

People remain calm as the world ends, video game study suggests

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The study is based upon the virtual actions of more than 80,000 players of the role-playing video game ArcheAge (seen above). Credit: University at Buffalo

As the world ends, will you lock arms and sing "Kumbayah" or embark on a path of law-breaking, anti-social behavior?

A new study, based upon the virtual actions of more than 80,000 players of the role-playing [video game](#) ArcheAge, suggests you'll be singing.

The study, conducted by a University at Buffalo-led team of computer scientists, will be presented next month at the International World Wide Web Conference in Australia. It found that despite some violent acts, most players tended toward [behavior](#) that was helpful to others as their virtual world came to an end.

Researchers acknowledge that the results have limitations—namely that they are based upon a video game, not real life. Nevertheless, researchers argue that the study offers a realistic view into the behavior of people in an end-times scenario that is useful to both the [game industry](#) and other research communities.

"We realize that, because this is a video game, the true consequences of the world ending are purely virtual. That being said, our dataset represents about as close as we can get to an actual end-of-the-world scenario," says Ahreum Kang, postdoctoral researcher at UB's School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, and the study's lead author.

Additional authors include Jeremy Blackburn of Telefonica Research, Haewoon Kwak of the Qatar Computing Research Institute at Hamad bin Khalifa University and Huy Kang Kim of Korea University.

For the study, the researchers analyzed 275 million records of player behavior that were recorded during a trial of ArcheAge before the medieval fantasy game was released to the public in January 2013.

Researchers classified 75 different in-game actions into 11 categories. Examples of categories includes combat, partying and building houses. Players were aware their actions were being monitored and that the game would end after approximately 11 weeks.

As the game ended, anti-social behavior such as murder did increase. However, the acts were conducted by a small percentage of the overall population. Researchers found that most players exhibited prosocial behavior such as strengthening existing social relationships and forming new ones.

"It's kind of like sitting next to a stranger on the airplane. You may keep to yourself during the flight, but as the plane reaches the runway, you strike up a conversation knowing the end is in sight," Kang says.

Researchers say the study shows that individual and system-wide analysis of games helps improve understanding of players. Also, it provides insights for game designers on how to reduce "churners"—i.e., people that play the game only

leave early for another game.

Lastly, it's also believed to be the first large-scale quantitative analysis of how player behavior changes during a trial test of a [game](#) scheduled to end.

More information: I Would Not Plant Apple Trees If the World Will Be Wiped: Analyzing Hundreds of Millions of Behavioral Records of Players During an MMORPG Beta Test , arXiv:1703.01500 [cs.CY] , [DOI: 10.1145/3038912.3038914](https://doi.org/10.1145/3038912.3038914) , arxiv.org/abs/1703.01500

Provided by University at Buffalo

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