

Indian American led study links video games and creativity

Video games that energise players and create a positive mood may also enhance creativity, according to a team of media researchers led by an Indian American.

The study, led by S. Shyam Sundar, professor of film, video and media studies at Penn State University, found that players who were not highly energised and had a negative mood before the game witnessed a boost in creativity as well.

The bottomline: after playing a game, happy or sad people were most creative, while angry or relaxed people were not.

Sundar and his colleague Elizabeth Hutton are trying to understand how video games spark positive social traits, such as creativity.

"You need defocused attention for being creative," said Sundar. "When you have low arousal and are negative, you tend to focus on detail and become more analytical."

Sundar and Hutton, co-author of the paper, presented their findings Friday at the 58th annual conference of the International Communication Association (ICA) in Montreal.

Video games have come to be viewed as serious communication technology. Schools, corporations and governments are increasingly employing it as a tool in enhancing learning and decision-making.

As Sundar put it: "Video games are not just for entertainment alone. We are trying to figure out how they can aid in education as well."

In the study, 98 undergraduate and graduate students were asked to play a popular video game, Dance Dance Revolution, at various levels of complexity.

The students took a standard creativity test after playing. The researchers also took readings of the players' skin conductance and asked players if they were feeling positive or negative after the game.

"We looked at two emotional variables: arousal and valence. Arousal is the degree of physical excitation, and valence is the range of positive or negative feeling," said Hutton.

When the researchers ran a statistical analysis of the two emotional variables and the students' creativity scores, they found two totally different groups with high scores.

Players with a high degree of arousal and positive mood were most likely to have new ideas for problem solving. The statistical tests also revealed that creativity scores were highest for players with low arousal and a negative mood.

A negative mood, especially when there is low arousal, brings a different kind of energy that makes a person more analytical, which is crucial to creativity as well, he added.

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