

Gamers who buy advantages are respected less by other players

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How do gamers perceive other gamers that buy an in-game advantage using microtransactions (real money)? In studies with 532 active gamers as participants, psychologists from Tilburg University and UC Berkeley found that players who buy such advantages are evaluated more negatively. They are liked and respected less, are thought to have a lower status, and people are less willing to cooperate with them in the game.

With the advent of the internet, computer games have undergone substantial changes. Many games now contain some form of social interaction with other players. Furthermore, many games offer players the opportunity to buy upgrades using microtransactions. Based on social psychological theories on social comparisons, deservedness, and envy, psychologists from Tilburg and Berkeley tested whether the use of these microtransactions would affect how players perceive another player using them.

World of Tanks

For example, in the online [game](#) World of Tanks, players can spend hours in playing the game to acquire a better tank, or they can draw their credit card and buy one. "As psychologists, we know that people are very sensitive to how they perform compared to others," says Niels van de Ven, from Tilburg University in the Netherlands. "In games it is typically the case that stronger characters have a higher status. It can then be quite frustrating to realize that in a game like World of Tanks

someone drives around in a better tank than you, just because he spent more money on it."

This observation led to the prediction that players would like and respect other players who buy such an advantage less. "We studied this in MapleStory, World of Tanks, and Diablo III," says Ellen Evers from the Haas Business School at Berkeley, "and consistently found that players respect players who use microtransactions to get ahead less. The irony is that players buy an advantage to become stronger players and rise in the in-game hierarchy, but other players actually respect them less as a result."

Better understanding of gamer behavior

Previously it has been believed that [gamers](#) may react negatively to the use of real money in games because gamers believed game-worlds and real life should be strictly separated. The current research, however, reveals that players do not dislike the use of all microtransactions equally. When players use real money to buy more ornamental items (such as a vanity pet in World of Warcraft) that only help to make a character unique without actually making the character stronger, other players do not respond negatively. Only when other players actually become better off do players resent that.

The findings of this research help to better understand gamer behavior. It also provides information to game developers in finding ways to use microtransactions so as to minimize the negative influence on gamers.

Other notable findings

- Despite the fact that players like those who buy an advantage less, seeing other players who bought an advantage actually

tempted players to buy something using real money themselves.

- The results show that people like and respect [players](#) who buy an advantage less when they are the enemy in the game, but also when they are in the same team (and the player actually benefits from the other player having bought something to strengthen their team).

Provided by Tilburg University

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