

Multimodal multimedia

Multimedia was the focus of a recent issue of the HKFYG Journal of Youth Studies¹ and online gaming was one of the foci. Selected publications exploring attitudes to and side effects of online games are reviewed here.

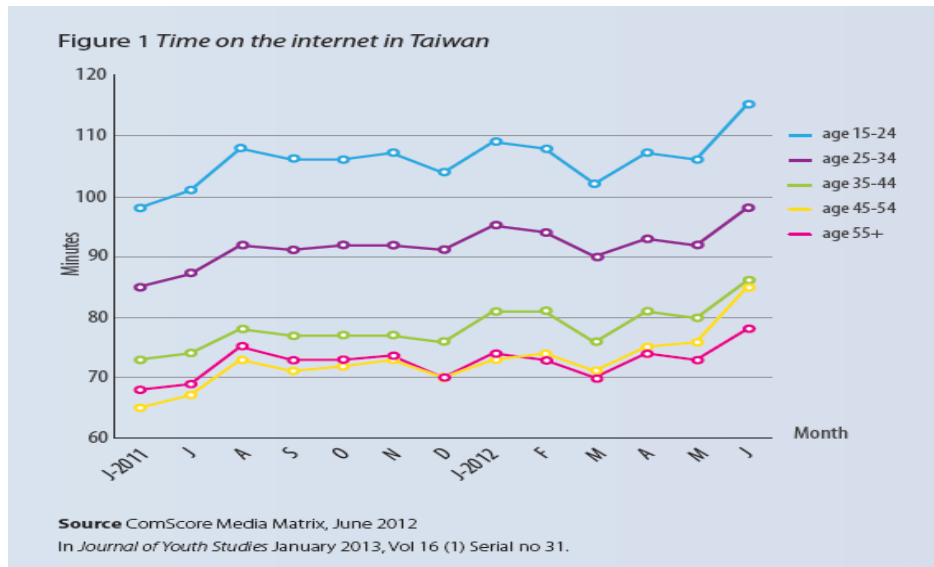
Many recent reports have focused on young people's preoccupation with the internet, particularly online games. Some gamers play compulsively, to the exclusion of all else, and significant effects can include distress from withdrawal. As a result, the new edition of the primary diagnostic manual for psychiatric disorders² included "Internet Gaming Disorder" as a condition warranting more research.

Buried in the screen

Dr Ya-Chin Huang, of Shih Hsin University in Taiwan, has looked at the way multimedia has changed the way young people live.³ For them, having a smartphone in one hand with an iPad open in the other, is normal. Turning off their mobile devices is like turning off life. Technology "comes from what makes us human," Dr Huang says. But what are the negative effects of these multimodal media?

Using the 11-minute Taiwanese micro movie, *Temperature*, as an example, she shows how technology influences relationships, creating an artificial distance between people that is a comfort for those who want to escape from the confusing experiences of growing up. Cold temperatures are symbolic of cool relationships, reluctance to get too close to other people and wanting to withdraw from social life. Hot temperatures symbolize warmth, passion and face-to-face interaction.

Dr Huang also writes about the physical and psychological health risks of too much time at the computer, such as osteoarthritis in the shoulders and wrists. She mentions short-sightedness as a result of texting, spending a lot of time looking down and focusing on a small screen instead of looking into the distance. The risk of developing a compulsive need to be online, or "Internet Addiction", a term introduced by Dr Ivan Goldberg (see box on page 36), is also discussed by Huang. Figure 1 shows how the time Taiwanese people spend online has been escalating.

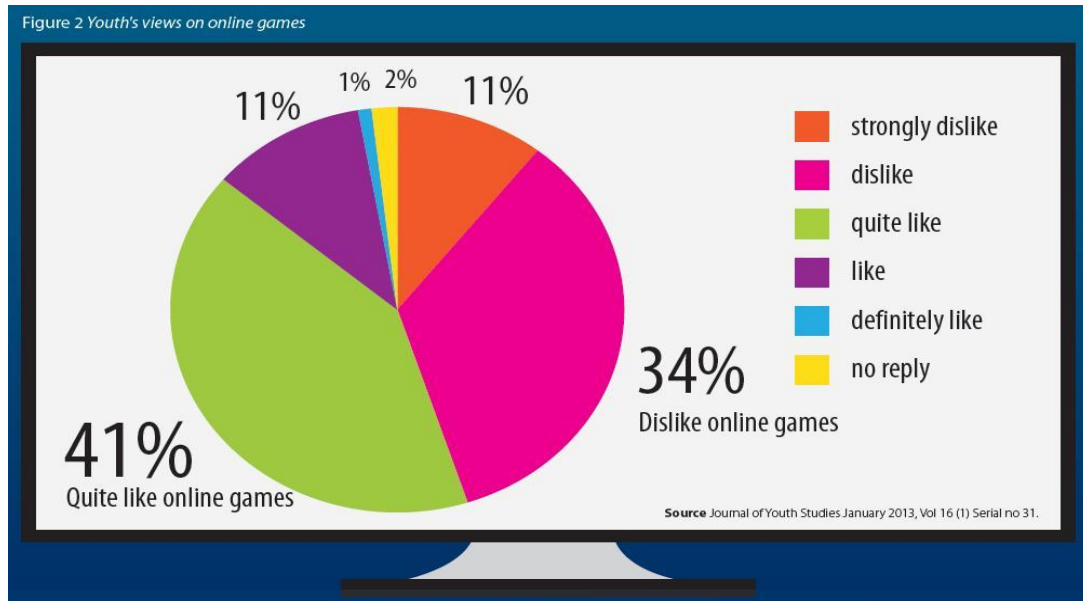


Anonymous attraction

A recent survey, organized by Professor Anthony YH Fung of the Chinese University of Hong Kong gives data on online gaming. Some of the statistics are cited in his article in the *Journal of Youth Studies*.⁴ Like Dr Huang, Professor Fung suggests that the attraction lies in the interactivity and anonymity of the games. Much more complex than the early computer games, they offer an escape from the real world and its problems. Young players don't think they will become addicted, but the games can act as a trigger to compulsive use.

Figure 2 has data from Professor Fung's 2011 survey⁵ which showed that over 40% of the young respondents actually disliked or even strongly disliked online games. Only 12% said they liked the games. In this survey, "online games" are defined as games that need software installed on computers. On average the 15-24 year-olds spend nearly two hours a day playing them. The most popular, in order of preference, are "shooting, role-play, sport, mahjong and education."

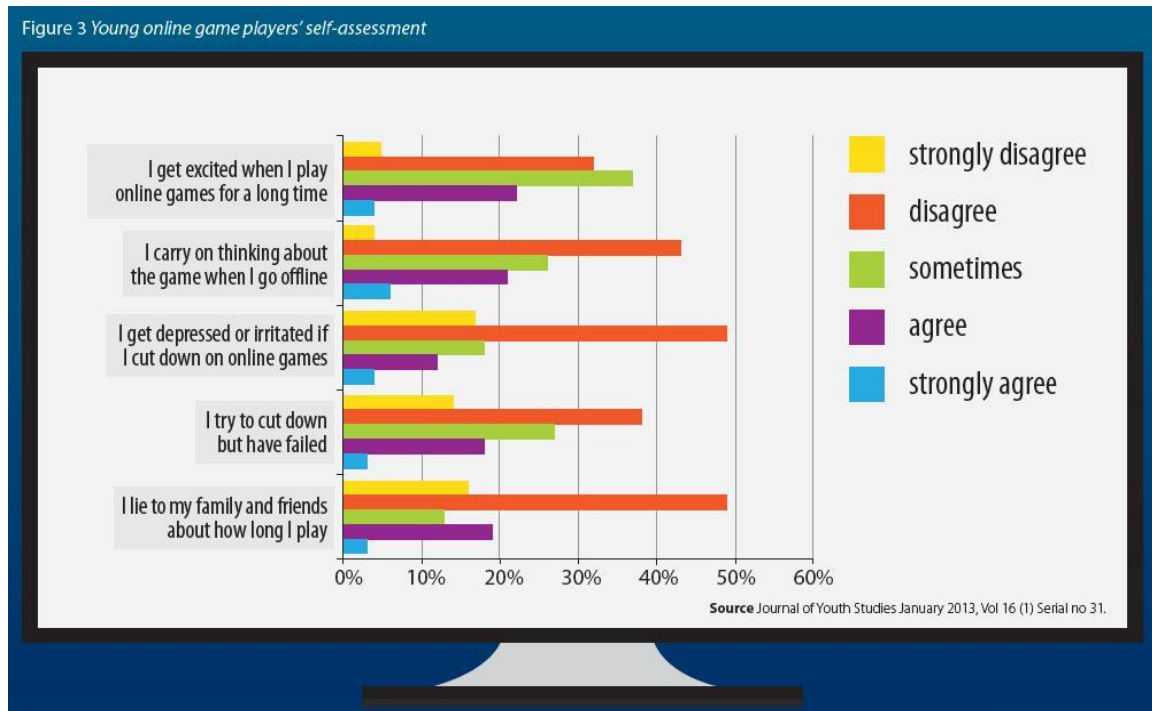
Figure 2 Youth's views on online games



About half of the respondents had negative views of online games, believing they were to blame for poor time management, bad moods and decreased performance. Figure 3 also shows that about 30% of the young players find playing games online for a long period exciting. About 20% of the young players agreed that they would become depressed or irritated if they cut down their online gaming time and had tried to do so but had failed. Overall, the findings reveal that young players do not find online games as evil as the general public would suppose. They also want teachers, parents and other adults to understand the reasons why young people as a whole rather like them.

Much literature on this subject stems from evidence in Asia and centres on young men. Some studies suggest that pathways in the brain can be triggered by online gaming in the same way as a drug addict's brain is affected by substance abuse. These prompt a neurological response that influences feelings of pleasure and reward. The extreme result is manifested as addictive behaviour.

Figure 3 Young online game players' self-assessment



Notes and sources

1. Summaries of articles in the Journal of Youth Studies, January 2013, Vol 16 (1) Serial no 31 can be found at <http://yrc.hkfyg.org.hk/?locale=en-US>
2. American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th ed, 2013.
3. Huang, Ya-chin. Journal of Youth Studies. 16(1) Serial 31. January 2013. pp 29-42
4. Fung, Anthony. Journal of Youth Studies.16(1) Serial 31. January 2013. pp 43-55.
5. Chinese University of Hong Kong, School of Journalism & Communication. Hong Kong Internet Use and Online Gamer Survey, 2011. Findings of the random sample telephone survey of 800 15-45 year-olds. It distinguishes between age groups, gender, socio-economic background and types of internet game. Its aims were to provide data to government for policymaking and to offer industry stakeholders data about consumer behavior. The survey was commissioned by the HKSAR Research Grants Council and supported by the Hong Kong Game Industry Association.]

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