

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PORTRAIT OF THE VIDEO GAME PLAYER: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PERCEPTION, MOTIVATION, EXPENDITURES, AND THE EXPECTED FUTURE OF VIDEO GAMES

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Purpose: To create and analyse a multidimensional portrait of the video game player, thereby identifying potential new research areas for future inquiry.

Design/methodology/approach: The grounded theory methodology was used. Qualitative studies were performed using the method of individual-in-depth-interviews (N = 21). They were followed by semi-structured interviews and field note-taking. The interview scenario was the measurement tool.

Findings: The qualitative findings demonstrate a profound correspondence between player experiences and the established economic drivers and psychological/sociological frameworks of the video game industry. Core motivations - such as flow, escapism, and socialising - directly underpin the success of the Games-as-a-Service (GaaS) economic model. The study confirmed the existence of polarised financial habits and the high profitability derived from "High Spenders", whose uncontrolled expenditure on microtransactions (e.g., P2W mechanics) raises ethical concerns. The results also reflect the ongoing normalisation of gaming alongside the persistence of the negative gamer stereotype.

Research limitations/implications: The main limitations stem from the methodology: the purposive sampling of a small group (N = 21) precludes statistical generalisation. Data relies on self-reported accounts, susceptible to bias, particularly regarding sensitive topics like expenditure and potential "psychological harm." Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the analysis cannot capture the dynamics of motivational change or long-term impacts.

Practical implications: It is suggested that ethical redesign of GaaS business models is necessary to mitigate manipulation risks among "High Spenders" and address P2W criticism. To maintain competitiveness, developers should enhance features that foster immersion and implement flexible engagement models suited to adult players' unpredictable schedules.

Social implications: Despite the trend of normalisation, the study highlights the need for continued public discussion regarding the psychological risks and developmental benefits of video games, given the persistence of the negative stereotype.

Originality/value: The study's value lies in providing a rich, qualitative portrait of the player, primarily within the Polish context. It offers empirical evidence of how modern GaaS business models exploit intrinsic player motives (e.g. achievement and escapism) for revenue generation, forming a valuable basis for subsequent quantitative verification.

Keywords: video games, consumer behaviour, perception, gaming, motivation, player, gamer.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The heightened academic interest in video games as a subject of scientific inquiry emerged following their debut as a commercial product in 1971 (Kent, 2010). Initially, the discussion in the literature focused exclusively on purely technical and engineering aspects, specifically the technology underpinning the games themselves, ranging from microprocessors to display systems (Smith, Mitchell, 1978; Foley, Van Dam, 1982). However, one of the first scientific publications to directly investigate what makes computer games engaging and how these elements could be leveraged for learning appeared as early as 1980 (Malone). The subject matter of publications appearing throughout the period 1980-2000 was heavily polarised. On one hand, research explored the potential negative impact of video games on the user (Anderson, Dill, 2000; Dominick, 1984), while on the other, studies investigated their cognitive and applicational potential (Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, 1994; Jones, 1984). During this era, interest in hardware technology gave way to a focus on the user (the player) and the influence of games on their behaviour.

It should be emphasised that video games and their popularity have remained in a close relationship with technological development essentially since the first video game appeared on the market in the 1970s. For example, the mass popularisation of networked games (including MMORPG, MOBA, Battle Royale, etc.) was directly tied to the development of the Internet infrastructure, while the emergence of mobile games was directly associated with the widespread adoption of smartphones. Both of these phenomena contributed to a significant expansion and diversification of research problems in publications concerning video games, starting from the early 21st century. Studies conducted within this framework shifted from concentrating purely on harms to analysing complex engagement mechanisms (Brockmyer et al., 2009; Travaglino et al., 2020), positive effects (Dye, Green, Bavelier, 2009; Bonnechère et al., 2016), and the influence of games on identity and society (Kaye, Kowert, Quinn, 2017; Liao et al., 2020).

Despite numerous publications focused on video games, several research gaps persist, including, but not limited to: the influence of new technologies (VR/AR/Metaverse) on players' perceptions of video games; the relationship between players' personality traits and preferred game genres; the impact of game monetisation mechanisms on perceived value; and the lack of research on the psychological profiles and motivations of older players (i.e. those aged 50 plus).

Consequently, video games remain a relatively interesting research area that not only requires continuous monitoring but also exploration, particularly through the use of qualitative research methods (McCaffrey, 2023).

The main objective of the paper is **to create and analyse a multidimensional portrait of the video game player**, which consequently would allow for the determination of potential new research areas for planned future research. The paper is interdisciplinary and exploratory

in nature, and while closely related to economics and studies on consumer behaviour, it also covers the fields of psychology, sociology, and management.

Specific objectives of both a cognitive and methodological nature also defined in the research process include:

- exploring and analysing the conceptualisation of video games and understanding the respondents' general perception of them,
- examining the respondents' perception of the typical player stereotype,
- identifying and classifying the main reasons/motivations for playing video games among active players,
- investigating the respondents' expenditure on and in video games,
- determining the respondents' preferences regarding video game genres and platforms, and assessing their engagement levels,
- gathering and analysing players' opinions and expectations concerning the future of video games and the industry,
- and finally, exploring and defining specific research avenues, providing the foundation for subsequent quantitative work, thereby enabling quantification of the analysed variables and verification of the research hypotheses generated during the qualitative phase.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Video Games – Economic Aspects

Video games allow players to precisely control actions at a distance (similar to remotely controlling a device, but with greater detail). Cognitive research suggests that this detailed mechanism of remote action leads to the feeling that the player's mind and body are extending to actually enter that new virtual space (Clark, 2003). This is an undoubted advantage that video games hold over books and movies which, for all their virtues, cannot replicate this effect (Gee, 2003). It is, moreover, one of the reasons for the dynamic growth and increasing popularity of video games among consumers in the entertainment market.

The video game industry, while relatively young at 54 years since the introduction of the video game as a commercial product in 1971 (Wolf, 2017), is simultaneously one of the fastest-growing segments in the media and entertainment market. The industry remains an industry bright spot with the global video games market exceeding the movie and music industry combined (pwc.com). The global player base is projected to reach 3.6 billion in 2025 (+4.4% YoY), representing 61.5% of the world's online population, while the total global revenue is expected to reach \$188.8 billion in 2025 (+3.4% YoY) (2025 Global Games Market Report). By 2029, revenue could approach \$300 billion (+5.7% YoY) (pwc.com).

For comparison, global revenue in the music industry is estimated to reach only \$29.6 billion in 2025 (Rechardt, 2025), and revenue in the film industry is projected at \$56.37 billion (boardroom-business.com).

It is worth noting that the results achieved by the video game industry over recent years are all the more impressive when considering that it shares more than a few economic drivers (including high and increasing production and marketing costs, strongly seasonal patterns, long development cycles, and hit-driven economics) with other entertainment segments. Additionally, to fully understand how the video game industry has been able to develop so dynamically, it is necessary to mention the two eras in which disruptive consumer technologies were introduced (Van Dreunen, 2020).

During the first period (1984–2008), product-based revenue represented the largest source of income for all entities in the industry. In this model (known as traditional game publishing), publishers sold physical discs and cartridges through retailers to consumers, who primarily played on consoles. This was the dominant form of monetisation for the first three decades. Due to steadily rising game development costs, this model became heavily dependent on the market launch of hit productions. Consequently, this led to a relatively high rate of market consolidation, with key entities controlling the majority of the market (Van Dreunen, 2020).

The second period (beginning roughly in 2009) was closely linked to the widespread adoption of the Internet and the general digitisation of entertainment. This shift consequently enabled the development of video games as a service (networked game publishing). The value chain in this instance is entirely different from the first era: the consumer can download the game directly from the network onto their device (mobile, console, PC). Once in the game, they can then make payments for additional content and in-game items. Following this change, a multitude of new market entities emerged, which began offering video games cheaply or entirely for free (F2P), and subsequently monetising them through so-called microtransactions - MTX (Van Dreunen, 2020).

As a consequence of these industry changes, video games are now an easily accessible experience: often available for free, quick and easy to install, and not requiring high hardware specifications. Successful examples in this model (including games like League of Legends or Fortnite) clearly point to the immense importance of building long-term relationships with the player base (e.g. through numerous events and tournaments). The Games-as-a-Service (GaaS) model itself remains almost in full opposition to the model used in the first period because it emulates the software industry, allowing for ongoing iterations of a game. These iterations, in turn, compel publishers to continuously maintain servers, customer support, and constant marketing and sales activity. On the other hand, the video game industry has become free from the physical and logistical constraints that shaped it between 1984 and 2008, with the result that a large part of the entities operating under the first model gained additional digital distribution channels (Van Dreunen, 2020).

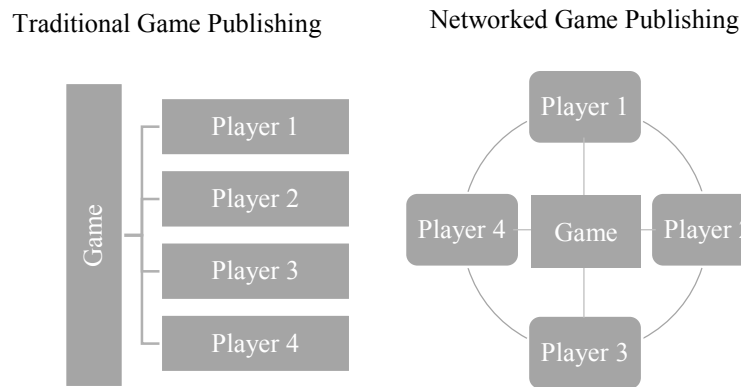


Figure 1. Traditional and networked game publishing.

Source: Van Dreunen, 2020.

Regarding the shift in business models within the video game industry, it is also important to note that the change towards GaaS not only brought numerous success stories for new market entities (including Tencent, NCSoft, Nexon, and HoYoverse) but also opened the door to controversial solutions in the realm of Pay-to-Win (P2W). The term "Pay-to-Win" is relatively often criticised by players themselves, as it signifies the ability to gain an advantage in a video game through dedicated microtransactions (e.g. loot boxes or other paid bonuses that give a player an edge over others). Consequently, P2W has also become the subject of numerous academic publications in recent years, which emphasise, among other things:

- pay to win microtransactions may change “the game from a competition where the best player wins to . . . who wants to and can pay the most” (Heimo et al., 2018),
- attitude toward virtual goods and the beliefs about peers’ attitudes strongly increase the willingness to purchase virtual goods (Hamari, 2015),
- the need for continuous research into loot boxes, which, given the complexity of the issue, should be conducted particularly using qualitative research methods (McCaffrey, 2023).

Based on the aforementioned articles regarding the use of MTXs, it can be assumed that contemporary commercial success in the video game industry depends on the skillful balancing act between company profit and player satisfaction.

However surprising the statistics cited above may be, it must be noted that as early as the mid-1990s, the first scholarly opinions emerged regarding the potential future significance of the video game industry, which, it was predicted then, should become a leader within the entertainment and media market (e.g., Shuker, 1996). Contemporary research, almost 30 years later, confirms that video games are playing an increasingly important role in the lives of people, especially those born after 2000 (Bu, Ding, 2024). Moreover, the time spent using video games had grown significantly after the COVID-19 pandemic (Lewicki, 2020; Romanowski 2020; Pallavicini, Pepe, Mantovani, 2022). Despite the fact that the call for serious consideration of research in this area emerged as early as 2004, when Newman (2004) identified

at least three key arguments supporting video game studies - namely: the size of the video game industry, the popularity of video games, and video games as a prime example of human-computer interaction - it is only recently that the associated research has been properly taken as a consequential form of visual culture worthy of historical, theoretical, and cultural attention (Murray, 2023).

2.2. Psychological and Sociological Contexts of the Video Game Player Experience

Contemporary video games are capable of providing players with extraordinarily elaborate experiences. The sources of these experiences can be highly diverse and are strongly linked to the players' motivation to continue playing a particular video game. As early as the mid-1990s (Bartle, 1996), an attempt was made to define how varied these motives can be, based on the inter-relationship of two dimensions of playing style: action versus interaction, and world-oriented versus player-oriented. Considering these dimensions, four player types were identified (Fig. 2):

1. **Achievers** who regard points-gathering and rising in levels as their main goal, and all is ultimately subservient to this, they are interested in doing things to the game, i.e. in **acting** on the **world**,
2. **Explorers** who delight in having the game expose its internal machinations to them, they are interested in having the game surprise them, i.e. in **interacting** with the **world**,
3. **Socialisers** who are interested in people, and what they have to say, they are interested in **interacting** with other **players**,
4. **Killers** who get their kicks from imposing themselves on others they are interested in doing things to people, i.e. in **acting** on other **players**.

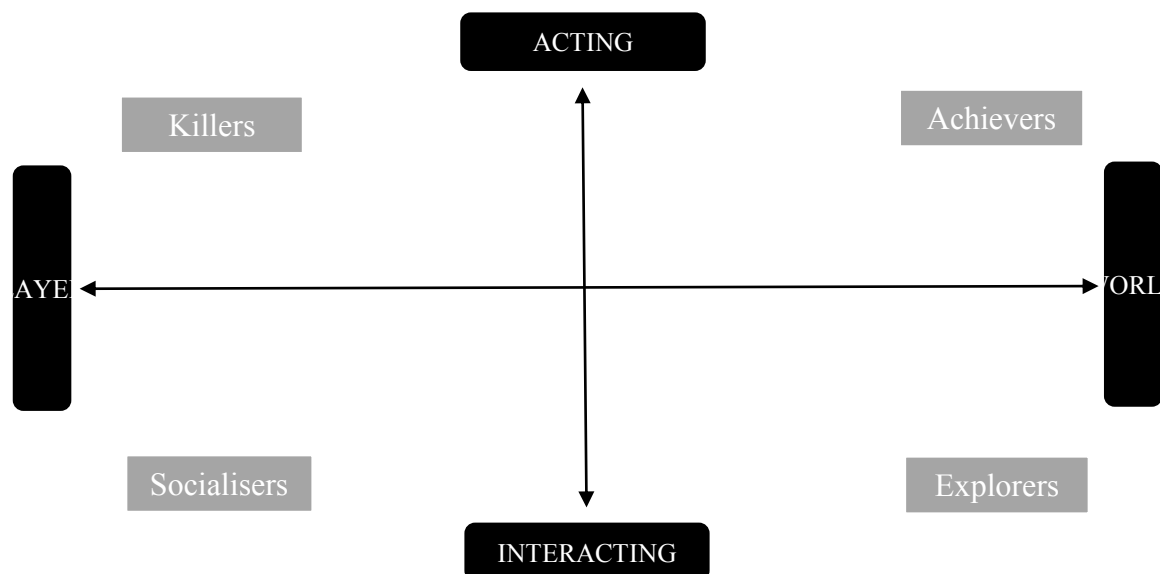


Figure 2. Basic types of video gamers based on their preferred playing style.

Source: Bartle, 1996.

This typology can provide a framework for the strategy of creating a new video game, depending on the creators' preference regarding the type of player they aim to attract. However, Bartle (1996) emphasises that regarding the number of each player type within a given game, an appropriate balance is desirable. This balance is crucial because the commercial success of the video game depends on it.

Research into the psychological and social context of video game player experiences continued in subsequent years, often using the aforementioned player typology as a foundation. Its development included the statistical analysis of five factors (Yee, 2006) that motivate players of Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs), specifically:

1. **relationship** - the desire to form meaningful, supportive relationships with other users and the willingness to disclose real-life problems,
2. **manipulation** - the tendency to objectify and exploit other users for personal gain and satisfaction, including cheating, harassment, and dominating,
3. **immersion** - enjoying the fantasy world and being “someone else” a fondness for storytelling, and creating avatars with elaborated backgrounds consistent with the video game's lore,
4. **escapism** - using the virtual world as a way to temporarily avoid and escape from real-life stress and problems,
5. **achievement** - the desire to gain power and influence within the virtual environment by accomplishing goals and collecting items that bestow this power.

In a subsequent study concerning video game player motivation, the authors (Ryan, Rigby, Przybylski, 2006), aiming for a more general picture (i.e. detached from a strictly defined, single type of video game), highlighted the need to reference widely established theories of motivation in the literature, such as Self-Determination Theory - SDT (Deci, Ryan, 2013). Through a series of four distinct studies (referencing four selected game types), they found, among other things, that the ultimate influence of games on well-being does not have to be inherently negative, but rather depends on whether the gameplay itself allows the individual to satisfy their psychological needs. Moreover, when a video game fulfilled these psychological needs, and when its control system and mechanics were intuitive enough for the player to focus on the action rather than the technical aspects of operation, the highly desirable phenomenon of immersion (i.e. being fully absorbed in the game world) occurred. From a developer's perspective, inducing the player into a state of immersion often constitutes a key objective in the evolution of video games. From the players' perspective, this state can be described as optimal experience. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) defines such an experience as a state where the person feels a sense of exhilaration and a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished. Such a state does not come through passive, receptive, relaxing times but usually occurs when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. The concept of immersion can be equated with the concept of flow state (Michailidis, Balaguer-Ballester, He, 2018). Within both phenomena, players report

feeling, among other things, increased concentration, loss of time perception, and loss of self-awareness (Brown, Cairns, 2004). It is worth noting that a player's deep engagement with the video game world may also depend on the level of control over the character in that game, including the possibility of making decisions with a real impact on the character's fate. This emotional and temporal investment appears to be the strongest motivation that drives a player towards perseverance and the pursuit of mastery in the game (Gee, 2003). Additionally, the influence of technology itself on a player's ability to achieve a state of immersion cannot be overlooked, including the potential application of VR technology (Slater, Sanchez-Vives, 2016). This is especially relevant given the fact that the VR games market is experiencing a resurgence due to more affordable hardware and software, more high-quality content, and ties with the metaverse (Knezovic, 2025).

It should no longer be debated today that games have the potential to yield both psychological harms and benefits to players (Ryan, Rigby, Przybylski, 2006). Moreover, the long - dominant stereotype of video game players - who were often caricatured and associated with negative connotations (e.g. unpopularity, unattractiveness, idleness, and social incompetence) - lacks full empirical confirmation (Kowert, Festl, Quandt, 2014). As demonstrated by an extensive study covering a group of 2,550 individuals, most stereotypical traits correlate more strongly with individuals deeply engaged in online games (i.e. a narrow subgroup of players) rather than with all video game players. There is thus an empirical basis for a unique stereotype, but only in reference to this specific subset of players. Consequently, publications increasingly appear in the literature pointing to the positive aspects of video games (e.g. Johnson et al., 2013; Granic, Lobel, Engels, 2014; Bowman, Rieger, Lin, 2022). A player's reception of a given video game will always depend on many variables that make up their profile. However, in the context of player well-being, particular significance has been attributed to variables such as: motivation for gaming, outside variables and the presence of violence, social interaction, and physical activity (Halbrook, O'Donnell, Msetfi, 2019).

It must be emphasised that the psychosocial context of video game player experiences, as presented in this section of the article, and the understanding thereof, constitutes an essential element for the interpretation of the qualitative findings of the author's own research.

3. Data and method

Primary research was conducted to create a multidimensional portrait of the video game player. In the process of the research performance, the grounded theory methodology was used. Qualitative studies were performed using the method of individual-in-depth-interviews (with elements of observation). They were followed by semi-structured interviews and field note-taking. The interview scenario was the measurement tool. The following research

problems were distinguished: attitudes of the respondents towards video games, perception of the typical gamer, reasons for playing video games, expenditure on and in video games, preferences and engagement in video games, the future of video games. This study was conducted for 1 month in 2025. The exploratory nature of the research necessitated the adoption of a purposive sampling criterion in order to ensure the broadest possible representation of players, especially in light of data suggesting that typical gamers tend to be males, rather introverted, and younger – i.e. under 30 years old (De Grove, Courtois, Van Looy, 2015; Ribeiro, Veloso, Brinson, 2023). The main criteria for selecting the respondents to the sample were being an active video game player; furthermore, in the selection of the sample, the aim was to obtain the broadest possible representation in terms of age and a roughly equal representation in terms of gender.

A total of 21 individual interviews were conducted. 10 women and 11 men participated in the study, the youngest person was 19 years old, and the oldest person was 50 years old. Five of the interview participants were of a nationality other than Polish. The characteristics of the people participating in the study are presented in table 1 (see: Annex). It is worth noting that the respondents had varying levels of knowledge regarding the meaning of popular video game acronyms (such as P2W, F2P, PVP, and PVE); furthermore, most of them were interested in video games and played on a daily basis, and they also had clear preferences regarding the platform on which they played video games.

The analysis of the content of the collected material was performed according to the principles developed by Miles and Huberman (1984), with the use of the descriptive, attribute and process coding of statements in accordance with Saldana's recommendations (2021). QDA Miner Lite software was used in the data analysis.

It should be added that the research was prepared and implemented in strict adherence to ethical standards. The primary concern was to ensure that participants suffered no psychological harm as a result of their involvement. They were fully informed about key aspects, including voluntary participation, the methods of observation and registration used (covering both verbal statements and electronic documentation), data protection and privacy (guaranteeing anonymity), the method of publishing the results, and the commitment not to use the data for commercial purposes (Malhotra, Miller 1998).

4. Results

4.1. Conceptualisation of Video Games and Their Perception

In the process of conceptualising the term "video games", participants were first asked to provide their spontaneous associations related to video games and compare them with other forms of entertainment such as books, films, or music. Several recurring motifs and similarities were observed in the participants' statements. Most individuals treat video games as a way to spend free time, relax, or de-stress. Phrases that appeared relatively frequently in their statements included: *free time, entertainment, rest, a break, a way to de-stress* and *killing time*. A portion of the respondents explicitly pointed to video games as a method of relaxation, particularly after work, for instance: *when I am exhausted after work, I prefer to turn off my brain with a game* (res. 12).

Based on the collected interviews, it can be concluded that the interactivity of video games constitutes one of their most significant distinguishing features when compared to other forms of entertainment. Participants indicated that video games allow players not only to participate but also to decide and create within the game world: *the game allows you to go through worlds, the mind doesn't work so intensively; in the game, you decide the scenario, there is a feeling that you are a co-creator of that world, and that is cool* (res. 21). For some, it is even considered an art form because it combines elements of music, film, and literature: *in a game, you have both the image and the sound and the plot, and on top of that, interaction, and that makes it my favourite form of art* (res. 10).

When comparing video games with other forms of entertainment, respondents most frequently referred to books. On the one hand, they emphasised that books are a *more valuable way to spend free time* (res. 17) and simultaneously more mentally developing: *For video games, it's different compared to books (books are made to imagine, make our brain work) in video games, it's the scenario of the developers. We only control a part* (res. 7). On the other hand, there were also statements indicating video games as the preferred form of entertainment over books: *[I]...don't find any joy in books or movies whatsoever, like books and video are fine, but there's absolutely no point to them, whereas in video games, you actually have something to work towards* (res. 19) and *I don't read books much, I can't get into them, and playing games is a relief/break for me* (res. 8).

Furthermore, some participants highlighted the social aspect of the video game experience: *I always play video games online, they allow me to get to know more people compared to reading books or watching television* (res. 5) or *I love the social side of video games* (res. 7). It is also noteworthy that when asked about their associations with video games, participants often described their memories or emotions related to playing. They were able to name specific game titles, for instance: *when I remember Final Fantasy 7 from high school, my jaw dropped and I was blown away* (res. 10), *The first association with video games is a console and,*

for some reason, Angelina Jolie's face from years ago, square-ish [the game Tomb Raider] (res. 8), or Prince of Persia, spending free time, and Super Frog, comparable to other forms of entertainment, but more engaging, it's hard to pull yourself away when you're passing a stage (res. 18).

In summary, the analysis of participants' spontaneous associations shows that video games are evaluated in a differentiated manner and evoke both positive and negative feelings. Moreover, a clearly ambivalent attitude towards this form of entertainment was observable in some of the respondents' statements: *...I think games can be developmental, but you have to be careful not to get hooked, because once you start, you can sit there for 3-4 hours* (res. 14), *Fun and rest. I believe they can be quite manipulative, in terms of behaviour, social and financial understanding* (res. 6) and *It's definitely entertainment, but it's decidedly less developing and imagination-stimulating than other forms, especially a book* (res. 15).

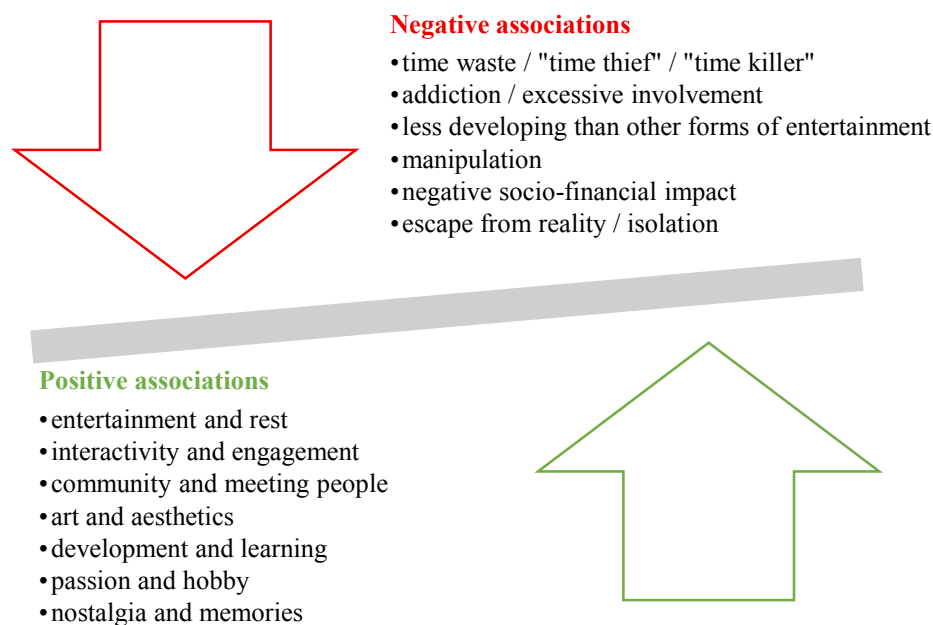


Figure 3. Ambivalence in Spontaneous Associations with Video Games.

Source: Based on Own Research.

4.2. Perception of the Typical Gamer

In the conducted interviews, participants were asked for their opinion on the typical video game player (i.e. the perceived image/stereotype). In the original version of the interview script, this question was directly aimed at the respondent, asking them to describe themselves as a video game player. Unfortunately, during the testing of the script, it turned out that this question caused the participants too many difficulties, and as a result, this form was abandoned in favour of a more indirect approach.

Based on the collected statements, three approaches to perceiving the typical video game player can be presented:

1. Negative Perception.
2. Positive Perception.
3. Normalising Perception.

The first approach shapes the image of the typical gamer through the lens of negative social and physical traits. The typical gamer was relatively often associated with the word *nerd* by the participants. It is worth noting that this word, according to the dictionary definition (Cambridge Dictionary), carries both positive (“a person who is extremely interested in one subject, especially computers, and knows a lot of facts about it”) and negative associations (“a person, especially a man, who is not attractive and is awkward or socially embarrassing”). However, for the respondents in this group, considering especially the tone of the statements, the word was associated exclusively negatively: *First thing, a nerd, even though I don't actually believe that because it's not really true* (res. 3), *The first thing that comes to mind is what has been adopted in society, which is a nerd, 'I'm gonna play a game,' 90% of society will tell you that* (res. 10). Other individuals noted that the typical gamer is someone who is rather lost and detached from the real world, and quickly succumbs to negative emotions: *For me, a gamer, gamer, gamer, is a person who is lost in the world of games, not interested in the real world, I don't have good associations, often irritating, annoying, rather negative [association]* (res. 2). The typical gamer was more frequently perceived as an introverted person: *An introvert, a person who prefers to live in an unreal world rather than the real one, plus a person who doesn't have much of a private life, so they escape into the virtual one* (res. 12), rather than an extroverted one, and requiring specific conditions for playing: *Dark room and controller, eh, usually loud or extroverted, stay up late, dark rooms, monitors, LED lights, controller*. One of the strongest statements fitting the negative perception of the gamer came from a person who completely abandoned playing video games at the beginning of 2025 after 7 years of continuous playing: *A loser, I hid myself with that game for so long, my resignation also stemmed from that, I didn't want to boast about it...* (res. 21). Interestingly, later in the same statement, this respondent had a completely different opinion about players participating in games other than video games: *...if I had to give a second association, if we were talking about traditional [games, e.g., board games, card games], it would be a person with passion* (res. 21). It can be assumed that, according to the respondent, such games hold significantly greater value than video games. Similarly, another respondent held a strongly negative opinion, especially regarding players who had already reached adulthood, emphasising the importance of maintaining a certain balance between gaming and other activities: *Thinking of such dedicated gamers, to me, it's kind of a person who has no life, no social contacts, no responsibilities - it's okay in the teenage years, but as an adult, it's not serious; if someone plays from time to time and it's intertwined with other activities, then it's okay* (res. 17). Additionally, it is worth noting that individuals with negative associations with video game

players were simultaneously more inclined to describe such a person through the lens of their appearance and surroundings: *Young, a boy, unshaven, surrounded by various dirty glasses and dishes, 40-year-old men plus, who have a lot of money for these games and play all night* (res. 15), *Rather glasses, longer hair, unkempt, hard to say...* (res. 14), *I associate it more with a man than with a woman, less frequently [with a woman], someone in the 15-30 age range, rather introverted* (res. 16).

Respondents most frequently identified the positive image of the video game player with someone who is ambitious and stubbornly pursues goals: *...stereotypical gamers, stubborn people striving for a goal, for finishing the game...* (res. 1), *Determined, ambitious, cognitively curious – seeking interesting things* (res. 9). Furthermore, the commitment of typical gamers and their desire for competition were also highlighted: *Committed, I would say competitive* (res. 6), *Good equipment [gaining good in-game equipment as an expression of commitment] and the desire to play as soon as the person has time* (res. 7). One of the study participants described herself as a gamer precisely through the lens of the aforementioned traits: *I am quite a competitive player, especially in MOBA-type games. I play Dota 2, Mobile Legends, and League of Legends, and I always strive to achieve the highest rank or MMR [a system used in player rankings] I can reach or maybe even make it to the top of the leaderboard* (res. 5). In addition, positive associations referred to perceiving gamers as video game enthusiasts: *...a computer gamer is a computer game enthusiast, there are many types of gamers, for one, in-game achievements will be important, but for me, that doesn't matter at all* (res. 10), for whom games constitute a hobby: *...hobbyist, a game lover* (res. 18).

In the statements normalising the perception of video game players, respondents attempted in various ways to emphasise that a video game player is just like any other person. They pointed directly to a lack of prejudice towards gamers, sometimes with unconcealed surprise that a specific individual turned out to play video games: *...lack of prejudice, I've seen many different people who play, and I wouldn't have expected it from them* (res. 20), *...stereotype is a stereotype, I know people who play, and I would never have thought that they spend so much time on games* (res. 14). The gamer was perceived as a normal person, and the diversity within the social group of video game players itself was also highlighted: *A typical person... I don't associate them with any bad things, a normal person who sometimes plays games, but there are also hardcore people who play for 20 hours* (res. 13), *To me, they are normal people, I don't know if there is any type, there is no type for me, I am more of an occasional player, my husband is a gamer, who plays completely differently than I do, my brother is also a completely different gamer, I know few people who don't play at all* (res. 8). The final group of statements in this segment consisted of assertions regarding the non-existence of a typical video game player: *There is no typical player... everyone will tell you something different* (res. 1), *there is no typical player in my opinion* (res. 11), or a lack of interest in the subject: *A gamer, I'm not very interested in other players or what they represent* (res. 4).

4.3. Reasons for Playing Video Games

Based on the conducted interviews, several main reasons for participants engaging with video games can be identified. Importantly, these reasons clearly correspond with specific needs that can be fulfilled through the product that is a video game (Fig. 4.).

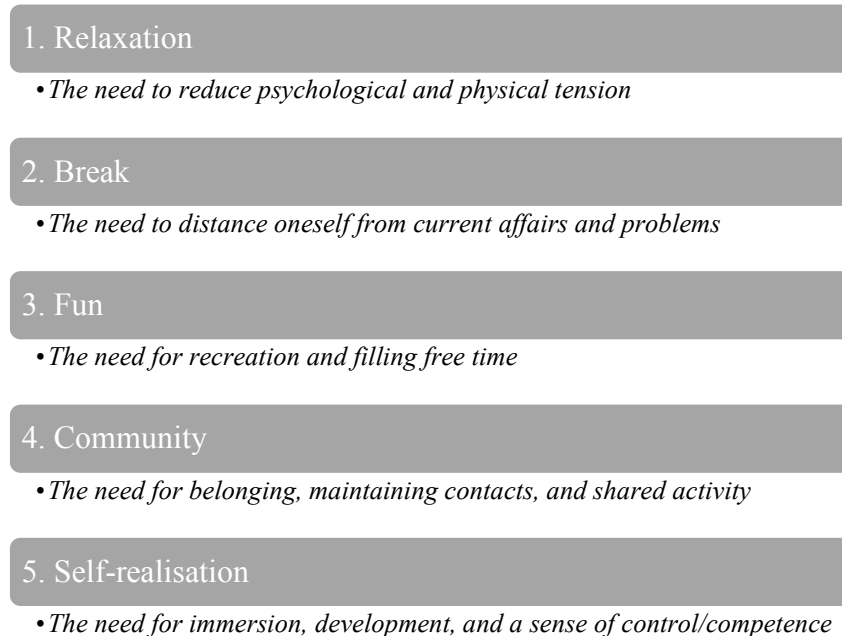


Figure 4. Frequency of Main Reasons for Video Game Use Among Participants and Their Corresponding Needs.

Source: Based on Own Research.

The relatively most frequently cited reason was relaxation, which respondents identified with rest: *I rest while playing games, even though I work all day as a programmer, for entertainment, every day, unless I'm on vacation, I don't have a computer, or access* (res. 1), and de-stressing: *...to relieve some stress after work...* (res. 11). It is worth noting that the specific game title may be significant in this context. One respondent pointed out that a game can produce the exact opposite of the intended effect: *...for relaxation and pleasure and rest, well, unless it's FIFA [a football game with online competition], then no, because it unleashes aggression* (res. 18).

Video games undoubtedly constitute a way for participants to break from reality: *escape from worries* (res. 21), *...because I need to switch off for a bit...* (res. 13), or what is referred to as a reset: *after an influx of information at work, I need to clear my mind, I try to reset myself and switch off from work* (res. 12), *the desire to turn off my brain, it's definitely easier for me than starting a series or a movie...* (res. 14), *when I want to reset, with games like a zombie staring at the screen, sometimes I need it, but I'm too tired* (res. 15).

It should not be a major surprise that fun was also cited as one of the main reasons provided by this product: *...it gives me joy when I'm bored* (res. 13), *...to have fun...* (res. 6; res. 11), *...Bananza [a game on Nintendo Switch 2] is fantastic...* (res. 8).

Respondents repeatedly emphasised the social aspect of video games in this topic as well: *...the social aspect and playing with friends are important...* (res. 9), *...the desire to play with someone, then I will choose a game even if I have started a book* (res. 2), *...because I really like the game community* (res. 7), *...[to] have fun with friends who live in different countries* (res. 11), *...for the people in it... lead my alliance, and speak to my friends...* (res. 19).

Furthermore, during the interviews, the possibility of self-realisation through video games was highlighted. Self-realisation was perceived in a variety of ways and was identified, among other things, with adventure, plot, or engaging with art: *For adventure, for the plot... for engaging with art, I like games that are beautiful, with nice music...* (res. 10), testing new strategies: *since I am part of a competitive team in Mobile Legends, practicing and trying out new strategies is part of my responsibility as a pro player* (res. 5), a sense of control (res. 11), or even the desire for revenge: *...to get revenge...* (res. 19).

In summary of the analysis regarding the primary reasons why respondents turn to video games, it must be emphasised that they very often cited several different reasons simultaneously in their statements. Nevertheless, taking a more holistic view, it can be concluded that entertainment in the broadest sense was the dominant element for the interview participants in this aspect.

4.4. Expenditure on and in Video Games

Analysing the respondents' answers regarding the scale of expenditure on/in video games, four groups of players can be identified:

1. **High Spenders:** Uncontrolled expenditure.
2. **Moderate Spenders:** Reasonable expenditure.
3. **Low Spenders:** Occasional expenditure.
4. **Non-Spenders:** No expenditure at all.

In the first group of players, attention is drawn not only to the extreme sums cited by some participants as having been spent within just one video game (these were mobile games) but also to the way they described this expenditure i.e. by emphasising a lack of control: *Yes, I buy PS5 games occasionally, but I spend a lot within Age of Empires Mobile (over 10000 US dollars), much more than I should, we can even say in a somewhat uncontrolled way* (res. 6), justifying the size of the expenditure: *Yes I spend some money on games, but depends on the type of games I played, like for Mobile Legends I spent already 1500 US dollars, but I don't spend it every day or week or month it's just a total spending I have done* (res. 5), or openly admitting that the scale of these expenditures is worrying: *My spending on games is terrifying, sometimes in games, on packs in FIFA [an implemented loot box system in FIFA]* (res. 18).

The largest group among the study participants (i.e., 9 individuals) consisted of those who spent money on/in video games in a reasonable manner. Representatives of this group often highlighted various issues related to this matter in their statements. For example, one respondent

clearly and immediately expressed their negative, uncensored attitude towards any form of micropayments in games: *I despise micropayments, unless it's DLC in Forza [the game Forza Horizon 5] – a car pack, you get something concrete for it, it's not some skin or crystals that speed up your game, I don't give a f*** about micropayments, to put it crudely...* (res. 1). In the next interview, the importance of the social aspect of video games in the context of expenditure was emphasised: *I don't spend too much, it depends on several factors, I play for companionship, I often buy a game because friends buy it, it's just a few titles a year, I sometimes spend money on microtransactions, but very small amounts, in F2P games to honour the creators, and very rarely, I spend reasonably, not much* (res. 10). Another respondent was able to precisely define the acceptable scale of these expenditures for himself: *On games, yes, I try not to buy games for \$100, the range of \$20-30 per game is okay, I am willing to spend a small amount, 3.80 PLN [i.e. ≈\$1] for some cosmetics would be okay, I'll spend up to 20 PLN [i.e. ≈\$5], but I don't need to spend more* (res. 9). A large portion of the representatives of this group also used phrases emphasising the rationality of their spending, e.g. *...I spend responsibly...* (res. 14), *...I wait for promos...* (res. 12), *I'm spending a moderate amount each month* (res. 11), *Reasonable...* (res. 20), etc.

In the group of individuals who spend sporadically and small amounts, one respondent noted that the character of these expenditures directly results from the fear that one might spend too much money: *It happened that I paid in a game on my mobile phone, but I don't remember; if I get too hooked on a game, I delete it because I'm afraid I'll spend my entire salary there, recently I bought something on Nintendo on sale for 4 PLN [i.e. ≈\$1], very sporadic expenditure* (res. 8). Another person, however, noted that despite avoiding in-game payments and having a negative attitude towards this form of video game payment, expenditure in the game may be justified by the desire to support the creator: *In games, I'll be honest with you, no. Once there was a game about taking care of kittens, I'll support the creator because it was free, otherwise I don't spend money in games, I think it's poor, I often use Game Pass, I spend very little* (res. 13). Seeking justification, or even more so, an excuse for the decision to buy a video game was a common characteristic of statements on this topic - even despite the sporadic nature and relatively small amount of money: *Sporadically, a maximum of 20 PLN [i.e. ≈\$5] per month, I rather try not to, I excuse myself with the fact that I didn't buy magazines or other things that could serve for entertainment, and here I could spend a few PLN once* (res. 17).

The last group consisted of individuals who spent nothing or amounts close to zero. In some cases, the statements were very brief: *Nope, no spending whatsoever* (res. 19). In other cases, the expenditure was only incurred by the player at the beginning of the game, resulting from their adopted financial discipline before starting it: *...the assumption was that I wouldn't spend, I watched ads not to spend, I bought a starter pack* (res. 21). Another person, in turn, emphasised that game purchases are most often made by their life partner: *I generally don't spend on games, sometimes I happen to buy one, but it's a negligible amount over the year, buying one game is the maximum, usually my partner buys them* (res. 2). An interesting

statement within this group was the confession of a person who stressed that they are still trying not to succumb to the temptation of spending money on video games: *No, but I am tempted sometimes, extra lives and saving time, I still haven't broken* (res. 16).

To conclude the topic of expenditure on/in video games, based on the collected statements, it is necessary to highlight the relatively strong polarisation of attitudes and actual spending on/in video games. Differences were visible in the scale of expenditure (high vs. none), the manner of spending (lack of control vs. control), and the focus of the spending (game purchase vs. in-game purchase). Furthermore, there were also statements that were difficult to definitively classify into one of the four groups distinguished above. An example is a statement that would allow the individual to be classified into both the first group (high expenditure - lack of control) and group 2 (moderate expenditure - control): *I spend, in my opinion, too much, because I shouldn't, and I noticed that if you pay once, later you are not able to get through without it; I bought a few games on Nintendo, but those aren't even 200 PLN [i.e. ~\$50] annually, I wait for promos* (res. 12). In relation to the quoted statement, it is also worth noting that the respondent had issues with expenditure control regarding in-game payments (mobile games), but was able to maintain control over the purchase of full game versions (Nintendo games). This observation is consistent with the previously cited statements, where extremely high expenditure amounts were linked to mobile games, as was the accompanying sense of guilt observed during the interview.

4.5. Preferences and Engagement in Video Games

Based on the conducted research, it can be stated that respondents generally had clearly defined preferences regarding video games. With the exception of one respondent who stated that: *If I like a game, I want to smash it, get all the achievements... but I don't have a favourite genre, it's like with music, good music defends itself, and it's similar with games* (res. 1), the participants were able to indicate their favourite video game genre and title. Respondents also specified the game title they were currently playing and identified the video game title they had played for the relatively longest period, considering their overall experience with the product.

It is worth citing one statement that highlighted the issues of time management when there is too much involvement in video games: *...[I have] quit all of them to make time for Call of Antia actually... running three accounts and managing an alliance isn't easy* (res. 19). This situation forced the participant to give up playing other titles.

Equally interesting is the statement: “Legion TD, for me, it's not so much playing as it is a time filler, in that sense, I'm not playing anything, I'm just running a round here and that's it...” (res. 1). In this quote, the participant clearly indicated that a kind of distinction is possible between what can be understood as actual video game playing. For this respondent, 'playing' involved significantly greater commitment (primarily temporal) than merely “running a round”.

There are numerous reasons why a particular genre or video game is designated as a favourite by a respondent. Such a reason might be an entirely new approach to game mechanics solutions: *I have this one beloved game for many, many years, Black and White 1, when it came out it was a pioneer of the genre, a bit of economy, you are God there and you manage the world...* (res. 2). A video game might be cited as a favourite due to a positive attitude towards a specific publisher (e.g., Nintendo games) or the unforgettable impressions derived from engaging with the game environment, which in this case could faithfully recreate a real location: *Everything by Nintendo, Zelda and Mario and Bananza is also fantastic, Assassin's Creed, the one who ran across the roofs in Venice... I could walk through those cities without a map, I love it when there is a collecting element, I remember that square was very well reflected, Florence was similarly great too* (res. 8). The reason for designating a video game as a favourite can also be a specific sentiment, e.g., a memory related to it being the first video game one played: *I definitely like fantasy the most, I have the greatest weakness for Diablo 2, the first game I played...* (res. 13), or in the case of a relatively younger gamer (23 years old), the desire to continue playing a game that one of their parents previously played: *...I remember when Dad played World of Warcraft, I took over the account and I'm still playing* (res. 14). Finally, such a reason can also be the existence of a challenge within the video game: *Tactics and strategy, roguelike, because there is a challenge* (res. 9), *my best was hitting the opponent, exploring the world independently is also interesting, but still player vs player, I liked wars the most* (res. 21).

Considering the respondents' answers in this part of the interviews, it must be emphasised that the range of favourite genres and titles was highly diverse, covering RPG (Role-Playing Games) as well as strategy, puzzle, simulation, and sports games. The responses from participants regarding the game with which they spent the most time were equally varied.

In some cases (including res. 1, 3, 4, and 18), participants, using access to their accounts on video game platforms (such as Steam or PSN), were able to state precisely how many hours they had spent on a given video game title: *Cyberpunk 2077 (1100 h), Forza Horizon 5 (1600 h), Hades (191 h)* (res. 1), *FC24 (380 h), The Witcher 3 (over 100 h), Elden Ring (over 100 h)* (res. 18).

At other times, they estimated roughly how long they had been playing a particular game, referring not so much to the exact number of hours spent in the game, but to how long they had been regularly engaged with it. In the case of starting a video game on the day of its global release, this time can reach up to 20 years: *I still play World of Warcraft, so that's 20 years with breaks, about 5 years of breaks total, I started 2 weeks after the release* (res. 10).

Beyond commitment measured in years, some participants also simultaneously mentioned the time spent in a single, uninterrupted session with a game. Respondents often experience a complete loss of time awareness during individual video game sessions (immersion state): *Candy Crush Saga, recently I got a bonus [because] I sat on my phone for 12 hours and didn't even know where I was when I stopped, I started Candy Crush Saga years ago, I don't remember*

when, 18 years ago, Farm Heroes Saga is the same (res. 12), GTA 5, one marathon was a good few hours, I think I didn't see the sun all day... (res. 20). Furthermore, it may happen that certain specific conditions must be met for a longer video game session to occur: *Empire and Puzzles, 7 years, the longest single session was 6 hours, that must have been somewhere without my wife* (res. 21).

The vast majority of participants, considering their previous experience, have completed at least one video game. A significant portion of respondents declare that they often or almost always finish story-driven games if they become invested in them: *I would bet that I finish 90% of games, unless I don't get hooked; I definitely finished The Witcher, I'll finish Bananza soon, I finished the Tomb Raiders, I practically always finish games, or I abandon them at the beginning* (res. 8), *...recently I finish everything...* (res. 18), *Yes, many, Hogwarts Legacy, all parts of Fallout, I happen to complete all story-driven ones* (res. 3).

On the other hand, a large group among the participants admits that most of their time is spent on titles that are endless by nature, or they only finish short games: *...mostly I play games that don't have an ending, because they are usually online games, not single player* (res. 4), *Yes, often they are small tactical games, e.g., Inscription, a card game, I did all the achievements, I have it organised on Steam, most often they are short games...* (res. 9), *No, because I play that kind of game... and mobile games don't have an end* (res. 15), *the games I play now don't end, neverending story* (res. 12), *the video games I've played don't have ends, they're 'play everyday type' games, either that or a zillion lvls!* (res. 19).

The reasons why respondents abandon video games before reaching their conclusion are varied and can include:

- **So-called material fatigue:** *I don't usually complete long games because there is material fatigue, e.g., in The Witcher 3 I collect flowers in the first region and I can't move on because I want to buy all the weapons, etc.* (res. 9).
- **Loss of pleasure/challenge:** *FF7 I finished, Bullet Storm I went through twice in a row, the texts they were throwing around, what a stream of insults was going on, how the main character and the general were calling each other names, oh, that was funny. Out of the number of games I've played, maybe 2% I completed, because I play games as long as they give me pleasure. A good example is the Fallout series, I played until my build was completed, I was too strong, there was no worthy opponent, so why play, and for example, I stopped three-quarters of the way through the plot without regret* (res. 10).
- **Simple loss of interest:** *I lose interest quickly and I'm not a hardcore gamer...* (res. 19).

4.6. The Future of Video Games

The future of computer games in the short-term future (up to 5 years) elicits extreme opinions among respondents, concentrating around three main areas: 1. technological development, 2. social impact, 3. business model.

Many respondents predict significant technological progress, focusing on greater realism: *In the next five years, video games will certainly become more futuristic. As we know, video games are no longer played only with a keyboard and PC or just on game consoles, but with VR and AI technology, video games in the future will become more realistic and lifelike* (res. 5), immersion in the game world: *They must become more immersive Using hardware such as VR or AR systems* (res. 6), and the abandonment of physical media or the development of new university courses: *They will be more popular, they will completely move away from DVD media, everything will be more virtual, and there will be special university courses dedicated to games...* (res. 18). On one hand, participants show some optimism in this regard: *I think people like to play to detach from their reality, I think they will rather develop, it will move towards VR, and they will be doing very, very well for a very long time* (res. 13). On the other hand, the lack of time needed for the appropriate technology to develop was also emphasised: *I think they'll stay relatively the same, people have been blabbing about 3D video games for a while now, but no progress, lol, also, graphics don't improve within 5 years, that's too little time* (res. 19).

When discussing the future of video games, participants repeatedly raised issues related to the broad social impact of video games. A continued increase in the number of players and the significance of games as a form of spending free time is commonly predicted: *I think it will be one of the main entertainments. When I already see the scale it has gained in recent years* (res. 7), which, in their opinion, should be closely linked to the development of subsequent generations of gamers: *I think [video games] have a chance to be a more popular form of entertainment due to the generation that is growing up; my brother has a 10-year-old daughter, and she can play Roblox all day on the phone; as far as I can see these kids, it is becoming more and more popular, the success of various games proves this; it used to be harder to play, although the fact that children are bought a PS [PlayStation] for their First Communion also proves something* (res. 8), *Gamers will play more, they will spend more time on games, they are more likely to have more friends in games than in life; such a generation is growing up, 'playground climbing frames are going into oblivion* (res. 12). It is worth noting that these statements usually had a pessimistic tone: *Unfortunately, they will play more, the brains of young people will be corrupted; I already see with my younger child that the game wins over everything, less focus, less attention, because of the game* (res. 15), *It will develop, because as we have already established... society is getting dumber and will need increasingly simpler forms of entertainment* (res. 16). One participant, referring to their own example and one of the reasons they completely abandoned video game playing, pointed to the need for games to adapt to players' schedules: *...I'll tell you why I left games... [the game creators] changed the schedule, you couldn't speed up time, because I work, I couldn't freely adjust the time when I play; if games take into account the player's daily schedule, they will develop, but if they have a very rigid one, the player will have to adapt; people don't read books but play games, they want to participate in other worlds, in this respect they will develop* (res. 21).

The statements of participants who reduced the future of video games to issues related to the implemented business model had a distinctly negative tone. One respondent stated directly: *I don't predict anything good, I think big studios will fall, reducing gameplay to cosmetics and typical gambling psychology, loot boxes, skins, raffles, e.g., FIFA, typical P2W. Big studios will strive in this direction, hope lies in indie studios, small, independent ones, or CDPR* (res. 1). This pessimistic narrative was continued in subsequent statements: *...games are currently becoming and will continue to be increasingly poorly polished, less and less optimised, more MTX [microtransactions], and there will be more and more 'leftism' in them. I hope that in 5 years the situation will be fixed or this medium will only get worse and worse; the current state is already quite tragic, when games often serve as a money-making machine to squeeze money out of suckers and push propaganda* (res. 4) and *Looks pretty grim, with some rare exceptions, mostly money grab* (res. 11). However, hope is placed in the collapse of studios that are often responsible for introducing aggressive monetisation mechanisms into the gameplay (including EA Sports): *...I hope that these commercial studios like EA Sports will perish, but probably not because they are targeted at casual gamers...* (res. 10).

To conclude, while the majority of respondents agreed that the video game industry should continue to develop, the directions of this development were generally viewed through the lens of negative consequences. This was the case in two (namely, the area related to social impact and the one related to the business model) out of the three dimensions mentioned.

5. Discussion

The qualitative findings across the paper (Sections 4.1-4.6) demonstrate a consistent and profound correspondence with the established economic drivers (Section 2.1.) and the psychological and sociological frameworks (Section 2.2.) governing the video game industry. Player experiences, motivations, financial habits, and future expectations are collectively shaped by the unique economic models and underlying human psychological needs.

Addressing the economic and market dynamics (2.1.), the structural success of the industry, particularly the Games-as-a-Service (GaaS) model, is both validated and challenged by the research data. The perceived superiority of interactivity and the capacity for co-creation (4.1.) is the core technological factor driving the industry's dynamic growth, surpassing other entertainment sectors (Clark, 2003). This technological advantage is efficiently leveraged by the GaaS model, which uses motives like relaxation and escape (4.3.) to secure the long-term player retention necessary for continuous revenue (Van Dreunen, 2020). Expenditure patterns (4.4.) starkly illustrate the GaaS model's dependence on high-revenue players (so called "whales"). Extreme spending, often in F2P titles using loot boxes and P2W mechanics, confirms the financial efficacy of these systems. The "High Spenders" self-reported

"uncontrolled" behaviour and guilt align with academic concerns that P2W can be manipulative, exploiting player investment (Heimo et al., 2018). Conversely, the majority of "Moderate Spenders" demonstrate rational resistance, demanding tangible value and explicitly rejecting pure cosmetics, underscoring the necessity for publishers to balance profit with player satisfaction. Future predictions (4.6.) are heavily influenced by this economic landscape. The predominant pessimism regarding the business future stems from the belief that large studios will intensify their focus on "purely psychological gambling" and P2W. This perceived systemic flaw drives demand for alternative, less aggressive models from indie studios. Furthermore, the player demand for games that accommodate flexible daily schedules could be seen as an economic imperative; strict time requirements force players to adapt or quit, risking player retention crucial for the GaaS structure.

Turning to the psychological, motivational, and sociological frameworks (Section 2.2.), player engagement and perceptions confirm the validity of established motivational typologies and reflect the ongoing normalisation of the medium. The primary motives of fun, control, and escape are mechanisms for achieving the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The frequent reporting of the complete loss of time perception is the direct behavioural hallmark of this optimal experience. The desire for greater realism and immersion through VR/AR reflects a deep psychological demand to intensify this flow state and presence (Clark, 2003). The positive perception of the gamer (4.2.) - associating players with ambition and competitiveness - aligns with the "Achievers" and "Killers" types (Bartle, 1996) and the "Achievement" motive (Yee, 2006). This pursuit of mastery is evident in the preference for challenging genres and the tendency to quit games once the challenge is lost. The appreciation for the "social side of video games" confirms the significance of the "Socialiser" type (Bartle, 1996). The simultaneous existence of the negative stereotype and the normalising perception (4.2.) reflects a society in transition. The prediction (4.6.) that gaming will become "one of the main entertainments" and a primary social sphere underscores the medium's growing cultural dominance, confirming the shift noted in the literature (Kowert et al., 2014). Finally, the underlying ambivalence (4.1.) regarding developmental potential versus manipulative risk reflects the literature's conclusion that video games yield both psychological harms and benefits (Ryan et al., 2006). This tension is evidenced by the fear of excessive spending and the pessimistic social predictions (4.6.) that increased engagement will lead to cognitive decline.

Based on the synthesis of the study's findings (Sections 4.1.-4.6.) and their correspondences with the established literature (Sections 2.1.-2.2.), several critical and complex areas emerge as high-priority avenues for future research. These potential gaps primarily lie at the intersection of psychology, ethical economics, and changing social dynamics.

The most urgent research gap concerns the dynamic relationship between monetisation and psychological wellbeing, necessitating deeper, potentially longitudinal, studies focusing on the negative consequences of aggressive Games-as-a-Service (GaaS) monetisation. While the current study notes the ethical strain and the existence of "High Spenders" reporting

“uncontrolled” behaviour (4.4.), a specific quantitative and qualitative investigation is needed into P2W ethics and player attrition. This should explore how the perceived unfairness of P2W mechanics impacts the long-term engagement and satisfaction of the highly competitive “Achievers” segment, quantifying the balance point where P2W generates maximum profit without causing critical alienation and loss of this core player base. Furthermore, determining the precise psychological and behavioural mechanisms that cause the “Escapism” motive (Yee, 2006) to cross into harmful, uncontrolled spending (4.4.) is crucial, addressing the escapism vs. addiction threshold. This requires exploring the link between the frequency of the flow state (4.5.) and the compulsion to engage monetarily with microtransactions, using models like prospect theory (Tversky, Kahneman, 1992) or nudge theory (Thaler, Sunstein, 2009) for empirical testing.

The findings also suggest a fundamental shift in how players manage their time and friendships, necessitating research into the socio-cognitive impact of GaaS engagement models and the cognitive and social costs of continuous engagement. Further exploring the respondent concern regarding the rigid time demands of GaaS titles is warranted to assess the impact of GaaS on time management and stress. Research should quantify the impact of such schedules on player stress, work-life balance, and overall cognitive load, particularly for older players whose life demands conflict with “play everyday type” games (4.5.). Although the normalisation of gaming (4.2.) is widely observed, research should investigate the long-term implications of the predicted shift where individuals form more friendships online than in real life, focusing on the psychological costs of normalisation. This requires examining the quality and resilience of “Relationship” motives fostered primarily through virtual interaction compared to traditional social ties. A necessary exploration into why the negative stereotype (4.2.) persists despite massive demographic diversification, addressing stereotype resilience vs. real - world harm, should focus on whether the stereotype is sustained by observed societal anxieties regarding low attention spans and cognitive “laundering”, thus linking a perceived social harm to the persistent cultural stigma (Kowert et al., 2014).

Finally, the high expectations for future technological immersion require focused research on consumer response to technological and design innovation and consumer readiness and adoption. While respondents express a desire for greater realism and immersion through VR/AR, research is needed to quantify the specific barriers (cost, required space, motion sickness) hindering mass adoption, addressing VR/AR adoption vs. investment barriers. This would inform the economic timeline for large-scale investment in the next generation of interactive hardware (4.6.). Given that interactivity is the core defining feature (4.1.), future studies should investigate how players define and quantify the “value” of this co-creation experience (Clark, 2003) versus the passive consumption of traditional media, which addresses defining the value of interactivity. This could provide publishers with non-monetary metrics for success that focus on intrinsic player satisfaction beyond financial return.

The limitations of the present study are directly inherent in the adopted qualitative research methodology and the principles of Grounded Theory. The research is fundamentally exploratory and qualitative in nature. Consequently, while the findings offer rich contextual detail and in-depth insights into the studied group's experiences, they cannot be extrapolated to the entire player population. It must therefore be stressed that the results represent a portrait of the investigated group rather than representative population data.

Furthermore, the generation of theory from data implies that the conclusions are context-dependent and subject to the researcher's subjective interpretation during the coding process. Crucially, all collected material relies solely on verbal accounts and field notes. This inherent reliance on self-reported data introduces a susceptibility to subjective distortion and the social desirability bias. This is particularly critical when addressing sensitive topics such as declared expenditures, the perception of stereotypes, and self-identified potential "psychological harm".

The limitations extend to the sampling and temporal scope. Although an attempt was made to secure the broadest possible age range (19-50 years) and include five respondents of a nationality other than Polish, this still constitutes a highly restricted cross-section. As a result, fine-grained analysis of cultural differences or precise age-based distinctions remains infeasible.

The selection criterion required respondents to be "active players". This indirectly excluded individuals who play sporadically, potentially leading to an overrepresentation of players with a strong "engagement" motive and omitting the perspective of those who use games as a marginal form of entertainment.

Finally, the study is a single-time analysis (cross-sectional). It is therefore incapable of capturing the dynamics of motivational change, the evolution of expenditure patterns, or the long-term impact of video games on the participants' lives.

Given all these inherent limitations, it is deemed relevant and necessary to conduct quantitative research as the subsequent stage of inquiry by the author of this paper, aiming to validate and generalise the generated qualitative findings.

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Appendix

Table 1.

Characteristics of the surveyed respondents

Res.	gender	education	age	nationality	frequency of playing video games	video game interest	I know acronym:				preferred platform
							F2P	P2W	PVE	PVP	
1	male	primary	36	Polish	every day	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	PC
2	female	secondary	36	Polish	several times a week	no	no	yes	no	yes	PC
3	male	higher	36	Polish	every day	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	PC
4	male	secondary	27	Polish	every day	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	PC
5	female	higher	25	Indonesian	every day	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Mobile Phone and Console
6	male	secondary	30	Brazilian	every day	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Mobile Phone and Console
7	female	higher	36	Belgian	every day	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Mobile Phone and PC
8	female	secondary	34	Polish	irregularly	rather no	no	no	no	no	Console
9	male	secondary	41	Polish	every day	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	PC
10	male	higher	40	Polish	every day	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	PC and Console
11	male	secondary	30	German	every day	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	PC
12	female	higher	38	Polish	every day	no	no	no	no	yes	Mobile Phone
13	female	secondary	34	Polish	irregularly	rather no	yes	no	yes	yes	PC
14	male	higher	23	Polish	every day	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	PC
15	female	higher	38	Polish	irregularly	no	no	no	no	yes	PC and Mobile Phone
16	female	higher	46	Polish	every day	no	no	no	no	no	Mobile Phone
17	female	higher	37	Polish	several times a week	no	no	no	no	no	Mobile Phone
18	male	higher	39	Polish	every day	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Console
19	female	secondary	23	American	every day	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Mobile Phone and PC
20	male	primary	19	Polish	several times a week	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	PC
21	male	higher	50	Polish	following seven years of daily engagement, the respondent ceased all gaming in early 2025	no	no	no	no	no	PC and Mobile Phone

Source: Based on Own Research.