

*B. DE SCHUTTER. A qualitative inquiry into the meaning of digital games for an older audience in Flanders. Gerontechnology 2012;11(2):420; doi:10.4017/gt.2012.11.02.609.00* **Purpose** The majority of studies on digital games for older adults (50+) and seniors (65+) have researched the extent to which digital games can be used to improve the lives of older adults and seniors<sup>1-3</sup>, or how games should be designed taking age-related decline into account<sup>4-6</sup>. The common denominator between both kinds of studies is that they focus upon non-playing elderly. Studies that focus on the already playing older audience of digital games are much rarer<sup>7-11</sup>. Furthermore, these studies suffer from small sample sizes and little theoretical framing. The purpose of this study is therefore to expand upon previous research by further describing the older audience of digital games, explaining their gaming behavior using existing theoretical paradigms, and classifying them from within their playing context. **Method** The study uses a mixed methods design, combining a quantitative pre-study (n=112; aged between 50 and 70) and a qualitative study (n=35; same age group). Data collection in the latter part of the study was done using 2-hour long semi-structured interviews. The data was analyzed through an iterative process using Fred Wester's interpretation of Grounded Theory<sup>12</sup>. **Results & Discussion** The results of the study are (i) a framework that describes the older audience of digital games using concepts that were derived from the data, (ii) a theoretical explanation for the gaming behavior of older adults that draws from Uses and Gratifications Theory<sup>13</sup>, Self-Determination Theory<sup>14</sup> and media psychological inquiries into the concept of enjoyment<sup>15</sup>, and (iii) a player classification for both on- and offline playing. Finally, the study identifies a series of design recommendations.

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