



Can Gaming be the Bad Escapism?

Waralak V. Siricharoen^(✉) 

Faculty of Information and Communication Technology, Silpakorn University,
Nonthaburi 11120, Thailand
siricharoen_w2@su.ac.th

Abstract. Game (Computer Game) is considered one of entertainment activities for many people. Therefore, several people have used technology to flee from technology as the usage rate has been increasing rapidly because of the emergence of the latest technology as well as the increasing speed of internet. In today's world, technology is considered an essential service, similar to food and alcohol due to several benefits such as for daily activities and work. However, as the usage has been increased, video games or social media can also have advantages, which individuals should also avoid. Although many students use computers for study essentials, building technological skills for work place and learn to combat distraction and procrastination as part of that growth, it is still considered a waste of time especially for those who start to develop an addiction or use as a regular escapism. This paper concluded a number of the researches and facts about taking escapism with gaming too far.

Keywords: Gaming · Escapism · Gamer · Escapist · Technology

1 Escapism Revisited

Several concerns have been developed throughout humans' lifestyles, including work, errands, health problems, etc. The technology has become developed to help solving issues to minimize time as well as assisting with daily activities. It does not only become helpful for individuals, but allow relaxations and experience delight in entertainment or leisure activities like watching movies, hiking, reading, playing games. It is also considered a great escape for individuals as some people use the technology sources to cope with troubles and pressures from daily routine. Considering a healthy amount of using an internet as an escape, it can be a healthy way to shake off from reality especially for a reasonable period. As the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated several trends to the gaming market, it starts to increase the demands of entertainment sources worldwide. Such contribution has started to cause excessive spending to individuals as well as developing the habits involving gaming especially during the pandemic and lockdowns. Also, it does show that the gaming entertainment industry will keep experiencing its growth for several years without fail.

People start to develop habits in escaping reality using video games more than ever. It is essential to understand that escapism is the reasonable defence reaction, it occurs as a result of people trying to protect themselves from hardships or irritations. Such

action is also called ‘survival mechanism’, which is beyond using the source just for relaxation.

This exploitation of this matter may end up being an unhealthy habit because it can develop the condition that makes individuals not able to separate fantasy from the reality. This has become an insecure concept that cause us to deny reality. Laziness or escape behaviour will be interpreted from developing this habit. Even though, being away from reality by using internet can also have positive and negative sides, but living with escapism will produce denial or inability to interact with real life [1].

Gaming has become more popular and mainstream in recent years [2, 3], with a 2016 Roy Morgan report showing that almost a third of Australians aged 14 and older own a gaming console. In the United States, gamers are still detained for committing violence after mass shootings in the country as the media usually have mentioned gaming when the issues have risen. The same report shows that the country’s 6.1 million console game owners. Regarding the Digital Australia 2018 report has shown that Australians spend an average of 5–6 h on a daily basis on the Internet and have been increasing during past years. As of now, the Global Games Market Report of Newzoo (<https://newzoo.com>), a subscription service This includes quarterly trends and forecast update reports, additionally as continuous access to a dashboard with gamer and game revenue forecasts by country and group [3]. The report shows that in 2021 [17], 2.8 billion gamers worldwide helped raising the the global games market generate revenues of over \$189.3 billion. In an merging markets, the drive of revenue is considered to be favourable and would also rise infrastructure and economic growth across regions such as in Southeast Asia and the Middle East & Northern Africa. The growth is expected to continue outpacing in the game and entertainment markets as the year 2021, it is expected to exceed over \$106.4 billion total revenue with the contribution of 59% total revenue come from smartphone and tablet game applications [3, 17]. Also, the growth of the PUBG Mobile’s e-sport have increased rapidly over years and has become the world’s fourth-largest esports activity in the year.

Escapism occurs after people try to avoid or procrastinate tasks or issues, which is available in different forms. Some people escape by seeking out alternate activities such as sleeping and outdoor activities. Some have drowned themselves in work or productive activities or substance addictions such as drinking, smoking and drugs. There are two forms of escapism, including positive and negative. The positive form is to feel exposed to new environment and explore new contents which allow individuals to see places to visit in order to cultivate the freedom of adventure. On the other hand, the negative escapism happens when individuals try to get away to feel more secure or as a matter to forget real life’s encounters or issues. The type of individuals may feel that living in the fantasy world would help them in forgetting bad thought and rather refuse to grasp or recognize the trouble or pain. It shows that positive escapism helps humans ascend pain and disappointment in this world, while negative escapism prevents humans from doing the exertions necessary that helps in growth. In the Fig. 1 below by Nordby et al. (2019), it shows the main review on the reasons of game playing, which escapism has ranked the first choice among 15 samples out of 393, whereas participants believed that the main advantage for video game playing is rather for entertainment [21].

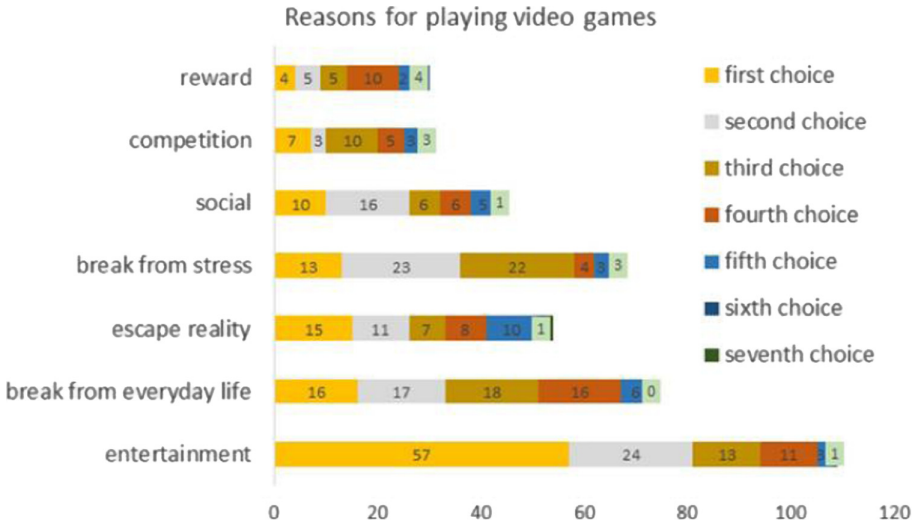


Fig. 1. Reasons for video gaming. (Source: Nordby et al., 2019. Journal of BMC Psychology)

Moreover, there are simple symptoms or signs which individuals with negative escapism may have experienced which are including the desire to quit productive activities such as a job or study, which can lead to a lack of performing such activities. The individuals may also develop the addiction from gaming that can be challenging to stop. They can also start to develop different mindsets by thinking that the world may be a cruel place that can be difficult to handle, and starting to rather procrastinate most real-life activities to perform the routine of gaming without being able to accept the sense of reality. Such signs can create harm to individuals as the intensity of the symptoms have developed to become addiction, which can be challenging for individuals to perform decent lifestyle and may demand a psychological treatment in order to improve mental health and well-being [4].

2 Gaming: The Route to Escape the Reality

"Individuals who play games to get away from their lives or to pretend to be other people seem to be those most at-risk for becoming part of a vicious cycle. These gamers avoid their problems by playing games, which in turn interferes with their lives because they're so busy playing games. [5]"

McGonigal [1] has mentioned that escaping to a better condition is what people have started to seek for especially during hardships without realizing that it can cause harm to individuals, especially in the digital age, gaming has influenced several people's lives as it causes individuals to be less in touch with real life activities than in the past. The statistics showed that people have spent over 300 million minutes a day just on the

game Angry Birds and over 170 h a year on Call of Duty. The rate depicted a dramatic increase in the activity, judging from the popular games mentioned. Currently, are not enough psychological studies on downturns of escapism to gaming such as developing mental illnesses, suicidal thoughts, or substance addictions [1]. However, many experts have discussed that gaming can cause negative effects from both physically and mentally to individuals as it is shown to focus on two key issues including mental aggression and postures. McGonigal also stated that these types of issues are considered mild and would not have a high impact towards society as using aggression towards gaming is common, and can help with stress relief, rather causing problems towards others. However, it is undeniable that it can still affect the mood such as creating mood swings and aggression.

Several scientific studies show that competing in gaming with strangers can cause a surge in testosterone, which can make game players to develop traits such as an urge to dominate or to be over-competitive. On another hand, beating someone you are conversant within a game causes testosterone to drop and rather develop a better bond with the person. The sitting disease is common within gamers as it has now been put into an attention as it is considered a complicated issue as sitting for over six hours a day can increase the chance of experiencing death more than moving individuals due to the lack of movement. The only best way to stop individuals from sitting disease is to reduce the screen time. However, it can be troublesome to many individuals to give up on the addiction so suggesting to reduce the screen time can be more beneficial especially at the young age. It helps individuals to become more active in the real world. Also, it is suggested that playing games that takes a short duration to complete or involving physical input can also help solving such issue.

A new study in Comprehensive Psychiatry, published by Elsevier [6, 7], is the first to compare professional electronic sport (e-sport) players with recreational video game players and explores the similarities and differences between what motivates each group. It showed that both esports and recreational gamers run the risk of developing internet gaming disorder when their intense immersion in the activity, which can also lead to escapism. Internet gaming disorder (IGD) is described by leading classification manuals (DSM-5 and ICD-11) as severe behaviour patterns that significantly impair personal, family, social, educational, and occupational functioning [6, 7]. The way in which both esports gamers and recreational gamers escape from reality into virtual worlds could also be the result of different mechanisms and psychological backgrounds. In some pro players, mental health status (stress level, psychosocial well-being, self-esteem) can modify the effect of escapism within the development of gaming disorder [7].

“Escapism can cause negative outcomes and interfere with an esports gamer’s career just like any sportsman’s career could end with a physical injury or trauma”, noted Professor Demetrovics [8]. Escaping to online games and community can create several drawbacks to individuals. As the rate of escapists have increased rapidly, it rather creates a massive community which can cause harm to health and well-being of individuals [9]. Online games have now been commonly played by children, which differs from the past that children used to play more offline community games such as marbles or hide and seek as they are busy playing on their phones or tablets. Such increasing has driven the number of players worldwide.

Overall, problematic life events or stressful situations can motivate individuals to go online and use specific applications, such as video games, to satisfy unhappy needs or to alleviate an unfavourable emotional state [10]. It is noteworthy that this can lead to both positive and negative outcomes, that is, positive when compensation is successful (feel better and when the app is in use for a short time) and negative when this mechanism is constantly on and the intensity of use. Compromise other areas of each person’s life can help to balance and prevent the problems from going forward. Moreover, these things are not necessarily mutually exclusive [10, 22]. The interpretations of each problematic used in the gaming habits, which can be categorized into three main types can be shown below (See Fig. 2).

Types	Problematic Causes	Treatments	Measurement Scales
Gaming Disorder	Excessive gaming with reports from self or related on addictions	Self or family reports on the addiction, Clinical treatments	Addiction scales (IGD, PG), Interviews
Internet Addiction	Intensive time spent online, more than average screen-time	Clinical/Professional help on the cause of problem	Scales on internet addiction and IPU, Interviews
Other	Other problematic usages regarding time spent, extension on games	Specific interviews and single-diagnosis on symptoms	Measurement scales on each game or internet usage

Fig. 2. Problematic interpretations on online platform

It is important to notice that the existence of gaming disorder does not mean doctors are saying games are inherently bad or dangerous. Video games can be an effective learning tool, and they can also just be fun [11]. Fun is essential. Nobody wants to take away the fun, and it is good escapism. However, some experts simply feel that addiction is too loaded a term, given the fact that many gaming addicts are children and adolescents. There is concern that classifying such an addiction could lead parents and doctors to classify normal video game use as a pathological behaviour when it suits them, perhaps even leading kids to seek out more dangerous substances when their games are taken away. For now, the sole behavioural addiction in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) is gambling addiction. But some argue that addictions to eating, shopping, internet use, sex, and other activities should be included [11, 18].

Addiction does not have to involve drugs or substances as addiction is a chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory, and related circuitry or clearly relates to the mental health. Over the past 10 years, scientists have made similar findings of compulsive gaming [12]. Neurological studies have confirmed that video games induce dopamine release in the reward circuitry. However, it also shows that dopamine release does not work in a normal level, but is considered to more excessive when developing addictions. A study in China has found that game players tend to have unusually low

activity in the prize circuit once they are expected to receive a monetary reward. Some researchers think that inherently unresponsive reward systems get people hooked by pushing them into the massive excitement pursuit. Others interpret it as an early sign of patience.

On May 25, 2019, the World Health Organization officially voted to adopt the latest edition of its International Classification of Diseases to include an entry on “gaming disorder” as a behavioural addiction [16]. During the activity, WHO declared that gaming disorder as an official mental illness in the version of draft from International Classification of Diseases (ICD). The information regarding ICD from WHO has the latest 11th edition which provides information in several languages, which serves as an international standard for diagnosing and treating health conditions [13].

The characteristics were listed by WHO regarding gaming disorders including:

- Impaired control over the onset, frequency, intensity, duration, termination, or context of gaming
- Increasing priority given to gaming to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other life interests and daily activities
- The continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences.

The addition caused by playing games concern two related terms. They are *internet gaming disorder* and *gaming disorder* [14]. Gaming addiction is described in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), which is employed by mental health professionals to diagnose mental disorders.

Internet Gaming Disorder: DSM-5 notes that gaming must cause “significant impairment or distress” in several aspects of a person’s life. This proposed condition is limited to gaming and does not include problems with the general use of the internet, online gambling, or use of social media or smartphones. The proposed symptoms of internet gaming disorder include [14]:

- Preoccupation with gaming
- Withdrawal symptoms when gaming is taken away or not possible (sadness, anxiety, irritability)
- Tolerance, the need to spend more time gaming to satisfy the urge
- Inability to reduce playing, unsuccessful attempts to quit gaming
- Giving up other activities, loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities due to gaming
- Continuing to the game despite problems
- Deceiving family members or others about the amount of time spent on gaming
- The use of gaming to relieve negative moods, such as guilt or hopelessness
- Risk, having jeopardized or lost employment or relationship due to gaming.

Gaming disorder is characterised by a pattern of persistent or recurrent gaming behaviour (‘digital gaming’ or ‘video-gaming’), which may be online (i.e., over the internet) or offline, manifested by [15, 19]:

1. impaired control over gaming (e.g., onset, frequency, intensity, duration, termination, context);
2. increasing priority given to gaming to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other life interests and daily activities; and
3. continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences.

The pattern of gaming behaviour may be continuous or episodic and recurrent. The pattern of gaming behaviour leads to marked distress or significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. The gaming behaviour and other features are normally evident over a period of at least 12 months in order for a diagnosis to be assigned, although the required duration may be shortened if all diagnostic requirements are met and symptoms are severe [20].

3 Conclusion

As escaping reality has become more common in the digital age, it also increases several negative issues for individuals such as increasing in more self-conflicts and are prone to anti-socialism more than individuals without the condition. It is crucial for gamers to consider the time limit in order to prevent the condition or trying to set the limit of time to cease the screen time duration. It can help individuals to have control of game playing and help to cope with addiction better. Escaping to the internet does not only have a negative effect, but also a positive side, which individuals have to consider in order to be able to keep track of reality. Individuals should start applying escapism to other activities including reading, socializing, sports, or outdoor activities which require productivity.

Despite both negative and positive sides from escapism, positive escapism still does lead to more productive activity, which can increase creativity, innovation as well as the sense of adventure whereas negative sides can lead to procrastinating important events as well as denial in reality. If the condition has developed to an extreme intensity or is considered an addiction, individuals are recommended to seek professional health in order to regain the courage to be in touch with reality in the future. As technology has become unavoidable for several individuals, it should be used in the most productive way in order to prevent negative sides of escapism, especially in gaming activities.

References

1. Kollar, P.: Jane McGonigal on the good and bad of video game escapism (2013). <https://www.polygon.com/2013/3/28/4159254/jane-mcgonigal-video-game-escapism>
2. Examiner.com.au: Gaming is a form of escapism but when do you know it's too much (2019). <https://www.examiner.com.au/story/6330838/balance-in-gaming-is-the-answer-to-health/>

3. Wijman, T.: Mobile revenues account for more than 50% of the global games market as it reaches \$137.9 billion in 2018 (2018). <https://newzoo.com/insights/articles/global-games-market-reaches-137-9-billion-in-2018-mobile-games-take-half/>
4. Mistry, M.: 10 signs you're an escapist (both good and bad) (2020). <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/productivity/10-signs-youre-escapist-both-good-and-bad.html>
5. Kuchera, B.: I play video games to run from my problems (2015). <https://www.polygon.com/2015/7/13/8950163/i-play-video-games-to-run-from-my-problems>
6. Bányai, F., Mark, D., Griffiths, Z., Demetrovics, O.K.: The mediating effect of motivations between psychiatric distress and gaming disorder among esports gamers and recreational gamers (2019). http://irep.ntu.ac.uk/id/eprint/37462/1/14673_Griffiths.pdf
7. neuroscienews.com: Escapism: a powerful predictor of internet gaming disorder among video gamers (2019). <https://neuroscienews.com/escapism-internet-gaming-disorder-15107/>
8. Debuglies.com: Esport gamers – excessive immersion can indicate mental health issues (2019). <https://debuglies.com/2019/10/23/esport-gamers-excessive-immersion-can-indicate-mental-health-issues>
9. Mbisasur: Are the online gaming leading to escapism? (2020). <http://networkconference.netstudies.org/2019Curtin/2019/05/08/are-the-online-gaming-leading-to-escapism/>
10. Melodia, F., Canal, N., Griffiths, M.D.: The role of avoidance coping and escape motives in problematic online gaming: a systematic literature review. *Int. J. Ment. Health Addict.* (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00422-w>. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11469-020-00422-w.pdf>
11. Leaf life radio: Gaming: Just For Fun? (2017). <https://www.facebook.com/leafiferadio/posts/1996497357342960>
12. Jabr, F.: Can you really be addicted to video games? *Newyorktimes magazine* (2019). <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/22/magazine/can-you-really-be-addicted-to-video-games.html>
13. Park, A.: 'Gaming disorder' is now an official medical condition, according to the WHO (2019). <https://time.com/5597258/gaming-disorder-icd-11-who/>
14. Parekh, R.: Internet gaming (2018). <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/internet-gaming>
15. WHO: ICD-11 for Mortality and Morbidity Statistics (Version: 09/2020): 6C51 Gaming disorder (2020). <https://icd.who.int/browse11/lm/en/#/http%3a%2f%2fid.who.int%2fid%2fentity%2f1448597234>
16. Kamenetz, A.: Is 'Gaming disorder' an illness? WHO says yes, adding it to its list of diseases (2019). <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/28/727585904/is-gaming-disorder-an-illness-the-who-says-yes-adding-it-to-its-list-of-diseases>
17. Newzoo's Games, Esports, and Mobile Trends to Watch in 2021 (2021). https://resources.newzoo.com/hubfs/Reports/2021_Newzoo_Trends_to_Watch_Report.pdf?utm_campaign=Global%20Mobile%20Market%20Report%202020&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=113081565&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-95D0XIfqPPpk7mNSMFQvtgHgTDq7ocK0G9mIFuZCBM9AYuuntYAfXrEPGgG4fGPMQj5UldqUR_Fy7TG4D9T0C13FcXmw&utm_content=113081565&utm_source=hs_automation
18. Mayer, I.: Press enter of escape to play deconstructing escapism in multiplayer gaming (2009). <https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/32050604/09287.04129-with-cover-page-v2.pdf?Expires=1631387763&Signature=cMB8QLWKavoae88OCvBti5Uhk9HqcTU7x1aWIEdC0srMNDvp5cefbdYSbKsyIDNyzu0s7gtBKBf4izkV9PqmvSrFzqkG~ElwR6Li3EyiEW1vf-RoBog6FPpInUfz~UpL58dvmgwgMevnoZ9-hCeWXM-aePjYLYU9d-tumNZmPXNcP~zUmjZ-42hvcZVj1DhmpkfMcrrn-XcN78NYwl2roxJpUlmcIDL077wO8dKVHARG2mQsekXbBe-23LkuyUCnedCDYF9LP7n1D5mbiy7MPXhjkkWMwZfCPxDu>

Lh2JVZjeZxlbYqMdd6oEGWzQKRivgdu-IBgULO64w90qN8Ing__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA

19. Kardefelt-Winther, D.: The moderating role of psychosocial well-being on the relationship between escapism and excessive online gaming (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.05.020>
20. Li, D., Liao, A., Khoo, A.: Examining the influence of actual-ideal self-discrepancies, depression, and escapism on pathological gaming among massively multiplayer online adolescent gamers (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2010.0463>
21. Nordby, K., Løkken, R.A., Pfuhl, G.: Playing a video game is more than mere procrastination (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-019-0309-9>
22. Carras, M.C., Shi, J., Hard, G., Saldanha, I.J.: Evaluating the quality of evidence for gaming disorder: a summary of systematic reviews of associations between gaming disorders and depression or anxiety (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0240032>