

# Research finds impacts of games psychologically complex

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Florian first came to Wellington in 2014, for a trimester abroad from Göttingen University in Germany, and returned several years later to do his doctoral research. "In Germany it is rare that students can choose

their own doctoral topics, so I was grateful for the chance to pursue my interest in gaming."

When he began, he was surprised to find the impacts of [game](#) usage were still an under-researched field of study, with little research on how games are used.

"When people have studied gaming in the past, they came mainly from the direction of game development, trying to understand motivations so they can tailor games so people play them more—or they only looked at it from the perspective of how much time is spent on games. I wanted to analyze it in more detail."

His initial research included 23 in-depth interviews, plus tests involving over 1000 participants. Then he investigated the relationship between game usage and [wellbeing](#) with more than 500 gamers over a period of three to nine months.

"I studied four key variables: personality, psychological needs, game usage—which includes but is not limited to gaming behavior—and wellbeing. My first discovery was that personality did not predict gaming behavior to any great extent, beyond discovering that extroverts tended to play more with friends—but this could be traced back to people who are more extroverted typically having more friends they can play with.

"I also expected psychological needs to be more indicative of game usage, thinking there would be some compensation for a lack of fulfillment of social interactions, autonomy, or competence. But the correlations were very weak.

"I did, however discover a positive correlation with wellbeing relating to people having positive or negative experiences in the game. People who have more psychological wellbeing out-of-game tend to experience

games more positively, while negative people have more negative in-game experiences."

Florian says gamers can get different things out of the same games. People may play to interact socially in forums, to talk with their out-of-game friends, to gain strategic and planning skills, or simply for the thinking involved.

One of the eight different games players involved in the interviews played was Grand Theft Auto V, which has a negative reputation. "While you can play this game as the drug lord, you can also just play to complete all missions, or explore the huge virtual worlds—you can even create your own content within the game, or just run around with your friends.

"Even competitive first-person-shooter games like Counterstrike can have a cooperative aspect and community building that occurs outside the games through forums, chat and so on."

However, the biggest impact on wellbeing Florian found came from interactions between players' situations outside of games and their already established game usage.

"It isn't just important to distinguish between different game usages—it is also important to distinguish players' situations out-of-game when evaluating a game's impact. For example, playing more socially was not generally linked with increased wellbeing, but for those frustrated with their relationships outside of games, it was.

"In fact, I realized that it was questionable to talk about 'real life' and 'virtual life,' because the same rules seem to apply regarding the impacts on wellbeing. Virtual satisfaction of needs, for example, seems to have a similar impact on the person as real satisfaction of those needs."

It is important, says Florian, that players themselves understand how they use games and how this may interact with their situation outside of the game to impact their wellbeing. "They can then choose to consciously direct their behavior in a way that fosters their wellbeing."

This ties into research conducted by Dr. Terry Fleming of the University's Faculty of Health in the field of youth mental health, which uses the understanding of what aspects can be introduced into these games and how players use the games to have positive outcomes for specific players.

Florian also wants to increase understanding and reduce the stigma of being a 'gamer.'" "Just because someone plays computer games, doesn't say a lot about their personality. It doesn't make them a killer, or a bad driver—it is just a different activity.

"It makes no real difference whether people play League of Legends or rugby as a pastime," says Florian, joking that the physical aspects may actually make rugby more dangerous and therefore unhealthy.

Provided by Victoria University of Wellington

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