Does Online Gaming Promote Well-Being or Maladaptive Behavior? A 360-Degree Examination into the Industry and Consumers

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Considerable debate exists on the degree to which online gaming is problematic. Two competing perspectives as to the impact of gaming on "gamers" are (1) the *consumer well-being* perspective (i.e., gaming can be fun and/or educational) and (2) the *maladaptive consumption* perspective (i.e., gaming can be harmful). As such, current approaches to identify and address potential problems with online gaming are siloed and thus limited in social efficacy and impact. What happens when gaming creates so much harm that society is forced to address it? On the other hand, when does harm to a relatively small group consumers, who may knowingly misuse gaming, justify regulation. It is not clear what the impact is of different types of societal approaches, where the social responsibility resides for the behavior, and the impact that these approaches have on social welfare in terms of consumer and societal well-being. Having a clearer understanding of when the benefits of a social intervention may be needed and what constitutes undue harm are key societal questions with complicated approaches (Martin & Stewart 2024). We believe developing a 360-degree view of online gaming will be beneficial, and we propose to explore the factors contributing to well-being and maladaptive consumption among gamers. Such an analysis of one industry and its markets(s) has the potential to create a template for similar analyses of other industries and markets.

Our goal is to begin an in-depth, transdisciplinary conversation about the massive, rapidly growing gaming industry that impacts 2.6 billion consumers worldwide. We plan to deepen marketing's collective understanding of this industry and related consumption through the various factors that contribute positively to well-being and negatively to maladaptive behavior. We argue that research needs to understand the impact of rapid technological changes (AI, VR, AR, XR, etc.) in product design strategy and the impact of 'design thinking' on the extent that consumers continue to be immerse in a game, engage in related gaming communities, and avoid churn and switching to competitors' offerings (Teng, et al. 2023).

We will spend the next year focused on developing a holistic perspective of product design through interactions with game designers, attorneys for gaming firms, advocacy organizations such as ESA, regulators, gaming industry experts, technology experts researching tech-based changes/advances in the gaming industry, experts in different types of gaming such as e-Sports, Roblox, Twitch, and others. Our methodological approach will be multi-method: secondary research (in-depth literature reviews across disciplines; secondary data from various databases) followed by primary research, including in-depth interviews, focus groups, and surveys. We will also attempt to access data from gaming companies (e.g., smartphones facilitate tracking of gamers' behaviors). Finally, people often have strong views toward online gaming, which creates strategies that are based on advocacy rather than scientific research. Our goal is to start an in-depth, transdisciplinary conversation in the area of online gaming, advancing technology, consumer well-being, and maladaptive behavior, (see Table with the perspectives that will guide our research and timeline for the next year).

Table: Use of the Transdisciplinary Approach to Investigate Stakeholders in Online Gaming

1. Industry perspectives and strategies
    a. "Insiders" working in the gaming industry
    b. Game designers and UX/UI researchers
    c. IP Attorneys
    d. Trade groups such as ESA
    e. Marketers
    f. Media and Influencers
    g. Investors
2. Online gamers and their relationships
    a. Professional gamers and e-Sports participants
    b. Recreational gamers
    c. Participants in gaming communities and e-Sports events
    d. Influencers
    e. Inter-generational gamers (parent-child)
3. Public policy regulators, educators and medical industry
    a. Clinicians
    b. Parents of gamers
    c. Teachers
    d. Regulators and lawyers
    e. Researchers – industry and academic

General Timeline (planned activities over the next year)

1) September - November
    - Connect team through Zoom meetings
    - Commit to background readings and focused literature review
    - Define scope and objectives for the team project
    - Discuss methodology and develop approach and protocol for initial gathering data
    - Develop general interview guide
    - Start interviews of 'experts' from each of the above groups
2) January - March
    - Synthesize literature from respective reviews and readings.
    - Outline initial conceptual and practice insights
    - Continue interviews and collection of secondary and primary data
    - Present initial framework and results at Winter AMA (Phoenix, AZ)
3) April - June
    - Continue with data collection with industry practitioners, influencers, regulators, and consumers
    - Ideas for a manuscript and strategy to write and submit to a selected journal
4) **TCR 2023**
    - Preliminary report from initial data collection
    - Discussion between practitioners and team
    - Continued development of empirical investigation
    - Outline manuscript and specific team assignments

5) Beyond TCR
    - Develop a session for MPPC to share insights and receive scholarly feedback
    - Present at an interdisciplinary conference to receive input from other fields
    - Identify venues for practice-based input, involvement, and dissemination
    - Develop manuscripts for journal submission
    - Assess further collaborative research stemming from mutual interests (e.g. explore potential funding applications)

References

Martin, Ingrid M. and David W. Stewart (2024), "A Marketing Perspective on Maladaptive Consumption and Product Regulation," *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing,* https://doi.org/10.1177/07439156241250356.

Teng, Ching-I, Tzu-Ling Huang, Guan-Ling Huang, Chieh-Ni Wu, T.C.E. Cheng, and Gen-Yih Liao (2023), "Creatability, Achievability, and Immersibility: New Game Design Elements That Increase Online Game Usage", *International Journal of Information Management*, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2023.102732.

Signatures:

1. **I agree to work on the project across its duration and will attend the TCR Conference in person.**

Arianna Uhalde
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2. **I agree to work on the project across its duration and will attend the TCR Conference in person.**

Ingrid M. Martin

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4. **I agree to work on the project across its duration and will attend the TCR Conference in person.**

I commit to working on this TCR conference across its duration. However, I will be unavailable for the TCR conference as the result of activities scheduled around my 50th wedding anniversary. The team will do zoom mini conferences to go over everything in advance of TCR and after TCR we will do another zoom mini conference to go over what we accomplished at TCR. I will participate in both of these mini conferences.

David W. Stewart

David W. Stewart
Professor Emeritus
Loyola Marymount University

5. **I agree to work on the project across its duration and will attend the TCR Conference in person.**

Lauren B. Cheatham

Lauren Cheatham
Title/position: Principal Quantitative Researcher
Organization/university: Roblox

***Note:** Our goal is to recruit 1-2 non-academics and 1 academic from a field outside of marketing to join our team. We have started the process of reaching out to some potential candidates with the goal that our final team will be between 6 and 7 researchers/industry people.