

The Implications of Video Games on Social Behaviors of Adolescents in China

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Abstract:

This paper uses an online survey method based on 54 Chinese adolescents aged 10 to 19, semi-structured interviews with 4 girls from middle school and high school, and a secondary literature study to examine the potential impacts of playing electronic games on Chinese adolescents' social behaviors. The paper mainly focuses on three representative components of social behaviors from the perspective of a teenager: relationship with their peers and family members, as well as aggression. The research reveals that playing video games can lead to the formation of friendship, and will not necessarily result in aggressive behaviors, because it could be influenced and controlled by other factors, with proper family education being the most important one. Most Chinese parents regard playing electronic games as a bad habit for young people, and the result found that video games could trigger family quarrels and put certain psychological burdens on adolescents, though the reasons behind are vary under different circumstances.

Keywords: Video games; adolescents; social behaviors; family relationships; aggressive behaviors.

1. Introduction

The vast majority of research by psychologists on the effects of “gaming” has been on its negative impact: the potential harm related to violence, addiction, and depression [1]. While in terms of social behaviors, the influences brought by video games are not altogether unsatisfactory. Other arguments claimed that ‘Exposure to prosocial video games activated the accessibility of prosocial thoughts, which in turn promoted prosocial behavior [2]. Therefore, whether video games are beneficial or harmful to teenagers depends on the contents of the games. Furthermore, a more balanced perspective is needed, one that considers not only the possible negative effects but also the benefits of playing these games [1]. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of playing electronic games is the key to promoting a healthy online gaming community among different stakeholders for adolescents around the world.

2. The Implications of Video Games on Adolescents' Social Behaviors

Whereas violent video games increase aggression and aggression-related variables and decrease prosocial outcomes, prosocial video games have the opposite effects [3]. At some point, video games started to become related to the word ‘addiction’, and this is especially the case for teenagers since they generally lack self-control. In fact,

from the online questionnaires collected, about 40 percent of the respondents in China, aged 10 to 19, have more than 5 hours of screen time on gaming every day. Therefore, Chinese parents might be concerned that playing video games for long hours daily will inevitably make young people solitary or even introverted. However, playing video games can foster the social activities of adolescents in various ways, due to the characteristics of gaming being a group phenomenon not only among teenagers in China but also the popularity it has already gained among young adults worldwide.

Firstly, video games can lead to the formation of friendships and maintain the bonds between adolescents and their peers later on. According to the survey result, there are approximately 60 percent of the participants in China have 90 percent of their classmates play video games, with role-play games and social media mobile games being the two most popular types. More importantly, almost 90 percent of Chinese students play video games with their friends. Players in the cooperative condition engaged in more tit-for-tat behaviors—a pattern of behavior that typically precedes cooperative behavior [4]. In multiplayer games, teenagers can get in touch with their partners online, even those from other countries, though there might be certain language barriers. Moreover, the number of opportunities provided by video games for adolescents to enhance friendship is immense. They can develop

collaboration, leadership, decision-making, and tacit understanding within only a few hours through multiplayer gaming.

Furthermore, video games can become a hot topic for discussion at school among students in China, and it is even capable of creating social circles surrounding particular games a group of teenagers like to play. Valid evidence that supports this claim can be found in two individual interviews with two middle school girls, aged 13-year-old and 14-year-old respectively. Interviewee 1 told the interviewer, 'In my boarding house, there is a group of people who play *Minecraft* every night and they got closer because of it.' The reason behind this was stated by the other girl when being asked the question 'Are there specific groups of friends that come together because they play the same (type of) games?' And she answered 'Yes, because they have more things to say in common and they would be more likely to get along with each other because they like the same games.' Surprisingly, video games might trigger teenagers, especially those who are born to be timid or ineloquent, to open out and discuss with others any impressive character or plot in the games they like to play, therefore being a contributing factor for young adults to make new friends with almost no obstacles. On the one hand, it is fair to say that the purpose of playing electronic games has become no longer singular among Chinese adolescents, not only just for fun. 'Prosocial and interpersonal video game play was related to greater social satisfaction, peer support, and prosocial behavior, which led to increased well-being' [5].

On the other hand, for adolescents with certain individuality, this kind of 'unity' based on video games sometimes brings inappropriate actions. Some side effects behind various social groups formed by playing video games on teenagers could be overlooked. Exclusions or ridicule between peers might occur in this case. Interviewee 1 from China said that she had once been taunted by others because she had never played *Fortnite* before, which is a popular third-person shooting game. It is very likely that the embarrassment that comes afterward will push young people to play more games, that is, to spend more time online, encouraged by the desire to fit into a specific social group. Nevertheless, finding common topics between peers through playing games could be extremely entertaining for young people, and there is no doubt that the majority would show great willingness and enthusiasm for making friends in this way in China.

However, depending on individuals' personalities, spending an excessive amount of time online daily will make face-to-face communication feel increasingly uncomfortable for adolescents. The online survey reveals that there are more young people who prefer online communications

in China, rather than face-to-face communications, though the reasons behind this situation can be varied. The questionnaire result also shows that more than half of the participants in China spend more time playing video games than joining in outdoor activities. Meanwhile, prolonged use of gaming screens can cause Chinese teenagers to miss out on opportunities to meet with new people outdoors, though Pro-social behavior was promoted more as they were exposed to more pro-social scenes when playing video games [6].

3. The Impacts of Electronic Games on Family Relationships

The great popularity of video games their ability to make players indulge, and the turnout of players to play video games dramatically led to transforming the video game industry from the entertainment side to be involved in most other areas in life [7]. Does the enjoyment and satisfaction brought by electronic games outweigh that of family accompaniment? Moreover, is it realistic that the emotional support provided by virtual characters can replace that of a living being? A lot of video games allow adolescents to play multiple roles that do not even exist in the real world, which can immediately arouse their curiosity and attention. Although everyone indeed understands the importance of staying and communicating with family members during their spare time, the more online games teenagers play, the more exposure they have to a variety of game plots, and thus the more difficult for them to stop once they start playing.

To get involved in this issue, the survey gathered the answers for the question that asks 'Do you spend less time with your family than playing video games?' The feedback shows that only about 30 percent of Chinese teenagers spend less time with their families compared with playing games, though more than 60 percent of Chinese adolescents do not play video games directly with their families, there are certainly other ways for them to enjoy their family time. The vast majority of adolescents in China do not prefer the daily habits of completely immersing themselves in the world of gaming and fantasy. However, this might only be the case for young people growing up with a typical and relatively harmonious family relationship. Otherwise, it is necessary to mention that from the perspective of teenagers who are living in a family that has experienced long-term trauma, such as domestic violence or divorce, especially when the children are still very young, video game certainly has the potential to become an irresistible temptation for them. Video games may be the ideal form of media for managing mood states because they are active rather than passive [8]. Often lack-

ing proper supervision, caring, or attention from parents from a very young age, these teenagers can find greater company and receive more warmth from virtual characters, since a lot of them are specially designed to have the ability to cater to the players' emotional needs, making electronic games a truly indispensable part of their lives.

While worries from parents are not entirely unconvincing, excessive gaming is indeed inappropriate and harmful to adolescents, who typically cannot balance their time between staring at a screen and exercising outdoors or studying. There is, however, much debate on whether 'gaming addiction' should be included as a disorder at all due to a lack of empirical support [9]. According to the survey, one of its questions asked 'Have your parents ever blamed you because of playing video games?' Approximately 61 percent of Chinese adolescents were once blamed by their family members when playing games, and there are 13 percent of teenagers in China are even scolded by their family every time they are found playing games. Up to 76 percent of Chinese participants are opposed to their parents' scolding, thus leading to the sticky situation that the majority of (60 percent) students in China will have to face back home after school, that is family quarrels on the topic of whether they should play games. Meanwhile, it is also worth noting that more than two-thirds of the total participants admitted that this kind of dispute would put certain psychological burdens on them. Adolescents' minds are not yet fully developed and mature, therefore playing is still their nature, regardless of how hard-working or self-disciplined they try to become. Even for adults, it will be exceedingly difficult for them to say 'no' to simply, for example, a short break after hours of work or a vacation offered by the company.

As for Chinese parents, entering the inner world of a teenager might not be an easy task to accomplish. There are always a lot of obstacles involved, and the backtalk from their children seems nothing but incomprehensible most of the time. As already mentioned above, the majority of (more than 60 percent) Chinese parents do not have the habit of playing video games with their children, and thus the only method capable of searching for solutions to solve family disputes on gaming is through delving into the angle of view of Chinese adolescents themselves. The interview, interviewee 1 (female; 13-year-old; grade 7) told the interviewer, 'From FIFA, I learned lots of football knowledge and alongside that, you can learn about countries in the football world.' She believes that games with healthy and positive content can be considered to be both entertaining and educational.

Interviewee 2 (female; 14-year-old; grade 8) responded to a scenario assumption problem, which asked 'If you do not have such time management skills and there is a de-

cline in your grades due to video games, will you continue to play games after school, or choose to stop playing and study harder since then?' And the girl said that she would stop playing and start studying. Based on the possible relationship between gaming and coursework, interviewee 3 (female; 16-year-old; grade 11) claimed that playing video games can help her to release pressure from schoolwork. And she gave the same response to the above question as interviewee 2. As a result, reasons behind the psychological burdens on adolescents in China caused by parents' scolding might be related to the skills they gained from playing video games, the ability to balance their time between playing and studying, as well as the desire to fit into specific gaming communities of their peers.

4. The Guidance of Video Games Towards Violent Behaviors

Previous studies have found that playing video games is positively associated with aggressive behaviors and negatively associated with prosocial behaviors [10]. Adolescents are skilled at imitating, and they are often not experienced enough to predict the exact outcomes of their aggression. Since most parents are busy with work, they might not have the understanding or simply do not want to care about the game content viewed by their children every day. However, the possibility of teenagers acting like a character in the game and engaging in any irrational behavior that harms themselves or others, whether accidentally or deliberately, physically or verbally, can never be ignored by both parents and educators. On the contrary, according to the survey, there are up to 73 percent of participants in China claimed that their friends do not have any aggressive behavior because of playing video games or when they are playing games. For the rest of those who chose 'yes' to the question, verbal violence accounts for the largest proportion (44.8 percent), and physical harm accounts for the smallest (10.3 percent) among the four categories of aggressive behaviors: verbal violence, cold violence (24.1 percent), emotional violence (20.7 percent), and physical harm. At the end of the questionnaire survey, participants who gave positive answers were asked to rate the level of aggression of their friends on a scale of 1 to 5, and more than half of these respondents in China think the level of violence of their friends due to electronic games is at level 3, which is not considered to be completely uncontrollable or unbearable.

The fundamental preventive measure for reducing aggressive behaviors in juveniles is to let them fully understand the price that needs to be paid if they have done something wrong that can hurt others badly. Compared with younger children, teenagers need to receive a proper

family education that teaches them the ability to bear the consequences of their behaviors. Thus, at this age, the vast majority of them are aware that an act of free will is not realistic and acceptable in reality in China, unlike those game characters. Besides, many other factors can prevent teenagers from aggression, such as personality, emotional competence, and empathy. Furthermore, different stakeholders are obligated to take responsibility for promoting healthy online gaming for young people around the world.

5. Conclusion

If you follow the “checklist” your paper will conform to the requirements of the publisher and facilitate a problem-free publication process. To conclude, video games bring both benefits and harms to social behaviors of adolescents in China. Due to the popularity it gained from worldwide, video game has already become a common topic at school for Chinese young people, and thus it plays a vital role in the strengthening of friendship during multi-player gaming, through developing mainly collaboration skills and tacit understanding, as well as providing the opportunity for adolescents to meet with new people online. However, exclusions among peers based on gaming might occur easily, therefore acting as a stimulation for adolescents to play more games in the future. In terms of family accompany, playing video games will not shorten the time Chinese teenagers stay with their families. Nevertheless, family disputes still happen, since there are a lot of Chinese parents consider gaming as a harmful habit due to its negative implications on teenagers’ health, both physically and mentally. This type of family quarrels in China on the topic of whether adolescents should play video games during leisure time could even link to the pressure from their schoolwork, their desires to fit into a specific gaming community, and the accessibility for new skills. In the end, there is no direct correlation between electronic games and aggressive behaviors. To say the least, aggression that appears among adolescents can be mostly avoided by appropriate precautions from parents and schools. The extent of aggression in adolescents is also affected by personality and other related factors.

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