

# Persuasive Games in Context: A Theoretical Model.

Teresa de la Hera, Erasmus University Rotterdam

## Abstract

The persuasive potential of digital games has been applied to influence the attitude and/or behavior of players in several fields such as marketing, pro-social communication or healthcare. However, a literature review of the different academic definitions used for the concept of persuasive games shows that there is no consensus in the way researchers define persuasive games, or at least, that they are studying persuasive games from different approaches and with different applications in mind. The differences in the way persuasive games are defined and studied are the result of the wide range of possible applications of this practice, but also due to the complexity of the process of persuasion itself and how the specificities of digital games have an influence in this process.

In this paper I present a theoretical model designed to explain the different ways digital games can be used for persuasion, this is, to influence the attitude or behavior of players. This model is based on the conceptual framework of behavior scientist B.J. Fogg, who explained the three different roles interactive technology can play in the process of persuasion (i.e (1) as media, (2) as tools, and (3) as social actors for persuasion). In the theoretical model proposed in this paper it is explained how digital games can play these roles in different ways, taking into consideration the persuasive goal of the game and the level of involvement of the player. The result is an eight dimensional model that establishes relationships between these three variables.

To outline the theoretical model presented in this paper, I followed the four step process proposed by Casetti and Di Chio: (1) segmentation: I identified the variables that I wanted to take into consideration when designing the model; (2) stratification: I identified internal elements of the variables selected in the previous step; (3) enumeration and classification: in this step I created a small descriptive map that helped me to continue the process; (4) regrouping and modeling: in this final step I proposed a representative model for the object of study.

The selection of the variables that have been considered for this theoretical model has been made attending to a Player-Context-Game perspective. The purpose of this model is to explain the roles of persuasive games in context, by establishing relationships with the persuasive purpose of the game in a specific context and the level of involvement of players during the game. Considering this three-folded perspective, I have identified the following variables:

- Persuasive Roles of Digital Games
  - Games as Media for Persuasion
  - Games as Tools for Persuasion
  - Games as Social Actors for Persuasion
- Level of Involvement of Players
  - High Involvement
  - Low Involvement
- Persuasive Goal of the Game
  - Games that aim to Shape an Attitude
  - Games that aim to Reinforce an Attitude
  - Games that aim to Change an Attitude

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