

Research on video games and adolescent socialization

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Abstract: In recent years, the rise of the Internet has driven rapid development in the video game industry, making electronic games an integral part of adolescents' daily lives. This paper examines the relationship between video games and adolescent socialization from a sociological perspective, analyzing the impacts of electronic games on adolescents' interpersonal communication, social behavioral norms, and role-playing, and proposes corresponding solutions.

Keywords: video games, adolescents, socialization

1. Introduction

Since its inception, video games have possessed characteristics distinct from traditional games, yet conventional social theories and sociology have not provided adequate explanations for this phenomenon. As the primary user group of video games, adolescents are inevitably influenced by electronic games during their participation. Therefore, this paper explores the sociological significance of video games by examining their impacts on adolescent socialization, specifically in terms of interpersonal communication, social behavioral norms, and role-playing.

2. The relationship between video games and socialization

"Socialization refers to the process through which individuals, via interaction with society, gradually develop unique personalities and traits, transform from biological beings into social beings, and gradually adapt to social development through the internalization of social culture and the learning of role knowledge" [1]. In this process, social environments such as family, school, peer groups, workplaces, and mass media play crucial roles. According to the 2015 China Adolescent Internet Behavior Research Report released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the number of adolescent netizens in China reached 287 million, with adolescent netizens showing a clear preference for online entertainment applications [2]. This indicates that video games have become an important arena influencing adolescent socialization.

Referring to Zheng Hangsheng's definition of socialization, the quasi-socialization mechanisms of video games are mainly manifested in three aspects. First, interpersonal communication: Deng Tian ying points out that although the virtual world and the real world are fundamentally different, their modes of interpersonal communication tend to be consistent in certain respects [3]. Second, normative constraints: Cao Ying and others argue that game norms support the normal operation of video games, with every player in the game world subject to rule constraints; essentially, game norms reflect real-world ethics and morals, thus good game norms can provide players with experiences meeting socialization requirements [4]. Third, role-playing: Lou Zhang sheng and others found that role-playing in video games closely resembles real life, with the experiential process of game characters itself constituting a socialization process of role shaping and role learning [5].

3. The impact of video games on adolescent socialization

Although "video games" carry certain negative connotations in public perception, with gaming-related problems arousing public concern, relevant research has proven that video games, as an important arena for adolescent socialization, possess numerous advantageous factors. Excessive focus on violence, anomie, and

other issues has obscured the positive effects of gaming. Moreover, the fact that video games as a form of entertainment can easily integrate players into a cohesive whole is itself highly significant. Based on this, the author analyzes the impact of video games on adolescent socialization.

3.1. Positive impacts of video games on adolescent socialization

3.1.1. Promoting the development of adolescent interpersonal communication

Video games expand the scope of adolescents' interpersonal communication and enhance their communicative competence. The emergence of video games enables strangers who were previously unknown to each other and who may differ significantly in geography or social status to meet and converse, free from the constraints of inherent factors in the real world. This phenomenon of transcending class, age, region, and ethnicity is commonly seen in video games, extending the temporal and spatial boundaries of adolescents' interpersonal communication. Furthermore, video games increase the possibility of cross-gender interaction among adolescents. According to the 2016 China Game Industry Report, in 2016, female gamers in China had surpassed 30% of total users, becoming a significant demographic that cannot be ignored [6]. For adolescents undergoing constant physiological and psychological changes, cross-gender interaction can have certain positive effects on their emotions. Moreover, interpersonal communication among players occurs not only through game characters but also in real life; in fact, most players already know whether their friends are online before entering the game. Therefore, the author argues that players' social connections in real life and the video game world are tightly intertwined.

3.1.2. Enhancing adolescents' learning capacity for behavioral norms

Both game content itself and the gaming process display various formal and informal norms. Game rules constitute an external norm, analogous to "law," while the conventional standards formed during adolescent gaming activities represent an internal norm, similar to "morality" [7]. The former is established by game designers, with game operators penalizing player behaviors that violate rules, such as using cheats, maliciously exploiting system vulnerabilities, or idling. The latter emerges through player interaction. "All morality is a system comprising many rules, and the essence of all morality lies in individuals learning to observe these rules" [7]. Therefore, the sense of morality formed through in-game interaction also provides adolescent gamers with an excellent platform for self-discipline. The behavioral norms in video games regulate player conduct; through repeated gaming operations, players deepen their understanding of social norms in the virtual world, while simultaneously promoting adolescents' capacity to learn and comprehend social norms in real life, helping them integrate into real-world society more rapidly.

3.1.3. Strengthening self-awareness and enhancing team collaboration

Virtual identities in games have become one of the charms of online gaming, offering players the possibility of shaping an ideal self. In video games, players grow alongside their game characters, overcoming various challenges to obtain rewards—a process highly similar to real-life experiences. The growth of game characters itself constitutes a process of players experiencing socialization. Players equip their game characters according to their own ideas, select their own directions, and ultimately form avatars that meet their inner expectations. This is both a process of role-playing and a process of self-development. Meanwhile, different roles bear different responsibilities, and players' experiences with various division-of-labor roles also facilitate the positioning of their own social roles.

Secondly, most video games incorporate team collaboration as an important factor from the initial design stage, indirectly binding players together through game settings featuring complementary character attributes. The collective consciousness formed by adolescents in team battles within video games helps them coordinate task distribution and strengthen group cooperation in real life.

3.2. Negative impacts of video games on adolescent socialization

3.2.1. Limiting the development of adolescent emotions

There is a qualitative difference between interpersonal communication in daily life and purely gaming-based relationships, with the latter primarily revolving around game-related topics. In video games, player interaction relies on the game itself; most player communication concerns game task experiences,

with little emotional exchange involved. Under such circumstances, their communication exhibits characteristics of "shallow interaction," and this fragile interpersonal relationship often breaks down with the switching of games. Furthermore, based on the fact that players spend most of their leisure time participating in video games and that veteran players rarely engage in offline activities, it can be argued that most players coexist with games or even live within them. Although in-game social connections have not replaced offline friendships, gaming-induced lack of idle time restricts adolescents' daily interpersonal communication, weakens individual emotional exchange, and consequently develops into social isolation. From a technological perspective, video games extend various human organ functions, but they also limit the development of human emotions [8].

3.2.2. *Inducing aggressive behavior and erroneous monetary values*

Although bloody and violent content in online games does not necessarily lead to real-world violence, the negative effects on adolescents from prolonged exposure to violent environments are objectively present. Research by Liu Guiqin and others found that violence in games can activate adolescents' aggressive cognition and increase aggressive behavior. Wei Jin and others further discovered that players in negative emotional states are more prone to activating aggressive behavior, thereby increasing violent behavior among adolescents in real life. Particularly in shooting games such as CrossFire, players obtain a sense of achievement through eliminating opponents; deriving pleasure from violence itself distorts the meaning of life's value, affecting adolescents' physical and mental health.

Furthermore, RMB consumption in video games shapes erroneous monetary values among adolescents. In video games, point card consumption in item malls (exchanged for RMB) can be used to obtain rare items or fashionable clothing. The behavior of players recharging to gain advantageous positions for their game characters fosters a money-worshipping consumer view, bringing tremendous psychological pressure to adolescents and inducing social deviant behavior.

3.2.3. *Leading to self-identity confusion*

Freud believed that the balance among the id, ego, and superego is a necessary condition for healthy personality development. The development of video games undoubtedly plunges players into another dilemma during their quest for self-identity. In the virtual society of video games, individuals play multiple different roles on one hand, experiencing diverse life journeys and freeing themselves from the constraints of fixed real-world identities. However, from another perspective, each identity encompasses multiple individual selves, making it difficult to distinguish between self and other, thereby leading to self-identity confusion. Moreover, since game characters in video games lack the full characteristics of social roles, players cannot completely transfer the experiences of their played roles into real life.

4. **Measures to address the impact of video games on adolescents**

Adolescent players experience different role-playing in video games and interact with strangers from around the world—these interactions contain both positive and negative elements. To address the negative impacts of video games on adolescent socialization, we should first fully collect and analyze data, examine issues from adolescents' perspectives, and identify the root causes of problems. Second, eliminating negative impacts requires not only the cooperation of families, schools, and game developers, but also the support of national policies and social systems. By integrating micro-level and macro-level social systems, we can conduct real-time management and monitoring of adolescents' online behavior to protect their healthy growth. Specifically, this mainly includes three aspects: time supervision, cognitive guidance, and institutional intervention.

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4.1. Time supervision

As Lin, designer of League of Legends, stated: "We are not an education company; we are first and foremost a game company, but we know how to use games for education." While pursuing economic interests, game developers should maintain social responsibility and safeguard minors' physical and mental health. In 2017, Tencent's Honor of Kings introduced a health system limiting players under 12 to one hour daily and those 12 and above to two hours. Unlike previous anti-addiction systems, this health system incorporated parents into the supervision framework, implementing real-name registration, login time control, and parental one-click locking. Joint supervision of adolescents' gaming behavior by developers and parents represents the future trend.

4.2. Cognitive guidance

Schools and parents need to guide adolescent players in properly using video games, helping them objectively perceive electronic games and form correct understanding of their positive and negative impacts, while encouraging active participation in extracurricular activities. Adolescents require not only textbook knowledge but also various social skills; they should actively engage in practical activities to cultivate social competence. Through extracurricular activities replacing gaming behavior and positive reinforcement from schools and parents, adolescents can gradually reduce gaming and return to real life.

4.3. Institutional intervention

According to the 39th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China, as of December 2012, China's online game user base reached 417 million, accounting for 57.0% of total netizens [9]. Given this massive user population, relevant state departments should attach sufficient importance. Referencing foreign legal systems: South Korea's 2011 Juvenile Protection Act institutionally prohibits minors' nighttime gaming; the United States and European countries establish game rating standards based on violence and gore indices, restricting player ages for different levels. Compared to other countries, China's relevant legal system is somewhat inadequate. Although the 2010 Interim Measures for Online Game Administration required real-name registration for gamers, the emergence of online identity information sales chains has rendered this minimally effective. Faced with an ever-expanding gaming population, more specific institutional protections for adolescents' healthy growth are urgently needed.

5. Conclusion

The impact of video games on players presents a dual nature. On one hand, they demonstrate positive effects in expanding the scope of interpersonal communication, guiding adolescents in learning social norms, developing self-awareness, and cultivating collective consciousness. On the other hand, violent factors, erroneous values, and self-identity confusion in games exert negative influences, restricting individuals' emotional communication. Particularly for adolescents in a critical period of physical and psychological development, urgent intervention from families, schools, and institutions is needed to guide rational use of video games and facilitate smooth adolescent socialization.

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