

The Digital Pull: Exploring Generation Z's Tendency for Online Gaming Addiction

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Abstract. Focused on the widespread phenomenon and increasing tendency of online gaming addiction, this research investigates its psychosocial drivers in Generation Z through a descriptive qualitative study involving 106 participants. The results illuminate four essential themes: (1) the emotional consequences acting as a primary driving force, (2) the impact of social pressures and support structures within digital contexts, (3) gaming serving as a coping strategy to avoid confronting real-world challenges, and (4) the decline of self-regulatory abilities as a notable cause for concern. The results indicate that gaming addiction emerges from an interplay of individual and external influences, necessitating holistic interventions that promote emotional regulation, adaptive coping strategies, and an understanding of online communal dynamics.

Keywords: Online Game Addiction, Emotional Consequences, Maladaptive Coping Strategy, Self Control, Social Influences

1 Introduction

In conjunction with the rapid growth of social media platforms, online gaming has become a prominent pastime among adolescents and young adults. Online games are known as interactive digital experiences played on electronic devices with internet connectivity, which may be undertaken solo or collaboratively with other participants [1], [2].

Online gaming has become a very significant phenomenon in Indonesia's digital landscape. Almost half of the country's internet users are recorded as online gamers [3]. This activity is particularly high among young users aged 16 to 24 years, with about 70% of them being active players, averaging 3 to 5 hours per day [4], [5]. This immense popularity is closely linked to the demographic profile of its players, which is dominated by Generation Z—a group born between the mid-1990s and the late 2000s—who have naturally grown up in an environment of internet access, social media, and digital technology [2], [6].

In its development, online games serve not only as entertainment but also as a means of social interaction, a way to express themselves, and a digital competition venue. This change marks a shift in gaming from a recreational activity to a part of the younger generation's identity

and social life [7]. However, behind its entertainment value, this activity holds the risk of addiction that can have a serious impact on the psychological well-being, social life, and physical health of users [8]. Previous research shows that some young users exhibit symptoms of Internet Gaming Disorder, characterised by a loss of control over play duration, a higher priority for gaming over other activities, and a tendency to continue playing despite negative consequences. The disorder has been officially recognised as a mental health condition, with the effects of addiction equated with dependence on addictive substances [9], [10], [11].

Among the affected age groups, Generation Z is among the most vulnerable to experiencing a decline in quality of life due to online gaming addiction [12], [13], [14]. This vulnerability is mainly triggered by easy access and game designs deliberately designed to keep players tied in the long run [15], [16]. In individuals who are addicted, the negative impact is evident through disturbed sleep patterns, decreased achievement, and reduced direct social interaction. This impact is even worse for those who are unable to manage their playing time properly [17], [18].

The elaborate world of dependence on video gaming originates from a substantial blend of mental, neural, and social elements. Internally, the drive to engage in competitive activities, obtain acknowledgment, and cultivate a digital identity is substantially supported by the reward mechanisms inherent in the gaming milieu [19], [20], [21]. Externally, an individual's exposure to risk may be amplified by factors such as limited family engagement, peer interactions, suboptimal parental practices, and a lack of accessible alternative paths [22], [23], [24]. Additionally, limitations in self-regulation, emotional unpredictability, and deficient social support, often perpetuated by the established norms within digital communities, imply that the causation of gaming addiction involves factors beyond the individual [25], [26], [27].

Although various studies have raised the issue of online game addiction, the majority still dwell on a quantitative-descriptive approach with a focus on the population of school children and adolescents. This leaves a gap in understanding the subjective experiences of Generation Z, as the most dominant user group, especially regarding how psychological factors dynamically interact with social factors in shaping their addictive behaviour patterns. Therefore, this research was conducted using a qualitative approach to explore the meaning, motivation, and psychosocial dynamics underlying the gaming habits of Generation Z. The study's results are expected to provide a more contextual and integrated foundation for the development of intervention strategies in the digital era.

2 Methods

2.1 Research Participants

The study participants were selected purposively, with the main criteria being that the respondents were active users of online games (with at least 4 hours of playing online games a day) and came from the age group of Generation Z (13-28 years) [28]. Based on the results of data collection, 105 respondents were obtained, consisting of 51.4% men and 48.6% are women.

2.2 Measurement

The instrument used in this study was an open questionnaire prepared by the researcher, based on the items of the online game addiction measurement tool and on discussions with peers, to ensure its content validity. Some of the questions asked of respondents included: "*What*

emotions do you typically experience when playing online games?" "Tell me why you play online games." "What makes it hard for you to quit even if you want to stop playing games?"

The data analysis process is carried out in three stages of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding [29]. Open coding is used to identify and label units of meaning; axial coding to group codes into categories and establish relationships between categories; and selective coding to organize core categories and string together findings into a complete theoretical narrative. To ensure the reliability of the analysis process, categorization was carried out together (inter-rater reliability) with six students. Ambiguous answers are discussed and recategorized if necessary. The results of the final categorization were then cross-tabulated with the respondent sex.

3 Results

Before discussing the results of the qualitative analysis, the following characteristics of respondents based on gender and age category are presented. This data provides an overview of the profiles of participants involved in the study. Based on Table 2. The proportion of the sex of men and women tends to be the same, with males as much as 51.4% and females as much as 48.6%.

Table 1. Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Man	54	51,4
Woman	51	48,6
Total	105	100

Furthermore, the results of a thematic analysis on the reasons why respondents play online games produce four broad categories. The results of the study are presented in Figure 1. The results of the major categories that explain the reasons for online game addiction in Generation Z include emotional consequences, social influences, coping strategies, and loss of self-control.

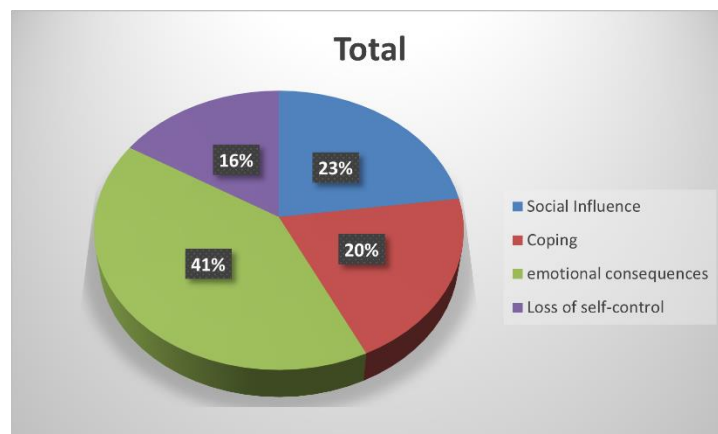


Fig. 1. Research Themes

Emotional consequences were the most dominant response (41%). The emotional consequences experienced by the study respondents are related to positive emotions such as happiness, feeling satisfaction and excitement when playing games. Meanwhile, negative emotions are related to feelings of frustration, especially when they lose games for the third time. Some of the responses that describe the category of emotional consequences are:

"Usually I feel happy and satisfied, like there is an achievement like that, especially if I can win or level up, I feel that there is a sense of happiness".

"Sometimes it's annoying, but it's still a fun experience to be upset and keep wanting to play"
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"Sometimes it's annoying, but it's still a fun experience to be upset and keep wanting to play"

The second category with the largest proportion is social influence (23%). Environmental factors play an important role in the formation of online gaming addiction behaviour among Gen Z, who are research respondents. In this category, two small categories appear, namely the influence of friends and digital communities, with a score of 11.75%, and the influence of partners, with a score of 0.63%. The first factor is seen from the influence of friends and the digital community; most respondents revealed that they played online games not only for entertainment reasons, but also because of the influence of friends in the surrounding environment and the digital community. Gaming activities are one way to maintain social relationships and gain a sense of acceptance in a group of friends. Respondents felt bad about leaving the team or were afraid of missing out on important moments in the game, and the desire to keep playing so as not to lose achievements on the glue. This can be seen from the quote:

"It's difficult because I have a lot of close friends there. So I have no choice but to meet them in the game too."

"What makes it difficult for me to quit is that I'm afraid of missing out on events or game updates, and I also feel bad about the progress I've made. Sometimes it's also because my friends are still actively playing, so I feel bad about leaving the team."

"I'm also afraid that my boyfriend will play with other girls."

"My girlfriends keeps inviting me."

The respondents' statements show that romantic relationships are also part of the social factors that influence online game addiction among Gen Z respondents.

The next category with the highest proportion is coping (20%). Based on the responses from the research respondents, playing online games is done as an effort to solve life problems. Online games are also considered a form of entertainment to relieve fatigue from daily activities. Some responses that describe the coping strategy category are:

"It's exciting, I can relieve fatigue and stress by playing games. When I'm feeling stressed about something, I feel that online games can entertain me."

"I feel calm and can forget my daily problems when I'm playing."

The last category that emerged was loss of self-control (16%). Respondents directly admitted to difficulties in controlling the duration of their gaming, even when they were aware of the negative consequences, such as disrupting sleep, neglecting tasks, or postponing important work. These difficulties were due to a strong internal urge that made it difficult for the research respondents to stop playing online games. Although at other times respondents tried to stop playing, their strong desire to play caused them to continue. Several responses that illustrate the category of loss of self-control can be seen in the following quotes:

"Sometimes I play until dawn, then go to class the next day feeling very sleepy. My intention to stop always fails because I feel a strong urge to keep playing even though I'm tired."

"I've tried to stop but always fail because I always feel the need to play again even though I've promised myself not to."

Furthermore, based on the Total by Gender in Figure 2, there are differences in tendencies between men and women in each aspect measured, namely social influence, coping, emotional consequences, and loss of self-control. These differences are observed descriptively through a comparison of the total values in each gender group.

In terms of social influence, the number of men is higher than that of women. The value for men is around 15, while for women it is around 9. This shows that, descriptively, men in this data tend to be more influenced by social factors or feel the impact of the social environment more than women. Meanwhile, in terms of coping, the opposite is true. Women have a higher value, around 12, compared to men, who are around 9. This indicates that, descriptively, women appear to use coping strategies (ways of dealing with stress or pressure) more often or more strongly than men. The aspect with the highest value in both groups is emotional consequences. Men have a score of around 23, while women have a score of around 20. Although both experience significant emotional impact, men show a slightly higher level of emotional consequences than women. Meanwhile, in terms of loss of self-control, women again show higher scores, at around 10, while men are at around 7. This indicates that, descriptively, women in this data tend to experience or admit to difficulties in controlling themselves more often than men.

Thus, it can be concluded that descriptively, men score higher on social influence and emotional consequences. Meanwhile, women score higher on coping and loss of self-control. Emotional consequences are the most dominant aspect in both genders. However, overall, these differences are not statistically significant, so these results are better understood as trends rather than definite or absolute differences.

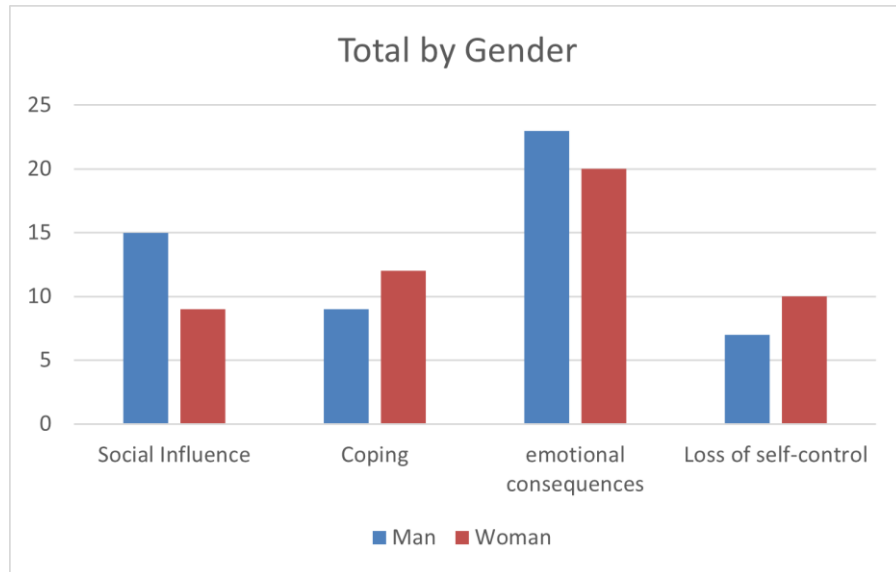


Fig. 2. Total by Gender

3 Discussion

The results of the study show that a single factor does not cause online gaming addiction among Generation Z, but rather is formed from the interaction between emotional, social, and self-control factors. Based on thematic analysis, four main categories emerged, namely emotional consequences, social influence, coping strategies, and loss of self-control. These findings indicate that Generation Z's online gaming behaviour is complex and closely related to their psychological needs and social relationships in their daily lives.

3.1 Emotional Consequences: The Search for Positive Experiences and the Cycle of Emotional Bondage

Emotional consequences arises as the most prominent factor (41%); here it becomes clear that gaming is not just for entertainment, but especially a search for, establishment of, and away from certain emotions. Experiencing joy, pride, and satisfaction may all be reported by players when they achieve desired game goals, such as winning a game (e.g., match), improving ranking or score, completing a challenge, or clearing an obstacle. These positive experiences are not independent, but can be traced back to the satisfaction of elementary psychological needs for competence, mastery and personal success [19], [26], [30].

Within the paradigm of motivational theory, achievement in gaming operates as a form of positive reinforcement, in which the cerebral mechanisms acknowledge that engagement in gaming activities yields enjoyable affective experiences, thus motivating individuals to replicate such behaviors. The more frequently this iterative process transpires, the more pronounced the correlation becomes between gaming and the sensations of competence, self-worth, and recognition—both from the individual and from peers within the gaming community [30], [31], [32]. As time progresses, this affirmative emotional experience has the potential to transform into intrinsic motivation, wherein participants not only aspire to achieve victory but also seek to cultivate positive self-regard through the engagement in the activity of play.

On the more critical and complex side, the role of negative emotions is actually the main driver. Defeats, failures, or poor performance in games often do not stop players. On the other hand, feelings of frustration, anger, or shame often trigger a strong desire to keep trying until it succeeds [11], [33]. This is where a potentially addictive emotional cycle takes shape: players initially play for fun, but when they experience defeat and feel uncomfortable, they extend the playing time to turn those negative emotions into positive feelings. Thus, games ultimately have a dual purpose—as a means of regulating emotions as well as a source of negative emotions themselves [11]. In the short term, this pattern appears to be a form of perseverance and motivation to improve oneself. However, in the long run, as players increasingly rely on games as their primary strategy to manage stress, disappointment, or boredom, the risk of getting caught up in harmful psychological patterns increases [21], [32]. Individuals can be caught in a situation where almost any emotional discomfort—whether from gaming or everyday life—is responded to by returning to play. This reinforces a feedback cycle that makes games dominate the way they manage their moods and actually adds to the emotional pressure they feel [19], [22].

3.2 Social Influence: Peer Pressure and Games as Shared Spaces

The theme of social influence (23%) shows that for many gamers, particularly from Generation Z, it is stated that online games serve as an important space for social interaction in the digital world. For them, games are often a kind of virtual "hangout" to joke, share stories, and feel a presence with friends [34]. In this context, the invitation to play is often seen as an invitation to be socially present, which then gives rise to peer pressure in a subtle but powerful form. Many players report feeling "uncomfortable" if they refuse an invitation to play. This feeling is even stronger when a player has a strategic role in the team, so there is a moral responsibility to participate because they feel they are an important part of the group's success. At this point, gaming activities are no longer entirely driven by personal desires but also by social norms and expectations that have been internalised [26], [35]. This social dimension becomes even more complex when the game is played with a partner. On the one hand, playing together can be a quality time that strengthens emotional closeness. On the other hand, if not managed properly, this habit risks increasing dependence because games are the main factor in maintaining these emotional relationships [34], [36].

The combination of the need for social acceptance and fear of missing out (FOMO) paves the way for addiction [35], [37]. Addictive behaviour patterns begin to emerge when players continue to play despite being aware of the negative consequences—such as neglected tasks, reduced sleep, or physical exhaustion—but persevere with the excuse that “...*sometimes it’s because my friends are still actively playing, so I feel bad about leaving the team.*” In the long term, gaming shifts from wanting to play to having to play. Therefore, social influence not only explains high involvement in gaming but also contributes to the emergence and strengthening of addictive patterns.

3.3 Games as a Strategy for Dealing with Problems: An Easily Accessible Escape

Engaging in gaming helps 20% of the participants manage stress and face life's hurdles temporarily [26]. In the face of challenges like academic expectations, personal hurdles, or anxiety, video games create a digital sanctuary that seems more manageable and immersive. This strategy functions as an emotional regulation technique by momentarily circumventing sources of stress [26], [38].

3.4 Loss of Self Control

This theme accentuates the critical juncture at which fervor for gaming transitions into a harmful disorder. The principal indicators encompass a pronounced inability to regulate impulses, such as the challenge of interrupting gameplay despite having the intention to do so, neglecting vital responsibilities including academic commitments, professional obligations, or adequate rest, and participating in extensive gaming sessions during nocturnal hours without cognizance of time. This state reflects a decline in self-regulatory mechanisms [39], [40]. Gaming shifts from a leisure activity to an obsessive compulsion; sessions initially intended to last for an hour frequently extend indefinitely as players perceive themselves as incapable of cessation. The consequences of diminished self-discipline are substantial, influencing academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being [6], [11].

3.5 Additional Findings Related to Gender

In a descriptive analysis, the present study elucidated variances in behavioral tendencies between male and female participants. Men showed a tendency towards higher results in areas of social sway and emotional effects, while women revealed better results in strategies for coping and experiences related to losing self-discipline. This observation suggests a divergence in motivational frameworks: males are inclined to engage in competitive and achievement-oriented play, while females are more likely to utilize gaming as a means of escapism or as a strategy to mitigate adverse emotional states [39], [41].

In summation, emotional repercussions emerged as a salient theme across both genders, implying that positive emotional experiences during gameplay foster a propensity for repetitive engagement [30], [31]. Regardless, the detected gender variations did not achieve statistical meaning, which positions these results as early indicators that warrant deeper inquiry. It is advisable for subsequent research to employ larger sample sizes or longitudinal methodologies to rigorously evaluate the hypothesis regarding gender disparities.

4. Conclusion

The concern regarding online gaming obsession in Generation Z showcases a detailed network intricately constructed from emotional, social, and self-control aspects. The propensity for excessive engagement with video games is predominantly fueled by emotional repercussions, further exacerbated by social influences, and by the utilization of gaming as an maladaptive strategy for problem-solving. According to the findings, men and women report markedly different experiences while gaming. As a result, a thorough and contextually applicable strategy is crucial for effectively addressing these psychosocial dimensions.

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