

## Research Article

# Gaming as a Representation of Urge and Passion: A Thematic Analysis of Online Gamers

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**Abstract.**

The meaning of playing online games is important to explore to understand why playing online games is a passionate activity for enthusiastic and problematic gamers. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from 20 gamers (Male, 19-24 years old) who intensely play online games. Through the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) technique, the meaning of the essential or basic things from the participants life experiences was sought. The results showed that the experience of craving and urge emerged as themes in the decision-making process to continue playing online games even though they realized the negative impact of being too fixated on playing games.

**Keywords:** craving, passion, problematic gamers, thematic analysis, urge

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Being the 12th ranked country in the world's gaming market, shows that online gamers are a large population in Indonesia. Data from the Indonesia E-Sport Premier League (IESPL) in 2019, Indonesia's active online game players were 62.1 million people [1]. This fantastic number shows that online gaming behavior has now become a social phenomenon.

Online games are a type of modern game that offers unlimited winning and losing experiences, as well as complex narratives and characters, vast open worlds to explore, and opportunities to socialize with other players [2]. Online games are designed to be long-playing applications, where game developers create systems that are highly

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engaging and make gamers want to continue engaging in the game and reduce their likelihood of leaving the playing field. Online game players spend more time playing games than those who play offline games, mostly because the gameplay characteristics of online games are considered more fun and satisfying and sometimes they prefer playing online games to doing other activities in real life [3].

Nowadays, there are many new types of games with features that are more immersive, socially integrated and financially rewarding than previous types of games. In psychologically vulnerable people, these features open the door to problematic gaming behavior or even addiction [4].

One of the defining features of problematic online gaming behavior is the use of gaming time. References [5], [6] stated that playing games for 4 hours per day is problematic; while reference [7] considered extreme problematic time use to be playing online games for up to 8-12 hours per day. These online gamers become unable to stop or control online gaming behavior [4], leading to problematic behavior [8] namely mental health, specifically psychological distress [4],[9].

There are factors that influence a person's decision to play online games. Reference [4] stated that there are three main factors behind the emergence of gaming behavior in enthusiast (non-problematic) and harmful (problematic) gamers, namely individual differences, external factors and gaming-related factors. As the only internal factor, individual differences play an important role in the development of problematic online gaming behavior such as gender, age, personality traits, personal characteristics.

The fixation to play games to the point of constantly playing games for a very long time, indicates an attachment to an activity. This attachment can occur, one of which is due to passion. Individuals with obsessive passion may experience an uncontrollable urge to take part in activities that they find important and enjoyable [10]. They become unable to not engage with the activity, including gaming. He stated that passion is differentially associated with problematic gaming behavior, where obsessive passion is positively associated with problematic gaming, but not with harmonious passion.

Behavior that is based on desire rather than need, is inseparable from the presence of urge. Urges are states in which individuals are motivated to seek out certain objects or feelings [11], [12]. In research on addictive behavior, it is known that the urge is preceded by various stimuli through various mechanisms. Most research on the nature and role of the urge has been conducted in the area of substance abuse, and several instruments

have been developed and widely used to explore the urge among substance users and abusers [12],[13].

In the context of behavioral addiction, several studies have been conducted including; knowing the relationship between brain activity and the urge to play online games [14], to determine the effect between game features and the urge to continue playing online games [15], as well as the level of difficulty in the game that affects the urge to game [16].

The understanding of gaming-related problems and gaming disorder is based on a conceptual model that emphasizes the role of factors that contribute to the adverse risks of gaming, including psychological traits that underlie vulnerability and develop into problematic gaming behavior. Not all vulnerable gamers will become addicted, nor will all types of games lead to addiction. The risk of gaming harm will arise as a result of vulnerable gamers' interactions with addictive game features/properties [17].

Addictive behavior describes a complex situation within the individual, as it involves many dynamic intrapsychic variables. Related to this, the development of online game addiction research is currently moving towards multi-methods, and in line with the statement from [4] that mixed observations with qualitative studies and clinical case studies are needed to observe these areas of addictive behavior. This strengthens the researcher's consideration in this study to use an exploratory method with a qualitative approach. The purpose of the qualitative approach is to gain a thorough and complete understanding of the phenomenon under study [18]. Through the depth interview data collection method, it will provide a greater opportunity for researchers, to be able to explore the experience of playing online games in the enthusiastic game player group as well as in the problematic group.

## 2. METHOD

This study is an exploratory study with a qualitative approach. The design chosen by the researcher is phenomenology through the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) technique. Data analysis with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which is a method of analyzing qualitative data [19], with the activity of determining meaning. The main goal of IPA is to conduct a detailed analysis of an individual's unique subjective experiences and how the individual makes sense of these experiences. This requires interpretive activity from the researcher. Smith (2003) describes this dual process as

one in which (1) participants try to make sense of their world, and (2) researchers try to make sense of participants trying to make sense of their world.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted in-depth, using an interview guideline. Participants were purposively selected with the main criteria being (1) active and fond of playing online games (2) playing online games for the past 12 months (3) playing online games every day (4) playing online games at least 4 hours a day. Meanwhile, the demographic characteristics of the participants to be selected are male gamers who fall into the age of early adulthood (18 - 40 years old). Recruitment of participants will be carried out through two events, namely (1) communication through whatsapp / telephone messages with a contact person known by the researcher from a group of gamers (2) notifications that will be distributed through social media.

The research procedure was carried out through the following stages: (1) the researcher contacts the informant and asks for consent to become a participant. If the informant gives his consent, then the researcher will make a schedule plan, to conduct the interview. (2) Researchers will conduct interviews online, through zoom/g-meet media using a recorder to record all interview results. Researchers will ask about the meaning of gamers about online gaming, using the guidelines that have been compiled.

TABLE 1: Depth Interview Guideline.

No	Primary & Secondary Question
1	Can you tell me about a time when you really wanted to play a game? What made you want it so much? How did you respond to that?
2	When you are in a situation where it is not possible to play games (e.g. traveling, exam week, sick) What comes to your mind? And then what happens?
3	Have you ever had a situation where you felt like you couldn't stop gaming, even though you wanted to? What was going through your mind at that time? What did you feel at that time?
4	Have you ever felt that gaming was taking up time in your life? Can you tell me?
5	Can you tell me what happens to you or how you feel when you hear stories about other people's experiences playing games, or advertisements for new games?

All information provided by participants will be kept confidential by the researcher. (3) The researcher will transcribe the interview results verbatim, then will ask participants to scrutinize the transcripts, in order to maintain the veracity of the research. This process will be carried out online (researchers communicate via whatsapp message/phone).

Data analysis based on references [19] : (1) the script was read and reread several times. Initial notes were made of anything that seemed important and interesting; (b) these initial ideas were translated into more concise terms/ themes. This process can be described as a high-level activity that may use psychological terminology. The aim is to be concise but at the same time, capture the essential qualities of the text [19]; (c) the emerging themes are condensed by placing them into clusters. (d) each theme cluster was labeled with a descriptive superordinate theme that conveyed the conceptual nature of the cluster; (e) a matrix was produced that provided illustrative data extracts for each theme. Each script was analyzed separately and a matrix produced for each before cross-case analysis was conducted. This process was carried out with the help of NVivo 14 software.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Result

There were 20 participants in this study (all male), aged early adulthood, actively playing online games in the last 12 months, have been playing games for more than 4 years, play online games almost every day, with a minimum gaming duration of 4 hours/day.

As individuals who have a passion for gaming, gaming activities are interpreted differently by each participant. By the researcher, themes and sub-themes were determined from the interview script. Analysis revealed a number of interrelated superordinate themes from the data, with the four largest themes being: positive experience, cognitive and attentional bias, neglect, and urge to game. A visualization of the theme analysis is presented in Figure 1 below:

In this paper, we will focus on the urge to game. Urge is a state in which individuals are motivated to seek certain objects or feelings [11], [12].

##### 3.1.1. Very Strong Desire to Play Games

*“playing that crazy and that long. Then what do you eat while playing what - what while playing stops just to take a shower and pray” (G, 22 years old).*

*“If I’m driving out of town, I put my cellphone on the speedometer so I can still play” (A, 20 years old).*

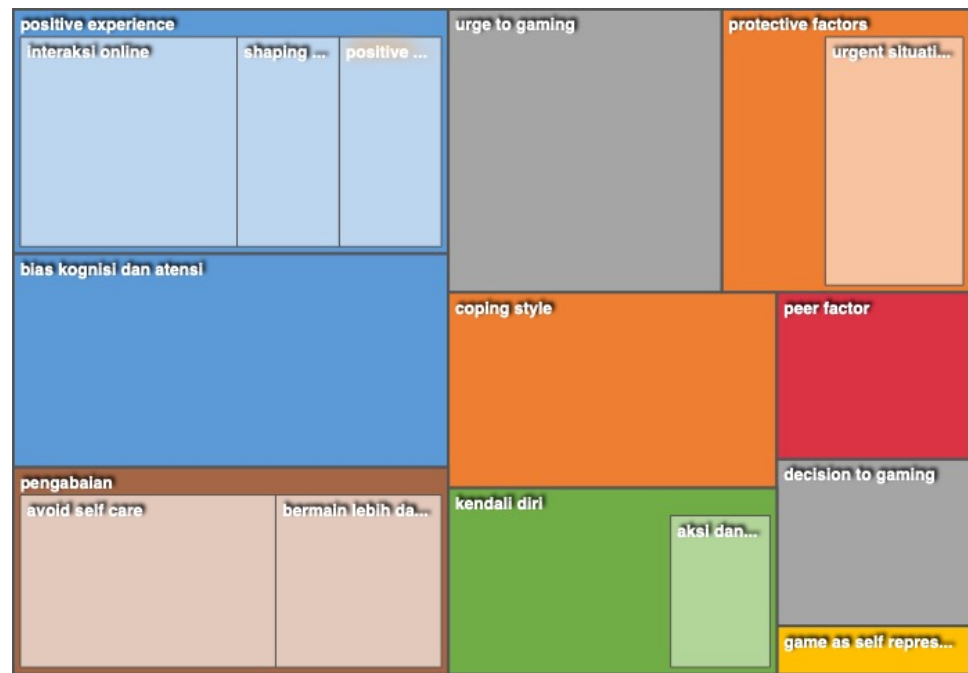


Figure 1: Themes Visualization.

*“If I’m sick ... yes ... the pain is not really bad, so I just play mah play aja” (R, 22 years old)*

*“When I’m playing, I want to keep playing, like I don’t want to stop, I want to keep playing” (T, 20 years old).*

Gamers admit that they have a very strong desire to play online games. They want to continue playing, even if they are in a situation or condition that is not conducive or free to play online games.

### 3.1.2. Motivated to Seek Out Specific Objects or Feelings

*“If it’s high season, multiple, you definitely want to play, want to play, want to play. If there is an event that is favorable for playing, I will definitely want to play” (R, 19 years old).*

*“If you’re outside, it’s not possible to play, just continue scrolling through social media, game content. Yes, we can’t play directly but the important thing is that at least we have watched the game content” (Gr, 21 years old)*

*“Let’s just play the game first, if there is an assignment, we can do it later” (D, 20 years old)*

*“If I can’t hold the device anymore, it’s like I’m itching ... I want to play, or if I’m in college, I want to go back to the boarding house quickly, I want to play quickly. Then if, for example, I don’t play, it’s just like a sprain” (Df, 21 years old)*

Gamers indicate that they feel a strong desire to continue playing games, a sensation that drives them to take action, namely playing online games. According to [20], this situation is an affective experience of image and verbal thought (craving) accompanied by a sensation of urge. They feel that gaming gives a certain feeling that makes them happy and want to always repeat to play games.

### 3.2. Discussion

Games involve a massive type of stimulation and information, where the game is designed in detail, thus provoking imagination and demanding strategy in completing a game. Games provide opportunities to fail and minimize the sense of failure when making mistakes; where in real life, one’s failure to act can have a permanent and irreversible impact [4]. This becomes a reward for individuals who play games, so psychologically they are comfortable and want to repeat the activity. The difference in gamers in appreciating eating games in the game, will also distinguish how their assessment and attitude towards games in online games. There are gamers who tend to be fixated on playing online games, but there are also those who only see online games as a leisure activity.

A person’s tendency to engage in an activity is related to passion. Individuals who have a passion for something or an activity can be referred to as passionate individuals. Someone who is passionate will have a motivational process within himself, this is the effect obtained when someone has a passion for certain things or activities. References [21] tried to explain passion for activities, not limited to the concept of romantic passion. There is another characteristic that can explain passion according to [22] is the internalization of activities that are preferred by individuals as part of their identity. Reference [21] define passion as a strong tendency for a preferred activity, which is then seen as something important, so that the individual gives the time and energy they have for this activity.

In examining online gaming behavior in both non-problematic and problematic groups in this paper, the researcher uses a multidimensional model (I-PACE) that synthesizes various theoretical considerations and empirical findings in the field of internet use disorders. The I-PACE model concludes that individuals who have a predisposition

to addiction, will seek satisfaction from gaming behavior, which leads to significant changes in emotional and cognitive responses to gaming, resulting in habitual gaming behavior, as compensation for a change and resulting negative consequences [4].

Affective & Cognitive Response as the Affectice (A & C) component of the multidimensional model, defined as affective and cognitive responses to internal and external stimuli, refers to changes in mood and thinking that follow exposure to the gaming stimulus, including coping tendencies, cognitive bias, craving and urge.

Regarding the craving & urge component, a study conducted by [23] stated that in problematic gamers, playing games increases craving in response to game-related stimuli. Whereas in the non-problematic gamers group, this was not proven. The assumption is that non-problematic gamers relatively do not experience craving and urge, while problematic gamers are assumed to experience craving and urge towards game-related stimuli. In contrast to the findings in this study, the 20 participants, consisting of problematic and non-problematic (enthusiast) gamers both showed craving and urge experiences.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Preoccupation on playing a game for a very long time indicates an attachment to an activity. This attachment can occur, one of which is due to passion. On the other hand, there is a very strong desire to do something and feel a sensation that encourages them to take action, namely playing online games. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, it was found that the situation experienced by participants was an affective experience of image and verbal thought (craving) accompanied by the sensation of urge. Passion as well as urge and craving are experienced by all participants who are enthusiasts and problematic gamers. This makes them repeat and decide to keep playing online games, even though they know the activity can have negative consequences.

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