

## HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

### Masaryk University

**Applicant**

Mgr. Ivan Ropovik, PhD.

**Habilitation thesis**

Addressing measurement and evidence quality idealizations in gaming research

**Reviewer**

Doc. Mgr. Lukas Blinka Ph.D.

**Reviewer's home unit, institution**

Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University

The submitted habilitation thesis addresses various types of idealisations related to different aspects of psychological research, with a more specific focus on their application to the psychology of computer game playing. The habilitation consists of eight original, predominantly empirical studies, which are coherently integrated through a shared introduction, a summary of the research questions and methods (including samples and analytical approaches), and a subsequent discussion. Most of the eight studies were published in prestigious journals, ranking within Q1 or even D1 in various areas of psychology. The author is the first author of five of these studies, and his contribution to the remaining ones was also substantial. The significance of the publications is further evidenced by their high citation counts, with some receiving several dozen citations (in WoS) despite being published relatively recently. Finally, it is worth noting that the author has published numerous studies beyond those included in this habilitation, demonstrating a broader and more extensive footprint in psychological science.

The habilitation can be summarised as encompassing two dominant methodological domains. The first is the network approach (as an alternative to the latent approach), applied primarily in research on gaming and gaming disorder. The second approach is meta-analytical, within which the author addresses, for example, issues of publication bias. Given the breadth of these domains and the potentially substantial debate they may provoke, it is, in fact, somewhat regrettable that the habilitation is "only" of a standard length. For instance, the latent variable approach is entirely dominant in research on mental disorders (such as gaming disorder), and it is conceivable that many colleagues may not fully agree with the challenge posed by an alternative paradigm, such as network analysis. However, the work raises no doubts or objections on my part; just curiosity.

I also appreciate the high level of reflexivity, critical stance, and healthy scepticism present throughout the text. In the discussion, I found particularly noteworthy the remark that efforts to improve methodology represent a more technical problem - "low-hanging fruit" - whereas the real difficulty lies in the theoretical domain. Given that the core of the submitted habilitation directly addresses methodological improvement, this statement reflects the author's healthy scepticism and modesty. Nevertheless, I would not wish the author's contribution to be unnecessarily

understated. There are studies and habilitation that merely replicate existing research using conventional, already well-established approaches. The author's work, by contrast, takes the more demanding path of a critical perspective. The habilitation thesis and the individual studies of which it consists demonstrate that the author's contribution to the advancement of research is compelling, original, and highly promising.

### **Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence**

Both in the habilitation thesis and in several of the published articles, a polarity is suggested between the latent approach (which, in the case of mental disorder, implies an affiliation with the so-called disease model) and the network approach (which assumes the relative autonomy of individual symptoms and their mutual interactions). Are these two approaches necessarily mutually exclusive? Allow me an analogy from physics: depending on the context, photons can be conceptualised as both waves and particles. Is it possible that gaming disorder may legitimately exhibit both latent and network characteristics, such that these approaches would be more appropriately applied depending on the situation (e.g., stage of development of the disorder)? If so, in which situations? Or does the author tend to favour the general validity of the network approach?

A further question concerns the suitability of the network approach for studying pathology, for which it is most commonly used. In the case of gaming disorder, such studies (including those presented in this habilitation) typically examine a pathological phenomenon within general, predominantly non-clinical populations. To what extent, then, can the distribution of symptoms (and the relationships among them) be used to infer the structure of the disorder itself? More specifically, if the same analyses were conducted in a clinical population, would the resulting network be substantially different?

### **Conclusion**

The habilitation thesis entitled "Addressing measurement and evidence quality idealizations in gaming research" by Ivan Ropovik, PhD, **fulfils** the requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of General Psychology.

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