



# The Keys That Bind Us: Belongingness in Discord Servers

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## Introduction

### Background:

- The need to belong is one of the three fundamental needs proposed and supported by self-determination theory (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2017), and its satisfaction is associated with increased human functioning and thriving (Gere & MacDonald, 2010).
- Social media has proven to be an effective means of satiating one's need to belong (Vincent, 2016; Hall & Davis, 2016).
- Aside from previous research assessing Discord's use as a distance-oriented communication tool for remote learning (Kruglyk et al., 2020; Vladoiu & Constantinescu, 2020; Razell, 2020; Fonseca Cacho, 2020), there is little research assessing the relationship between engagement in Discord servers and belongingness.

### Purpose:

- The present study evaluated associations between engagement in Discord servers and feelings of belongingness and identification.

## Participants

- 128 undergraduate students (78.1% female,  $N = 100$ ;  $M_{age} = 21.21$ ,  $SD_{age} = 2.56$ ).
- Participants identified as the following: 41.4% Asian, 31.2% Hispanic or Latina/Latino, 12.5% White/Caucasian, 7.8% African American, 5.5% Middle Eastern, and 1.6% "Other."
- Academic years represented: 41.41% seniors, 36.72% juniors, 21.1% sophomores, and 0.78% ( $N=1$ ) freshmen.

## Methods

### Measures:

- Discord Use Activity (see Table 3)
- Discord Server Type
  - Extracurricular (36.72%)
  - Academic (9.38%)
  - Close friends (46.1%)
  - Other (7.81%)
- Discord Server Binding Force
  - Interactions (1; 63.78%)
  - Similarities (0; 36.22%)
- Length of membership ( $M_{years} = 1.91$ ,  $SD_{years} = 1.44$ )
- Sense of Social Fit Scale (SSF; Walton & Cohen, 2007)
- Social Connectedness Scale - Revised (SCSR; Lee & Robbins, 1995)
- Inclusion of Others in the Self Scale (IOS; Aron et al., 1992)

### Procedures:

- Participants were recruited via the SONA system during the summer 2022 semester and completed an online self-report questionnaire at their own leisure.

## Hypotheses

- H1:** Prolonged membership in a Discord server will be associated with high feelings of belongingness.
- H2:** Discord servers comprised of close friends will report higher feelings of belongingness than extracurricular and academic servers.
- H3:** Activity in Discord servers (see Table 3) will be positively associated with feelings of belongingness.
- H4:** Servers based on interactions will be associated with higher feelings of belongingness than servers based on similarities.

	M	SD	SSF	SCSR	IOS	Activity	Membership
SSF	5.227	0.947	-				
SCSR	4.244	0.867	0.806**	-			
IOS	4.148	1.530	0.527**	0.599**	-		
Activity	22.961	8.401	0.380**	0.413**	0.466**	-	
Membership	1.907	1.441	0.109	0.163	0.171	0.195*	-
Interactions	0.638	0.483	0.152	0.202*	0.198*	0.351**	0.242**

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlations (N=128)

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Variable	SSF			SCSR			IOS		
	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>z	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>z	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>z
Activity	0.042	0.011	<.001	0.043	0.010	<.001	0.067	0.017	<.001
Membership	0.023	0.060	0.702	0.060	0.054	0.265	0.059	0.090	0.516
Type									
Academic	-0.328	0.298	0.272	-0.292	0.268	0.277	-0.795	0.452	0.079
Close friends	0.033	0.207	0.873	-0.151	0.186	0.417	0.544	0.314	0.083
Other	0.230	0.319	0.478	0.114	0.287	0.692	0.392	0.484	0.418
Interactions	0.033	0.188	0.861	0.120	0.169	0.479	-0.032	0.285	0.911

Table 2: Linear regression analyses (N=128)



Scan to access more in-depth information

Activity	M	SD
Voice call	2.688	1.435
Video call	2.219	1.273
Text message	3.328	1.243
Media message	3.094	1.360
Stream content	2.352	1.450
Watch content	2.586	1.412
Watchparty	2.406	1.377
Listen to content	2.516	1.286
Moderate	1.773	1.145

Table 3: Discord use behaviors (1 = Never, 5 = Frequently)

## Results

- Correlations among primary belongingness outcomes were all statistically significant, positive, and large (i.e.,  $r > 0.50$ ).
- Of the primary predictors, only the number of behaviors one engaged in with Discord servers had a significant correlation with SSF ( $r = 0.38$ ), SCSR ( $r = 0.41$ ), and IOS ( $r = 0.47$ ). The binding force of servers also possessed significant biserial correlations with SCSR ( $r = 0.20$ ) and IOS ( $r = 0.20$ ).
- Multiple regression analyses revealed that only the number of behaviors one engaged in with Discord servers had a significant relationship with SSF ( $b = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), SCSR ( $b = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and IOS ( $b = 0.07$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).
- Though no other primary relationship was significant in the multiple regression analyses, there was a significant marginal effect on IOS scores between Discord servers based on academics ( $M = 3.13$ ) and among close friends ( $M = 4.47$ ); such that servers of close friends had higher IOS ratings on average. This effect was not present in other regression models.

## Discussion

- Length of membership (H1) and server interactions (H4) had no significant relationship with feelings of belongingness or identification.
- Consistent with hypotheses (H3), higher levels of engagement in Discord servers demonstrated a positive association with feelings of belongingness and identification with server members.
- Partially consistent with hypotheses (H2), Discord server type had a marginal effect on identification with server members.

### Implications:

- Results show that the most important factor in a Discord server is its behavioral engagement, above and beyond time, purpose, and even interaction.
- Opportunities for behavioral engagement are important for building a stable sense of community in a variety of contexts.
- Future researchers could utilize a longitudinal design to examine causality between behavioral engagement and feelings of belongingness.