

Social gaming: A systematic review

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MOTIVATION

A large body of research work focuses on better understanding **gaming as a social activity**.

However, it is not clear how research has approached this topic and what **outcomes** and experiences, in terms of **games, populations,** and **contexts** have been considered.



METHODS

We conducted a **systematic literature review** on social gaming, following PRISMA guidelines.

Identification phase

Search query in digital libraries (e.g., IEEE) based on keywords (e.g., “social”, “games”)

6315 papers returned

Screening phase

Filtering according to criteria (e.g., about digital games, focused on social outcomes)

263 papers included

Analysis

Mixed inductive and deductive coding

45 coding fields

FINDINGS

Social as non-solitary

Any experience with more than one person involved

What makes it social?

Different definitions are presented but most works do not clarify

Social in the outcomes

Any experience that fosters social outcomes (e.g., connectedness)

Social inherent to gaming

Any gaming experience has social outcomes, including single-player

What scenarios are considered?

Different ways to engage in social gaming

Co-playing

Spectating

Mediating

Playing with AI



What interactions are covered?

Research considers both the modality and nature of the interaction

In and out of the game

Interacting in the virtual (e.g., combat, trade) and physical world (e.g., events)

Communication

Both verbal (text, voice) and non-verbal (e.g., pointing)

What outcomes are assessed?

Player experience

In terms of immersion, autonomy, flow, etc.

Social outcomes

Mostly at a shallow level (e.g., co-presence)

What determinant factors are acknowledged?

Game design and technology

Specific genres, mechanics, and devices

Players and setting

Few works consider the characteristics of the players (e.g., abilities) and the setting

HIGHLIGHTS & OUTLOOK

- Social gaming is **multifaceted**: varied roles (e.g., spectator), interactions, and outcomes.
- Tendency to explore **collaboration** and **novel elements** of design and technology.
- The need for more work looking at **barriers** to social gaming (e.g., inaccessibility).
- Lack of **in-the-wild studies** and established **constructs** to assess social outcomes.

