

New study explores video game addiction rates

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Using data from a top video game streaming service, Puneet Manchanda, Isadore and Leon Winkelman Professor of Marketing, and Ph.D. student Bruno Castelo Branco have challenged preconceived notions of high

addiction rates in the video game-playing community.

The findings are [published](#) in the journal *Quantitative Marketing and Economics*.

Building off Manchanda's [previous research on addiction](#), the research explores a [video game addiction](#) using data on actual gaming behavior in the real world. Previous research on the addiction rate of video games has focused on individual representations of addiction through surveys and questionnaires. Rather than looking at just time played as a key indicator for addiction, Manchanda and Branco explored the rates of consumption—whether playing video games makes you play even more.

In their exploration of the data from the [computer game](#) streaming platform Steam, Manchanda and Branco were able to look at consumption and [addictive behavior](#) objectively.

"To consider a person addicted, our definition is that playing video games makes you want to play video games even more," shared Branco. "Our methodological approach allows us to test each individual's behavior separately and come up with a share of people with addiction within the gamer population."

Using this definition, they found that depending on the type of video game, only 14.6–18.3% of their sample of 13,400 video gamers on Steam show signs of addictive consumption. As Manchanda and Branco noted, this may be a surprising statistic depending on an individual's relationship to the [video game industry](#).

"If I share this with some parents, they think, 'It's way too low, right?' But if I share this with gamers, they think, 'Oh, it's ridiculously high. Your definition of addiction must be wrong,'" said Manchanda. "I found a similar situation when I started researching gambling. First, [advocates]

have to agree with the number. The problem, then, is the valence around the number. Is it a positive or a negative? And that depends on your worldview, experience, who you are, and whether you are a video game player."

One particularly impactful finding was the negligible differences in the rates of addiction between types of video games. There are many critics of the new style of "battle royale" games, such as Fortnite, Apex Legends, and Valorant. Casual observers believe that the games are intentionally designed to increase addiction with bright animation and increased free access.

Manchanda and Branco shared that despite claims that some video games are purposefully designed to be addictive, they found that game characteristics are not strong predictors of addiction status.

"We look at the nuances of all the different types of games and try to correlate them with the addiction parameter, and we find that there isn't a lot of correlation," said Manchanda. "Based on our discussions with [game designers](#), they all design games to be engaging. So perhaps one explanation is that all these games on Steam are meant to make you come back. So there's no differential advantage one game has over the other."

A better predictor of addiction is an individual's predisposition to addictive consumption. In other words, video games are not inherently addictive because of certain [design elements](#) or genres. Rather, an individual's specific needs are being met by video games in an addictive manner.

"While playing video games related to survival, RPG, single-player, and shooter are more correlated with addiction, game type explains very little of the addictive behavior," shared Branco. "This suggests that addiction

is mostly determined by person-specific traits."

Additionally, the study found that the addictive subgroup of the gaming population had some unique features that separated them from the total population of gamers. For example, people classified as being addicted to video games, on average, own more games, have more friends on the platform, play longer sessions, and are more likely to purchase new games.

The questions of addictive consumption of video games, which Manchanda and Branco elucidate in their research, are ongoing. In their future research, Manchanda and Branco hope to explore avenues such as video games' impact on rational versus irrational behavior, the ethics of video game marketing and advertising, the particular design traits of specific video games, and more.

More information: Sridhar Narayanan et al, An empirical analysis of individual level casino gambling behavior, *Quantitative Marketing and Economics* (2011). [DOI: 10.1007/s11129-011-9110-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11129-011-9110-7)

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