MEDIA & ICT CONSUMPTION TRENDS

"STEREOTYPING AFFECTS FEMALE GAME PLAY AND EXPERIENCE"

Imagine you are a female athlete who has to compete against a bunch of male athletes. How would you feel? Confident? Or rather threatened? Negative beliefs of women being less athletic than men could influence your judgment – just think about common expressions such as 'you play like a girl'.

Hence, you might feel motivated to prove the boys wrong, but the pressure of wanting to disconfirm stereotypes could also lead you to perform worse or behave in ways that confirm the stereotype – this is the 'stereotype threat'.

Game culture also struggles with tenacious gender issues such as negative attitudes towards and hostility against the presence of female players. The question then is whether female game players also experience a sense of stereotype threat when involved in overtly cross-gender game competition.

Lab experiment with puzzle game

By means of a controlled lab experiment, we explored whether and how stereotype threat affects the performance and emotions of female game players. We examined under which circumstances stereotype threat effects were reinforced or softened. In doing so, women's previous game experience, gamer identity, female identity, and trait competitiveness were taken into account as moderators.

Eighty-seven female players were recruited and instructed to play a puzzle-platform game in which they had to outperform the best previous players (based on leaderboard scores). They were randomly assigned to three experimental conditions (neutral, boost and threat).

Negative game play experience

The results suggest that women in a stereotype threat condition perform worse, show lower self-efficacy and have increased negative affects compared to the women in the other experimental conditions. However, these differences (effect sizes) were rather small, yet significantly. Virtually no differences between the neutral and boost condition were found, suggesting that positive female role modelling does not guarantee improved performance or mood.

It was found that the positive impact of playing frequency and, especially, gamer identity on performance flattened out once threat was induced. In other words, women who were most invested in playing games most keenly experienced the negative effects of stereotype threat.

The study indicates that women worry about their gaming performance due to an assigned social status, which seems to negatively impact their play experiences. Gaining insight into cultural notions of gender behavior is one step in dealing with this issue. Another step lies in 'normalizing' gaming as a pastime in which emphasis is on its 'everydayness' and not on who plays them.

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> " Stereotyped female gamers perform worse and show more negative emotions "

> " Game culture struggles with tenacious gender issues "

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Media & ICT Consumption Trends is a partnership between iMinds Research Center Media & ICT (iMinds-MICT) and digital research institute iMinds. The project seeks to provide an overview of academic research in Flemish media and internet consumption, and links insights into transforming audiences to the current challenges for the Flemish media industries. It therefore combines results from original user-driven innovation research with conclusions from international studies and technology trends reports.

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