Gaming as a potential source of conflict with real life: The youth's assessments*

A.K. Mamedov, G.V. Denissova, O.V. Smirnova, O.V. Sapunova

Lomonosov Moscow State University,
Leninskie Gory, 1, Moscow, 119234, Russia

(e-mail: akmnauka@yandex.ru; denissovagv@my.msu.ru; smirnova.olga.msu@yandex.ru;
sapunovaov@my.msu.ru)

Abstract. Today, gaming practices seem to be at the forefront of the formation of a future society. In the current era of global digital transformations, the moment of total public involvement in the new digital reality was recorded in 2016, when an augmented digital reality was widely introduced and adopted. Thus, the period of post-post-modernity started with the situation, in which a person is at a loss facing an elusive old world with new features rather than a "brave new world". However, some grounds for forecasting future trends have been accumulated, which allows the authors to argue that behind the most striking manifestations of digitalization affecting social reality, there is the totality of their influence on many aspects of everyday life. The hidden restructuring of social practices that comes with every new multiplayer game is determined by both the gameplay of players involved and business structures that use psychological and digital tactical and strategic achievements for their own commercial purposes. The total gamification of social practices will become a new "bottleneck" for the contemporary civilization, if we do not manage to integrate a humanitarian approach and humanistic expertise into the strategic control centers for the development of digital technologies. The article presents the results of the survey conducted to reveal the general tendency in the youth's attitude towards the key aspects of life under the increasing digitalization (socializing, communication and learning) and to find out whether gaming might positively contribute to them or, on the contrary, should be considered a potential threat. The results of the survey show that the youth define both offline and online communication as equally important parts of their life and tend to restrain from total gamification but only in the field of education. The danger of getting addicted seems to be the most notable disadvantage of gaming, although in general it is viewed rather as an entertaining pastime provided the ability to keep it under control.

Key words: gamification; social practices; game industry; business; leisure; gamization (gamification); streaming; gameplay; virtualization; digitalization; socialization, communication; education

The recent three decades have shown a steady trend of introducing gaming practices in various spheres such as research and education, marketing and HR management, economics and politics, which encourages and boosts the transition to the digital society [22]. Among the most topical changes altering the society the following ones stand out: communication and sharing one's emotions in social networks and on online platforms at the expense of live interaction [15; 17]; increasing popularity of online gaming especially among the youth [4; 13]; financial sector's reliance on gaming industry when it comes to leisure activities [2; 6; 19; 20] especially for children and teenagers.

The main factor contributing to the widescale gamification is that games' plot and structure are determined by the post-modern paradigm of *Homo Confusus* characterized by ontological indeterminacy and decentration [22]. F. Jünger emphasizes the influence of three types of games: based on a lucky chance, based on well-developed skills, and those imitating some activities [3]. Within the contemporary social paradigm, the first type of games gave rise to such social problems as gambling addiction, the second type transformed into cybersports, while the third type is expected to generate long-term changes in social reality. Since imitation-based games offer an opportunity to take upon new roles (which is its inherent characteristic [3]), the phenomenon of gaming has gained increasing popularity among the youth attracted by both active games and initiative involvement, i.e., the chance to act as a driving force that both induces and alters the course of events [18]. However, an obvious downside of total gamification is that the gaming experience differs completely from the one obtained through non-gaming activities [18], which is especially important for socializing, communication and education as implying the most complex cognitive processes that can be interrupted and deformed by over-digitalization [10].

Psychologists argue that games of different kinds allow the child to understand better the external world [11]. However, wrong behavior patterns acquired through games (which happens in online and computer games) can lead to incorrect performance of social roles [9]. Virtual communication also demonstrates several differences compared to real interpersonal interactions, the main of which is eliminating socially significant characteristics of interlocutors such as gender, age, social status and belonging to a particular social group. Online anonymity, on the one hand, quickly expands one's circle of communication, but, on the other, promotes the concealment of personal information and creates an illusion of escaping the real-world problems [16]. Learning (both getting education and professional training) has proven to benefit from gaming techniques applied [1]. When introducing gaming elements into education, we should remember that in such cases attention management becomes thinking management in systemic interaction, while the improvement of learning implies adapting rules and standards to the efficient knowledge transfer tools [12; 21].

Thus, the penetration of gaming models and practices into various spheres of life seem to have become irreversible despite producing serious shocks for traditional social patterns. To find out whether gaming is considered by the youth as a potential obstacle to their real life, we conducted an online survey using the Google Forms platform. Respondents (undergraduates and postgraduates of Russian universities) received a link to the questionnaire about different aspects of digitalization in September 2024. The questionnaire consisted of six sections: the first was intended to provide the essential social-demographical information about respondents (birth year, native language and gender), while other sections aimed at identifying the influence of gaming on key aspects of the young respondents' upbringing: socialization, communication and learning.

The second section was based on the psycholinguistic method of targeted associative experiment in its two variations. Respondents were offered 23 stimulus words, among which 10 were experimental lexical units referring to the key spheres of life — socializing, communication, learning (In order of presentation: *game*, *sport*, *gamer*, *learning*, *communication/socializing*, *social network*, *competition*, *chat*, *message*, *addiction*), while others (*December*, *weather*, *paint*, *aluminum*, *tram*, *water*, *fish*, *beauty*, *spruce*, *myth*, *bee*, *time*, *oil*) worked as distractors. The experimental items were presented in alternation with the distractors; the list of items started with a distractor and ended with three distractors to avoid respondent's preparing for the next task. Each stimulus word was presented on a separate page. Respondents were asked to put down the very first word that comes to their mind when they see the given word (i.e., their first association); the instruction mentioned that associations were not limited by any specific part of speech.

The third section aimed at revealing whether the participant might get addicted to gaming and/or knows someone with such an addiction. The section included 10 questions with several options to choose: for example, "Do you play online games?" — "never", "infrequently", "sometimes", "quite often", "constantly". The fourth section aimed at identifying the meaning of gaming in the participant's life along the above-mentioned key lines — socialization, communication and learning. In particular, the offered statements focused on reasons the participant plays online/computer/video games; on whether gaming in any way prevents the participant's real communication (including the possibility that virtual reality substitutes real life); on whether gaming addiction can be revealed (namely, the ability of the participant to control time spent on gaming, mood dependance on gaming, determination to spend money on gaming); on whether respondents would like to introduce more gamification in their studies. There were 30 statements, and the instruction asked to evaluate how true each statement was related to the participant on the scale "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", and "always". The fifth section was based on the method of completing sentences: we asked the participants to finish 12 offered sentences so that they reflected their real situation (for instance, "For me gaming is …"). And the final section was intended to show how strong myths and prejudices

about gaming might be. Respondents were asked to evaluate 10 intentionally biased statements on the scale "I suppose it's a myth", "I suppose it's true", "I know cases that confirm it", "I know cases that refute it".

The third section provided us with detailed information about gaming practices: every second respondent (49 %) infrequently plays online games in addition to games on a smartphone or tablet (45 %); video games are unpopular (66 % claimed not to play this type of games). In general, the cohort showed quite a moderate interest to gaming: 38 % play online/smartphone/video games several times a month spending on gaming less than one hour a day (81 %). 36 % mentioned as their largest duration of gaming over 6 hours in a single day. The revealed tendency shows a sporadic but noticeable interest to gaming. 91 % know someone interested in gaming, namely online and console games (43 % each), and such a person plays every day (45 %) or several times a week (34 %) spending from 1 to 3 hours a day (59 %).

If respondents are moderately interested in gaming, it means that games neither substitute the real word (events of real life are more interesting than gaming for 74 %; the virtual world has never seemed real to 74 %) nor replaces real communication (74 %). Likewise, gaming never affects negatively respondents' relationships with family and friends (93 %) as respondents claim to be able to control time while gaming (45 %) and to stop playing easily (60 %). Neither distraction from problems nor entertainment appear strong reasons for playing online/computer/video games: respondents only sometimes play games to refocus (32 %) or relax (34 %); the majority never prefer gaming to other hobbies (51 %) or do this infrequently (34 %). Gaming does not seem to influence mood or to demand much money. Correspondingly, such a restrained interest to gaming reveals a cautious attitude to gamification of education: 34 % and 51 % of respondents respectively "never" and "infrequently" would like their learning to be based on interactive tasks or include more interactive tasks (the self-monitoring question whether respondents better learn in an interactive form got answers "infrequently" in 34 % cases and "sometimes" in 45 %). 34 % and 38 % of the cohort respectively "never" and "infrequently" would prefer different spheres of life to be more gamified.

In the fifth section (with unfinished sentences), respondents said to play games to have fun or because they like this type of pastime. Among the reasons not to play games respondents mentioned lack of time and wish to avoid addiction; some respondents find gaming boring; others prefer real world to the virtual one. For respondents gaming is a pastime (19 %), a way of self-entertainment (20 %), a way to forget about problems for a short time or to flee from reality (9 %); 9 % of respondents do not understand gaming and another 9 % find them unimportant and uninteresting. Thereby, gamers are viewed predominantly as "common people, just like everyone else" (26 %) or quite positively (23 %); only 13 % consider gamers to be addicted people. Among the negative sides of gaming respondents mentioned a danger of getting addicted (26 %), the fact that gaming is time-consuming (25 %) and might make the gamer forget about real life (13 %); 47 % consider the potential

threat of getting addicted the greatest danger of gaming. Among recommendations for the gamer, watching health, controlling time and maintaining the balance between games and real life prevail.

When it comes to the advantages of gaming, entertaining comes to the fore for 21 % together with boosting imagination (19 %), less frequently developing a reaction is mentioned (13 %). Every second respondent (49 %) claims not to be influenced by gaming; 6 % believe that gaming makes them consider the world in some other perspective, negatively influences them (also 6 %) or makes them more relaxed (6 %). 55 % prefer real world as more engaging, while only 9 % would definitely prefer the virtual world of gaming. Since respondents showed a moderate interest in gamification in the third section, quite predictably 38 % do not consider gamification of different spheres of life a necessary or engaging idea; 9 % would accept this idea provided it is well-measured and well-balanced; another 9 % find gamification of different aspects of life quite interesting and would welcome it. The leading option offered for gamification or partial gamification is education (28 %).

The survey revealed quite strong prejudices against gamers: 51 % support the myth that gamers are introverted ("I know cases that prove it" — 32 %, "I suppose it's true" — 19 %); 54 % — that gamers have troubles with live communication (28 % and 26 % respectively); 57 % — that aggression is an inevitable consequence of gaming (19 % and 18 %). The negative influence of gaming on studies and/or career is believed to be true by 55 %. However, at the same time, 45 % disagree with the statement that gaming might make a person infantile: 45 % suppose it to be a myth, although some respondents know cases that disprove (15 %) or prove (17 %) it. 51 % consider it only a myth that gaming might affect appearance. On the contrary, 47 % believe that gaming negatively affects health or know cases that prove it (25 %). It is worth mentioning that respondents unanimously consider gamers to be many-sided: 40 % do not believe that gamers are not interested in anything except for gaming, and 34 % know cases disproving this prejudice. At the same time, 45 % of respondents claim to know cases that disprove that gaming is a hobby for children and teenagers; another 30 % suppose it to be a myth. Likewise, 49 % suppose it to be a myth that only men are interested in gaming, and another 40 % know cases that disprove it.

Such a description of the youth's perception of gaming practices should be supplemented by the analysis of immediate associations. Quite predictably, this technique revealed that participants consider the key spheres of their life (socializing, communication, learning) to be "filled" with both live and virtual means. The stimulus *communication* (or *socializing* depending on the context) proved the importance of the counterpart (*friends* — 17 %, *friend* — 8 %, *University friend* — 2 %) and evoked a synonymic notion (*communication* — 8 %) together with associations denoting the corresponding process (*dialogue* and *conversation* — 6 % each). Moreover, both modes of communication were mentioned: *live* and *face-*

to-face (6 %); *messaging*, *social networks*, *Telegram* (8 %). The stimulus *social network* evoked associations of the following categories: the name of a particular *social network* (57 %), the purpose of using social networks (*communication* — 9 %; *photo*, *posting*, *messaging*, *friends*, *songs*, *gossiping*, *laughing* — 2 % each), the means ensuring an access to social networks (*smartphone* — 4 %, *Internet*, *media* — 2 % each), subjective characteristics of such communication (*timing*, *contented*, *addiction*, *inconvenient* — 2 % each).

Quite predictably, the stimuli *chat* and *message* were associated mainly with virtual communication; the leading association to *chat* is *bot* (17 %), for *message* — *news*, *information*, *notification* — 6 % each. The leading associations to *learning* are *school* and *university* (8 % each). Only 9 % have a gaming-based immediate association to *game* (*Roblox*, *computer* as an adjective, *joystick*); other associations relate to emotions (*joy*), the names of real games (*ball, football, hide-and-seek, whirligig*) or philosophical reflections (*my, life, loss*). The stimulus *gamer* got a wide range of associations, which can be combines in several categories: derivatives of the word *player* as a synonymous to the word *gamer* (*a game*, *addicted to gaming*, *plays* as a plural noun and a verb, *video games*); most general associations (*human being, hobby, teenager, a boy sitting in front of a computer, gamble, baby*); equipment for gaming (*computer, mouse, gamepad, joystick, console, earplugs; Youtube*); names of games (*Minecraft, Jinggg, Dota*); people involved in gaming (*blogger, doter, streamer*); slang of gamers (*GameDev, booster*); a particular person that plays games (*brother, boyfriend, friend, ex-boyfriend*); negative associations (*addiction, degradation*, *nerd*, *goof*, *laziness*). The leading associations are semantically neutral: *computer* (15 %), *computer mouse* and *gamer* (6 % each), *gamepad*, *a play*, *Minecraft*, *brother* (4 % each).

Thus, the youth consider live and online communication as equally important parts of their life. A counterpart in communication and the necessity of both parties to contribute to communication appear to be more important than the mode of interaction. At the same time, these findings do not contradict the previous studies' conclusions that the youth prefer to avoid reality by surfing the Internet [9]. Noteworthy, recent surveys have shown that, despite the departure of foreign companies from the Russian gaming market, the industry continues to develop — gaming and video blogging are still powerful phenomena in the Russian society [7]. Moreover, new Russian platforms have become popular [7], which proves the need for further intensive research in this field [see, e.g.: 8]. Interestingly, the survey revealed that education is considered the only sphere that could be gamified at least partially, which seems to be an expected consequence of distant learning under the covid-19 pandemics [10]. Due to the limitations of the research presented, its results do not follow the identified general trend [5; 14]. Nevertheless, even the youth moderately interested in gaming admits possible addiction to it as its most notable disadvantage, although generally, it is viewed as an entertaining pastime.

References

1. Aleksandrova E.G., Krivov M.V., Badenikov V.Ya. Highly effective cybernetic systems of the technological control development methodology. *New Technologies. System Analysis. Modeling.* 2016; 2. (In Russ.).
2. Anderton K. The impact of gaming: A benefit to society. 2018. URL: https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinanderton/2018/06/25/the-impact-of-gaming-a-benefit-to-society-infographic.
3. Average annual hours actually worked per worker. URL: https://stats-oecd-org.translate.goog/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ANHRS&_x_tr_sl=auto&_x_tr_tl=ru&_x_tr_hl=ru.
4. Gaming in 2022: How much time and money do Russians spend on video games? URL: https://nafi.ru/analytics/geyming-2022-skolko-vremeni-i-deneg-rossiyane-tratyat-na-videoigry. (In Russ.).
5. Gao Y.X., Wang J.Y., Dong G.H. The prevalence and possible risk factors of Internet gaming disorder among adolescents and young adults: Systematic reviews and meta-analyses. *Journal of Psychiatric Research.* 2022; 154.
6. Global Games Market Report. URL: https://newzoo.com/products/reports/global-games-market-report .
7. Lapin D.A., Kalimulin B.B., Khomich D.A. Mediatization of gaming experience on the example of the Russian video blogging. *Medi@lmanax.* 2023; 5. (In Russ.).
8. Lapin D.A., Malushenko V.A. On the video game research: Foreign approaches and methods. *Mediascope.* 2024; 2. (In Russ.).
9. Lebedeva T.V., Subbotin A.A. Digital generation. *RUDN Journal of Sociology.* 2020; 20 (4). (In Russ.).
10. Narbut N.P., Aleshkovski I.A., Gasparishvili A.T., Krukhmaleva O.V. Forced shift to distance learning as an impetus to technological changes in the Russian higher education. *RUDN Journal of Sociology.* 2020; 20 (3). (In Russ.).
11. Osorina M. *Children's Secret World Within Adults' Space.* Saint-Petersburg; 2008. (In Russ.).
12. Parr B. *Captivology. The Science of Capturing People's Attention.* Moscow; 2015. (In Russ.).
13. Risks and threats related to the development of cybersports and gaming. 2021. URL: https://rdc.grfc.ru/2021/05/cybersport-and-gaming. (In Russ.).
14. Rosendo-Rios V., Trott S., Shukla P. Systematic literature review of online gaming addiction among children and young adults: A framework and research agenda. *Addictive Behaviors.* 2022; 129.
15. Russian teenagers' leisure activities: Trends of the recent 10 years. URL: https://www.isras.ru/analytical_report_Youth_7_2.html. (In Russ.).
16. Ryumshina L. Communications in massively multiplayer online role-playing games as an issue of information and psychological safety. *Social Dynamics.* 2016; 8. (In Russ.).
17. Sakhnov K., Utochkin V. Game industry 2015. URL: https://hsbi.hse.ru/articles/igrovaya-industriya-geymdev. (In Russ.).
18. Shalaev V., Emelyanov F. Game in the space of self-identification and human identity in the post-modern society. *BSTU Publications. History, Phylosophy and Philology.* 2015; 5. (In Russ.).
19. Tsaryova A. Experience construction features of the computer game's players in the sociological perspective. *Discussion.* 2016; 8. (In Russ.).
20. Twitch.tv. URL: https://www.similarweb.com/ru/website/twitch.tv/#geography.
21. What are NPC and how to treat them… URL: https://aminoapps.com/c/rolevikam/page/item/chto-takoe-nps-i-s-chem-ikh-ediat/D8X4_ejpHNI2lGLq0W3wZM24JlWk01M84YQ. (In Russ.).
22. Yakovleva E. Game as motivation and action in social corruption. *Current Issues of Economics and Law.* 2015; 9 (4). (In Russ.).

Гейминг как потенциальный источник конфликта с реальной жизнью: оценки молодежи*

А.К. Мамедов, Г.В. Денисова, О.В. Смирнова, О.В. Сапунова

Московский государственный университет имени М.В. Ломоносова,
Ленинские горы, 1, Москва, 19991, Россия

(e-mail: akmnauka@yandex.ru; denissovagv@my.msu.ru; smirnova.olga.msu@yandex.ru;
sapunovaov@my.msu.ru)

Аннотация. Сегодня игровые практики оказались на переднем крае становления будущего общества. В нынешнюю эпоху глобальных цифровых трансформаций момент тотального вовлечения общества в новую цифровую реальность был зафиксирован в 2016 году, когда была широко внедрена и принята как неотъемлемая часть нашей современной жизни дополненная цифровая реальность. Оказалось, что период пост-постмодерна начался с ситуации, когда человек растерянно сталкивается не с «дивным новым миром», а с неуловимым старым миром, но наполненным новыми технологическими и информационными возможностями. Тем не менее, сегодня накоплены исследовательские данные, позволяющие прогнозировать некоторые будущие тенденции: в частности, ряд авторов утверждает, что за наиболее яркими проявлениями цифровизации, влияющими на социальную реальность в целом, стоит их совокупное воздействие на самые разные аспекты нашей повседневной жизни. Скрытая перестройка социальных практик, имплицитно встроенная в каждую новую многопользовательскую игру, обусловлена как особенностями игрового процесса, куда вовлечены игроки, так и деятельностью бизнес-структур, использующих психологические и цифровые, тактические и стратегические достижения цифровизации в собственных коммерческих целях. Тотальная геймификация социальных практик может стать новым вызовом для современной цивилизации, если не удастся интегрировать гуманистический подход и экспертизу в стратегические центры управления развитием цифровых технологий. В статье представлены результаты опроса, призванного обозначить общие тенденции в восприятии молодежью ключевых аспектов своей жизни в условиях нарастающей цифровизации (эти аспекты — социализация, общение и обучение) и оценить, могут ли игры внести в эти аспекты своей позитивный вклад или, напротив, должны рассматриваться как потенциальная угроза. Согласно результатам опроса молодежь считает офлайн- и онлайн-общение одинаково важными аспектами своей жизни, но отказывается от идеи тотальной геймификации в сфере образования. Опасность возникновения игровой зависимости воспринимается как наиболее значимый недостаток игр, хотя в целом они рассматриваются как развлекательное времяпрепровождение при условии способности его контролировать.

Ключевые слова: геймификация; социальные практики; игровая индустрия; бизнес; досуг; геймификация; стриминг; игровой процесс; виртуализация; цифровизация; социализация, коммуникация; образование