

The Lure of Virtual World: What Causes Video Games to Become So Attractive

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Abstract: This study investigates the motivations behind video game play, focusing on how different age groups engage with various game genres. Through a comprehensive survey, it examines the psychological and behavioral impacts of gaming, aiming to provide an understanding of players' motivations and the potential effects of video game engagement. The results highlight distinct motivational patterns across demographics, revealing key facts such as competition, relaxation, social interaction, and cognitive challenge. By analyzing these findings, the paper offers valuable insights for policymakers and educators to make informed decisions about the role of video games in society, including considerations for regulation, support of healthy gaming habits, and recognition of gaming's potential benefits. Ultimately, this research contributes to a more balanced perspective on gaming, challenging misconceptions and informing strategies that can foster positive outcomes in the gaming community.

Keywords: video games, gaming behavior, game industry trends

1. Introduction

On average, gamers spend 7 hours and 7 minutes each week playing video games [1]. Video games have become an indispensable part of young people's lives worldwide; with many players believing they help them relax both physically and mentally. However, online discussions about video games are often negative. Social media is filled with videos addressing the issues video games can cause and the addiction they can lead to among teenagers. Parents are also concerned that the violent and graphic content may impact teenagers' psychological well-being, potentially desensitizing them to real-world violence. Additionally, prolonged gaming can influence teenagers' social skills, making them more likely to withdraw from real-life interactions, which in turn affects their relationships and social adaptability [2]. In China, the problem of video game addiction has drawn significant attention, prompting the government to enact regulations limiting minors to playing games only between 8 and 9 PM on weekends. But what exactly is video game addiction? "Video game addiction (internet gaming disorder) is characterized by severely reduced control over gaming habits, resulting in negative impacts on daily functioning, including personal, social, educational and occupational responsibilities. While millions of people play video games, only a small percentage develop video game addiction"[3].

These points are undeniable, but aren't there any benefits to video games? Video games can help with quick decision-making, allowing players to explore new environments in unique ways, and can bring a sense of pride through achievements [4]. Moreover, they provide pleasure by allowing players

to engage in role-play and interact with characters and environments, thus offering creativity and strategic thinking.

There are numerous arguments about the potential harm of video games, but there is comparatively little discussion on what makes games so addictive and appealing to people. Teenagers no longer find many once-popular games to be fascinating since games are changed so frequently. Game producers always need to seek innovative ways to attract and engage more players. The form and function of video games has changed significantly over time. While many early games featured single-player modes, today's games emphasize more on multiplayer interaction, encouraging players to enjoy their gaming time with friends. The integration of gaming and socialization has also increased, allowing players to not only establish common topics through games, but also to use games as a social platform, as players often share similar interests [5]. In addition, the profit model of games has also changed. In the past, the types of props for consumption in games were limited and few. However, with the rise of the free-to-play model, developers are enticing players to spend money on purchases by introducing new characters, special equipment and other virtual items. This method of generating revenue through microtransactions and in-app purchases has become a primary source of income for many games.

When researching the trends in video game development, many references and data might be from four or five years ago, or even earlier. Therefore, to ensure the accuracy and objectivity of research, it is necessary to reassess these viewpoints and data to align with the latest changes and trends in the gaming industry.

Video games have become popular for a number of reasons [6]. For example, it provides players with a completely virtual world where they can do things they would not be able to or would find difficult to do in the real world. As supported by theoretical arguments and empirical research, part of what makes playing computer games exciting is that it allows people to enter imaginary worlds outside of their real-life experiences and perceive themselves in the way they want to.

The game also brings a strong sense of pride to the player. The Italian word “fiero” provides the exact definition, referring to the strong sense of pride that arises after experiencing great adversity. It is a feeling that players often seek out and experience. As Isabela Granic, Adam Lobel, and Rutger C. M. E. Engels point out, players feel joy every time they defeat a difficult boss [7]. Some games even prove to players that if you work hard enough, you can upgrade to defeat stronger enemies. This sense of accomplishment and pride is in line with a study that mentioned that when children are praised for their efforts, they are more motivated to continue working hard and develop an incremental theory of intelligence [8]. They believe that if they work hard enough, they can achieve their goals. The same principle applies to gaming. Players spend a lot of time improving their skills and competing with other players in MOBA (Multiplayer Online Tactical Athletic Game), FPS (First Person Shooter), TPS (Third Person Shooter) and other types of games. In RPGs (role-playing games), players also like to invest a lot of time in developing their character's behavior, improving their abilities, and ultimately challenging more powerful bosses. They believe that if they are willing to spend more time, they will be able to keep progressing and improving. By providing instant feedback, games enable players to see their progress, which further motivates them to keep challenging themselves and pursuing higher achievements [9,10].

2. Method

In order to gain a deeper understanding of why video games are so appealing to players, the survey contained two detailed questionnaires. The first questionnaire focused on players' gaming behavior and preferences, including the amount of time they spend on video games, the types of games they play, who they play with, and their age. In addition, players are asked about how often they play, their favorite game mechanics, and the impact of gaming on their lives. This data will be helpful to gain a

comprehensive understanding of players' gaming habits and needs, thus revealing what makes video games so appealing.

After obtaining the results from the first survey, participants were selected who had intersecting interests across different game types and were further invited to take part in the second survey. The second survey consisted primarily of open-ended questions to gain more insight into their personal experiences and perspectives. Specific questions included, “Are you attracted to games because they allow you to do things you can't do in real life?” “Do you feel a sense of achievement because you play games at a high level?” “Under what circumstances do you start playing games?” and “Do games help you alleviate negative emotions?”

Although these questions are open-ended, they are quite direct and can be categorized into “yes” or “no” responses along with their reasons. To analyze the data, the information was categorized according to the type of game the participants played, identifying groups of players across game genres. Then, these respondents were divided into two groups based on their answers to each question: those who answered “yes” and those who answered “no.” By carefully analyzing this data, the role that games play in players' lives could be revealed, thus to explore game players' motivations and needs, and to understand how games affect their emotions and sense of accomplishment. This approach helps to fully understand the appeal of games to different players and their actual effects on players' daily lives.

3. Result

They spent an average of 14.47 hours per week on video games, with 12 individuals spending nearly 56 hours per week on video games. Participants in the survey also preferred different kinds of games. In the question regarding games types, they were allowed to choose multiple answers. Out of 94 people, 36 people played FPS first-person shooter games, 36 played FPS (first-person shooter) games, 12 played TPS (third-person shooter) games, 32 played RPG (role-playing) games, 15 played ACT (action) games, and 8 played AVG (adventure) games. Additionally, 11 played SLG (strategy) games, 7 played FTG (fighting) games, 8 played SPG (sports competitive) games, 11 played CAG (card) games, 20 played MSC (music) games, 14 played B girl games, 22 played business games, 25 played PZL (puzzle) games, 35 played MOBA (multiplayer online battle arena) games, and 19 played sandbox and physics games. Regarding the third question which investigated the people participants played with, data showed that 53.19% played by themselves, while 46.81% played with friends, including online friends, classmates, colleagues, etc. The fourth question asked about the extent to which video games affected their participation in extracurricular activities, hobbies, or community activities, on a scale from 0 (no impact) to 10 (significant impact). The average response was 2.8, and the overall choice in this question was consistent, with 24 people choosing 0 to 2 and only 9 people choosing 9 to 10. The fifth question inquired whether playing video games had a positive or negative impact on their overall well-being and mental health, rated from 0 (games give me negative emotions) to 10 (games give me positive emotions). The average response was 7.2, with only 7 people choosing a range from 0 to 4.

The average age of the participants was 22.65 years old, and the participants' age distribution was very diverse, which added depth to the findings. Specifically, 47 participants were between the ages of 10 and 18, representing a younger demographic that is typically more focused on contemporary gaming trends and technologies. Besides, 20 participants were between the ages of 19 and 26, a group that is often highly educated or in the early stages of their careers and may have different gaming preferences or lifestyles than younger gamers. In addition, 19 participants were between the ages of 27 and 34, including those who may have more mature career or family responsibilities. A further six participants were between the ages of 35 and 42, and two were between the ages of 43 and 50.

The wide age range of participants allowed the data to reflect the views and experiences of video games at different life stages. This enabled the survey to capture a wide range of attitudes, preferences and influences related to gaming, thus ensuring that the findings were representative and relevant to different age groups.

The summary and analysis that follows is based on grouping players by the types of games they play, to show the feedback and experiences of each group. I will focus on analyzing the gaming preferences of each group of players, the impact of gaming on their lives, and how they perceive the emotional and psychological changes brought about by gaming. Through these analyses, I aim to gain a deeper understanding of the appeal of different types of games to players and their real-life effects on players.

FPS game players:

- (1) It's something they know and are familiar with. (Familiarity makes it easier for players to engage in the game)
- (2) Sometimes they feel satisfied when they play better than others in an FPS game.
- (3) There is no way to solve problems with a gun in reality. (FPS games provide a virtual way to solve problems)
- (4) No. Considers themselves to be average and occasionally relies on teammates.
- (5) Turns on the game when bored.
- (6) Usually plays with friends. (Social interaction adds to the enjoyment of the game)
- (7) Sometimes relieves negative emotions, especially when winning with friends.

RPG and MOBA game players:

- (1) The game allows them to experience a different worldview, like an escape from the utopia of the real world.
- (2) Sometimes seeing their favorite character and the story can provide some relief. (Character growth and storylines provide emotional comfort)
- (3) Games don't have many of the limitations of real life.
- (4) Consider themselves' games skills are on average level, but get a sense of accomplishment from beating bosses.
- (5) Usually play alone.
- (6) Sometimes play MOBA games to have more in common with classmates.
- (7) Think RPGs can alleviate negative emotions, they are like an escape from the real world.

Business games players:

- (1) Can run a small world of your own in the game.
- (2) Can earn virtual currency in the game and get a sense of accomplishment.
- (3) Can retry in the game, which they can't in reality. (In the game they can try again and again and revise their strategy)
- (4) The end of the game requires repeated attempts, but can be completed.
- (5) Will open the game when bored or miss the atmosphere of the game.
- (6) More often play games alone.
- (7) Sometimes opening the game feels like coming back to a second home.

B-girl game players:

- (1) There are handsome men in the game who can provide sentimental value.
- (2) Don't feel that games are always helpful and get angry when they fail. (Challenges of the game don't always bring emotional benefits.)
- (3) Yes, can have intimate interaction with the handsome men in the game.
- (4) Yes, some of the levels can be completed very quickly.
- (5) They turn on the game when they get bored.

(6) When playing a single-player game, they open the game when they want to play or see a handsome guy.

(7) Feel happy doing well.

ACT game players:

(1) Appearance is important when friends are playing.

(2) The primary reason for playing is to relax, and they play games when stressed.

(3) No, they primarily play games because of the character's appearance level or the game's setting.

(4) Their gaming level is average.

(5) They open the game when they want to play or have free time.

(6) They do not play games because friends are playing; most of their games are single-player.

(7) No, because they don't watch much and focus on levels.

TPS, MOBA, and RPG game players:

(1) Music, characters, and art style are important.

(2) They feel stressed when frequently failing and facing challenging bosses.

(3) Games feature many different characters that they can command, build bases, and create companies, which is entirely impossible in real life.

(4) Their gaming level is average, and they usually look for online guides; they experience a sense of accomplishment after completing the game.

(5) MOBA games are mostly played because friends invite them, similar to RPG games, which they play when bored or while doing homework.

(6) Yes, when playing with friends, it doesn't matter whether they win or lose.

(7) They enjoy playing single-player games by completing levels or watching the story.

In the first question, the factors that attracted players varied due to the type of game. For the second question, three participants felt that games could help them relax, one felt that it depended on the situation, and two felt that games did not relieve stress and sometimes even increased it. In the third question, five participants stated that one of the things that attracted them to games was the ability to experience activities that are not possible in real life. Regarding the fourth question, four participants felt that they were playing the game at an average level, one felt that it was at a fair level, and one felt that it was at a not so good level. In the fifth question, the reason why the players turned on the game varied depending on the type of game; some did so because they were invited by their friends, while others did so because they were bored. In the sixth question, four participants usually played the game alone, while two played with friends. Finally, in the seventh question, four participants believed that games could alleviate negative emotions, one believed that games did not provide this alleviation, and another believed that it depended on the situation.

4. Conclusion

It is evident from these two surveys that players are attracted to different types of games, but they generally view gaming as a means of passing time and escaping reality. In the case of RPG and B-girl games, players are drawn to the complex and diverse characters, enjoying the unique experiences that the real world cannot offer. They are fond of the opportunity to play the protagonist, actively shaping the narrative and influencing the decision-making process of the game characters. This immersive experience allows them to temporarily escape from the pressures and challenges of real life.

In FPS, TPS, and MOBA games, players focus more on the thrill of victory and competition. These games are characterized by fast-paced action, strategic thinking, and teamwork, allowing players to derive a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction from continuously improving their skills and tactics. Moreover, these games often provide immediate feedback and a competition context, enabling players to experience the gratification of surpassing others.

Business simulation games offer players experiences that are difficult to attain in real life, such as managing virtual enterprises and formulating business strategies. These games simplify the complexities of management while enhancing the fun, allowing players to experiment and fail in a virtual environment without facing the real-world consequences of loss and pressure.

This paper argues that understanding why games are so popular helps us understand player motivations and behavior, which can indicate effective ways of guiding teenagers to use their gaming time more wisely. Rather than banning gaming for adolescents, it is more beneficial to educate and guide them in balancing gaming with real life, so they can enjoy the fun of gaming while also recognizing the importance of undertaking real-world responsibilities.

5. Future research direction and improvement

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of gaming behavior and motivation, future studies could include larger and more diverse samples. Meanwhile, the samples need to cover different age groups, cultural backgrounds and levels of gaming experience. With a more representative sample, the common characteristics of different groups can be more accurately analyzed, while increasing the precision of the analysis for each type of audience.

Additionally, integrating quantitative and qualitative research methods can provide a more detailed perspective on player experiences [11]. Large-scale surveys can offer a broad data foundation, but the importance of in-depth interviews should not be overlooked, as they can reveal players' underlying thoughts and emotions. This mixed-method approach provides us with an individualized perspective: on one hand, it allows for analyses with distinctive characteristics, and on the other hand, by excluding specific cases, it makes the conclusions more universal.

Furthermore, investigating long-term effects would be beneficial for future research. Long-term tracking of players can reflect the change of gaming habits and their long-term impact on social skills, academic performance, and mental health. Such research methods help determine whether gaming behavior and its effects change with the player's age or other relevant factors.

Finally, exploring the potential of gamification in educational environments and other real-world applications can provide insights into how game design elements can promote learning and personal development [12]. Further research can include investigating how leveraging gaming technology can achieve positive outcomes in education and professional skills development. Currently, serious games have already made strides in this area. Future research could focus on how to further develop and implement serious games to maximize their effectiveness and applicability.

By addressing these areas of concern, future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted impacts of video games and contribute to developing more effective strategies to promote healthier gaming.

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