Existing studies indicate that favorable evaluations of gaming may strengthen intention when players associate online games with enjoyment, achievement, social interaction, or psychological relief. Subjective norm operates through perceived expectations and behaviors of friends, classmates, family members, and gaming communities. Perceived behavioral control concerns whether sufficient time, devices, money, connectivity, and gaming competence are available. The review argues that TPB is especially useful from a communication perspective because gaming decisions are shaped by both individual evaluation and socially mediated influence. Future research should examine emotional processes, platform differences, changing social norms, and the gap between intention and actual play.

**Keywords:** Online games, Theory of Planned Behavior, attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control

## **1. Introduction**

Online games are digital games in which players use internet-connected devices to enter a networked gaming environment. The category includes computer, mobile, console, competitive multiplayer, massively multiplayer, and social games. Despite differences in genre and technical structure, connectivity gives these games a common communication dimension. Players interact not only with software systems but also with teammates, opponents, guild members, streamers, content creators, and audiences. Online gaming therefore combines entertainment, media use, interpersonal communication, and cultural participation. The continuing development of China's game industry further indicates that digital gaming has become an established component of the digital economy and everyday media life [1].

The popularity of online games cannot be explained by a single motive. Games offer challenge, novelty, excitement, achievement, and temporary relief from everyday pressure. Narrative and visual design can provide imaginative experiences, while ranking and progression systems create visible signs of mastery. Social functions are equally important. Multiplayer games enable players to maintain existing relationships and create new ties through cooperation, conversation, and shared goals. Research on video games and intimate relationships has shown that gaming motivations and patterns of co-play can be associated with different relationship outcomes, illustrating that gaming is embedded in interpersonal life [2]. Studies of mobile social gaming similarly described game spaces as sites in which emotional interaction and mediated intimacy may develop [3]. Research on young online game players also suggested that digital relationships can move from weak ties toward stronger connections through repeated mediated interaction [4].

These things make wanting to play online games a big thing to study. Wanting behavior shows a person's readiness or willingness to do an action. Gaming often has a choice process where players check what might happen, look at how others act and react, and see if joining in is doable. Looking at wanting is also good because it stops making all game study about addiction or too much use. Bad gaming needs care, but online gaming also has normal free time, keeping friends, fun buying, showing themselves, and being part of digital culture.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) gives a clear way to see why people do things. Ajzen said intention comes from three main things: how a person feels about the act, what others think, and if they think they can do it [5]. Feeling about the act means whether it is seen as good or bad. What others think means social pressure from close people or groups. If they think they can do it means how easy or hard the act looks. Intention then acts as a close guess for real behavior. A big study checked many papers and found that TPB explains a good part of why intention and behavior change in different places, but each part matters a different amount [6].

For online games, TPB links how people think with how they talk. Attitude gets shaped by one's own play, reviews, live shows, and group talk. Subjective norm comes from friends, family, classmates, and online groups. Perceived control depends on tools and skill, which can also be changed by information and help from social circles. Therefore, this paper looks at how attitude, norm, and control push players to want to play online games, and checks the weak spots of the idea for later study.

## 2. Theory of Planned Behavior

TPB was developed to explain how beliefs and perceived constraints contribute to deliberate behavior [5, 6]. Its central assumption is that many behaviors are preceded by intention, while intention results from evaluations of the behavior and its surrounding conditions. TPB does not assume perfect rationality. Instead, it proposes that decisions are influenced by beliefs about likely outcomes, perceived expectations of significant others, and perceived capacity to act. The framework is particularly suitable for behaviors that are voluntary to a substantial degree but still constrained by opportunity, resources, or personal ability.

Attitude is the overall favorable or unfavorable evaluation of performing a specified behavior. In online gaming, it concerns the evaluation of playing rather than a general opinion about the game industry. Expected enjoyment, accomplishment, social connection, frustration, fatigue, or perceived risk may contribute to this evaluation. Subjective norm refers to perceived social expectations surrounding the behavior. It reflects whether significant individuals or groups are believed to approve, disapprove, encourage, or participate in online gaming. Perceived behavioral control describes the perceived ability to perform the behavior under existing constraints. It is related to

both self-efficacy and controllability. Behavioral intention integrates these influences into motivational readiness.

Direct empirical studies in game-related contexts support the relevance of TPB. Research using an extended TPB model for e-sports users found that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control were positively related to participation intention and behavior. Subjective norm showed a notable relationship with participation intention, while perceived behavioral control was strongly associated with actual participation [7]. More recent research on e-sports consumption also found that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control influenced behavior through consumption intention [8]. E-sports participation and ordinary online gaming are not identical, yet both involve digital-media use, social influence, skill requirements, technological access, and intentional participation.

TPB is well suited to online gaming because the behavior combines personal evaluation, visible social influence, and practical constraints. Online games often contain persistent communities, peer invitations, rankings, real-time communication, and public gaming identities. Decisions to play may therefore be shaped by interpersonal messages as well as game design. Access is also limited by free time, devices, internet quality, game knowledge, and sometimes financial expenditure. Perceived control can consequently vary even when players hold favorable attitudes and encounter supportive norms.

The framework also clarifies that intention is not identical to behavior. A player may want to play but be prevented by study, work, family responsibilities, or technical limitations. Habitual play may also continue when deliberate intention is relatively weak. TPB should therefore be treated as a central explanatory structure rather than a complete model of gaming behavior. Additional factors such as emotion, habit, immersion, and platform design can supplement its cognitive and social components.

### 3. Attitude and intention to play online games

Attitude toward playing online games refers to the degree to which the act of playing is evaluated as beneficial, enjoyable, worthwhile, undesirable, or harmful. This evaluation develops through beliefs and previous experiences. A player who expects enjoyment, relaxation, social connection, or achievement will hold a positive attitude. A player who associates gaming with frustration, wasted time, overspending, interpersonal conflict, or reduced self-control will have a negative attitude. Attitude is evaluative rather than descriptive. Awareness that a game is popular does not necessarily produce a favorable attitude unless participation is expected to generate personally valued outcomes.

Research on online game use attitudes among university students supports this multidimensional interpretation. A scale-development study identified cognitive, affective, and behavioral-tendency dimensions of online game use attitudes [9]. Cognitive judgments may concern challenge, fairness, usefulness, or perceived consistency. Affective responses include excitement, pleasure, comfort, irritation, and anxiety. Behavioral tendencies reflect readiness to engage in or avoid gaming situations. These dimensions often reinforce one another, although favorable cognition does not always produce positive emotion.

Positive attitudes frequently emerge when gaming satisfies psychological and communicative needs. Games provide visible progress through levels, scores, rankings, achievements, and mastery. Multiplayer environments add relational rewards because cooperation may produce belonging, recognition, trust, and shared memories. From a communication perspective, the value of gaming is created not only by content consumption but also by interaction. Players exchange tactical information, jokes, emotional support, evaluations, and signs of group membership. Research on

domestic mobile-game players found that emotional attachment, social satisfaction, cooperative competition, and immersive experience were associated with intensive play and fan enthusiasm, which were also related to willingness to spend money in games [10]. Spending intention differs from participation intention, yet the findings illustrate how emotional and social rewards can generate favorable evaluations of gaming.

Negative attitudes can be formed through concrete experiences. Repeated failures, toxic communication, perceived unfairness, technical problems, spending pressure, or conflicts between work and study may lower the expected value of games. Public discourse is also important. Online games are presented through different narratives. Some (content) mentions creativity, technology, computers, and society; others (content) put forward addiction, wasted time, aggressive interaction, and communication manipulation. Players obtain evaluations through news, family communication, peer discussion, streaming platforms, and online communication; personal attributes are formed by direct experience and indirect interaction.

According to TPB, favorable attitudes should generally strengthen intention because positively valued behavior is more attractive [7]. The relationship is not mechanical, however, because players assign different meanings to the same outcome. Competitive ranking may be rewarding for one player and stressful for another. Social interaction may increase enjoyment for teamwork-oriented players but reduce enjoyment for those who prefer solitary activity. Even relaxation may be interpreted differently depending on whether gaming is viewed as legitimate leisure or interference with obligations (obstr).

Attitude is also dynamic. Reviews, live streams, short videos, recommendation systems, and community discussions create expectations before play begins. Actual experience may confirm or challenge those expectations. Evaluations may change after updates, changes in peer groups, or shifts in personal circumstances. Attitude is therefore likely to be a strong predictor of participation intention, but it should be examined as a changing judgment rather than a fixed characteristic. It also interacts with other TPB components [7]. For example, friends may influence beliefs about a game's value, and perceived skill can affect how enjoyable the game becomes.

#### 4. Subjective norm and intention to play online games

Subjective norm (Subj norm) refers to the perceived social pressure regarding a certain behavior [7]. In online gaming, this pressure may come from friends, classmates, colleagues, family members, romantic partners, online communities, or gaming celebrities. Direct persuasion is not required. Normative influence can arise through repeated invitations, shared routines, group conversations, or the observation that important peers regularly play a particular game. A player may therefore perceive a strong norm even without explicit instructions.

Friends and classmates are especially influential because many online games are socially coordinated. Team-based games become more attractive when participation allows individuals to remain involved in a peer group. Invitations to join matches, discussions of game updates, shared viewing of e-sports events, and conversations about in-game experiences can create a local norm in which playing becomes part of group membership. The social value of participation may even exceed the intrinsic value of the game. Research on social network games has shown that interaction, satisfaction, and flow contribute to continued use, demonstrating that participation is sustained by relational as well as experiential factors [11].

Family influence can operate differently. Parents, spouses, or other family members may consider gaming either an acceptable recreation or a useful social activity, or a misuse of time. Their judgments are particularly important when the player values their approval or shares household

resources and schedules with them. Approval may also be conditional. Gaming may be accepted after work or study obligations are completed, but criticized when it interferes with sleep, academic performance, spending, or family interaction. Subjective norm refers to context-specific expectations rather than a simple positive or negative social attitude.

Research on adolescents' continued use of mobile social games also supports the importance of relational conditions. One study found that relatedness needs were more influential than autonomy or competence needs in predicting continued use intention [12]. Relatedness is not equivalent to subjective norm, yet the findings indicate that gaming intentions are closely linked to interpersonal environments. When gaming is a regular part of peer interaction, non-participation may also mean missing shared conversations, group achievements, or social rituals.

Digital environments make norms highly visible. Friend lists, online status indicators, rankings, guild activity, live streams, and social media posts allow players to observe the behavior of others. This creates descriptive norms concerning what others actually do as well as injunctive norms concerning what others approve. Online gaming research should distinguish these forms of influence because observed participation may normalize a game even when explicit approval is absent. A title widely played by trusted peers may appear more enjoyable, safer, easier to learn, or more socially valuable.

Subjective norm may influence intention through compliance and information. Players may participate because belonging and approval are valued, or because peer behavior provides evidence about the quality and accessibility of a game. Normative influence can therefore affect attitude and perceived control as well as directly influence intention. Communication research is particularly suited to studying these pathways because norms are carried through messages, interaction routines, visible behavior, and media representations. Their strength is likely to differ across age groups, game genres, friendship networks, and cultural contexts.

## 5. Perceived behavioral control and intention to play online games

Perceived behavioral control refers to the extent to which individuals believe they possess the resources, opportunities, and abilities necessary to perform a behavior [7]. In online gaming, this component is especially important because participation depends on several practical conditions. These may include time, access to a suitable device, stable internet connectivity, financial resources, game knowledge, and confidence in gaming skills. The importance of each condition varies by platform and genre.

Time is a basic control factor. Some games support short sessions, while others require lengthy matches, scheduled team participation, regular progression, or repeated practice. A player facing heavy academic or occupational demands may perceive low control even when the game is attractive. Team-based games add another constraint because participation may depend on whether friends are available at the same time. Perceived control can therefore be partly social rather than purely individual.

Equipment (balance) and connectivity create another layer of control. High-performance computer games require expensive hardware. Mobile games reduce entry barriers but still depend on developer capability, storage, battery life, and network stability. Technical restrictions influence feasibility, and lag, disconnection, or poor performance may reduce experience timing or ecological attitude. Money can matter even in nominally free games. Hardware, subscription services, downloadable content, paid props, and in-game purchases may create financial pressure. Research on game-related virtual currency has shown that digital games can reorganize emotional production, time investment, and economic participation, making expenditure part of the mediated gaming

environment [13]. Perceived financial constraints may therefore weaken participation intention for some players.

Gaming competence is equally important. Perceived behavioral control is subjective, so actual ability and perceived ability can differ. A novice may possess adequate equipment and free time while still believing that a difficult competitive environment is beyond personal capability. Tutorials, cooperative peers, practice modes, strategy guides, live streams, and peer coaching can increase control by making the learning process appear manageable. Communication becomes part of behavioral control because information and social support can transform uncertainty into confidence.

Player control also involves self-regulation. Recent research on player subjectivity has discussed tensions between agency and dependence in digital games, emphasizing how platform structures, reward systems, symbolic labor, and persistent engagement may constrain player choices [14]. This point is relevant because easy access to a game is not equivalent to control over how long or how much a player engages. Future studies should therefore distinguish access-related control, competence-related control, financial control, and self-regulatory control.

According to TPB, stronger perceived behavioral control should generally increase intention because the behavior appears feasible and easier to perform. It may also influence actual behavior directly when perceptions accurately reflect available resources. Research on e-sports participation supports this dual role [7]. Nevertheless, high perceived control does not create motivation by itself. A person can possess sufficient time, equipment, and skill while holding an unfavorable attitude toward a particular game. Participation intention is strongest when a favorable evaluation, a supportive or normalizing social environment, and sufficient perceived control converge.

## 6. Conclusion

The want to play online games comes from a mix of one's own thinking, friends' push, and whether it seems doable. Online gaming is not just one person's fun thing cause net games sit inside social systems, friend groups, platform ways, and real-world stuff. Theory of Planned Behavior gives a neat way to sort these pulls. Attitude says if playing feels good, give social wins, stress, cost, or other nice things. Subjective norm catches what folks think and whom they see playing around them—friends, class people, family, and close groups. Perceived behavioral control asks if players think they have enough time, gear, cash, net, and skill to do it.

Attitude shows what players think about what may happen. Fun, winning, getting into the game, chill, and hanging with friends can make them want to play more, but being mad, fighting, too much pay, or feeling time gone bad can make it less. Subjective norm says game choice happens with people around. Friends can make a game seem normal by asking to play and play again, while family might say yes, put up with it, or say no. Perceived behavioral control sets the real limit of wanting to do it. Good feelings and support from others may still not make someone play when time, gear, cash, or skill do not seem like enough.

Some limits are still in old studies. Lots of work looks at certain groups, platforms, or game types, so big general talk is hard. Fast e-sports players, easy mobile users, and huge online crowds may feel different on the same TPB factors. Subjective norm needs more exact checking too, because seen-behavior norms can differ from okay-based norms. Perceived control should also be split into access, skill, money, and self-control, not just seen as one thing.

One more limit is the kind of brain-heavy focus of normal TPB. Fun, thrill, calm, feeling part of group, mad, and close feeling can change how beliefs get judged and how plans stay going. Later work could check good game mood as a go-between for TPB start things and join wish, mainly in

talk places where feelings move through teams, net groups, live shows, and social sites. Habits also need to be looked at because playing games many times may rely less on careful planning as time passes. Long-term studies would help in seeing how attitude, rules, control, and plans shift after first use.

Overall, TPB gives a good start for knowing why players want to join online games. A talk view makes the theory bigger by showing that attitudes, norms, and control beliefs are shaped by society through media stuff, people's talk, group habits, and platform spaces. Putting TPB together with feelings, relationships, and platform-level factors can give a fuller explanation for joining online games without reducing it to just technology use or bad habits.

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