

For students, why are video games so tempting?

 *Ruining Jin*

Civil, Commercial and Economic Law School, China University of Political Science and Law,
Beijing 100088, China

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8542-7614>

May 13, 2023

World Health Organization and academia have identified gaming addiction as a mental disease caused by addictive behaviors [1,2]. In China, electronic games used to be called “electronic heroin” [3], which all parents and education practitioners abhorred. For decades, electronic games have been seen as distractions to students’ school engagement. To “rehab” these students, in 2021, China introduced new rules that limit the amount of time under-18s can spend on video games to three hours a week, a move it said was necessary to combat gaming addiction [4]. However, people might wonder, did all Chinese students engage in school learning before the creation of electronic games? The answer is definitely no, and apart from gaming, students back in the day would skip classes to attend other activities perceived as “irrelevant” to school learning. While gaming addiction and poor academic performance mutually reinforce each other in a vicious loop, can we know for sure which one is the initial trigger in the beginning?

Why do most students always seem to become disengaged in school learning? A brief walkthrough of the Chinese education system is needed to answer this question. Like many other developing countries, the Chinese education system is often criticized for being too standardized and test-oriented, where students are under immense pressure to perform well on exams and are often required to attend after-school tutoring sessions. That means students are being evaluated based solely on test scores. When unable to get a good score, students would be marginalized by peers and criticized by teachers and parents. Having said that, they live in a world where they are not appreciated and, therefore, cannot gain a sense of self-actualization. As a result, students who don’t perform well in exams would

want a “break” by skipping classes and conducting deviant acts, including playing electronic games. Here, an escape to the virtual world particularly seems to be a sweet temptation.

What made electronic gaming much more attractive than conventional studying or other school activities is that the mechanism of electronic gaming could provide instant feedback and reward to gamers [5]. Moreover, multiplayer games’ environments offer a sense of social connectedness in a virtual community where players can gain a sense of self-belonging by meeting and knowing more who share their life experiences and values. On the other hand, in traditional education and school activities, students’ efforts do not lead to instant gratifications, and their chances to expand their social circle are restricted. Therefore, from a cost-benefit perspective of student gamers, gaming has more perceived benefits, such as instant gratification and self-actualization, escape from competition and boredom, and social and emotional bonds with the virtual community, compared to perceived costs, such as being marginalized in the real world.



Illustration: Playing video games (AI-generated with Stable Diffusion)

From an information-processing perspective, actively engaging in even the most self-destructive behavior – or usually referred to in a casual way as suicide – is also a rational decision based on consideration of multiple factors in life and society [6]. Following this line of thinking, it is plausible that gaming addiction – in its initial stage – is not a mental

disorder. Rather, the strong preference for gaming over studying could stem from a rational choice made by students with poor performance and expectations living in the physical world where they are marginalized and despised upon. And so, immersing themselves in a virtual world where their social, emotional, and self-actualization needs are satisfied becomes the fairytale they are willing to dream in [7].

References

- [1] Poci B. (2019). [The ICD-11 Has Been Adopted by the World Health Assembly](#). *World Psychiatry*, 18(3), 371–372.
- [2] Zhao W, et al. (2021). [The Influence of Online Game Behaviors on the Emotional State and Executive Function of College Students in China](#). *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12, 713364.
- [3] Cao S, He W. (2021). [From Electronic Heroin to Created in China: Game Reports and Gaming Discourse in China 1981–2017](#). *International Communication of Chinese Culture*, 8(4), 443–464.
- [4] Xiao LY. (2021). People’s Republic of China Legal Update: The Notice on Further Strictly Regulating and Effectively Preventing Online Video Gaming Addiction in Minors. <https://doi.org/10.1089/glr2.2021.0026>
- [5] Burgos D, van Nimwegen C, van Oostendorp H. (2007). [Game-based learning and the role of feedback: A case study](#). *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 38(3), 385-393.
- [6] Vuong QH, et al. (2023). [Near-Suicide Phenomenon: An Investigation into the Psychology of Patients with Serious Illnesses Withdrawing from Treatment](#). *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(6), 5173.
- [7] Vuong QH. (2023). *Meandering Sobriety*. <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0C2TXNX6L/>

