

We can assume the target group for Netflix games will particularly be casual players with high interest in movies. Company should take advantage of their licences like they did with *The Stranger Things* games. If Netflix was able to manage this gaming extension and attract more paid members, it seems likely that other video-on-demand services will just follow their path.

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“Sorry Guys, I Can’t Play with You Anymore”: Regulations of Online Gaming of Minors in China

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The Chinese market has been an enticing target for digital games producers for quite some time. With an enormous potential player base and the Chinese government opening up to more digital game releases in the country, producing games with demographic and regional restrictions in mind could be seen as a potential boost to sales and revenues. Some companies have already been criticised for overly focusing on the Chinese market, and, more importantly, for complying with its strict regulations. Activision Blizzard’s *Hearthstone*¹ has had its share of controversy seemingly connected to abiding by China’s rules, from altering artwork of certain cards to not include blood or scantily clad women, to suspending professional player Blitzchung for voicing his opinion about ‘freeing Hong Kong’ during a streaming event. However, with the new regulations of online gaming that have been recently pushed through in China, the market may no longer be as financially attractive as it used to be.

In August 2021, new rules prohibiting minors from playing online digital games were established. This new set of limitations adjusts the time underage players can play online to only Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m.² That is a total of three hours

1 BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT: *Hearthstone*. [digital game]. Irvine, CA : Blizzard Entertainment, 2014.

2 ZHAI, K.: *China Limits Online Videogames to Three Hours a Week for Young People*. Released on 31st August 2021. [online]. [2021-11-30]. Available at: <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-sets-new-rules-for-youth-no-more-videogames-during-the-school-week-11630325781>>.

of online gaming per week, bound to very specific timetables. The regulations of online playing have been strict before, with the 2019 restrictions concerning minors allowing an hour and half per weekday and three hours of daily playtime on holidays.³ Before that, the allotted time for online games was three hours daily.

This massive change did not come unexpectedly. Reuters reports that approximately a month prior to the playtime change, a state media article described online games as 'spiritual opium'. The original piece further elaborates the topic by claiming that "'spiritual opium' has grown into an industry worth hundreds of billions," and "no industry, no sport, can be allowed to develop in a way that will destroy a generation," singling out one of the most popular games in China, *Honor of Kings*^{4,5}.

Even though the new regulations are supposed to protect Chinese children from becoming addicted and having their healthy growth endangered by excessive gaming, it is more likely that this will only push them to find more creative workarounds to 'cheat the system'. It is known that to play online in China, a player has to log in using their personal ID. Even before the stricter regulations were enforced, children had already been abusing the system flaws by purchasing adult credentials. Moreover, some digital games had been accessible based on fake ID numbers. Children will surely be resourceful enough to circumvent these new restrictions. But will the companies trying to sell their online games on the Chinese market be as clever as well?

So far, 'no' seems to be the answer. The first casualty surfaced just a few days after the news on these changes. On 15th November 2021, the shutdown of *Fortnite*⁶ for China was announced. The Chinese Fortnite client has been running since 2018 and was altered to comply with the government regulations. Some notable changes were the omission of microtransactions, removal of all skulls visible in-game, an alternative way of winning besides eliminating all other players and story changes that imply the enemies are holograms in a simulation and the player's goal is to 'disconnect them'. While it has not been explicitly stated that the server shutdown is connected to the new regulations, the timing of both announcements seems to heavily imply so. Chinese companies are impacted by these changes as well, with *Tencent* losing over 11% of its stock value and falling out of the top 10 global digital games companies⁷ after the article comparing online games to 'opium' was released.

Even though the Chinese government became more open to officially licensing digital games, their new approach to online gaming in relation to minors may deter some developers from the arduous process of localising their games for China. While those who are focused on producing single player games may not be affected by these changes as significantly, most of the recently released AAA digital games include multiplayer elements to increase the 'life cycle' of the product or to simply allow additional monetisation. China distancing itself from the world of online gaming and enforcing strict Internet regulations in the country thus makes it even harder to academically examine the digital games market on a global scale.

3 VALENTINE, R.: *China Gaming Regulator Publishes New Rules for Minors Targeting Playtime, Spending*. Released on 5th November 2019. [online]. [2021-11-30]. Available at: <<https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2019-11-05-china-gaming-regulator-publishes-new-restrictions-for-minors-targeting-playtime-spending>>.

4 TIMI STUDIO GROUP: *Honor of Kings*. [digital game]. Shenzhen : Tencent Games, 2015.

5 GOH, B., SHEN, S.: *Tencent Vows Fresh Gaming Curbs after 'Spiritual Opium' Attack Zaps \$60 Billion*. Released on 3rd August 2021. [online]. [2021-11-30]. Available at: <<https://www.reuters.com/technology/tencent-falls-after-china-media-calls-online-gaming-spiritual-opium-2021-08-03/>>.

6 EPIC GAMES: *Fortnite Battle Royale*. [digital game]. Cary, NY : Epic Games, 2017.

7 HUANG, Z.: *Tencent Stock Craters as Investors Fear Beijing Will Crack Down on Gaming Next*. Released on 3rd August 2021. [online]. [2021-11-30]. Available at: <<https://fortune.com/2021/08/02/tencent-stock-shares-netease-xd-china-gaming-entertainment-crackdown/>>.

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Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: What the Recent Lawsuit against Activision Blizzard Tells Us about the State of the Industry

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The digital-gaming industry is a place notorious for two problems: crunches and ever-present sexism. In this context, it seems that 2021 has not been kind to Activision Blizzard, or at least to its top representatives, although Activision Blizzard is not the only name shaken by accusations of macho culture, a toxic environment, or sex-based discrimination. But why is it so important? Firstly, this case includes every infamous trope that we know. It is a display window into misogyny in the digital-gaming industry containing dangerous and tragic behaviour extending to the highest places. Let's take a look at the events leading up to this moment in a simplified factual timeline:

- **2019-2021:** Two years of investigation by the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) that ends in a 7 pages long complaint against Activision Blizzard. An investigation was initiated into allegations of allowing and encouraging sexual misconduct towards female employees, allegation of frat boy culture and sex-based discrimination.¹

¹ For more information, see: WIPPER, J. L. et al.: *Department of Fair Employment and Housing v. Activision Blizzard Inc.* Los Angeles, CA : Superior Court of California, 2021. [online]. [2021-12-08]. Available at: <<https://aboutblaw.com/YJw>>.