

Exploring Negative Online Interactions on X and Their Psychological Impact on Malaysian Gamers: A Qualitative Perspective

Dakshayani Siva Balan¹, Armeetaa Kaur Mallanhase^{2*}

¹ *QUEST International University, Ipoh, Perak.*

² *QUEST International University, Ipoh, Perak*

*Corresponding Author: armeetaa.kaur@qiu.edu.my

Citation: Balan, D. S., & Mallanhase, A. K. (2025). Exploring Negative Online Interactions on X and Their Psychological Impact on Malaysian Gamers: A Qualitative Perspective. *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(3), 126–140. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i3.2393>

Published: November 26, 2025

ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of online gaming has created spaces for social connection while simultaneously fostering toxic behaviors that undermine players' psychological well-being. Despite growing global concern, limited research has examined these experiences within non-Western cultural contexts. This study aimed (1) to explore Malaysian gamers' experiences with negative online interactions on the platform X and (2) to examine how these interactions influence their mental well-being and coping strategies. Employing a qualitative phenomenological design, six Malaysian gamers aged 20 to 25 were recruited through purposive sampling and participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed thematically using NVivo. Findings revealed three main themes describing negative online experiences: toxicity and hostility in online interactions, harassment and targeted attacks, and structural and social dynamics of negativity, including the role of anonymity and misinformation. These interactions often led to emotional distress, such as stress, anxiety, and reduced self-esteem, and fostered long-term effects including social withdrawal and diminished trust in online communities. Nevertheless, participants demonstrated resilience through coping strategies such as detachment and avoidance, seeking supportive communities, and emotional regulation. The results highlight the dual nature of online gaming spaces as both supportive and psychologically taxing. Culturally, the findings suggest that Malaysia's collectivistic values shape how toxicity is expressed and managed, emphasizing conformity and group harmony. This study underscores the importance of culturally grounded digital literacy programs, empathy-based interventions, and improved platform moderation to foster healthier online environments.

Keywords: Online gaming, Mental well-being, Coping strategies, Digital culture.

INTRODUCTION

The global rise of online gaming has ushered in an era of unprecedented digital connectivity and entertainment while simultaneously giving rise to widespread concerns about **toxic behavior** within these virtual environments (Zhu et al., 2022). Although scholars have yet to reach a universal definition of the term, toxic behavior in online gaming is widely acknowledged as a pervasive issue across multiple disciplines (Nexø, 2024). Research indicates that a significant majority of players, approximately 80%, have witnessed prejudiced or aggressive comments, while between 52% and 74% have personally experienced some form of victimization in multiplayer online games (Cary et al., 2020; Nexø, 2024; Yunhao et al., 2025). These findings highlight the global prevalence and impact of online toxicity, which not only undermines player well-being but also affects game development, player retention, and the overall social climate of gaming communities (Gandolfi & Ferdig, 2021). As gaming becomes increasingly integrated into everyday social life, understanding the psychological and cultural implications of these behaviors has become essential for fostering healthier digital environments.

In Malaysia, gaming is an upcoming industry that has expanded rapidly in recent years. The Malaysian gaming market is valued at millions, and with an increasingly tech-savvy population, the community continues to grow (Sabri et al., 2024). The gaming community is diverse, spanning age, race, and socioeconomic backgrounds, yet reflects collectivistic values that emphasize group participation and friendship bonding (T'ng & Pau, 2020). This collectivistic orientation helps explain the popularity of multiplayer games such as *Mobile Legends*, *PUBG*, and *Genshin Impact*, which foster teamwork and social connection. However, these games can also be double-edged swords, promoting social bonds while heightening competitive pressure and psychological strain. The nature of these communities reflects players' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Aziz et al., 2021). Some players engage for competitive validation and escapism, which may reinforce obsessive or toxic behaviors (Gonçalves et al., 2023).

These toxic behaviors often extend into social media platforms such as X. The platform's design enables users with shared interests to connect and debate in real time (Ryan et al., 2017; Traverso, 2021;). However, this also amplifies negative interactions, including trolling, cyberbullying, and online shaming (Xiao et al., 2023). Some gamers may wish to withdraw but remain due to collectivistic pressures, which can lead to social ostracism (Liu & Agur, 2022). Additionally, as topics on X change rapidly, users often experience *Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)*, which increases stress and anxiety (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). Over time, this can lead to social media or gaming addiction and even academic decline (Demir, 2022).

Although much research has explored social media and mental health broadly (Karim et al., 2020; Naslund et al., 2020), there is limited focus on X, a real-time discussion platform distinct from Instagram or Facebook. The immediacy of X contributes to more complex forms of harassment, including cancel culture, doxing, and online shaming (Klonick, 2015). These behaviors exploit the platform's vast audience and content permanence, making their effects more enduring. Furthermore, most existing studies focus primarily on Western contexts (Crawford et al., 2013), overlooking how these issues manifest in non-Western societies. This gap is important because cultural norms and social values influence how individuals experience and respond to online toxicity. In Malaysia, collectivistic tendencies, societal expectations, and linguistic diversity shape how harassment and social exclusion are understood and managed (Tomaszewski, 2018).

Consequently, concerns about the mental health of Malaysian gamers are growing. Many experience depression, anxiety, or social isolation but hesitate to seek help due to cultural stigma surrounding mental health (Jusay et al., 2022; Roslee et al., 2021). When individuals face public shaming or cancellation online, they often experience negative emotions that can escalate if left unaddressed. Therefore, understanding how negative online interactions on X affect the mental health of Malaysian gamers is crucial. This study aims to address this research gap by exploring the influence of online toxicity on the psychological well-being of gamers within Malaysia's unique cultural context. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

1. To explore Malaysian gamers' experiences with negative online interactions on X.
2. To examine how such negative online interactions influence their mental well-being and coping strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gaming Community and Online Interaction

Online interaction refers to engagement and participation across online platforms (King et al., 2016). Within the context of this study, online interaction encompasses how often individuals communicate on gaming platforms, the nature of their conversations, and the types of content they engage with. A gaming community, meanwhile, can be defined as a group of individuals who connect in online or offline contexts that revolve around video games. Such communities consist of people who share social interactions, social ties, and common interests in virtual or physical spaces centered on gaming (Sirola et al., 2020). In this study, the gaming community specifically refers to individuals in Malaysia who participate in video games or online gaming platforms and share gaming-related content. Online gaming platforms also play a crucial role in fostering player interaction and communication, allowing individuals to build social connections and a strong sense of community through shared experiences (Tseng et al., 2015).

Building upon these definitions, the gaming community has evolved into a dynamic and diversified subculture within the digital landscape. It attracts a broad range of players, from casual gamers to professional esports athletes. The rise of online gaming platforms has enabled the creation of virtual spaces where gamers can connect, collaborate, and compete in real time regardless of geographical boundaries (Zakaria et al., 2022). Malinen (2015) describes online communities as a common form of communication and networking among individuals who rely on computer-mediated interactions to build and sustain meaningful social relationships. When applied to gaming, such communities transform games into tools of communication, promoting sociability rather than isolation

(Granic, 2013). Consequently, online interactions have become an integral part of the gaming experience and significantly influence the social dynamics within these communities (Qin et al., 2011).

Furthermore, gamers often connect through shared interests and group interactions, which substantially enhance their social networks (Anderson et al., 2021). One defining feature of these communities is the formation of fandoms, groups of fans passionately invested in specific games, brands, or gaming personalities. Fandoms foster strong, supportive communities where members bond over shared experiences and interests (O'Connor et al., 2015). Platforms such as YouTube, Twitch, and X serve as common spaces for gamers to showcase their creative work, interact with others, and build identities within their communities. Examples include videos, fan art, fan fiction, and merchandise that allow players to express their passion and engage meaningfully with peers (Kaliebe & Weigle, 2018).

These forms of social support available in fandoms, whether emotional or informational, can greatly enhance gamers' mental health and overall life satisfaction (Wright, 2016; Kelly et al., 2017). Emotional support fosters belonging and reduces stress, while informational assistance offers guidance and problem-solving resources. For instance, Jahan and Kim (2020) found that active participation in online communities was associated with social advantages, improved mental health, and hedonic benefits such as enjoyment and fun. This suggests that when an online community actively shares and supports one another, gamers' mental health improves significantly.

Understanding how these communities operate is therefore essential. Zakaria et al. (2022) emphasize that communication within gaming communities often begins with engagement-based activities. Gamers interact and collaborate through community events or information-sharing sessions (Fox et al., 2018). Such events promote connection, skill development, and an enhanced gaming experience. For example, community challenges encourage players to achieve shared in-game goals, while play-together events foster cooperation. Additionally, players frequently exchange valuable insights such as gameplay strategies to strengthen their in-game social networks (Lee et al., 2013).

Online Interactions and Mental Health

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which individuals realize their potential, cope with daily stresses, work productively, and contribute to their communities. It encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being, influencing how individuals think, feel, and act. In online environments, mental health is increasingly shaped by the nature of social interactions that occur on digital platforms.

With the rise of social media, platforms such as Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok have become central to how young adults communicate and express themselves online (Kross et al., 2021). These spaces facilitate social connection and self-expression but also expose users to negative interactions. Research shows that while social media can promote support and belonging, it also contributes to behaviors that harm mental health and social relationships (Ostic et al., 2021; Naslund et al., 2020; Zsila & Reyes, 2023).

Among the most damaging behaviors are cyberbullying, doxxing, online shaming, and cancel culture. Cyberbullying has been consistently linked to depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Bansal et al., 2024; Maurya et al., 2022). Maurya et al. (2022) found that cyberbullying victimization significantly elevates the risk of depression and suicidal thoughts, with emotional consequences such as distress and low self-esteem being prevalent. Similarly, doxxing, the malicious exposure of private information online, poses serious psychological risks. Victims often face ongoing harassment and threats, leading to anxiety and stress (Anderson & Wood, 2021; Kukul, 2023).

Online shaming, characterized by public humiliation for perceived wrongdoings, is amplified by the viral nature of social media. This can damage victims' emotional well-being, social reputation, and career prospects (Forestal, 2023; Muir et al., 2023). The anonymity and disinhibition of online spaces intensify hostility, often resulting in social withdrawal (Thomason, 2021). Cancel culture, closely related to shaming, involves public condemnation and exclusion for perceived moral transgressions (Picarella, 2024; Ng, 2020). Though sometimes viewed as promoting accountability, it is also criticized for fostering intolerance (Scheinbaum, 2024; Masferrer, 2023). Experiencing cancellation can lead to anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, and diminished self-esteem due to the strain of public scrutiny (Vallette, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a phenomenological approach to explore Malaysian gamers' lived experiences within online communities. Phenomenology focuses on individuals' perceptions and personal understandings of their experiences without imposing predetermined assumptions (Neubauer et al., 2019; Bliss, 2016). This approach aligns with the study's aim of examining how Malaysian gamers perceive and experience negative online interactions on X and the mental health challenges that arise from these experiences. Such a design enables the collection of rich, nuanced insights into participants' emotional and psychological responses (Eppich et al., 2019).

A purposive sampling technique was employed to identify participants with relevant and information-rich experiences (Palinkas et al., 2015). The target population comprised Malaysian gamers aged 18–25 who are active users of X and members of gaming communities (Dixon, 2024). The inclusion criteria required participants to: (1) have an active X account, (2) be aged between 18 and 25, and (3) actively engage in gaming-related discussions, interactions, or communities on X. The exclusion criteria applied to individuals who were inactive on X or not affiliated with any gaming community. The sample size was estimated at 5–7 participants, which is sufficient to achieve data saturation, where no new themes emerge from additional interviews (Sargeant, 2012; Guest et al., 2020). The current study included six participants, which falls within this recommended range and was deemed adequate to capture rich and meaningful insights into the research phenomenon.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via Google Meet or secured chat platforms, depending on participant preference. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was conducted in English. The instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide containing open-ended questions exploring participants' online interactions and mental health experiences, allowing flexibility and depth in responses (Ruslin et al., 2022). Participants received an information sheet outlining the study's purpose and provided written consent before participation, ensuring ethical compliance and confidentiality (Lee, 2022). Audio recordings were made with participants' permission for accuracy. A pilot study involving two participants was conducted to refine the interview guide and ensure the clarity and effectiveness of the questions (Majid et al., 2017).

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify and interpret patterns within the data (Thomas, 2006). Transcribed interviews were organized and coded using NVivo software. The analysis followed an inductive approach involving open and axial coding to identify recurring patterns and group them into broader themes (Byrne, 2021; Naeem et al., 2023). The final themes were then interpreted in relation to the research questions and existing literature to provide comprehensive insights into the psychological impact of negative online interactions among Malaysian gamers.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile of Participants

A total of six participants were involved in this study, all of whom were Malaysian gamers actively engaged in gaming communities on X and Discord. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 25 years old, comprising three males and three females. They represented various states in Malaysia, including Perak, Kelantan, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Selangor, and Pahang. This diverse distribution ensured a range of perspectives across different geographic and cultural backgrounds within the Malaysian gaming community. Table 1.0 below presents the demographic profiles of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the participants.

Participant code	Age	Gender	State
Participant 1	23	Male	Perak
Participant 2	25	Female	Kelantan
Participant 3	24	Male	Kuala Lumpur
Participant 4	21	Female	Penang
Participant 5	24	Male	Selangor
Participant 6	20	Female	Pahang

RQ1: What types of negative online interactions are experienced by Malaysian gamers on X?

Through qualitative analysis of participants' responses, the findings revealed that Malaysian gamers encounter various forms of negative online interactions that significantly shape their social experiences on X. Three main themes emerged from the analysis, each comprising distinct subthemes. Theme 1: Toxicity and Hostility in Online Interactions encompassed subthemes of *escalation of conflicts* and *cliques and exclusion*, illustrating the prevalence of verbal aggression, personal disputes, and social exclusion within gaming communities. Theme 2: Harassment and Targeted Attacks included *personal attacks and insults* and *group-driven harassment*, highlighting experiences of intentional harm, public shaming, and collective online bullying. Finally, Theme 3: Structural and Social Dynamics of Negative Interactions comprised *role of anonymity*, *social structure and norm enforcement*, and *misinformation and fake narratives*, which reflected the broader systemic factors that perpetuate toxicity and shape the culture of online gaming spaces. Table 2.0 below summarises the main themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis of Malaysian gamers' experiences with negative online interactions on X, along with a brief description of each.

Table 2. Summary of RQ1.

Theme	Subthemes	Brief Description
-------	-----------	-------------------

Theme 1: Toxicity and hostility in online interactions	Escalation of conflicts	Minor disagreements that quickly turn into personal attacks or arguments.
	Cliques and exclusion	Certain groups dominate and exclude others from discussions.
Theme 2: Harassment and targeted attacks	Personal attacks and insults	Individuals receive demeaning or provoking remarks.
	Group-driven harassment	Coordinated group attacks that intensify public shaming.
Theme 3: Structural and social dynamics of negative interactions	Role of anonymity	Anonymity promotes toxic behavior and lack of accountability.
	Social structure and norm enforcement	Community norms enforce conformity and exclude differences.
	Misinformation and fake narratives	False claims and rumors fuel tension and mistrust.

Theme 1: Toxicity and Hostility in Online Interactions

This theme captures the general negativity frequently observed within Malaysian gaming communities on X, reflecting how competitive and emotionally charged interactions can foster an unwelcoming environment. Participants described that toxicity often emerges through aggressive communication, sarcasm, and exclusionary behaviors that disrupt otherwise casual or friendly exchanges. The findings indicate that these hostile interactions are not isolated incidents but part of broader community dynamics where conflicts escalate rapidly and certain groups form cliques that marginalize others. Two subthemes were identified under this theme: escalation of conflicts and cliques and exclusion.

Escalation of Conflicts

In online spaces especially gaming communities, disagreements are often found among each other. Sometimes, these conflicts often spiral out of control, where discussion become personal attacks and hate speech. Few participants have observed and also experienced how some minor arguments often turned into heated debates among each other. One participant particularly stated "... Like, you're just sharing your opinion or having fun, and suddenly it feels like you've walked into a firing squad". Similarly, personal preferences in conflict also lead to these issues as explained by 'ship wars' in fandoms. "I'm here to enjoy the game, not watch people fight over who's better, Blade or Jing Yuan, or argue why a certain ship is "problematic." This type of escalation reflects on the lack of moderation in the app X itself and also shows the unpredictable nature of online communication in digital spaces.

Cliques and Exclusion

The Malaysian gaming community are found to often bond over their love for games and also based on their nationality (Ching et al., 2019). However, it was found some groups can exclude others, hence making them feel quite unwelcomed or are ostracized. These types of behaviour are often found in gaming communities that are large and dominate the others. Some participants mentioned of being invalidated of their own interests. For example, a participant 3 shared "For example, if I talk about loving Star Rail or Final Fantasy, I've definitely had people side-eye me like, "Why don't you just play Valorant?" or outright call me childish." He also emphasized on feeling excluded if he indicates being different compared to others. "But sometimes, when you say something different it's the same feeling of being part of something but as an outcast. Like you're opposite or minority of the majority of the fandom." Another participant had also shared his experience in being alienated in a similar situation, "...if you play certain game like mobile legend or FIFA, they are more dominant. But if you're interested in niche games like RPG or tabletop, you might feel like you're an outsider." It can be concluded that these types of behaviours show how negativity often appear in online spaces, hence creating environment that is unwelcoming and toxic towards other players.

Theme 2: Harassment and targeted attacks

This theme explores the intentional and coordinated behaviors aimed at harming or humiliating individuals within online gaming communities. Participants described experiencing or witnessing acts of harassment that ranged from direct personal insults to collective, organized attacks. Such behaviors often escalate beyond casual disagreements, becoming targeted efforts that undermine individuals' sense of safety, belonging, and self-worth in these spaces. These harmful interactions not only cause emotional strain but also reinforce a toxic culture of hostility. Two key subthemes emerged from the participants' experiences: personal attacks and insults, and group-driven harassment.

Personal Attacks and Insults

Multiple participants have admitted they have been victims of personal attacks such as insults that's directed to them or demeaning language that is meant to provoke them. For example, participant 5 described his encounter as, *"They can just tell me politely or just, like, say, normally, but then sometimes they use some harsh words."* In the same regard, participant 1 also shared his experience when he posted about a game he liked and received an insulting comment, *"Why are you wasting time with stupid games like this? Just get good at normal games"*. These type of comments and remarks often target those individuals' interests, or opinions. As participant 3 explained, *"Because no one likes feeling dismissed or attacked, right? ... When people undermine you, even over something as small as a comment, it can make you second-guess whether it's worth putting yourself out there."* This idea mirrors the vulnerability that these individuals experience when their interests are belittled and lead them to internalize the negativity.

Group-Driven Harassment

When discussing on their experiences, participant 1 raised a key concern on group attacks. These types of attacks happen when a group of people, usually around 3 or more often harass an individual collectively. Due to these attacks takes place on social media platform, X, the harm they cause are amplified as not only X is a public platform, implying public shaming but also anyone can join in. Reflecting on his experience, participant 1 explained, *"When one person comments, it is easy to ignore. But then if a lot of them tag teamed you and starts trolling... It makes your head think about it, until you feel wronged."* This type of harassment is particularly unfair as it creates a situation where the victims are outnumbered and are unable to defend themselves properly.

Theme 3: Structural and social dynamics of negative interactions

This theme focuses on the broader structural and social factors that contribute to negative interactions within Malaysian gaming communities on X. Unlike individual-level hostility or targeted attacks, these factors reflect the systemic and cultural conditions that shape online behavior. Participants highlighted how features such as anonymity, community norms, and the spread of misinformation interact to sustain a toxic environment. Together, these elements influence how gamers perceive and engage with one another, shaping the overall climate of interaction on the platform. The findings reveal three subthemes: role of anonymity, social structure and norm enforcement, and misinformation and fake narratives.

Role of Anonymity

X, is a social media that has many users from various type of communities. As it is, the reason behind this is from the anonymity the platform itself had given to its users. This particular factor emerged as five out of the six participants discussed on it, which suggest that it plays an important role in shaping toxic interactions within the gaming community itself. Two of the participants described that anonymity makes people much more comfortable with being mean or rude online. For instance, participant 2 stated,

If you are anonymous, people won't know who is behind the screen which makes it easier for them to say negative things about you or say ratio you. I think people can be meaner to you if they don't know you especially in social media. (Participant 2)

Similarly, participant 6 had pointed out the lack of empathy in these interactions,

I think the anonymity thing really changes how people behave. You don't have to directly face someone when you're posting or replying, it's easy to forget there's a real person on the other side of the screen. Like, sometimes people can be super blunt, or even mean, because they're hiding behind a screen and don't see how it affects someone in real life. (Participant 6)

Other participants emphasized that anonymity makes people escape their responsibility, leading a more aggressive behaviour. For example, participant 1 noted, *"I think if become anonymous easy to escape any responsibility. That's why sometimes you meet people that talk freely, ready to criticize or troll because they know their identity won't be exposed."* Similarly, participant 3 also shared, *"sometimes I see people harass or just start drama for no reason. When you think about this, these people know they don't have the accountability so of course they bravo and speak however they want."*

Despite focusing on the negative aspects, 3 of the participants highlighted its benefits in self-expression. Participant 1 shared, *"But for me right, I am introvert, so got space to speak up or what."* Similarly, participant 3 also expressed how anonymity provided a sense of freedom, *"For me personally, I'm introvert so being anonymous help a lot when I can just be me without people knowing who I am."* As for participant 4, she reflects on anonymity's duality, *"it's easier for you to post whatever, say whatever, and be how you want to be on X, you know, because no one can really relate it back to who you actually are in real life"*

Social Structure and Norm Enforcement

A particularly interesting theme that came from the participants is how these gaming communities often enforce social norms through judgment, exclusion, or criticism towards gamers that don't follow the trend. This creates social structures in the community as well as reinforcing conformity in the collective. As participant 1 noted, *"Many people have the mentality of following the current. If you like mainstream games like ML or PUBG, you get easy acceptance."*

But anything outside of it, you might be labelled being weird, because outside of normal people expectation.” Likewise, another participant shared,

If you like a game that’s “not trend,” people look down on you, which feels kind of harsh...sometimes it feels like there’s this pressure to fit in or be seen as a “real” gamer, y’know. people look down on you if you’re not playing the “right” games or if you don’t play on the “right” platform. (Participant 6)

These explanations highlight how the gaming community values conformity and excludes those that do not follow the expectations.

Misinformation and Fake Narratives

Misinformation and the spread of fake narratives were some concerns among participants, particularly in the context of manipulative content and false accusations. Participant 2 shared her experience on how misinformation are crafted with the intention of manipulating opinions or provoke reactions.

I got see a post where someone was groomed. Now usually, when they post these types of callouts its usually with evidence like screenshots and all. It’s the same here too. But then got this one fella coming out and say this person is doing this for attention. Now im not someone who is gullible to just easily believe someone online but at least if you wanna deny it, send proof or something. But this guy he says “I don’t need to send more evidence for this person to twist the story”. Now, you tell me, would you believe this guy?... So everyone was like me, asking him to send proof but he doesn’t and then made this situation to entirelyly different one to the point the main issue isn’t the main thing anymore. Come on, how can you make a post of the victim to be the least important issue. And it’s even worse that people were believing him. So can you see now how something like that can make you stress? (Participant 2)

Another participant shared how fake narratives can come, particularly in fandom discussions. *“Sometimes I see people harass or just start drama for no reason... Then there was once I answered someone on their build, and suddenly people start bashing me cause I don’t play meta characters and said they can use 4-star characters too”* This implies that the participant’s response was taken out of context, implying his opinion was invalid just because he was not following meta in the game. Another participant also described her experience when her perception of a character was inconsistent from the common narrative of the characters, *“I tweeted something that apparently came off as clueless, and someone quote me, calling me out on it”* She further explained how the community itself controls interpretations, making it difficult to freely discuss differing perspectives. *“Everyone has their own headcanons and interpretations, right? ... But then, yeah, if it doesn’t line up with how someone else sees it... then suddenly it’s like I did something wrong.”* This explains the fake narrative of the participant lacking knowledge even though its just their perspective is different from others.

RQ2: How do negative online interactions on X influence Malaysian gamers’ mental well-being, and how do they cope with these experiences?

The analysis revealed that negative online interactions on X have significant emotional, psychological, and behavioral consequences for Malaysian gamers. Three major themes emerged from participants’ accounts, each with corresponding subthemes. Theme 1: Emotional and Psychological Impact consisted of *stress and anxiety* and *mood disturbances*, reflecting the immediate emotional strain and mental distress caused by exposure to hostility and conflict. Theme 2: Long-Term Psychological Effects included *insecurity and negative self-perception* and *reduced trust in online communities*, highlighting how persistent online negativity can lead to lowered self-esteem, social withdrawal, and mental fatigue. Finally, Theme 3: Resilience and Coping Strategies encompassed *detachment and avoidance*, *seeking supportive communities*, and *emotional regulation and content management*, demonstrating how gamers develop adaptive mechanisms to maintain their mental well-being and navigate the challenges of toxic online environments. Table 3.0 below summarises the themes and subthemes related to the influence of negative online interactions on Malaysian gamers’ mental well-being and their coping strategies, providing a concise description of each.

Table 3. Summary of RQ1.

Theme	Subthemes	Brief Description
Theme 1: Emotional and psychological impact	Stress and anxiety	Negative exchanges trigger worry and emotional strain.
	Mood disturbances	Hostility causes anger, confusion, and frustration.
Theme 2: Long-term psychological effects	Insecurity and negative self-perception	Repeated negativity reduces confidence and self-worth.
	Reduced trust in online communities	Leads to hesitation and withdrawal from online spaces.
Theme 3: Resilience and coping strategies	Detachment and avoidance	Managing negativity by limiting or avoiding interactions.
	Seeking supportive communities	Finding positive groups that offer understanding and support.
	Emotional regulation and content management	Using reflection and curation to protect mental well-being.

Theme 1: Emotional and psychological impact

The findings revealed that all participants experienced emotional and psychological distress as a result of negative online interactions. These experiences included immediate emotional reactions such as anger, frustration, and confusion as well as longer-lasting effects like stress and anxiety. Many participants described feeling mentally exhausted and disheartened after repeated exposure to online hostility, which gradually affected their overall well-being. This theme highlights two key dimensions of these effects: stress and anxiety, and mood disturbances experienced following negative encounters on X.

Stress and Anxiety

One of the main effects of these negative interactions that the participants experienced on X is feeling stressed and anxiety. These participants reported of feeling overwhelmed due the negativity they faced. For example, participant 2 expressed, *“Well, for me I get stressed when people cannot understand simple logic. They cannot understand the vibe of a conversation online and can say don’t have any media literacy”* The participant recounted an incident she experienced where a callout post about grooming, supported by evidence was dismissed by another individual without providing counter evidence and shifting the focus away from the victim. Seeing people believe into the baseless claims made by the individual left her feeling mentally drained as she shows struggle in how easily information can be twisted. She concluded with frustration, *“... So, can you see now how something like that can make you stressed?”*

Another participant’s experience had meaningfully narrated the significant stress and anxiety caused by their negative interactions online. They described how even seemingly minor incidents, such as being called out or misunderstood, could trigger intense emotional distress. The participant explained, *“Ugh, yeah. It’s been a lot. I hate to admit it, but those moments really did mess with my head... it’s like, all the little interactions add up.”* This shows how the buildup effect of negative interactions can overwhelm individuals, particularly those who are more sensitive to criticism. She also had elaborated further on how this interaction led her into a spiral of negativity. *“I tend to be pretty sensitive, and when people call me out, even if it’s in a way that’s not meant to be mean, I just spiral, you know”* This spiralling often involved feelings of shame, embarrassment, which the participant described as *‘really heavy feelings to carry.’* She disclosed, *“There’s been times where it’s gotten overwhelming, and I’ve thought about just disappearing or deleting everything, just to make the bad feelings go away.”* The participant also described her feeling of constant pressure, which worsens her anxiety, as noted, *“Sometimes I feel like I’m carrying this weight of not being good enough or being misunderstood even though I know I shouldn’t feel that way.”* This participant’s experience shows how online negativity can contribute to mental health issues, such as anxiety. It highlights the psychological effects that one experiences from the platform X.

Mood Disturbances

In addition to stress and anxiety, many participants reported having their mood disturbed after triggered by an aggressive interaction. To illustrate, participant 5 described feeling angry and frustrated after his interactions with other gamers on X during their disagreements regarding the games they play. *“They can just tell me politely or just, like, say, normally, but then sometimes they use some harsh words, so it makes me angry, sometimes a bit disappointed and sad.”* His reaction to the harsh words used by other players highlights the immediate mood impact despite being brief. He questioned the interaction, *“Why do they have to do that?”* showing his confusion and frustration he had, adding to the negativity found in the community interaction. Another participant, whose experiences on X were largely limited to specific fan bases she is in, described a similar sense of confusion and worry when encountering negativity. *“It’s more like I feel a brief amount of confusion or like, what is this? What kind of nonsense is this? And some kind of worry, and that’s it.”* Both recounts from the participants shows how negative interaction can disturb the emotional state, by various feelings such as anger, confusion and frustration lead to disappointing interactions online.

Theme 2: Long-term psychological effects

Beyond the immediate emotional distress, participants also described lingering psychological consequences resulting from prolonged exposure to negative online interactions. These experiences often extended beyond temporary feelings of stress or frustration, influencing their self-concept, confidence, and willingness to engage online. Many participants reported that repeated hostility, judgment, and public criticism gradually eroded their sense of security and belonging within the gaming community. Over time, this contributed to two main long-term effects: insecurity and negative self-perception, and reduced trust in online communities.

Insecurity and Negative Self-Perception

Few participants admitted that repeated hostility and criticisms from their community had reduced their self-esteem and confidence. For participant 2, he described how repeated exposure to negativity led to lasting psychological effects, including increased self-doubt and behavioral changes. He reflected on an experience where

he was dismissed and attacked on a comment which led to him second-guessing his understanding of the game and withdrawing from any other interactions. *"I start second-guessing how the game works and everything and even start to defend myself. So after that, I also start to less frequently comment because I was scared if I experience it again."* One other participant shared, *"Sometimes I feel like I'm not cut out for this whole public social media thing"*, mirroring the pressure she had to meet from the expectations of fellow gamers on X. She also described the feeling of *"this weight of not being good enough or being misunderstood"* despite knowing this isn't the truth of the context. She knows she *"shouldn't feel that way"* but she was still affected, highlighting her decreased self-esteem.

Reduced Trust in Online Communities

Another theme that came up from the participants is the reduced trust in online communities, causing mental burnout among the gamers. Three participants mentioned about being wary and hesitant in engaging with other users on X, due to their experience with the overall negativity of online interaction. Participant 6, who had experienced being called out publicly on their alleged ignorance regarding a game they played narrated how she felt regarding the situation. *"At first, I didn't think it was that big of a deal, but it kept nagging at me."* She further elaborated that it had a lasting emotional impact on her. *"it's hard to explain, but it's like every time I log on, I remember that quote tweet and feel that same cringe and regret all over again... it's like, even one little mistake, and suddenly it feels like it's out there forever, you know?"*

Another example is from participant 3 who shared his impactful experience after being attacked by multiple people due to his comment. *"So after that, I also start to less frequently comment cause I was scared if I experience it again."* When asked to elaborate, he continued on, *"Hababa simple only. If you were in my place, would you comment like usual? No right? Because no one likes feeling dismissed or attacked, right? It's not just about avoiding the negativity... After a few experiences like that, it's easy to just go, 'Meh, why bother?'"* His response indicates he had heightened his caution in his online activity and to protect himself further from the emotional impact. To add on, this behaviour also shows how repeated exposure to negativity online can lead to mental burnout.

Theme 3: Resilience and coping strategies

Despite the emotional and psychological strain caused by negative online interactions, participants also demonstrated notable resilience through various coping mechanisms. Their responses revealed a conscious effort to protect their mental well-being and maintain a sense of balance when navigating online spaces such as X. Many participants described adapting strategies that helped them manage emotional distress, minimize exposure to toxicity, and regain control over their online experiences. These coping mechanisms generally fell into three main approaches: detachment and avoidance, seeking supportive communities, and emotional regulation and content management.

Detachment and Avoidance

When it comes to coping strategies, almost all participants acknowledged they use various ways of overcoming the negativity from their online interaction, as well as building their resilience. From the findings, one common strategy they use was detachment or avoidance. This is when participants either reduce their interaction or not engage at all. To illustrate, participant 4 shared her approach to handling negativity she receives from another gamer. *"It depends on the situation or how you interact with that person. If you're going to interact with that person in a negative way first, then you... who are going to bring that same thing into the game? Then it's going to affect you."* She further expanded her thoughts on her ability to separate the situation, *"But if you are the type of person who is like, 'Okay, that was an entirely different interaction. This is a game. Let's just play fair and play like you usually play'."* This shows how the participant reframed her perspective and instead focus on the game rather than the negativity. Another participant stated, *"When it gets too much, I just close the app and do something else."* indicating her detachment towards the situation.

Similarly, participant 5 emphasized the importance of setting boundaries to manage negative interactions, stating, *"Not really, because I do have my boundaries. Sometimes I set my boundaries on what I do. I feel any interaction through these games, especially games when we play together, when we want to win a game, and it doesn't happen... sometimes I just don't take it personally, because it's just a game."* This shows how the participant used detachment as a coping mechanism by establishing clear boundaries and refusing to internalize negativity. By reminding himself that *"it's just a game,"* he distanced from the emotional part of negativity and build up his resilience.

Seeking Supportive Communities

Moving on, another coping strategy that the participants used is by actively looking for supportive communities or spaces in order to connect with like-minded individuals. Participant 1 highlighted moments of support within the local gaming community, explaining, *"There are some moments when it's supportive. Like if local gamers made content or achieved something big, you will see a lot of people come support, like 'Web, proud of Malaysians.'" This sense of*

pride and encouragement often bring together individuals despite their differences in online spaces due to how big social media such as X.

Similarly, participant 5 shared how he felt more connected to the Malaysian gaming community, stating, “...I will say... maybe I will be more connected to the Malaysian gaming community, because sometimes I will be like, ‘Oh, are you from Malaysia? Are you from Malaysia?’ From that, we will have some similarity. So, maybe sometimes there are a few instances that because of the similarity, we will be the ones to stay true (to ourselves).” He also shared the positive impacts of being in those communities, “Uhh, so far, it’s positive, because... your objectives, how to play games, some clues, or how to read the game all is, I think it also brings on our perspective (together). If anything negative happens, we don’t take it personally. So, I do believe in that statement. That’s why everything that’s positive, I’ll take it. Usually, the negative one, I will ignore it.” This shows that being in a community with like-minded people helped him maintain a positive environment that focuses on gaming and building his resilience against the toxicity.

Emotional Regulation and Content Management

Lastly, participants emphasized on emotional regulation and the importance of content management. Participants specifically mentioned on reflecting back, mindfulness and also personalizing their online content for a healthier online interaction and experience. For example, participant 2 described, “It’s actually not difficult for you to experience toxic people, especially in big fandoms like K-pop groups like Enhyphen, animes like Haikyuu or games even. It’s just a matter of curating your timeline (X homepage) to see what’s suitable.” Another participant supported her strategy of safeguarding his peace using content management on X. “If I encounter bad interactions, especially those that troll or judge, I just mute, block, and go on lol.”

In terms of emotional regulation when dealing with other users on X, participant 3 shared how he came to terms with differing opinions on playing styles, saying, “I realized some people play differently.” Similarly, participant 5 emphasized on his ability to detach from negativity, explaining, “I don’t take it personally.” Both of the participants show acknowledgment helped them in avoiding taking conflicts personally and maintain a more balanced outlook during their interaction. Participant 6, however was more reflective in her way of regulating emotions. She reflected, “I was hating myself for the things I’ve done and also trying to remind myself that I’m still learning and growing.” Her way highlights her self-compassion and learning mindset to cope with her feelings of guilt and self-doubt she had from negative interactions.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that **toxicity and hostility** were common features of online interactions among Malaysian gamers on platform X. Participants described how minor disagreements about gameplay or opinions often escalated into personal attacks, verbal insults, and public shaming. The **anonymity** of X reduces accountability, encouraging impulsive and aggressive behavior (Pan et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2017). This detachment fosters hostility as individuals feel less responsible for their actions without fear of real-world repercussions (Pandita et al., 2024). Additionally, exclusion within gaming groups was frequently reported, where marginalized members experienced intentional ignorance and isolation (Naidoo et al., 2019). This exclusionary behavior, driven by reduced self-awareness and increased individualism, reinforced in-group cohesion while alienating others (Lim et al., 2015).

In addition to these general experiences of hostility, the findings revealed that online aggression often took the form of deliberate personal attacks and coordinated harassment. Participants shared experiences of being targeted due to differing beliefs or gaming preferences, which led to feelings of anger, sadness, and self-doubt. Such behavior reflects **power dynamics** and **social dominance**, where harassment serves as a tool to maintain hierarchy and enforce conformity (Blackwell et al., 2017; Jagayat & Choma, 2021). From a psychological perspective, these attacks represent **identity threats**, where victims experience shame and marginalization for violating group norms (Bates & LaBrecque, 2020). This dynamic reinforces in-group belonging for aggressors but deepens victims’ psychological harm.

Beyond individual behaviors, the findings also highlighted broader **structural and cultural factors** that sustain online toxicity. The design of X allows moral disengagement and limited moderation, enabling hostility to thrive (Falla et al., 2023). The **online disinhibition effect** (Syrjämäki et al., 2024) and poor emotional regulation (Gan et al., 2024) further contribute to aggression. In the Malaysian context, where direct confrontation is culturally discouraged, online spaces become outlets for suppressed frustration (Abdullah et al., 2024). Moreover, **normative influence** within groups encourages conformity, with dominant members setting behavioral standards (Bar On & Lamm, 2023). These findings, supported by **Social Identity Theory (SIT)**, suggest that in-group loyalty and collectivist values shape online hostility and exclusion (Verkuyten, 2021; Rathbone et al., 2023).

Negative interactions on X were also found to have significant **emotional and psychological effects**, including stress, anxiety, and mood disturbances. Participants reported distress from unpredictable and personal

attacks, often leading to **anticipatory anxiety** and withdrawal from online discussions (Aleksandric et al., 2023; Wilhelm & Joeckel, 2018). These findings align with SIT, which posits that threats to group identity trigger emotional strain such as anger and confusion (Chen et al., 2020; Siddique et al., 2023). Prolonged exposure further resulted in **long-term mental health consequences**, such as low self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness, and identity-based trauma (Mullan et al., 2023; Allwood et al., 2021). The **digital permanence** of harassment made it difficult for victims to heal, fostering distrust and social withdrawal within online communities (Pantic, 2014).

Despite these negative outcomes, participants also demonstrated **coping strategies and resilience** in managing online toxicity. Common approaches included disengaging from harmful interactions, practicing mindfulness, and curating their digital spaces through blocking or muting tools (Kang et al., 2023; Yang, 2020). These strategies helped reduce emotional strain and promoted self-regulation and identity reconstruction (Huang et al., 2021). Importantly, these findings challenge the assumption that online negativity only causes harm, as some individuals transformed adversity into opportunities for emotional growth. This reflects **adaptive resilience** within Malaysia's collectivist culture, which emphasizes social harmony and emotional balance.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that negative online interactions within the Malaysian gaming community have a significant impact on mental health, particularly through the platform X. The findings revealed that toxic online interactions such as exclusion, hostility, and emotional strain negatively affect users' psychological well-being. However, gamers also employ coping strategies to manage and protect their mental health. These results highlight the dual nature of online gaming spaces, which can function as both supportive environments and sources of psychological distress (Malinen, 2015; Jahan & Kim, 2020). Therefore, while online toxicity remains a pressing concern, fostering digital resilience and strengthening coping mechanisms are essential to reduce its harmful psychological effects.

The findings of this study further support the Social Identity Theory (SIT) by demonstrating how in-group and out-group dynamics contribute to negative online interactions within the Malaysian gaming community. Yet, this research extends SIT by adding a cultural perspective often overlooked in earlier studies. For instance, past research has emphasized in-group favoritism as a key driver of online hostility (Verkuyten, 2021), but the current study suggests that Malaysian social norms, particularly those rooted in collectivistic values of group harmony and respect for hierarchy, influence how toxicity is expressed and perceived. This observation highlights the need for theoretical frameworks that consider non-Western perspectives when examining online negativity (Rathbone et al., 2023). From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that policymakers and platform developers should strengthen digital literacy initiatives through collaborative fact-checking, employ artificial intelligence and community-based moderation systems to limit misinformation (Falla et al., 2023), and enforce stricter community guidelines to create a more respectful and constructive online environment.

Another key contribution of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which integrates perspectives from social media analysis, gaming culture, and mental health research, offering a holistic understanding of online toxicity and its psychological outcomes (Gan et al., 2024). By focusing on Malaysian gamers, the research contributes valuable cultural insights to a field largely centered on Western contexts (Tomaszewski, 2018). However, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential bias, as participants might have underreported their experiences due to stigma or discomfort (Roslee et al., 2021). Future research should therefore expand the sample to include more diverse participants and adopt an intersectional approach to explore how gender, race, or sexuality influences experiences of online toxicity (Jusay et al., 2022). Employing mixed methods, such as combining interviews with observational or psychological assessments, could strengthen validity, while exploring intervention strategies across multiple platforms may offer insight into how digital communities can foster resilience and well-being (Demir, 2022).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This publication is supported by Quest International University under the QIU Academic Publication Funding

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, N. N., Ali, A. a. E. R., Basari, S. N. M., Ramli, M. S., & Ayob, N. H. (2024). Profanity on Malaysian social media: Implications on brand perception and organisational communication. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(8). <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v14-i8/22303>

- Aleksandric, A., Pankaj, H., Wilson, G. M., & Nilizadeh, S. (2023). Sadness, anger, or anxiety: Twitter users' emotional responses to toxicity in public conversations. *arXiv (Cornell University)*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.2310.11436>
- Allwood, M., Ghafoori, B., Salgado, C., Slobodin, O., Kreither, J., Waelde, L. C., Larrondo, P., & Ramos, N. (2021). Identity-based hate and violence as trauma: Current research, clinical implications, and advocacy in a globally connected world. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 35*(2), 349–361. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.22748>
- Anderson, B., & Wood, M. A. (2021). Doxxing: A scoping review and typology. In Emerald Publishing Limited eBooks (pp. 205–226). <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83982-848-520211015>
- Anderson, D., Sweeney, K., Pasquini, E., Estes, B., & Zapalac, R. (2021). An exploration of esports consumer consumption patterns, fandom, and motives. *International Journal of eSports Research, 1*(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.4018/ijer.20210101.oa3>
- Aziz, N., Nordin, M. J., Abdulkadir, S. J., & Salih, M. M. M. (2021). Digital Addiction: Systematic Review of Computer game Addiction impact on adolescent Physical health. *Electronics, 10*(9), 996. <https://doi.org/10.3390/electronics10090996>
- Bansal, S., Garg, N., Singh, J., & Van Der Walt, F. (2024). Cyberbullying and mental health: past, present and future. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1279234>
- Bar-On, K. K., & Lamm, E. (2023). The interplay of social identity and norm psychology in the evolution of human groups. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B Biological Sciences, 378*(1872). <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2021.0412>
- Bates, R. A., & LaBrecque, B. (2020). The Sociology of Shaming. *The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology, 12*(1). <https://doi.org/10.62915/2154-8935.1162>
- Blackwell, L., Dimond, J., Schoenebeck, S., & Lampe, C. (2017). Classification and its consequences for online harassment. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 1*(CSCW), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3134659>
- Bliss, L. A. (2016). Phenomenological research: Inquiry to understand the meanings of people's experiences. *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology, 7*(3), 14–26. <https://doi.org/10.4018/ijavet.2016070102>
- Byrne, D. (2021). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity, 56*(3), 1391–1412. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y>
- Cary, L. A., Axt, J., & Chasteen, A. L. (2020). The interplay of individual differences, norms, and group identification in predicting prejudiced behavior in online video game interactions. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 50*(11), 623–637.
- Chen, Y., Li, L., Ybarra, O., & Zhao, Y. (2020). Symbolic threat affects negative self-conscious emotions. *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology, 14*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/prp.2020.3>
- Cheng, J., Bernstein, M., Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, C., & Leskovec, J. (2017). Anyone Can Become a Troll. *Proceedings of the 2017 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing - CSCW '17, 1217–1230*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2998181.2998213>
- Cheung, A. (2014). Revisiting privacy and dignity: Online Shaming in the global E-Village. *Laws, 3*(2), 301–326. <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws3020301>
- Crawford, G., Gosling, V. K., & Light, B. (2013). Online gaming in context: The social and cultural significance of online games. *Routledge*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203869598>
- Demir, A. (2022). The impact of gaming on fear of missing out: The case of Bahcesehir University E-Sports Team. *International Education Studies, 15*(2), 130. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v15n2p130>
- Dixon, S. (2024, June 26). Global X/Twitter user age distribution 2024. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/283119/age-distribution-of-global-twitter-users/>
- Eppich, W. J., Gormley, G. J., & Teunissen, P. W. (2019). In-depth interviews. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 85–91). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26837-4_12
- Falla, D., Ortega-Ruiz, R., & Romera, E. M. (2023). Minimizing responsibility in the aggressive dynamics of bullying and its impact on other strategies of moral disengagement: a longitudinal study. *Current Psychology, 42*(36), 32512–32523. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-04229-x>
- Forestal, J. (2023). Social media, social control, and the politics of public shaming. *The American Political Science Review, 1–15*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055423001053>
- Fox, J., Gilbert, M., & Tang, W. Y. (2018). Player experiences in a massively multiplayer online game: A diary study of performance, motivation, and social interaction. *New Media & Society, 20*(11), 4056–4073. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818767102>
- Gan, W., Chen, Z., Wu, Z., Huang, X., & Wang, F. (2024). Aggression in online gaming: the role of online disinhibition, social dominance orientation, moral disengagement and gender traits among Chinese university students. *Frontiers in Public Health, 12*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1459696>

- Gandolfi, E., & Ferdig, R. E. (2021). Sharing dark sides on game service platforms: Disruptive behaviors and toxicity in DOTA2 through a platform lens. *Convergence the International Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies*, 28(2), 468–487. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565211028809>
- Gonçalves, D., Pais, P., Gerling, K., Guerreiro, T., & Rodrigues, A. (2023). Social gaming: A systematic review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 147, 107851. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107851>
- Granic, I. (2013). Video games play may provide learning, health, social benefits. *American Psychological Association*. <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2013/11/video-games>
- Guest, G., Namey, E., & Chen, M. (2020). A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in qualitative research. *PLoS ONE*, 15(5), e0232076. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0232076>
- Gupta, M., & Sharma, A. (2021). Fear of missing out: A brief overview of origin, theoretical underpinnings and relationship with mental health. *World Journal of Clinical Cases*, 9(19), 4881–4889. <https://doi.org/10.12998/wjcc.v9.i19.4881>
- Huang, J., Kumar, S., & Hu, C. (2021). A Literature Review of Online Identity Reconstruction. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.696552>
- Jagayat, A., & Choma, B. L. (2021). Cyber-aggression towards women: Measurement and psychological predictors in gaming communities. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 120, 106753. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.106753>
- Jahan, N., & Kim, S. W. (2020). Understanding online community participation behavior and perceived benefits: a social exchange theory perspective. *PSU Research Review*, 5(2), 85–100. <https://doi.org/10.1108/prr-12-2019-0036>
- Jusay, J. L. A., Lababit, J. a. S., Moralina, L. O. M., & Ancheta, J. R. (2022). We are Cancelled: Exploring victims' experiences of cancel culture on social media in the Philippines. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 14(4). <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n4.04>
- Kaliebe, K., & Weigle, P. (2018). Youth internet habits and mental health, an issue of child and adolescent psychiatric clinics of North America, E-Book. Elsevier Health Sciences. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1056-4993\(18\)30003-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1056-4993(18)30003-8)
- Kang, H., Wang, Y., Wang, M., Yasin, M. a. I., Osman, M. N., & Ang, L. H. (2023). Navigating Digital Network: Mindfulness as a shield against Cyberbullying in the Knowledge Economy era. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-023-01604-2>
- Karim, F., Oyewande, A., Abdalla, L. F., Ehsanullah, R. C., & Khan, S. (2020). Social media Use and its Connection to Mental Health: A Systematic review. *Cureus*. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.8627>
- Kelly, M. E., Duff, H., Kelly, S., Power, J. E. M., Brennan, S., Lawlor, B. A., & Loughrey, D. G. (2017). The impact of social activities, social networks, social support and social relationships on the cognitive functioning of healthy older adults: a systematic review. *Systematic Reviews*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-017-0632-2>
- King, L., Stark, J. F., & Cooke, P. (2016). Experiencing the digital world: The cultural value of digital engagement with heritage. *Heritage & Society*, 9(1), 76–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159032x.2016.1246156>
- Klonick, K. (2015). Re-shaming the debate: Social norms, shame, and regulation in an Internet Age. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2638693>
- Kukul, B. (2023). Personal data and personal safety: re-examining the limits of public data in the context of doxing. *International Data Privacy Law*, 13(3), 182–193. <https://doi.org/10.1093/idpl/ipad011>
- Lee, H. J., Choi, J., Kim, J. W., Park, S. J., & Gloor, P. (2013). Communication, opponents, and clan performance in online games: A social network approach. *Cyberpsychology Behavior and Social Networking*, 16(12), 878–883. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2011.0522>
- Lee, H. S. (2022). Ethical issues in clinical research and publication. *Kosin Medical Journal*, 37(4), 278–282. <https://doi.org/10.7180/kmj.22.132>
- Lim, J., Gwak, A. R., Park, S. M., Kwon, J., Lee, J., Jung, H. Y., Sohn, B. K., Kim, J., Kim, D. J., & Choi, J. (2015). Are Adolescents with Internet Addiction Prone to Aggressive Behavior? The Mediating Effect of Clinical Comorbidities on the Predictability of Aggression in Adolescents with Internet Addiction. *Cyberpsychology Behavior and Social Networking*, 18(5), 260–267. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2014.0568>
- Liu, Y., & Agur, C. (2022). “After all, they don’t know me.” Exploring the psychological mechanisms of toxic behavior in online games. *Games and Culture*, 18(5), 598–621. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120221115397>
- Majid, M. a. A., Othman, M., Mohamad, S. F., Lim, S. a. H., & Yusof, A. (2017). Piloting for interviews in qualitative research: Operationalization and lessons learnt. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 7(4). <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v7-i4/2916>
- Malinen, S. (2015). Understanding user participation in online communities: A systematic literature review of empirical studies. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 46, 228–238. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.01.004>
- Masferrer, A. (2023). The Decline of Freedom of Expression and Social Vulnerability in Western democracy. *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law - Revue Internationale De Sémiotique Juridique*, 36(4), 1443–1475. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-023-09990-1>

- Maurya, C., Muhammad, T., Dhillon, P., & Maurya, P. (2022). The effects of cyberbullying victimization on depression and suicidal ideation among adolescents and young adults: a three year cohort study from India. *BMC Psychiatry*, *22*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-022-04238-x>
- Muir, S. R., Roberts, L. D., Sheridan, L., & Coleman, A. R. (2023). Examining the role of moral, emotional, behavioural, and personality factors in predicting online shaming. *PLoS One*, *18*(3), e0279750. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0279750>
- Mullan, V. M. R., Golm, D., Juhl, J., Sajid, S., & Brandt, V. (2023). The relationship between peer victimisation, self-esteem, and internalizing symptoms in adolescents: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLoS ONE*, *18*(3), e0282224. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0282224>
- Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A Step-by-step process of thematic analysis to develop a conceptual model in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *22*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789>
- Naidoo, R., Coleman, K., & Guyo, C. (2020). Exploring gender discursive struggles about social inclusion in an online gaming community. *Information Technology & People*, *33*(2), 576-601. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-04-2019-0163>
- Naslund, J. A., Bondre, A., Torous, J., & Aschbrenner, K. A. (2020). Social media and mental health: benefits, risks, and opportunities for research and practice. *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science*, *5*(3), 245–257. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41347-020-00134-x>
- Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., & Varpio, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. *Perspectives on Medical Education*, *8*(2), 90–97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-019-0509-2>
- Nexø, L. A. (2024). Toxic Behaviours in Esport: A Review of Data-Collection Methods Applied in Studying Toxic In-Gaming Behaviours. *International Journal of Esports*, *3*(3). <https://www.ijesports.org/article/127/html>
- Ng, E. (2020). No grand pronouncements here: Reflections on cancel culture and digital media participation. *Television & New Media*, *21*(6), 621–627. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476420918828>
- O'Connor, E. L., Longman, H., White, K. M., & Obst, P. L. (2015). Sense of community, social identity and social support among players of massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs): A Qualitative analysis. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *25*(6), 459–473. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2224>
- Ostic, D., Qalati, S. A., Barbosa, B., Shah, S. M. M., Vela, E. G., Herzallah, A. M., & Liu, F. (2021). Effects of social media use on psychological well-being: A mediated model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.678766>
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, *42*(5), 533–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
- Pan, X., Hou, Y., & Wang, Q. (2023). Are we braver in cyberspace? Social media anonymity enhances moral courage. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *148*, 107880. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107880>
- Pandita, S., Garg, K., Zhang, J., & Mobbs, D. (2024). Three roots of online toxicity: disembodiment, accountability, and disinhibition. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, *28*(9), 814–828. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2024.06.001>
- Pantic, I. (2014). Online Social Networking and Mental Health. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *17*(10), 652–657. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2014.0070>
- Picarella, L. (2024). Intersections in the digital society: cancel culture, fake news, and contemporary public discourse. *Frontiers in Sociology*, *9*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2024.1376049>
- Qin, H., Rau, P. P., & Gao, S. (2011). The influence of social experience in online games. In *Lecture notes in computer science* (pp. 688–693). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-21619-0_81
- Rathbone, J. A., Cruwys, T., Stevens, M., Ferris, L. J., & Reynolds, K. J. (2023). The reciprocal relationship between social identity and adherence to group norms. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *62*(3), 1346–1362. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12635>
- Roslee, N. L. B., & Goh, Y. S. (2021). Young adult's perception towards the formation of stigma on people experiencing mental health conditions: A descriptive qualitative study. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, *30*(1), 148-157. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12766>
- Ruslin, R., Mashuri, S., Rasak, M. S. A., Alhabsyi, F., & Syam, H. (2022). Semi-structured Interview: A methodological reflection on the development of a qualitative research instrument in educational studies. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)*, *12*(1), 22-29.
- Ryan, T., Allen, K. A., Gray, D. L., & McInerney, D. M. (2017). How Social Are Social Media? A Review of Online Social Behaviour and Connectedness. *Journal of Relationships Research*, *8*, e8. doi:10.1017/jrr.2017.13
- Sabri, T. I. M. T., Syed, M. a. M., & Shamshudeen, R. I. (2024). Tracing the evolution of video game culture in Malaysia: A sociohistorical analysis. *International Journal of Creative Multimedia*, *5*(2), 64–87. <https://doi.org/10.33093/ijcm.2024.5.2.5>

- Sargeant, J. (2012). Qualitative research part II: participants, analysis, and quality assurance. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*, 4(1), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.4300/jgme-d-11-00307.1>
- Scheinbaum, A. C. (2024). Corporate cancel culture and brand boycotts: The Dark Side of Social Media for Brands. *Routledge*.
- Siddique, B., Khan, W., & Rauf, U. (2023). Bullying behavior and human health: factors and causes pjaee, 20 (2) (2023) bullying behavior and human health: factors and causes. *PalArch S Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology*, 20(2), 860–881. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372140702_bullying_behavior_and_human_health_factors_and_causes_pjaee_20_2_2023_bullying_behavior_and_human_health_factors_and_causes
- Sirola, A., Savela, N., Savolainen, I., Kaakinen, M., & Oksanen, A. (2020). The Role of Virtual Communities in Gambling and Gaming Behaviors: A Systematic review. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 37(1), 165–187. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-020-09946-1>
- Syrjämäki, A. H., Ilves, M., Olsson, T., Kiskola, J., Isokoski, P., Rantasila, A., Bente, G., & Surakka, V. (2024). Online disinhibition mediates the relationship between emotion regulation difficulties and uncivil communication. *Scientific Reports*, 14(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-81086-7>
- T'ng, S. T., & Pau, K. (2020). Identification of avatar mediates the associations between motivations of gaming and internet gaming disorder among the Malaysian youth. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 19(4), 1346–1361. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00229-9>
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 237–246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748>
- Thomason, K. K. (2021). The moral risks of online shaming. In Oxford University Press eBooks (pp. 145–162). <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198857815.013.8>
- Tomaszewski, E. (2018). Addressing the social and cultural norms that underlie the acceptance of violence. National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25075>
- Traverso, M. (2021). Measuring magnetism: how social media creates echo chambers. *Nature Italy*. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d43978-021-00019-4>
- Tseng, F., Huang, H., & Teng, C. (2015). How do online game communities retain gamers? social presence and social capital perspectives. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 20(6), 601–614. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12141>
- Vallette, B. (2021). The toxicity of cancel culture. *Spring Showcase for Research and Creative Inquiry* (p. 187). https://digitalcommons.longwood.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1189&context=rci_spring
- Verkuyten, M. (2021). Group identity and ingroup bias: The Social Identity Approach. *Human Development*, 65(5–6), 311–324. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000519089>
- Wilhelm, C., & Joeckel, S. (2018). Gendered Morality and backlash Effects in online discussions: An experimental study on how users respond to hate speech comments against women and sexual minorities. *Sex Roles*, 80(7–8), 381–392. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0941-5>
- World Health Organization: WHO. (2019, December 19). Mental health. https://www.who.int/health-topics/mental-health#tab=tab_1
- Wright, K. (2016). Social networks, interpersonal social support, and health outcomes: A health communication perspective. *Frontiers in Communication*, 1. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2016.00010>
- Xiao, S., Jhaver, S., & Salehi, N. (2023). Addressing Interpersonal harm in online gaming Communities: The opportunities and Challenges for a Restorative Justice approach. *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction*, 30(6), 1–36. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3603625>
- Yang, F. (2020). Coping strategies, cyberbullying behaviors, and depression among Chinese netizens during the COVID-19 pandemic: a web-based nationwide survey. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 281, 138–144. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2020.12.023>
- Yunhao, H., Sophie, E., & Elizabeth, C. M., & Bianca, K. (2025) Player Versus Player: A Systematic Review of Cyberbullying in Multiplayer Online Games. *Computer in Human Behaviour Reports*, 18, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2025.100675>
- Zakaria, M. H. F., Ali, A., & Aziz, A. (2022). Online gaming: Exploratory of the communication process and current scenario of virtual community development. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(11). <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v12-i11/14739>
- Zhu, Z., Zhang, R., & Qin, Y. (2022). Toxicity and prosocial behaviors in massively multiplayer online games: The role of mutual dependence, power, and passion. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 27(6). <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmac017>
- Zsila, A., & Reyes, M. E. S. (2023). Pros & cons: impacts of social media on mental health. *BMC Psychology*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-023-01243-x>

