

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Faculty

Faculty of Social Studies

Applicant

Mgr. Ivan Ropovik, PhD.

Habilitation thesis

Addressing measurement and evidence quality idealizations in gaming research

Reviewer

doc. Mgr. Kateřina Lukavská, Ph.D.

Reviewer's home unit, institution

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I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to review the submitted habilitation thesis.

Topic and structure of the habilitation thesis

The thesis is clearly structured and contains all essential components of a habilitation submission, including an Introduction, a description of the included studies, a General Discussion, and the full texts of the individual papers.

I highly appreciate the author's focus on the quality of scientific inquiry, which is both timely and necessary. The choice of digital gaming as a case study for this purpose is meaningful, as it represents a rapidly developing and methodologically challenging research area. Owing to its transdisciplinary nature and ongoing conceptual debates, capturing the field of digital gaming in its full breadth would be difficult.

For this reason, the author appropriately narrows the scope of the thesis to issues of measurement in gaming disorder research. This focus is complemented by an analysis of selection and publication biases. I consider this structure to be pragmatic and conceptually well justified.

Theoretical background and research aims

The Introduction begins by outlining the rationale for the aims of the habilitation thesis. It would benefit from a more elaborated discussion of the problem of idealization in science. Similarly, while presenting selected findings on gaming, some shortcomings can be identified. For example, in assessing the role of COVID-19 in online gaming, it is unclear why a "letter to the editor" is cited instead of full-length peer-reviewed studies.

The network approach, proposed as an alternative to the traditional common-cause model of mental health disorders, is described clearly and convincingly. The text summarizes its advantages, such as the possibility of identifying central and peripheral symptoms of a disorder, which may inform targeted interventions. However, it may be questioned whether it is preferable to target symptoms rather than etiological factors. A broader discussion of the respective advantages and limitations of both approaches would therefore be beneficial. When describing the aims of Studies 2–4, it remains unclear how the network approach is reflected in the comparison of DSM-5- and ICD-11-based conceptualizations of disordered gaming.

The chapter “Evidence quality” introduces important sources of bias in the research and publication process. Attention to these issues is clearly warranted and is increasingly emphasized in contemporary science. In this context, however, it is debatable whether the accounts of Ioannidis and Rothstein et al. still adequately reflect the current state of the field and whether they can serve as a strong argument for the persistence of idealization in the interpretation of summative findings. Nevertheless, the development of methods to detect and adjust for common biases has been, and remains, an important endeavour.

Overall, the Introduction provides the essential background for understanding the included studies. At the same time, its structure is somewhat confusing, and its internal coherence is limited. The concept of idealization, which is intended to link Studies 1–4 (network approaches to mental health measurement in general and to gaming disorder in particular) with Studies 5–8 (biases in meta-analyses), functions only partially in this respect. A stronger focus on disordered gaming could have enhanced coherence, but not all of the included studies address this phenomenon directly. The main unifying element thus appears to be the author’s effort to improve statistical methods in psychological research, although this methodological emphasis varies across the individual studies.

Included studies and their description

The individual studies were published in respected peer-reviewed journals, most of them with high impact. With regard to the author’s contribution, his role was primarily related to study design, methodology, statistical analysis, and the reporting of results. Some of the studies are purely methodological (Studies 1, 5, and 6), whereas others focus on (disordered) gaming, examining mainly the structure of gaming disorder and its symptomatology.

The overall description of the studies is adequate, although in some places rather vague formulations are used (e.g., “Beyond examining simpler temporal patterns, the study also sought to understand GD development as a dynamic complex system, attempting to disentangle the intricate network of relationships on within-subject temporal and contemporaneous levels as well as on a stationary between-subject level.”).

The methods are described in a detailed and clear manner. In addition to sample characteristics, attrition rates are also reported, which is commendable. The description of the statistical analyses is accompanied by a rationale for their use, demonstrating the author’s analytical focus and methodological competence.

Discussion and conclusions

The Discussion provides a concise summary of the findings of the included studies. It is noteworthy that the author explicitly addresses results indicating that the proposed innovative and more elaborate approach may be effective only under certain design conditions (e.g., analyses of internal structure versus relations with external variables).

In the section concerning Studies 1–4, the findings are linked to dynamic systems approaches in general psychopathology. This connection is relevant, but a more detailed explanation would be beneficial. Similarly, a stronger linkage to theoretical models of gaming disorder would be welcome, even though gaming research is framed primarily as a case study for illustrating more general principles of idealization in science. In this respect, Studies 3 and 4 appear particularly relevant and could contribute more explicitly to the ongoing debate on the nature of problematic gaming.

If correctly understood, Studies 1 and 5 are not addressed in the general discussion, which can be considered a limitation.

The final part of the Discussion succeeds in placing the results in a broader context related to the main aim of the thesis, namely to contribute to our understanding of the nature and limitations of scientific evidence in psychology (and the social sciences more generally). This is an important question in the context of evidence-based decision-making, policy, and treatment. From this perspective, contributions that address these issues are valuable. The author's long-term engagement with this topic is also evident.

Overall evaluation

The included studies form a relatively coherent set, guided by the aim of understanding sources of bias in the social sciences in general and in gaming research in particular. The thesis itself would benefit from a more thorough explanation of the key concepts and phenomena it addresses, namely idealization, gaming disorder and its operationalization, and the network approach to psychopathology. Nevertheless, the author succeeds in introducing the topic, justifying its relevance, and delineating his specific contribution to the field. The work also reflects a nuanced understanding of psychological research and a cautious, self-critical stance toward the author's own findings.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence

General questions:

Could you elaborate on the statement: "In the particular case of our two meta-analyses, this principled approach revealed that publication bias did not seem to severely distort effect estimates in either meta-analysis"? How do you interpret the finding that publication bias was not as detrimental as might have been expected (even in Study 7, where effect sizes were the primary focus of most studies)? Do you believe that there has been positive progress in psychology with regard to publication bias, beyond advances in statistical methods designed to address it?

To what extent do you consider digital gaming, as a case study, essential for addressing the problem of idealization? Would your main conclusions differ if another domain of psychopathology had been used instead?

Specific question:

Based on Study 3, you argue that “relationships with external criteria often show greater stability.” In the context of network-based psychopathology (e.g., the Hierarchical Taxonomy of Psychopathology), is the notion of “external criteria,” such as symptoms of depression and anxiety, theoretically meaningful?

Conclusion

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

Date: 27.1.2026

Signatur

