

Online Gaming and its Effect on Students' Socialization

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ABSTRACT: Online gaming is a popular pastime for students and has the potential to impact their social behavior. This research attempted to find out the correlation of online game to students' socialization at Southern de Oro Philippines College. Specifically, it determined online gaming frequency and duration, emotional effects and psychological effects, and the relationship of these factors with students' socialization. The descriptive correlational research design was used. Data were obtained from 279 students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Criminology and Bachelor of Science in Information Technology courses through a questionnaire that was validated and reliability-tested. For statistical treatment, Mean, Standard Deviation, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, and Multiple Linear Regression were used. The findings indicated that the degree of online game (frequency and duration, psychological, and emotional effects) was Moderate and the socialization of the students was High. There was also a significant positive relationship between online gaming and socialization of the students. Among the dimensions, frequency and duration and emotional effects were significant predictors of students' socialization. The study concluded that playing games online has the potential to have a positive effect on students' socialization when it is done in moderation, especially through its emotions. It so recommended that students may do online gaming in moderation so as not interrupt their studies and other responsibilities.

KEYWORDS: emotional effects, online gaming, socialization

I. INTRODUCTION

Socialization allows students to connect with friends, make strong bonds, build useful people skills like talking kindly and working as a team, and know their role in family, school, and community life. It begins in early childhood and develops further through casual interactions, like doing group projects at school, family dinners, and neighborhood hangouts. Socialization is how students learn to interact with peers and build friendships, develop social skills and understand their place within the context of their families, schools, and communities.

In today's digital age, online gaming has become very popular among students, including those students at Southern de Oro Philippines College. The use of computers, cell phones, and Internet has enabled students to engage in gaming activities at any place and time convenient for them. Students prefer engaging in online gaming during their breaks rather than discussing things face to face with their peers. Some students may become absorbed in playing games and communicating online, reducing their involvement in class activities. According to Santrock (2021), spending too much time on online games may affect students' ability to socialize well with others.

However, Ismail & Hamid (2022) stated that playing online games for a short time each day can help students keep their real-life friendships, but playing for many hours is linked to procrastination. Students tend to enjoy more in playing online game rather than making friends or socialized in the school. If a student manages the time in playing online games, they can still interact with others especially in school. Playing games in moderation can be healthy for social life, and we need to balance our time between task and games. Spending too much time in online gaming may lead to fewer real-life interactions and students feel isolated and sad which may harm student's mental well-being.

Furthermore, Zhong et al., (2022) explained that students who have strong friendships in real life are more likely to lose confidence and feel depressed if they spend too much time playing online games. But for students with limited real-life friendships and relying heavily on online gaming for social interaction may not provide the same emotional support. Instead, it could make them feel more disconnected and lead to lower self-esteem and depression. This shows that gaming can affect students differently

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depending on their existing social life. For those who already have strong social support outside of games, playing online might not be harmful.

In addition, Li et al., (2024) stated that teenagers use online games to escape from bad feelings. Students play online games to avoid problems instead of facing them. But this habit is less likely if parents guide and monitor their gaming. This shows that guidance from parents plays an important role in how students use online games. The parents should set limits, give advice and check on their child's gaming habit. The Guidance from parents can help students play in a healthy way it can prevent them from using online games as their main way to avoid stress or sadness. Supervision from parents and teacher can also help them learn healthier ways to cope with problems, such as talking about their feelings or dealing with problems in a positive way or finding other hobbies. Without the guidance, students may spend more time in virtual worlds and ignore real-life challenges, which can harm their emotional growth.

On the positive side, online games can promote teamwork, collaboration and a sense of belonging as indicated by Choi & Kim (2022). When students play together, they learn how to work as a team to win. They also practice sharing ideas, helping one another since most games require players to communicate and plan strategies. At the same time, gaming communities make students feel accepted because they connect with people who have the same interests with them and they will feel comfortable in sharing their interest.

Furthermore, as explained by Smith (2021), online gaming also helps students express themselves more openly especially when they feel shy in real-life situations. The students who are quiet or afraid to talk in person may feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings through games. Since many games use chats, voice calls or teamwork features. Shy students get a chance to practice communication in a way that they feel less stressful. This can help build their confidence because they will learn how to talk, cooperate and connect with others in a safe space.

This study was anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) to frame student engagement with online gaming. Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) focuses on the idea that audiences are not simply passive consumers of media messages, but instead they are trying to satisfy specific psychological and social needs, and they actively select specific media channels and content. As audiences fulfill their social and psychological needs for entertainment by using media, the goals they pursue will fit into one of needs identified in UGT, such as cognitive (knowledge/information), affective (emotional), personal integrative (self-esteem and status), social integrative (relating to people), or tension release (relaxation/escape). Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) central premise is that media use is goal directed, and that people are motivated to use media when they seek satisfy such needs. Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) highlights purposely engaging with media, rather than accidental or habitual consumption.

In the scope of this study, Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) provides a strong advantage point to explain the motivations behind students' participation in online gaming settings and what gratifications students pursue. Students do not engage in online games at random; rather they are fulfilling a variety of needs (e.g., stress relief, cognitive engagement, and recreation, interacting with others). For instance, Chen (2020) demonstrated that adolescents often depended on mobile gaming as a coping strategy to relieve the stress and emotional exhaustion brought about by academic responsibility and social anxieties. There is an enhanced facet to this, which is that these findings aligned with UGT's argument that media usage is often motivated by emotional relief and taking a break from real life in a way showing that playing a game can serve as a psychological buffer against stressors from everyday life.

The conceptual framework with three interrelated sub-variables to consider online gaming and student socialization holistically: (1) frequency and duration of video game play, representing the behavioral aspect of engagement; (2) psychological impacts, which include cognitive stimulation and emotional benefits, such as stress relief; and (3) emotional aspects, which include perceived social support and the development of social connections. These three sub-variables demonstrate how online gaming can encourage cognitive and social benefits while also threatening traditional forms of connection that depend on direct interpersonal interaction.

Enhancing the recognition of the dual-purpose nature of UGT, recent research points to the multiparty interaction of both online gaming engagement and offline behaviors. For example, Li et al., (2023) report that moderate gaming can improve social skills and peer bonding through exploring collaboration in online environments, while high hours of playtime were negatively correlated with face-to-face social interaction and potential social disengagement. This competition to satisfy needs within virtual or real environments raises concerns. As we spend longer periods with media, we may be replacing potentially fulfilling offline social experience, adding to the recognition of UGT's acknowledgment of gratifications being many-layered, and at times contradictory. As a framework, UGT recognizes and embraces the tension of gaming being a double-edge sword; gaming provides gratifications needed for satisfying well-being and social connections all while inhibiting the process of traditional socialization.

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Moreover, Nguyen & Park (2024) provided further evidence of this complexity when they found that students who engaged in online games for social integration were higher on peer connectedness and life satisfaction measures, which indicates positive psychosocial outcomes. The authors also described how too much playing games has potential hazards of leading to social isolation, when online interactions become inadequate substitutes for physical relationships. Their findings demonstrate that gratification derived from online gaming is context-specific when embedded with offline social engagement as opposed to replacing it; gaming positively contributes to social connection, whereas replacing physical interaction with online interaction increases risk of social disengagement.

To summarize, this research locates online gaming in a larger social-psychological context through a Uses and Gratifications Theory lens. Students are intentionally engaged with games to meet a variety of social and psychological needs; therefore, gaming is something they do with a clear reason in mind. This theoretical framework is valuable in elucidating the complex roles of gaming for students, where engagement serves dual functions of coping (with stress) and socializing. Students were engaged in a complex field between the benefits of gratifications from gaming and the drawbacks they faced, e.g. social withdrawal. By applying UGT with an emphasis on behavioral, psychological, and emotional elements to explain online gaming behavior, the research also revealed how online gaming serves as a multi-faceted vehicle for student socialization in a digital context.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study used a correlational and causal designs to examine the relationship of online gaming and students' socialization. This design is appropriate because it describes and explains how online gaming and its following sub-variables; frequency/duration, psychological effects, and emotional effects are associated with how the participants socialize while making no effort to manipulate or control the variables.

Correlational design indicates a type of non-experimental research where the researcher studies the relationship between variables but does not manipulate or control the variables in any way model or structure. A correlational design examines only the strength of the relationship and whether the relationship is negative, positive, or none at all between two or more variables while not addressing or inferring that any one relationship causes another. The correlational research design is useful to determine whether two or more variables are changing together in some correlation, whether positive, negative, or no correlation at all. Bhandari, (2021). Correlational research design is examining relationships between variables and not manipulating them.

Causal design is a method of research that seeks to establish cause-and-effect relationships between variables by manipulating one or more independent variables and measuring the effects on dependent variables (Dudovskiy, 2024). Causal design focuses on the development of temporal order, correlation, and accounting for alternative explanations that support a causal inference. Causal design is often used in experimental and quasi-experimental studies where the conditions of the study are controlled to isolate outcomes. Researchers employ causal design to formally test their hypotheses and predict outcomes based on how the variables might interact and correlate. It may be difficult to control all factors occurring outside of the study and that can potentially influence the validity of the study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Problem 1. What is the level of online gaming in terms of:

- 1.1 frequency and duration;
- 1.2 psychological effects; and
- 1.3 emotional effects?

Table 1. Overall Online Gaming

Indicators	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description
Frequency and Duration	3.03	1.27	Moderate
Psychological Effects	3.15	1.16	Moderate
Emotional Effects	3.37	1.16	Moderate
Overall	3.18	1.19	Moderate

Note: 4.21-5.0 Very High; 3.41-4.20 High; 2.61-3.40 Moderate; 1.81-2.60 Low; 1.0-1.80 Vey Low

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The overall Mean score for online gaming on students' socialization is 3.18 with SD = 1.19, qualitatively described as Moderate. This shows that online gaming relates to students' social life in a balanced way, neither too strong nor too weak. Kim et al. (2022) stated that high social capital students who play games online exhibit greater self-esteem and life satisfaction, while low social capital students tend to have higher levels of depression and social withdrawal. This moderate effect means gaming helps some students connect online but can hurt others if they play too much. Parents and teachers should guide students to play just enough to enjoy friends without losing real-life talks.

Emotional aspects show a Mean of 3.37 with a SD = 1.16, qualitatively described as Moderate. This points to online gaming linking to students' feelings in a fair but not extreme manner. Games bring joy and a sense of win that helps peers connect over shared play. Yet losses can spark anger or letdown, which strains talks with others. Hajizah et al. (2024) found that online games give young students fun and pride to build peer ties, but bad feelings from defeats can cause fights or pullback from friends.

For Frequency and duration aspects, show a Mean of 3.03 with SD of 1.27, qualitatively described as Moderate. Students who frequently and reasonably use video games often use them for connection with friends, especially if they are shy in person. Widyorini & Primastuti (2023) noted that socially sensitive students play social games more often to grow their friend circles in a safe space. This shows gaming helps shy students make friends online without too much risk. Parents can guide playtime to keep it balanced and fun.

Problem 2. What is the level of students' socialization?

Table 2. Students' Socialization

Indicators		Mean	SD	Qualitative Description
<i>Playing online games...</i>				
1.	helps me enjoy with friends.	3.84	1.22	High
2.	improves my communication skills.	3.58	1.18	High
3.	makes me feel I belong to a group.	3.51	1.17	High
4.	helps me to keep in touch with friends.	3.48	1.15	High
5.	allows me to participate in group activities.	3.43	1.12	High
6.	makes me learn to collaborate with friends.	3.48	1.17	High
7.	develop my confidence to interact with people.	3.49	1.14	High
8.	makes me find it easier to socialize with other people.	3.48	1.13	High
9.	encourages me to develop teamwork and cooperation.	3.55	1.09	High
10.	helps me improves my ability to form and maintain relationships.	3.48	1.19	High
Overall		3.53	1.15	High

Note: 4.21-5.0 Very High; 3.41-4.20 High; 2.61-3.40 Moderate; 1.81-2.60 Low; 1.0-1.80 Vey Low

Table 2 presents students' level of socialization. It shows an overall Mean of 3.53 with SD = 1.15, qualitatively described as High. This means that students are able to interact, communicate, and establish relationships with their peers through various social activities. According to Encollado et al. (2024), socialization is a key part of human growth that helps people interact, form bonds, and fit into society through activities in communities, schools, families, and now online gaming spaces.

The indicator 1, *Playing online games helps me enjoy with friends*, got the highest Mean of 3.84 with SD = 1.22, qualitatively described as High. This shows that students connect online gaming with enjoyment when spending time with friends. Enjoyable interactions help strengthen friendships and encourage active participation in social activities. These experiences also help students develop communication and cooperation skills. This supports Prochnow and Patterson (2024), who state that online gaming relationships can reduce loneliness and strengthen bonds through shared enjoyment with friends.

Moreover, indicator 3, *Playing online games allows me to participate in group activities*, got the lowest Mean of 3.43 with SD = 1.12, qualitatively described as High. This suggests that while students generally participate in group activities, this aspect of socialization may not be as strongly experienced compared to other indicators. According to Hughes & Nguyen (2024), online gaming offers inclusive environments for friendship development and social skills practice with less pressure, though over-reliance on online group play may limit real-world confidence and deeper participation.

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Problem 3. Is there a significant relationship between the level online gaming and students' socialization?

Table 3. Correlation Analysis Between Online Gaming and Students' Socialization

Online Gaming	r-value	p-value	Description	Decision	Qualitative Description
Frequency and Duration	0.617	0.000	Significant	Reject	Moderate Positive
Psychological Effects	0.672	0.000	Significant	Reject	Moderate Positive
Emotional Effects	0.780	0.000	Significant	Reject	High Positive

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows how online gaming is linked to students' socialization in terms of frequency and duration, psychological effects, and emotional effects. The frequency and duration of online gaming has an r-value of 0.617 and a p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected, and the degree of relationship is Moderate positive. This means that students who play online games often and for a long time have a high level of socialization. According to Sun et al. (2023), if it is too much, it may reduce the time of socializing in real life, yet in a balanced way, it still helps students maintain some kind of socialization with others. Simply put, playing online games a lot has a relation to how much students interact and hang out with friends and classmates.

The psychological dimension of online gaming shows an r-value of 0.672 and a p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, so Ho is rejected and the degree of relationship is Moderate positive. This tells us that how students feel inside when they play games is clearly linked to how they behave around others, but not in an extreme way. Mahalle & Zailani (2025) explained that when gaming is balanced, students feel more connected and more comfortable in their social life. When they play in a healthy way, they are more likely to share, talk, and feel part of a group. But if they start using games too much to escape problems, they may talk less and stay away from face-to-face meetings with friends.

The emotional aspects of online gaming have an r-value of 0.780 and a p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, Ho is rejected and the degree of relationship is High positive. This means that students' feelings during gaming are very closely linked to how they socialize. Hajizah et al. (2024) found that games can make students happy and proud, and these positive feelings help them bond with friends and talk about the games they play. On the other hand, feeling angry or upset when they lose can cause small fights or distance from others. Overall, how students feel while gaming strongly affects if they stay close to others or pull away.

Problem 4. Which of the dimensions of independent variable singly or in combination affects students' socialization?

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Between Online Gaming and Students Socialization

Online Gaming	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Coefficient Beta	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	0.740	0.138		5.370	0.000
Frequency Duration	0.133	0.056	0.130	2.397	0.017
Psychological Effects	0.110	0.607	0.105	1.650	0.100
Emotional Effects	0.605	0.060	0.610	10.000	0.000
		R=0.742	R ² =0.672	F=154.244	Sig=0.000

Dependent Variable: Students' Socialization

Predictors (Constant), Frequency/Duration, Psychological Effects, Emotional Effects

Table 4 provides a Multiple Linear Regression Analysis using online gaming variables and measures the relationships among participating students' social capacities. The regression model fit the data adequately ($F = 154.244$; $p = 0.000$) indicating significant differences in students' social characteristics due to online games when compared to the null hypothesis level of 0.05. Additionally, the coefficient of multiple determination ($R^2 = 0.672$) indicates that online game use can explain 67.2 % of the total variation in students' socializing characteristics. Therefore, the combined behaviors and characteristics of online gamers were very influential in establishing social relationships resulting in rejecting the null hypothesis. The findings of the current study are consistent with Encollado et al. (2024) in that online game environments give online gamers opportunities for socialization and forming interpersonal relationships among student gamers.

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Emotional components of online gaming have been identified as the primary predictor of students' socialization in this study ($\beta = 0.610$; $p = 0.000$), indicating that students who derive more positive emotions from their online gaming experience will also have a greater capacity to socially interact and develop relationships with one another (Zhao et al., 2021). In addition, frequency and amount of time playing online/console games were also significant predictors of a student's ability to socially interact and develop relationships with others through gaming ($\beta = 0.130$; $p = 0.017$). However, the effect of time spent gaming was less than that of emotional effects. Together, frequency, time spent, and emotional experience both affect how students socialize, with emotions being the strongest.

The findings indicate that frequency and duration use of gaming (or gaming for a long time) and the emotional effects of playing games (or feeling emotional about games) have both impacted socialization among students (and that when both are combined), but emotional impact is the stronger factor. In other words, gaming can provide some level of interaction, but the experience gained through gaming (the emotional experience) significantly impacts students' social behavior. This finding is backed by a study published by Widyorini & Primastuti (2023), which found that frequent gamer use of online games helps socially isolated students to build or maintain friendships in online spaces.

The psychological domain of gaming such as stress and mental health was not sufficiently predictive of socialization in the present study ($p = 0.100$). In other words, psychological variables alone do not provide a clear explanation of how students' social abilities might be affected by gaming. It has been suggested in some studies that online gaming is beneficial for creating positive mental health as long as students use moderation. On the other hand, excessive gaming leads to experiences of loneliness, anxiety, and disconnection from people (Mahalle & Zailani, 2025). Students who game only as a method of escaping will be avoiding genuine emotions and real friends which will inhibit their development socially.

Model

$$Y = 0.133X_1 + 0.605X_2 + 0.740$$

Where: 0.740 = Constant

Y = Students' Socialization

X_1 = Frequency/Duration

X_2 = Emotional Effects

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the following conclusions are formulated:

1. The students tried to balance/manage their gaming activities and their daily task especially their studies.
2. The students still have time to be with their friends and not solely concentrate on their online gaming activity.
3. Online gaming encourages socialization and expand their social circle.
4. Emotional effects and frequency and duration greatly influences socialization among the students.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings and conclusions, the following are hereby recommended:

1. The students may sustain in balancing/managing their online gaming activities so as not to distract or interrupt their other responsibilities especially their studies.
2. The students may continue to allocate/spend time to mingle with friends and not just enjoying the online gaming alone.
3. The students may do online gaming but in moderation so as not to disrupt the other daily responsibilities and their studies.
4. Students may be advised to manage their time properly and to be disciplined in their online gaming in order to strike a balance between their online gaming, study and social life.

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