Exploring a Positive Relationship between Commercial Video Games and Common Mental Health Disorders

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the potential of commercial video games as a tool in managing common mental health disorders, juxtaposing their therapeutic benefits against their addictive risks. It delves into how digital services, particularly video games, can aid in the passive treatment of conditions like depression and anxiety, leveraging their immersive and interactive elements. The paper also highlights the dangers of addiction and negative mental health impacts associated with excessive gaming. By analyzing the dual nature of video games in the context of mental health, the study emphasizes the importance of balance and moderation, suggesting that when used appropriately, video games could complement traditional mental health treatments.

Keywords: Video Games, Mental Health Disorders, Therapy, Addiction, Digital Services, Interactive Engagement

INTRODUCTION

Background

Recently, the commercial space within the digital world has expanded dramatically, and a variety of services and applications are incredibly accessible, and of great magnitude. These digital services have reached already reached heights in several industries, and our dependence on them has only seemed to increase, so to fit with the times, bringing these newfound opportunities into mental health care could show immeasurable benefits due to the tech space being constantly worked upon from all sides and the increasing prevalence of mental health disorders, especially because of our recent recovery from the global pandemic since 2020. This correlation between the two fields will be vital in the upcoming years, so for the purposes of this paper, video games will be specifically studied due to their relevance in the current entertainment industry and its relation to the digital realm.

Tradition mental health treatment practices

With the increasing frequency of depression across the globe, its relevance has become more important in recent times, and so has its potency and tendency to increase in severity. It is due to this reason that experts are inclined towards professional treatment as soon as possible. This however, can prove to be extremely difficult in the loneliness and worthlessness that these mental health disorders often induce in patients, with medicinal and therapeutic help being harder to approach if close help such as with family and friends is unavailable, if its severity has reached a concerning point, and with the problematic monetary cost that can take a toll on their already unstable self. Even with suitable access to professional help, medicinal side effects can pose different issues which then also need treatment, creating an implicitly harmful cycle in the process.

The intricate relationship between technology and mental health has brought forth a scenario in which recurring video game characteristics can smoothen out traditional therapeutic treatment methods but can also serve as a breeding ground for addiction.

Pushing the boundaries of casual, effective, and accessible therapy

Expanding horizons with video games

Being already established in the entertainment industry as a common stress outlet and an indulging source of amusement for many, adopting it as a periodic or passive method in aiding individuals with mental health disorders makes sense in the 21st century with its involvement with the internet, especially when considering the often-advised indulgence in board

games and card games which already has its proven benefits of anxiety relief and improved enthusiasm towards the entire process (Edwards, 2022). It is in this regard that commercially available video games can have a range of benefits and drawbacks due to their extensive coverage of a wide variety of genres, concepts, and purposes that can have their factors optimized to support a standard audience. They can be utilized to provide a useful experience that can be a form of active therapy or a more subtle approach to have an effect on the patient's mindset, subconscious behavior, and overall mood. Shifting towards this ideology as a subsection of healing mental health disorders can also open new doors in the existing space of experiences specifically catered for victims of these disorders.

Features that allow for video games to be effective in therapy

Most video games share a generalized set of characteristics and features that allow the person to both actively enjoy the session and take away benefits from it as well. To keep the player engaged in each session, it is important that the time they spend is time spent enjoying the session instead of viewing it as a chore, which could override possible benefits and lead to unnecessary stress and kill productivity levels. The 2 main factors that aid in overcoming this situation are immersion and interactivity (Bocci et al., 2023). By nature, games intend to be engaging in keeping an interesting story, involving a unique game mechanic, and keeping an interesting game loop, and this can be pushed further when interactivity within the digital environment is fun and subtle. It also needs the player to be actively using commands to do so. This is especially helpful for those who face issues relating to disorders like ADHD and communication disorders. While keeping the player interested, factors such as puzzle solving, game customization, and feedback are used to instill self-esteem into the therapy patient, by actively needing them to utilize a specific set of cognitive abilities, allowing them to tailor level design, challenges, and other requirements to their liking, and by reinforcing them every step of the way, to improve both their behavioral and mental health issues.

Creating, Harboring, and Escalating Symptoms

The case against video games

As with any product published with the intention of wanting to maximize the amount of time its audience spends with the product, it is no surprise that video games can be harmful in certain aspects, most notably, creating a common case of addiction, which when developing to become a serious issue can be the basis of a number of issues, and in the mental health space, can start or worsen symptoms of depression, anxiety, OCD and ADHD while also taking a toll on the individual's general wellbeing (BetterHelp, n.d.). Using the same logic that supports the case of video games, a handful of generalized characteristics of certain games can have an effect on both hardcore gamers and casual players.

Why the general intent of commercial video games limits the extent to which they can be useful in therapy

At the root of the problem lies the addictive nature of video games. Modern video games in the commercial space are tailor-made to have a simple gameplay loop or high replayability instead of developing structural features, simply to be able to trigger the release of dopamine in the first few instants of the game. This ensures that the person is involved later down the road even if the game has run dry of new and interesting content. As a result, players tend to go about playing these games at the expense of other basic actions that keep their mental health grounded (Gillette, 2022), which is at the heart of sprouting these disorders in a healthy mind, and in the hands of an already mentally unstable person, the after-effects could have a drastic impact on their state after a couple of months after starting the habit.

CONCLUSION

Due to the distinct features standard video games possess, it is quite evident that they can be of massive aid in the passive treatment of depression, anxiety, and other common mental health disorders by expanding the patient's world in giving them an outlet that can trigger the positive changes in their mental and behavioral nature, but also as a transition into formal treatment to maximize its effectiveness. Contrarily, video games can act as a boundary to improving any state of a person's mental health as more often than not they possess an addictive quality.

Video games have often been seen in the effect of their sole presence on a person's mental and behavioral conditions, but rarely in cohesion with traditional treatment practices, and thus can be beneficial and mainstream when utilized in a healthy balance. This can not only improve its effectiveness but also render the experience more calming, forgiving, and fun for the patient.

Future research should focus on empirically examining the specific features of video games that positively impact mental health. Studies could explore tailored game design for therapeutic purposes and the long-term effects of gaming on various mental health conditions. Additionally, investigating potential risks and developing guidelines for balanced and healthy gaming habits would be beneficial.

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