UTILIZING VIRTUAL REALITY AND VIDEO GAMES TO ENHANCE POSITIVE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIORS

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROJECT

As globalization becomes pervasive and the increasing global mobility of human capital in the labor market, many countries around the world face challenges to understand and manage cultural differences. The increased diverse population and frequent contact with cultural different others is not always accompanied by the same level of rising social acceptance of minority groups. Majority groups within each country tend to have a strong tendency to maintain their own culture and privileges. As a result, minority groups such as migrants, refugees, persons with low social economic status or disabilities often face social exclusion and prejudices. As such, diversity management within any given society is imperative in this global age, both scholarly and pragmatically.

Empirical studies have shown that digital games and virtual reality can be helpful in making learning personally meaningful to students (Barab et al., 2012), reducing stigmatizing of remedial education groups, (Wiklund et al., 2014), and fostering empathy and identification with minorities (Igartua, 2013) or immigrants (Gabriel, 2015). Gameful experiences are structured by rules and are goal-oriented, in order to effectively utilize an infusion of game design techniques, game mechanics, and/or game style (Bouça, 2012) to motivate user behavior in various non-game contexts.

Therefore, this project aims to develop and test an interactive gamified virtual environment with carefully designed messages and playful ways for users to engage with the topic of social inclusion and develop positive attitudes towards it. The purpose of developing the gamified interactive media is four-fold:

1. To study the effect of interactive digital media in changing people's attitudes and behaviors towards marginalized groups.
2. To raise self-awareness of users' perceptions and biases about issues of immigration and social integration.
3. To theorize effective design principles, in accordance with current research on promoting social integration, for the purpose of promoting positive attitudes towards cultural diversity and social inclusion.
4. To implement the proposed design principles in the design of the gamified interactive media and test its effectiveness.

SCOPE OF WORK FOR SELECTED PHD STUDENT

Aside from fulfilling requirements by IGS and the university to obtain a Ph.D. degree, the student will work closely with supervisors and their respective research teams to collaborate and co-publish with researchers across disciplines. The student is expected to be familiar with relevant theories and methodological and/or programming skills from both disciplines in the topical area of the project. Specifically, the student needs to

1. Make significant intellectual contributions to the body of knowledge;
2. Conduct empirical user studies and think analytically;
3. Apply critical thinking to the research field;
4. Communicate effectively -both orally and in written form;
5. Design a gamified virtual reality environment.