

COMM 3513

Video Games & Society

Autumn 2022, 3 credits

Online Course

Faculty Instructor:

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Course Overview

Social science research has revealed fascinating truths about the influence of video games on human behavior, but this body of research is fraught with conflicting results. Consider the example of violent video games. Do they [incite mass shootings](#)? Do they [propagate white supremacy](#)? Do they [make people smarter](#)? To the untrained eye, it might seem difficult to separate fact from clickbait.

Developing this ability to differentiate high-quality versus low-quality research requires a firm understanding of experimental methods. In this class, students will grapple with these concepts by reviewing and critiquing experimental research on violent video games. Later, students will examine these concepts in a variety of other contexts, including educational video games (e.g., [Bad News](#)), brain-training games (e.g., [Lumosity](#)), and massively-multiplayer online games (e.g., [Fortnite](#)). Additionally, students will investigate a specific video game topic of their choice by identifying relevant experimental research, critiquing that research, and proposing a novel experiment that addresses the limitations of that research. Finally, students will learn how experimental methods are applied in practical career settings, including user-experience research and video game design.

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to...

1. ...explain how experiments are used to test hypotheses about video game effects.
2. ...evaluate the quality and limitations of experimental research on video games.
3. ...design an experimental study that tests a hypothesis about video game effects.
4. ...evaluate the sociopolitical context in which video game research is produced.

Textbook/Readings

There is no textbook for this course. All readings are posted on Carmen (<https://carmen.osu.edu>).

Grade Distribution

This class has 100 possible points. Points are distributed as follows:

Questionnaires (x4)	4 points
Practice Quizzes (x5)	15 points
Gameplay Assignments (x3)	48 points
Video Game Hypothesis	3 points
Experiment Proposal (x3)	30 points

Letter Grade Distribution

You must attempt each assignment to receive a grade. Your final grade will be determined based on the combined score of all assignments. The grading distribution is as follows:

≥ 92.5	A	72.5 – 76.4	C
89.5 – 92.4	A-	69.5 – 72.4	C-
86.5 – 89.4	B+	66.5 – 69.4	D+
82.5 – 86.4	B	59.5 – 66.4	D
79.5 – 82.4	B-	≤ 59.4	F
76.5 – 79.4	C+		

Technology

Each weekly module features video lectures on Carmen. Lectures are posted in two formats: (1) PowerPoint files with audio recordings, and (2) online YouTube playlists. The content included in each version is identical, so you only need to access one version (whichever you prefer). The YouTube playlists allow for closed captioning. Please make certain you have a strong internet connection and relevant audio equipment (e.g., headphones). It is not feasible for me or your TAs to help you with technical problems. University Tech support can help you (614-688-HELP) with technical problems.

Overview of Assignments

Each weekly module contains readings, lectures, and assignments. All work is due by 11:59 pm on Sunday (i.e., the **END** of each week).

Questionnaires: Three brief questionnaires will periodically assess your overall experience in the course. I will use this feedback to provide you with personalized help and to improve the course as we progress through the semester. These questionnaires are graded for completion (i.e., complete = full credit; incomplete = no credit).

Practice Quizzes: You will have the opportunity to take six practice quizzes throughout the semester. These practice quizzes will assess your understanding of the lecture videos and course readings for a particular week. Each quiz is worth 3 points and has 6 questions. All quizzes are open note. You have two opportunities to complete each quiz, and these attempts have no time limit. Your final score will reflect the best of both attempts. Additionally, your lowest quiz score will be dropped. In other words, only your five highest scores will count toward your final grade (i.e., 15 points total). These quizzes are meant to prepare you for gameplay assignments.

Gameplay Assignments: Three gameplay assignments serve as “exams” in this course. Each gameplay assignment is worth a total of 16 points, and it consists of three components (i.e., a reflection, a set of readings, and an assessment):

1. **Reflection:** You will play an assigned video game. These games are all freely available online and can be played on desktop computers or mobile devices. The first assignment features an educational video game (i.e., [Bad News](#)), the second assignment features a popular brain-training game (i.e., [Lumosity](#)), and the third assignment features an online multiplayer game (i.e., [Fortnite](#)). The required play time varies for each assignment (i.e., 20-40 minutes). You will be required to submit a

brief reflection about each game, which will be graded out of 1 point (1 = satisfactory, 0 = unsatisfactory).

2. Readings: You will review 1-2 published research articles focused on the game that you played. These articles will be provided to you.
3. Assessment: You will answer a series of multiple-choice questions about the assigned research articles. This assessment will examine your understanding of key course concepts as they manifest in the assigned research articles. This assessment is worth 15 points, and you can complete it at any point during the assigned week. However, you will only have one attempt to complete it, and this attempt is timed (60 minutes). Although you cannot work with other students, you will be permitted to use your notes and any other desired materials.

In total, these gameplay assignments will each take around 4 hours to complete, though you do not have to complete everything in one sitting. On weeks that you are tasked with completing a gameplay assignment, no other work will be assigned. The intent of these assignments is twofold. First, they provide opportunities to play video games, especially games that you might not otherwise play. Second, they assess your ability to independently read and interpret published research on video games, which is one of the main learning goals of this course.

If you score less than 70% on the assessment portion of a gameplay assignment, you can complete a *Gameplay Correction Assignment*. This correction requires you to reflect on errors that you made on the assessment and to demonstrate mastery of the material. Satisfactory completion of this reflection will increase your assessment score to 70%.

Experiment Proposal: The final project of this course requires you to submit a 1- to 2-page proposal for an experiment that tests a hypothesis about video game effects. This project consists of three “milestones.” For the first milestone, you will identify and summarize two existing experimental studies that have previously tested your video game hypothesis. For the second milestone, you will identify and summarize the key limitations of those existing studies. For the third milestone, you will design a new experiment that addresses each of those limitations. More details about each milestone will be provided later, and each milestone will be graded out of 10 points.

Video Game Hypothesis: In preparation for the experiment proposal, you will first submit a written hypothesis that describes a prediction about video game effects. This hypothesis will specify an independent variable (i.e., a particular type of video game) and a dependent variable (i.e., a particular effect of gameplay). This hypothesis will be graded out of 3 points. You will receive instructor feedback on this hypothesis, which is intended to guide your experiment proposal.

Late Work Policy

All late assignments receive a zero.

Extra Credit

Participate in a research study! Conducting scientific research is crucial to the mission and purpose of the School of Communication at The Ohio State University. You can earn 2 points of extra credit for each 1 hour of research participation (up to 2 hours, or 2 points total) that you complete in School of Communication research studies. Be sure to read the detailed instructions on the SONA site. You must sign up for studies at: <https://osucomm.sona-systems.com>

Mental Health: Please Take Care of Yourself!

As a student, you might experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to your learning (e.g., strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation). These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. If you are or someone you know is suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life's Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting ccs.osu.edu or calling 614-292-5766. CCS is located on the 4th Floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th Floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on-call counselor when CCS is closed at 614-292-5766. If you are thinking of harming yourself or need a safe, non-judgmental place to talk, or if you are worried about someone else and need advice about what to do, 24 hour emergency help is also available through the Suicide Prevention Hotline (Columbus: 614-221-5445 / National: 800-273-8255); or text (4hope to 741741); or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Title IX

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories (e.g., race). If you or someone you know has been sexually harassed or assaulted, you may find the appropriate resources at <http://titleix.osu.edu> or by contacting the Ohio State Title IX Coordinator, Kellie Brennan, at titleix@osu.edu

Diversity

The School of Communication at The Ohio State University embraces and maintains an environment that respects diverse traditions, heritages, experiences, and people. Our commitment to diversity moves beyond mere tolerance to recognizing, understanding, and welcoming the contributions of diverse groups and the value group members possess as individuals. In our School, the faculty, students, and staff are dedicated to building a tradition of diversity with principles of equal opportunity, personal respect, and the intellectual interests of those who comprise diverse cultures.

Requesting Accommodations

The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know via email immediately so that we can privately discuss options. You can also register with Student Life Disability Services to establish reasonable accommodations. After registration, you

should make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: slds@osu.edu; 614-292-3307; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

Academic Integrity

All work must be the original work of the student and not turned in to any other course prior to this one. Cheating is unacceptable and will result in a formal report to the School of Communication and the Committee on Academic Misconduct. It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct: <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>

Student Academic Services

Arts and Sciences Advising and Academic Services’ website provides support for student academic success. Information on advising issues such as tutoring, transfer credits, academic standing, and contact information for Arts and Sciences advisors can be obtained through this website. The site is: <http://advising.osu.edu/welcome.shtml>

Student Services

The Student Service Center assists with financial aid matters, tuition and fee payments. Please see their site at: <http://ssc.osu.edu>

Copyright Disclaimer

The materials used in connection with this course may be subject to copyright protection and are only for the use of students officially enrolled in the course for the educational purposes associated with the course. Copyright law must be considered before copying, retaining, or disseminating materials outside of the course.

Additional Disclaimer

This syllabus represents a contract “in the works.” Events that transpire over the semester may require modifications to the course. In the event of a change, I will announce the change and update the syllabus on Carmen. Ultimately it is your responsibility to keep up with any such modifications and to be aware of current policies, deadlines, etc. I reserve the right to modify course policies throughout the semester.

UNIT 1: FOUNDATIONS OF VIDEO GAME RESEARCH (Week 1 - Week 4)

WEEK 1 (Aug 23 – Aug 28) Course Overview	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Course Overview (15:33) 2. Tips for Reading a Video Game Experiment (10:41) 3. Differentiating “Violence” and “Aggression” in Research (9:02) 4. News Report: The Debate Behind Video Game Violence (20:45)
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Aug 28	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introductory Questionnaire
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. None – (So please watch all the introductory lecture videos! They are crucial for understanding the course structure and course material.)

WEEK 2 (Aug 29 – Sept 4) The Basics of Video Game Experiments (Part I)	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction to Experimental Research (11:12) 2. An Example of Violent Video Game Research (15:00) 3. Understanding Random Assignment (15:31)
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Sept 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Practice Quiz 1
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Boyle, M., & Schmierbach, M. (2019). Experiments and threats to validity. <i>Applied Communication Research Methods: Getting Started as a Researcher</i>. (pp. 222-258). Routledge. 2. Anderson, C. A., & Murphy, C. R. (2003). Violent video games and aggressive behavior in young women. <i>Aggressive Behavior</i>, 29, 423-429.

WEEK 3 (Sept 5 – Sept 11) The Basics of Video Game Experiments (Part II)	
LECTURES	1. Understanding “Factors” in Experimental Design (15:11) 2. “Between-Subjects” vs. “Within-Subjects” Designs (11:22)
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Sept 11	1. Practice Quiz 2 2. Video Game Hypothesis
READINGS	1. Williams, K. D. (2009). The effects of frustration, violence, and trait hostility after playing a video game. <i>Mass Communication and Society</i> , 12(3), 291-310. 2. Hasan, Y., Begue, L., Scharrow, M., & Bushman, B. J., (2013). The more you play, the more aggressive you become: A long-term experimental study of cumulative violent video game effects on hostile expectations and aggressive behavior. <i>Journal of Experimental Social Psychology</i> , 49, 224-227.

WEEK 4 (Sept 12 – Sept 18) Gameplay Assignment 1: Educational Video Games	
LECTURES	1. Play online game: Bad News (~20 mins)
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Sept 18	1. Gameplay Assignment 1
READINGS	1. Unit 1 Study Guide 2. Roozenbeek, J. & van der Linden, S. (2019). Fake news game confers psychological resistance against online misinformation. <i>Palgrave Communications</i> 5(65), 1-10. 3. Maertens, R., Roozenbeek, J., Basol, M., & van der Linden, S. (2021). Long-term effectiveness of inoculation against misinformation: Three longitudinal experiments. <i>Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied</i> , 27(1), 1-16.

UNIT 2: OBSTACLES IN VIDEO GAME RESEARCH (Week 5 - Week 8)

WEEK 5 (Sept 19 – Sept 25) Methodological Concerns in Video Game Experiments	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Methodological Concerns in Video Game Experiments (18:24) 2. Tips for Finding Published Experiments (11:28)
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Sept 25	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Experiment Proposal: Milestone 1
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Devilly, G. J., Callahan, P., & Armitage, G. (2012). The effect of violent videogame playtime on anger. <i>Australian Psychologist</i>, 47(2), 98-107. 2. Lin, J.-H. (2013). Do video games exert stronger effects on aggression than film? The role of media interactivity and identification on the association of violent content and aggressive outcomes. <i>Computers in Human Behavior</i>, 29, 535-543.

WEEK 6 (Sept 26 – Oct 2) Manipulation Validity in Video Game Experiments	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stimulus Sampling in Experimental Research (9:38) 2. Understanding “Clean” vs. “Sloppy” Manipulations (9:11) 3. “Equating” and “Modding” Video Games (19:50)
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Oct 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Practice Quiz 3
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adachi, P. J. C., & Willoughby, T. (2011). The effect of video game competition and violence on aggressive behavior: Which characteristic has the greatest influence? <i>Psychology of Violence</i>, 1(4), 259-274. 2. Elson, M. & Quandt, T. (2016). Digital games in laboratory experiments: Controlling a complex stimulus through modding. <i>Psychology of Popular Media Culture</i>, 5(1), 52-65.

WEEK 7 (Oct 3 – Oct 9) Measurement Validity in Video Game Experiments	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Flexibility in Measurements of Aggressive Behavior (17:23) 2. Alternatives to Measuring Aggressive Behavior (16:30)
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Oct 9	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Practice Quiz 4 2. Mid-semester Questionnaire
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. https://www.flexiblemeasures.com/crtt/ 2. Chang, J. H., & Bushman, B. J. (2019). Effect of exposure to gun violence in video games on children's dangerous behavior with real guns: A randomized clinical trial. <i>JAMA Network Open</i>, 2(5), 1-11. 3. Bushman, B. J., & Anderson, C. A. (2009). Comfortably Numb: Desensitizing effects of violent media on helping others. <i>Psychological Science</i>, 20(3), 273-277.

WEEK 8 (Oct 10 – Oct 16) Gameplay Assignment 2: Brain-Training Games	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Play online game: Lumosity (~20 minutes)
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Oct 16	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gameplay Assignment 2
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unit 2 Study Guide 2. Ballesteros et al. (2014). Brain training with non-action video games enhances aspects of cognition in older adults: A randomized controlled trial. <i>Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience</i>, 6, 1-14. 3. Bainbridge, K., & Mayer, R. E. (2018). Shining the light of research on Lumosity. <i>Journal of Cognitive Enhancement</i>, 2, 43-62.

UNIT 3: DEBATES IN VIDEO GAME RESEARCH (Week 9 – Week 12)

WEEK 9 (Oct 17 – Oct 23) The Politics of Video Game Research	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Replication Crisis and Research Retractions (21:23) 2. News Report: Court Evaluates Violent Video Game Case (5:56 mins) 3. News Report: Court Rules First Amendment Protects Violent Video Games (3:22 mins)
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Oct 23	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Experiment Proposal: Milestone 2
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Markey, P. M., & Ferguson, C. J. (2017). Teaching us to fear: The violent video game moral panic and the politics of game research. <i>American Journal of Play</i>, 10(1), 99-115. 2. Hilgard, J. (2021). I tried to report scientific misconduct. How did it go? <i>Crystal Prison Zone</i>.

WEEK 10 (Oct 24 – Oct 30) Meta-Analyses of Video Game Research	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Basics of Meta-Analysis (12:49) 2. “Conflicting” Meta-Analyses of Violent Game Research (7:03)
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Oct 30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Practice Quiz 5
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. de Vrieze (2018). The meta-wars. <i>Science</i>, 361(6408), 1184-1188. 2. Ferguson, C. J., Copenhaver, A., & Markey, P. (2020). Reexamining the findings of the American Psychological Association’s 2015 Task Force on Violent Media: A meta-analysis. <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science</i>, 15(6), 1423-1443.

WEEK 11 (Oct 31 – Nov 6) Alternative Approaches to Violent Game Research	
LECTURES	1. Prosocial Content and Prosocial Effects (9:23) 2. How Gameplay Context Influences Player Responses (6:23)
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Nov 6	1. Practice Quiz 6
READINGS	1. Greitemeyer, T., & Osswald, S. (2010). Effects of prosocial video games on prosocial behavior. <i>Interpersonal Relations and Group Processes</i> , 98(2), 211-221. 2. Velez, J. A., Greitemeyer, T., Whitaker, J. L., Ewoldsen, D. R., & Bushman, B. J. (2016). Violent video games and reciprocity: The attenuating effects of cooperative gameplay on subsequent aggression. <i>Communication Research</i> , 43(4), 447-467.

WEEK 12 (Nov 7 – Nov 13) Gameplay Assignment 3: Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOs)	
LECTURES	1. Play online game: Fortnite (~40 minutes)
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Nov 13	1. Gameplay Assignment 3
READINGS	1. Unit 3 Study Guide 2. Shoshani, A. & Krauskopf, M. (2021). The Fortnite social paradox: The effects of violent-cooperative multi-player video games on children's basic psychological needs and prosocial behavior. <i>Computers in Human Behavior</i> , 116, 1-10.

UNIT 4: APPLYING VIDEO GAME RESEARCH (Week 13 - Week 15)

WEEK 13 (Nov 14 – Nov 20) Practical Applications of Video Game Research	
LECTURES	1. The Life of a User Experience Researcher (31:20) 2. The Life of a Video Game Designer (31:53)
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Nov 20	1. Experiment Proposal: Milestone 3
READINGS	1. Goins, A. (2020). What Skills Do I Need to Become a UX Researcher? <i>Kenzie Academy</i> .

THANKSGIVING BREAK (Nov 21 – Nov 27)	
LECTURES	1. None! Have a safe and relaxing break!
ASSIGNMENTS	3. None! Have a safe and relaxing break!
READINGS	3. None! Have a safe and relaxing break!

WEEK 14 & 15 (Nov 28 – Dec 7) Summary and Takeaways	
LECTURES	1. What Have We Learned from Violent Video Game Research? (7:43)
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Dec 4	1. Exit Questionnaire
READINGS	1. Schreier, J. (2013). From halo to hot sauce: What 25 years of violent video game research looks like. <i>Kotaku</i> . 2. Ferguson, C. J. (2020). Aggressive video game research emerges from its replication crisis (sort of). <i>Current Opinion in Psychology</i> , 36, 1-6.