

Ingress & Agoraphobia

Proposed study for AnxietySocialNet

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Overview

This proposed study for AnxietySocialNet to promote the use of Ingress as a social and coping tool for individuals that suffer from agoraphobia. This study hopes to find a link between augmented reality (AR) phone games, specifically Ingress, and a social coping skill for those who have been diagnosed with Agoraphobia. This study also hopes to add relevant research on social interactions via technology and mental health. AnxietySocialNet is a website that aims to provide a place where individuals diagnosed with anxiety disorders can come together to create a community of support. Users of the site can also find therapists from the site as well as published help guides. This study would provide the site with more outreach materials and publication topics to assist in users building a community from the site into their own city / area.

State of the field

Study of Ingress has been conducted and this study hopes to add psychological and game study into the relevant research. Margarete Jahrmann defines Ingress as a commercial urban game (Jahrmann, 173). “Ingress unfolds as a hybrid game melding technology and reality in urban space (Jahrmann, 173).” Through the game relying on users to create the data map the users themselves are creating the narrative map of the game. Turning well know urban spaces into their magic circle of play. These now areas of play can be used as a place for users to gather and develop a sense of community.

According to the Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5. (fifth edition agoraphobia is defined as: “fearful and anxious about two or more of the following situations:

- Using public transportation

- Being in open spaces
- Being in enclosed places
- Standing in line or being in a crowd
- Being outside of the home or alone in other situations (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).”

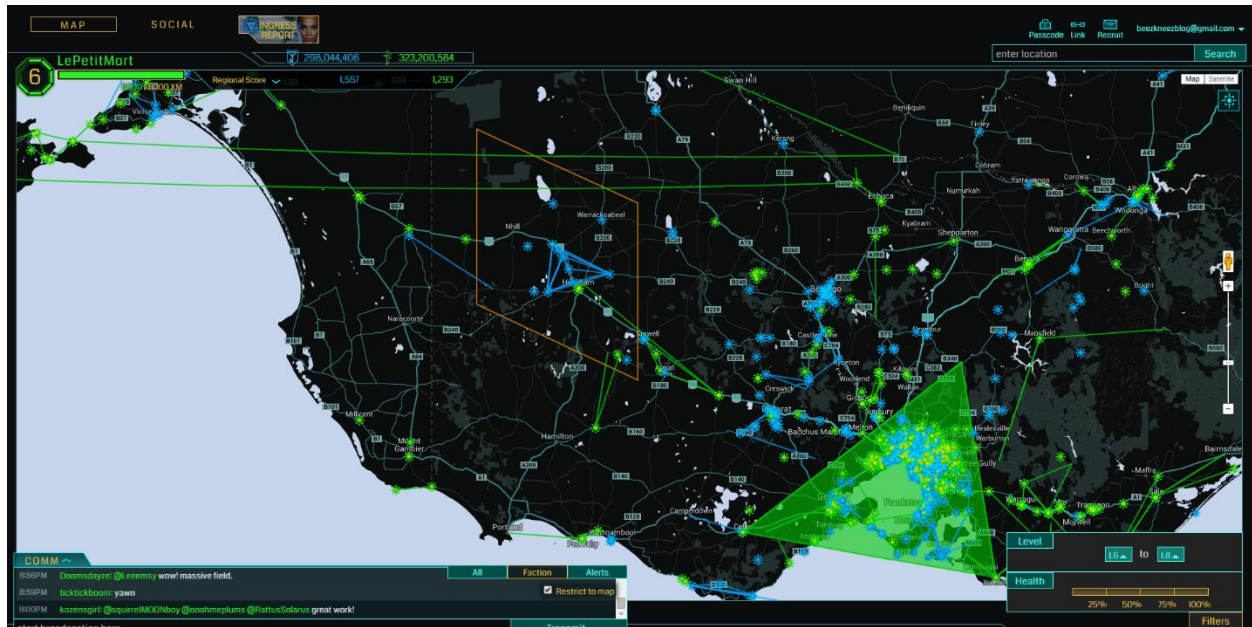
Due to the above factors individuals that have been diagnosed with agoraphobia it would be hard to form social connections that are not based on the internet. Finding online communities can be done with ease.

Object of study

Ingress is an augmented reality game in which you can join one of two teams and work with people from all around the world (Niantic, Inc , 2020). In the game you “help control a mysterious substance called XM (Niantic, Inc , 2020).” The two groups in the game are the Enlighted who believe that XM is the future of humanity and the Resistance who believe it is humanities downfall (Niantic, Inc , 2020). The theming of the game invites players to act as special agents to hack portals to control them. All of the promotional materials and information videos on their website are given in the format of briefings; never breaking the 4th wall for the augmented reality game.

The game is a mobile game that users can play from their phones, but because it is augmented reality users must go out to different physical locations and interact with portals. Users interact and capture the portals in the game of their group that they joined. There is often a sense of community between those in the same group and users can plan to work together to capture as many portals as possible. The portals themselves are often spawned around places of

historical and artistic value (Niantic, Inc , 2020). Below is a sample of what the interface of the map is, using the city of Melbourne:¹



Plan of study

Methods

This study will include a pre survey and a post survey. The study will be done from a poll of volunteers that have been diagnosed with agoraphobia. From then users will receive onboarding for the use of ingress on their smart phones. There will be monthly check-ins to determine usage data. The study will take place over a year with the check-in occurring every 4 months. There will be a post survey for users to report their qualitative data.

The pre survey will comprise of the following questions:

1. Have you used Ingress or similar games before?
2. Are you currently taking anti-anxiety medication or other medication?

¹ (Beezkneez, 2015)

3. Are you currently receiving therapy?
4. What prior knowledge of Ingress do you possess?
5. What do you hope to gain from participation in this study?

The post survey will comprise of the following questions:

1. Do you start therapy at anytime during the study?
2. How effective did you think Ingress was?
3. Did you enjoy using Ingress?
4. Did you build meaningful social connections from using Ingress?
5. Did you feel more confident leaving your home while using Ingress?
6. Will you continue to use Ingress?

Analysis

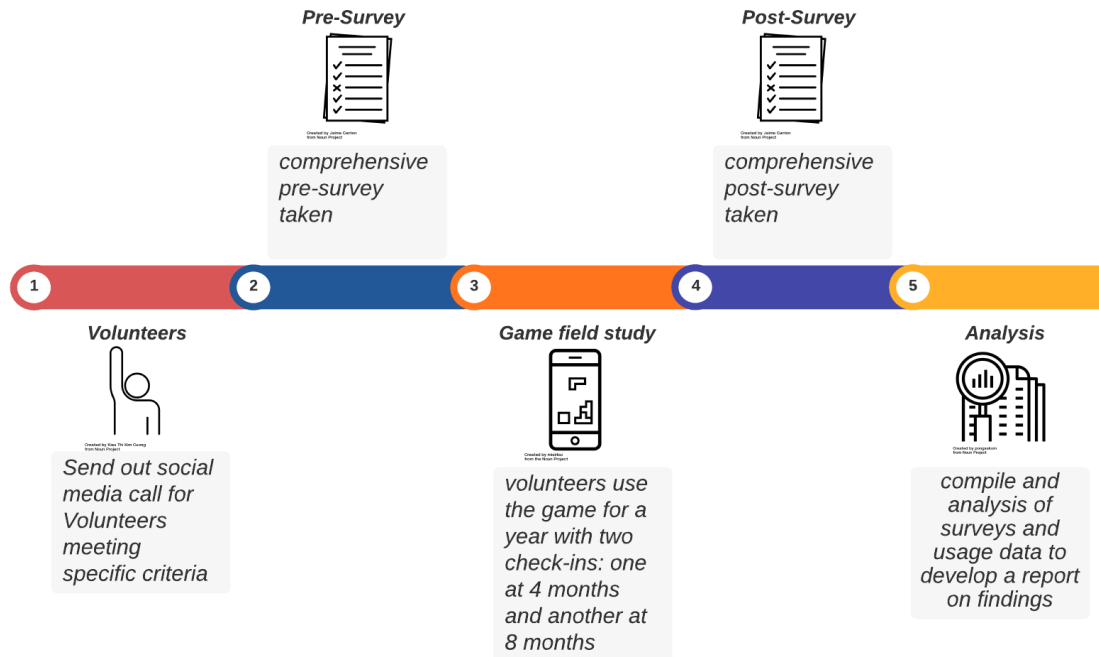
Upon collecting the data, it will be analyzed and compared to see if there is a positive trend of Ingress use with therapy or with just Ingress use on its own. The study will compare internally between all users who are currently receiving therapy and those who are not. The author hopes to find a positive trend between use of Ingress and emotional stability and wellbeing. This study is not guaranteed to succeed but hopes to develop and broaden the research field of augmented reality games and psychology.

Timeline:

Below is the time line and series of events that will take place for this study:

Ingress Application Study

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Conclusion

If there is a correlation between online social engagements that translate to in person social engagements, it can be concluded that augmented reality games with a social and communal component can be used in the assistance of treating agoraphobia. This study would urge AnxietySocialNet to engage with its community to promote the use of this game to increase social interactions. Through an augmented reality state, we can further develop social and coping mechanisms to better treat and manage this anxiety disorder.

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