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BA COMPUTER GAMES DESIGN

GAMES FOR POSITIVE IMPACT

Contemporary issues in gaming



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Lecture Contents

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Gaming is a huge part of not only the entertainment industry but within society at large.

- **Traditional Console gaming**
- **PC and internet based gaming**
- **Reconstruction and visualisation**
- **Mobile Gaming**
- **As a tool for education and training**
- **As a virtual showroom (aka a walking simulator)**

This means that gaming is a powerful entity, able to influence people across age ranges, genders and social classes with impunity

Today we will explore Issues that reflect poorly on gaming as a whole and discuss ways in which we, as creators could combat them.



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The User

Issues affecting individual users



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The end-user of a game is the most direct link between humanity and the game being developed. The individual users of games can have both positive and negative outcomes from play.

This section will focus on issues that affect the individual users of games, the issues we will cover are:

- **Isolation**
- **Social Delusion – acceptable behaviours in games (t-bagging, swatting and smurfing)**
- **Addiction (gambling, dopamine, gaming itself)**
- **Social Development**
- **IGD (Internet Gaming Disorder)**



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Isolation.

Isolation occurs when gamers neglect social interactions within their own sphere (family, friends and relatives) for the gaming experience; it is important to note that excessive interactions with other players in the game also contributed to isolation.

Studies show that excessive gaming and isolation negatively impacted empathy, relationships and disrupted family communication and dynamics (Park *et al*, 2025). However, other studies have shown that gaming helps to increase socialisation, particularly amongst people who find in person social interactions difficult or during lockdowns (E.G COVID) (Kowert & Oldmeadow, 2014).

How can we as content creators and users of games help to alleviate issues around isolation in gaming?



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Social Delusion

Social issues in gaming don't just fall into the “toxic” category. Many acceptable behaviours in game are not acceptable in the real world and there are pushes to make gaming reflect these standards. As gaming is a fantasy – this will be very difficult.

E.G. Behaviours such as t-bagging are widely accepted as a form of celebration within some games (especially in the FPS genre), if you did this to someone in real life – you would be arrested. The inability to separate the gaming sphere from the sphere of reality therefore leads to conflict between these worlds.

Real life examples of gaming behaviours spilling into the real world include Swatting (where armed police are called to an address of a gaming streamer under false pretences) and Luring (where people were lured by Pokemon Go! to remote areas where they were then mugged or beaten).

Games such as Hatred are designed to be provocative this damages the industry as a whole

Who has responsibility in these situations? Do the games themselves bear any of the blame?



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Social Development

Gameplay has been shown to have an impact on the social development of young people.

There are arguments for both positive and negative ones

Positive	Negative
Teamwork and Collaboration	Isolation and isolationist habits
Communication	Exposure to harassment/ bullying
Friendship and Community	Addiction
Critical thinking	Mental health such as anxiety/ depression
Problem solving	

Is this true for all computer games?



Addiction

what actually happens to a human brain when it plays computer games?

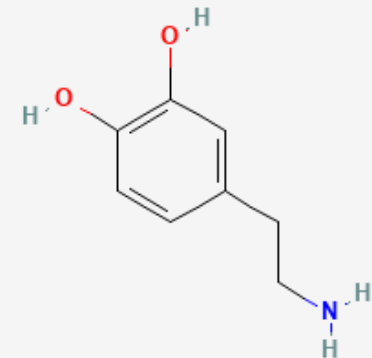
We know that gaming makes people feel good – this is caused by the release of a chemical called Dopamine.

Dopamine is responsible for motivation, pleasure and reward

Establishes “reward pathways” in the brain

Has a role in decision making, learning and motor control

Excess Dopamine contributes to addiction





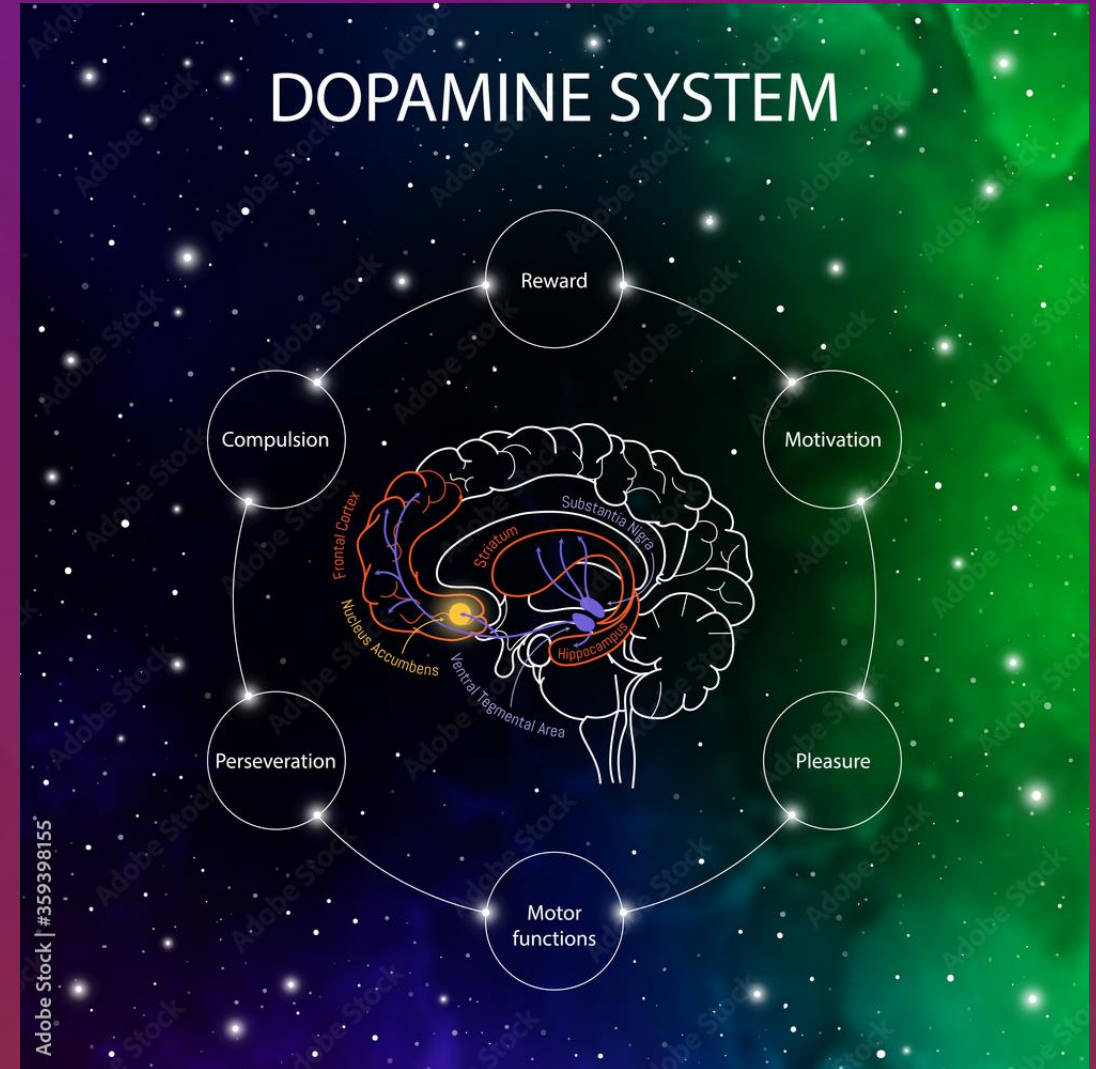
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Dopamine affects the brains *Striatum* which is the area of the brain that deals with motor function and reward. The more Dopamine in this area – the more someone is motivated to do a harder task (with the correct reward) (Frank *et al*, 2020)

This is because the Dopamine in the striatum affects our perception of the reward vs the cost of performing the task – making us more likely to perform the task.

When there is an imbalance in the activity pathway in this part of the brain, we can get stuck in a loop of addictive behaviour.





Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD)

IGD is recognised as mental health condition by both the WHO (2018) and APA (2013) although its specific classification is yet to be determined and there is much debate over its effects, triggers and details.

IGD is primarily recognised as a “lack of self control over gaming”. As with any mental health condition there are factors that increase the risk of addiction:

- Preexisting mental health conditions
- Impulsivity
- Aggression
- Neuroticism
- Type of game (MMORPG are worst)
- Age (younger people at higher risk)
- Sex (men more likely than women)

Does IGD truly exist in your opinion? Is the gaming industry at fault? Did it create a monster?



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Gaming Addicts Anonymous Quiz.

As the condition has become more recognised, there have been many successful methods developed to treat.

[Self Test to Assess Video Game Addiction \(2019\) – Gaming Addicts Anonymous](#)

- **This is NOT aimed at diagnosis**
- **If you feel you may have an issue, please speak to student services.**
- **Be aware of others in the room and DO NOT share your answers.**



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The Community

Issues affecting the gaming community as a whole



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Cybersecurity

The games industry collects and processes personal data from its consumer base. This means that all this data needs to be stored.

Many companies have become victims of cyber attacks including:

- Nintendo (2020)
- CD Projekt Red (2021)
- Capcom (2020)
- Epic Games (2018)

How can you secure a game for release to protect it against these sorts of attacks?

Top Cyber Threats in Gaming





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Economic barriers

The economic barriers to being able to buy and play games has also become a large topic of discussion. AAA titles are expected to reach past the £100 mark in the next few years.

Hardware and software decisions have forced millions of people to either upgrade systems they own or purchase additional hardware/ software to make the game playable. DLC, Loot boxes and in game currency are attractive to investors but price many gamers out of the full experience.

The ability to buy games that are still in development has launched several successful games but there are no guarantees, and many remain unfinished.

Why are we in this state? Is it an ethical model?



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Influencers

Influencers are the new celebrity endorsements that many companies want. They can reach target audiences quicker and have a direct line to a company's consumer base.

Influencers can be paid for positive opinions on a game and have endorsed scams for profit. There is no universal code of conduct for influencers to follow.

People listen to influencers and this makes them money.

What makes influencers so trustworthy?





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Society

Issues affecting society at large



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Monetisation practices

Predatory monetisation practices are an increasing issue in society, especially when gaming reaches nearly all ages and demographics (Petrovskaya & Zendle, 2022). Consider the following monetisation strategy:

“HOOK, HABIT, HOBBY”

Examples of these are:

- Misrepresentation of a game (video analysis of mobile game)
- “pay to win” mechanics
- Microtransactions
- Hidden player data sales to third party companies

UK Trading regulations can only defend people so far...



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FAKE ADS





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Environmental impact

Mining of Raw materials

- Silica
- Copper
- Zinc
- Cadmium
- Aluminium

Data centres

Need massive amounts of power for cooling and other operator costs.

Create large levels of CO₂ and waste energy through heat
GOV.UK websites (GWS) *alone* account for *4000* tonnes of CO₂ per year.

Worldwide – the IT/ Games and internet industries account for 1% of greenhouse gas emissions (416 *million* tonnes)





Conclusions

- Gaming has positive and negative effects on humans and our society
- It is up to us as creators to use these influences
- There are business practices that are unethical but profitable - How long will these practices last?
- Gaming can be a force of good, a force of bad or just a form of entertainment – it is peoples own personalities that decide.
- Research shows that gaming can be addictive and isolating
- As an industry we have a moral and ethical responsibility to make products in a way that cares for the creators, the environment and the users.



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Thank You

Any questions or comments?