

Clinical Brief

Challenges of Health Games in the Social Network Environment

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Abstract

Virtual communities and their benefits have been widely exploited to support patients, caregivers, families and healthcare providers. The complexity of the social organization evolved the concept of virtual community to social networks, exploring the establishment of ties and relations between people. These technological platforms provide a way to keep up with your connections network, through a set of communication and interaction tools. Games, as social interactive technologies have great potential, ensuring a supportive community, and thereby reducing the social isolation. Serious social health games bring forward several research challenges. This paper examines the potential benefits of the triad “health-serious games-social networks” and discusses some research challenges and opportunities of the liaison of serious health games and social networks.

Introduction

Health is a key factor in the human hierarchy of needs and affects all its roles in society. The social human nature develops an intrinsic dependency between the human being, as an individual, and the society, by their need for sharing, contact and socialization, resulting in the creation of communities.

Recent developments in information and communication technologies brought new opportunities for the creation of virtual communities and required the evolution social networks. As a result, social networks have emerged to foster communication and interaction between people. In order to keep its main goal alive - to socialize, social networks have integrated games as a powerful tool for this purpose.

Games have become more than a leisure activity. Serious games go beyond the idea of entertainment and offer other kinds of experiences, including learning and training. One application of serious games that is gaining interest from the industry and academics is health games. The challenge lies in adding a social component to health games to ensure a better integration into social networks, while providing the skills and abilities for players to be able to react to certain situations and symptoms. This paper discusses the challenges and research opportunities in the association of serious health games and social networks.