

Controlled Vocabulary for Engagement Mechanisms

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Introduction

We define *engagement mechanisms* as “game elements designed to direct and maintain player attention to the game, aiming to improve the involvement and interest from players.”

This controlled vocabulary was developed with three key concepts in mind:

- The construct of video game appeal factors¹
- The principle of reinforcement-reward structures²
- A concept we now call engagement mechanisms—elements of mobile game design created with the explicit purpose of motivating players to keep returning to the application.

These concepts are not categorical in nature, as elements in the engagement taxonomy may intersect with more than one of these facets, but they form the underlying gratification, psychological, and design bases of understanding how game elements are utilized with intent to engage and retain players.

Version History

1.0: Published at DiGRA 2020³

1.1: Revisions include: Relaxing -> Low Stakes

The following abbreviation is used throughout:

SN: Scope note

¹ Lee, J. H., Clarke, R. I., Cho, H., and Windleharth, T. 2017. “Understanding Appeals of Video Games for Readers’ Advisory and Recommendation.” *Reference and User Services Quarterly*. 57(2), 127–39.

² Cash, H., Rae, C. D., Steel, A. H., and Winkler, A. 2012. “Internet Addiction: A Brief Summary of Research and Practice.” *Current Psychiatry Reviews*. 8(4), 292–98.

³ Windleharth, T., & Lee, J. H. (2020). Taxonomies for transactions and user engagement in mobile games. In *Proceedings of DiGRA 2020 Conference: Play Everywhere.*)

Controlled Vocabulary for Engagement Mechanisms

Design elements of mobile games specifically created to maintain player attention or direct it back to the game application.

Leveling Up

SN: Measurable progress of game characters or other elements.

Collecting

SN: Game system provides collections to complete, promotes completionism such as achievements.

Log-In Rewards

SN: Provides a daily or periodic in-game reward for logging in and playing.

Notifications

SN: Push notifications are sent to the player to remind them to play.

Ease of Play

SN: The game is designed to be played with minimal player inputs, often with one hand or one finger.

Surprise Elements

SN: Unpredictable levels, rewards, or game mechanics.

Low Stakes

SN: Low stress game design without pressure to perform.

Exciting Visual Scheme

SN: Bright and colorful graphics are used to incentivize extended gameplay.

Interesting Sound Effects

SN: Ambient game music and in-game sounds are pleasing.

Leaderboards

SN: A board that shows names and scores, ranking the leaders in a competition.

Customizability

SN: Ability to modify game elements based on individual preferences.

Content Updates

SN: New content is released often and repeatedly to keep players engaged.

Special Events

SN: Time-limited occasions offering access to unique themed content that is typically not available to the players.

Social Features

SN: Can add friends in game, often for incentives, can ask for assistance in gameplay, communicate about the game, or can interact or view other players' game states.