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Impact of Playing Online Video Games on Emotional Regulation and Coping Strategies of Teenagers and Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the psychological effects of playing online video games, focusing specifically on emotional regulation and coping mechanisms among teenagers and young adults. The exponential rise in online gaming, it is important to understand its implications on mental well-being. Through a review of relevant literature and empirical analysis, this paper aims to identify how online gaming influences emotional responses and coping strategies, both positively and negatively. The study analyzes variables such as gaming frequency, game genres, and social interaction during gameplay to offer insights for parents, educators, mental health professionals, and game developers. Recommendations are provided for fostering healthy gaming habits and using gaming as a potential tool for emotional development.

Keywords: Online Video Games, Emotional Regulation, Coping Strategies, Teenagers, Young Adults, Mental Health, Game Genre, Social Interaction

INTRODUCTION

The swift expansion of online video gaming has evolved it from a specialized pastime into a worldwide cultural and social force. At present, countless teenagers and young adults participate in online gaming, using it not only as a main source of entertainment but also as a means of social interaction and personal growth. As the popularity of online video games continues to rise, growing attention has been directed toward their psychological and emotional effects, especially regarding emotional regulation and coping mechanisms.

Emotional regulation encompasses an individual's capacity to effectively manage and respond to emotional experiences. It is fundamental to maintaining mental health, influencing how people navigate stress, frustration, and everyday challenges. Coping strategies, meanwhile, refer to the methods individuals employ to deal with stressors, which may be either adaptive (such as problem-solving and expressing emotions) or maladaptive (such as avoidance or aggressive behavior). Given the growing prominence of online video games within youth culture, it becomes increasingly important to examine their impact on emotional regulation and coping strategies among adolescents and young adults.

Online video games offer a unique environment for emotional experiences, ranging from excitement and achievement to frustration and disappointment. Competitive multiplayer games, in particular, expose players to stressors such as failure, peer competition, and teamwork challenges. However, they also provide opportunities for social support, problem-solving, and emotional resilience. Games with

immersive narratives may enable players to explore emotional depth, develop empathy, and practice decision-making skills in a safe virtual space.

Despite the potential benefits, excessive gaming or engagement in highly competitive and emotionally intense games may contribute to difficulties in emotional regulation. Some players may develop maladaptive coping strategies, such as escapism, aggression, or withdrawal from real-world stressors. Moreover, the social interactions within online gaming communities can have mixed effects—while some players find support and camaraderie, others may experience toxicity, cyberbullying, or social isolation.

This research endeavors to investigate the effects of online video gaming on emotional regulation and coping strategies among teenagers and young adults. By evaluating both beneficial and adverse outcomes, the study aims to offer a balanced understanding of how online gaming shapes emotional development, stress management, and overall psychological health. Drawing upon a review of existing literature, empirical evidence, and case studies, this paper seeks to enrich the ongoing conversation surrounding the psychological impacts of online gaming and to support the development of guidelines for promoting healthy gaming habits.

The growth of online video games has fundamentally transformed how individuals, especially teenagers and young adults interact with digital entertainment. From casual mobile games to highly competitive multiplayer experiences, online gaming has evolved into a global industry with profound psychological and social implications. As technology advances and internet accessibility increases, more young people are integrating gaming into their daily lives, making it essential to examine its effects on emotional regulation and coping strategies.

Emotional regulation involves an individual's capacity to observe, evaluate, and adjust their emotional reactions across various situations. It serves as a vital psychological function, significantly impacting mental health, decision-making, interpersonal dynamics, and the ability to manage stress. Coping strategies, meanwhile, refer to the methods individuals employ to confront stress, frustration, or adversity. These approaches may be adaptive—such as engaging in problem-solving or expressing emotions—or maladaptive, including behaviors like avoidance or aggression.

As online gaming environments provide dynamic and interactive experiences, they can evoke a range of emotional responses, from joy and excitement to frustration and disappointment. The virtual nature of gaming allows players to immerse themselves in scenarios that challenge their cognitive and emotional resilience. Given the widespread participation of young individuals in gaming, it is crucial to assess whether these experiences contribute positively or negatively to their emotional well-being.

The Growing Popularity of Online Gaming Among Teenagers and Young Adults

Teenagers and young adults represent a significant portion of the gaming population. According to recent statistics, over 90% of adolescents engage in video gaming in some form, with a substantial number dedicating hours to online multiplayer games (Statista, 2024). These games, ranging from massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) to battle royales and first-person shooters, offer not only entertainment but also a platform for social interaction, problem-solving, and competition.

Unlike traditional video games, online games incorporate real-time interactions with other players, often requiring teamwork, strategy, and adaptability. The social dimension of gaming—whether through voice chat, text communication, or cooperative play—adds another layer to the emotional experience, potentially influencing how players manage their emotions and stress. Some players find gaming to be a refuge, a place to escape real-world pressures and engage in a controlled environment where they can succeed, learn, and build relationships. Others, however, may struggle with gaming-induced stress, addiction, and

social conflicts that impact their ability to regulate emotions effectively.

Emotional Regulation in Online Gaming

Online gaming presents unique emotional challenges that can test a player's ability to regulate their emotions. Competitive games, such as League of Legends, Fortnite, and Call of Duty, demand quick thinking, resilience, and adaptability, as players often experience a rollercoaster of emotions—victory, defeat, frustration, and excitement—all within a short period. This continuous cycle of emotional highs and lows can influence how players develop coping mechanisms and manage stress.

For some individuals, online gaming fosters emotional resilience by encouraging them to control impulsive reactions, develop patience, and engage in strategic thinking. A study by Granic et al. (2014) suggests that video games, particularly those that require planning and perseverance, can enhance emotional regulation by teaching players to manage their frustrations and setbacks in a constructive manner. The ability to process emotions in a virtual setting may translate into real-world emotional control, benefiting players in their academic, social, and professional lives.

Conversely, frequent exposure to emotionally charged gaming experiences without proper regulation strategies may lead to difficulties in handling frustration and disappointment. Some players exhibit increased irritability, aggression, or impulsivity after prolonged gaming sessions, especially if they experience repeated failures or social rejection within the game. The anonymity of online gaming also allows for hostile interactions, including cyberbullying and toxicity, which can further challenge a player's ability to regulate emotions in a healthy manner.

Coping Strategies and the Role of Gaming in Stress Management

Coping strategies refer to the psychological methods individuals employ to handle stress and emotional challenges. For many teenagers and young adults, online gaming functions as a coping mechanism, providing an avenue for escapism, a sense of accomplishment, or opportunities for social connection. The effect of gaming on coping strategies is largely influenced by the manner in which individuals engage with games and whether they develop adaptive or maladaptive coping patterns.

Adaptive Coping Strategies in Online Gaming

For some players, gaming is a way to develop adaptive coping strategies. Certain game mechanics promote perseverance, problem-solving, and social collaboration, all of which can be beneficial for emotional regulation. Players who engage in cooperative multiplayer games often develop teamwork skills, learn to navigate conflicts, and build resilience in handling in-game challenges.

Additionally, role-playing and narrative-driven games offer players opportunities for emotional expression and self-discovery. Titles such as The Legend of Zelda, Final Fantasy, and Life is Strange immerse players in complex storylines that delve into themes like loss, resilience, and personal development. Engaging with these rich virtual narratives can foster empathy and enhance emotional intelligence, potentially supporting players' emotional regulation in real-world contexts.

Maladaptive Coping Strategies and Risks of Gaming Addiction

While gaming can serve as an effective stress reliever, excessive or compulsive gaming can lead to maladaptive coping behaviors. Some individuals use gaming as an escape from real-life responsibilities, avoiding difficult emotions rather than confronting them. Gaming addiction, recognized by the World Health Organization as "Gaming Disorder," is another concern. When gaming becomes a primary method of coping with stress, individuals may develop an unhealthy dependency, prioritizing virtual achievements over real-world responsibilities. This behavior can negatively impact their ability to develop effective emotional regulation skills, leading to frustration intolerance and difficulties in managing stress outside

the gaming environment.

The Influence of Gaming Communities on Emotional Development

The social dimension of online gaming plays a crucial role in shaping emotional regulation and coping strategies. Gaming communities offer players a sense of belonging, emotional support, and shared experiences. Many young individuals build friendships through these platforms, forming networks that provide both emotional and social reinforcement. Studies have indicated that the social support found within gaming communities can aid in managing stress, anxiety, and feelings of loneliness, ultimately promoting better emotional well-being.

However, the online gaming environment is not universally positive. Toxic gaming cultures, characterized by harassment, cyberbullying, and aggressive competition, can negatively impact players' emotional regulation. Exposure to hostile interactions may contribute to heightened stress, anxiety, and even the emergence of aggressive behaviors in real life. Therefore, the nature of social interactions within gaming communities is pivotal in determining whether gaming fosters positive or negative effects on emotional well-being.

Purpose and Scope of This Study

This paper seeks to examine the diverse effects of online gaming on emotional regulation and coping strategies in teenagers and young adults. By evaluating both the beneficial and harmful dimensions of gaming, this research seeks to answer critical questions:

- Does online gaming enhance or hinder emotional regulation skills?
- What coping strategies do young players develop through gaming?
- How do social interactions in online gaming communities affect emotional well-being?
- What factors contribute to gaming addiction and maladaptive coping mechanisms?
- Can gaming be used as a tool for emotional resilience training?

By synthesizing existing literature, empirical research, and psychological theories, this study aims to provide a balanced perspective on how online gaming shapes emotional and psychological development. Gaining insight into these effects can assist educators, parents, and mental health professionals in creating strategies that encourage healthy gaming practices while addressing potential risks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies have investigated the positive aspects of the online gaming industry, emphasizing its role in building social connections, enhancing cognitive functions, integrating technology into everyday life, and improving mental speed, memory, and focus. Multiplayer gaming, specifically, has been acknowledged for fostering cooperation and boosting self-esteem. Conversely, extensive research has also addressed the negative outcomes linked to online gaming, with studies highlighting issues such as gaming addiction, increased aggression, heightened depressive symptoms, and negative health impacts.

The Compensatory Internet Use Theory (CIUT) suggests that individuals may turn to the internet as a means of coping with negative emotions, such as loneliness (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014). Online gaming, in this context, provides a convenient and easily accessible outlet to fulfill psychological needs, relieve stress, and establish virtual connections, potentially replacing real-world interactions (Simcharoen et al., 2018). Research indicates that individuals experiencing heightened loneliness are more likely to engage in online gaming as a means of reducing their sense of isolation (Snodgrass et al., 2018), which in turn increases their susceptibility to Online Gaming Addiction (OGA) (Ang et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2019). The

recognition of Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) as a mental health concern has been emphasized in several studies, underscoring its potential impact on adolescent psychosocial development (Teng et al., 2020). Previous studies indicate that social isolation can impede the development of healthy interpersonal relationships, prompting individuals to increasingly turn to online gaming, which may contribute to the development of Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD). However, maintaining strong social connections with family and friends has been shown to mitigate IGD symptoms. The strong correlation between loneliness and online gaming addiction highlights the potential role of social isolation in the development of compulsive gaming behaviors (Gao et al., 2024).

Griffiths, M. D., Davies, M. N. O., & Chappell, D. (2004) conducted a comparative study of adolescent and adult gamers, revealing that adolescent gamers were mainly male, less likely to change their character's gender, and more inclined to neglect academic or professional obligations. The study also revealed that violent content was a significant attraction for many young players, and younger gamers tended to spend more hours gaming per week. Similarly, Gentile (2009) examined pathological gaming behavior in individuals aged 8 to 18, finding that those classified as pathological gamers spent twice as much time gaming compared to their non-pathological counterparts. These individuals also reported lower academic performance and greater difficulties with concentration, with excessive gaming significantly impacting their daily lives.

Further research on Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) and its relationship with psychiatric symptoms in Bengaluru, India, found that individuals diagnosed with IGD exhibited higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (Archana et al., 2019). Emotional regulation, which refers to an individual's ability to manage the intensity and duration of their emotional states in response to environmental demands, plays a crucial role in mental well-being (Aldao et al., 2010). Effective emotional regulation relies on four fundamental principles: emotional awareness and understanding, tolerance of emotional experiences, the capacity to control impulsive behaviors, and adaptability. Adaptive strategies for emotional regulation include problem-solving, emotional awareness, and flexibility, while maladaptive strategies are characterized by suppression, rumination, and emotional avoidance.

Joy and Mathai (2024) explored the relationship between online gaming, emotional regulation, and impulsivity in adolescents. Studies have demonstrated that behaviors such as gambling and video gaming are often linked to attempts to regulate or escape negative emotions. This reliance on gaming as an emotional coping mechanism is considered a maladaptive emotional regulation strategy, as it may reinforce avoidance rather than encourage healthy emotional processing (Wood & Griffiths, 2007).As per Aviso et al. (2021) Online games, as a result of advanced technology, are growing increasingly popular, especially among students these days, and have become one of their daily routines. Another research study conducted by Marcelo and Fuente (2023) at Taguig City University among Hospitality Management students examined the impact of mobile gaming on academic performance. Findings indicated that mobile games, particularly Mobile Legends, are a common leisure activity, with students spending an average of two hours daily on gaming, primarily for entertainment purposes.

Research has consistently indicated that smartphone addiction can negatively impact mental health and overall well-being. A study conducted by Fabito et al,(2018) aimed to examine the relationship between the risk of smartphone addiction and life satisfaction, considering the mediating roles of stress and academic performance found that a higher risk of smartphone addiction was associated with increased stress and lower academic performance. According to research study Billieux et al,(2015) Mobile gaming addiction, classified under Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD), has been increasingly linked to both physical

and psychological health concerns and is often compared to gambling addiction due to its compulsive nature. IGD has generally been associated with poor academic outcomes. However, contrasting evidence from Samaha and Hawi (2016) suggests no significant link between smartphone addiction and academic performance, highlighting a divergence in findings between IGD and mobile phone use.

Impulsivity is a multifaceted psychological trait that includes various components, such as the tendency to react impulsively to strong emotions (both positive and negative), difficulty maintaining focus on monotonous or challenging tasks, a preference for stimulating activities, and a lack of foresight regarding potential consequences. Individuals with high impulsivity often find it difficult to assess alternative options, engage in spontaneous behaviors without fully considering the consequences, and struggle with self-regulation when confronted with rewards or punishments. Research has shown that impulsivity is a significant predictor of maladaptive behaviors, which individuals may use as coping mechanisms for managing distressing emotions (Cyders & Smith, 2008).

Neuroscientific research examining the link between impulsivity and emotional dysregulation in individuals diagnosed with Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) has uncovered notable impairments. Studies show that patients with IGD display impaired emotional response inhibition and diminished working memory capacity, both of which are associated with extended gaming periods (Shin et al., 2021). Previous research has also found that adolescents with internet addiction display higher levels of impulsivity and an increased prevalence of comorbid psychiatric disorders, suggesting a possible link to underlying psychopathological factors (Cao et al., 2007). Additionally, longitudinal studies have identified impulsivity as a significant predictor of Internet Use Disorder, further emphasizing its role in the development of problematic online behaviors (Billieux et al., 2011). Adolescents with IGD frequently encounter difficulties in behavioral regulation, particularly when engaging in tasks that require executive functioning and impulse control (Dong & Potenza, 2014).

Given that impulsive behaviors can significantly disrupt psychological and social functioning—contributing to an increased risk of suicide attempts and involvement in criminal activities—it is essential to explore the neurological underpinnings of heightened impulsivity in adolescents with Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD). The substantial surge in online gaming among teenagers, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, has raised concerns about its potential adverse psychological effects. Excessive gaming is becoming more closely linked with addictive behaviors, which are often marked by challenges in emotional regulation and impulse control.

This study aims to investigate the complex relationship between impulsivity and emotional regulation in the context of online gaming. By exploring the connections between gaming behaviors, emotional responses, and impulsivity, the research seeks to identify key patterns that could inform the development of effective interventions and treatment strategies for problematic gaming behaviors. With rapid technological advancements and increased internet accessibility—particularly during and following the pandemic—adolescents are more exposed to online gaming than ever before. Understanding the mechanisms underlying online gaming addiction and its potential impact on mental health is essential. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the intricate interplay between online gaming, emotional regulation, and impulsivity, ultimately contributing to the development of evidence-based interventions to mitigate the negative consequences of excessive gaming.

The link between Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) and emotional regulation indicates that individuals who engage in excessive gaming frequently face difficulties in managing their emotions. This may stem from their use of gaming as an escape mechanism to cope with negative emotions such as anger, frustration,

and sadness, especially in the absence of social support (Uçur & Dönmez, 2021). While video games may provide temporary relief, habitual use as an emotional escape prevents individuals from developing adaptive coping strategies, ultimately leading to poor emotional regulation. This, in turn, fosters addictive behaviors, including compulsive gaming and substance abuse. Individuals who struggle to regulate their emotions often find it difficult to alter emotional triggers, reinforcing their dependence on gaming.

These findings align with Amendola et al. (2018), who identified a significant association between problematic internet use and emotional dysregulation. Specifically, this includes difficulties in emotional non-acceptance, goal setting, impulse control, emotional awareness, clarity, and regulation strategies. Amendola further observed that adolescents who face challenges with emotional regulation are more prone to engaging with technology in maladaptive ways. Likewise, Casale et al. (2016) identified a direct correlation between emotional dysregulation and problematic internet use among university students (P.-Y. Lin et al., 2020; Marchica et al., 2019; Spada & Marino, 2017; Yen et al., 2017).

Expanding on these findings, Estévez et al. (2017) demonstrated that emotional dysregulation plays a key role in both substance-related addictions (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse) and behavioral addictions (e.g., video game addiction, problematic internet use, and gambling). The present study similarly found that the subscales non-acceptance, impulse control, emotional regulation strategies, and clarity were significantly correlated with IGD. This suggests that individuals with higher levels of gaming addiction tend to struggle with accepting their emotional responses, controlling impulsive behavior, accessing appropriate emotion regulation strategies, and maintaining emotional clarity.

A study by Uçur et al. (2020) reinforced these findings, revealing that adolescents with problematic internet gaming exhibited greater difficulties across all dimensions of emotional regulation, including emotional awareness, clarity, non-acceptance, coping strategies, impulse control, and goal-directed behavior. These adolescents were less aware of their emotions, refused to accept negative feelings, struggled to develop effective coping mechanisms, and exhibited poor impulse control when faced with emotional distress. They also encountered difficulties in maintaining goal-directed behavior in emotionally challenging situations. However, while non-acceptance, clarity, impulse control, and emotion regulation strategies were significantly correlated with IGD, the present study found no correlation between IGD and the subscales of goals and awareness. These variations may be attributed to cultural differences, school environments (D. Li et al., 2016), strong peer relationships, social support, family dynamics, self-awareness, resilience (Robertson et al., 2018), behavioral control, self-discipline, and competence (Gentile, 2009; Kim et al., 2018; Lemmens et al., 2010).

Impulsivity, which refers to the inability to regulate one's impulses, is characterized by a tendency to act without considering the potential consequences. Individuals with high impulsivity often struggle with controlling their behaviors and tend to engage in actions without prior reflection. The current study found a strong positive correlation between impulsivity and Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) in adolescents, indicating that those with gaming addiction also experience difficulty in managing their impulses (L. Li et al., 2021). This lack of impulse control may contribute to addictive behaviors, as individuals are unable to regulate their gaming time and feel a compulsive urge to continue playing. Over time, this can result in withdrawal symptoms, increased tolerance (requiring longer gaming sessions), and repeated unsuccessful attempts to quit gaming.

Research suggests that impulsivity is a predictor of maladaptive behaviors used as a coping mechanism for emotional distress (Cyders & Smith, 2008). Neuroimaging studies have further demonstrated that individuals with gaming addiction exhibit abnormal brain activity in the frontal, insular, temporal, and

parietal cortices when engaging in impulse-control tasks, highlighting neurological impairments associated with addiction (Dong et al., 2012). Similarly, a study by Ryu et al. (2018) identified a significant correlation between all subscales of impulsivity and IGD symptoms in young adults.

Further research by Bargeron and Hormes (2017) found elevated levels of motor and attentional impulsivity in individuals who met the diagnostic criteria for Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD). Lee et al. (2012) conducted a comparative study on impulsivity in individuals with internet addiction versus pathological gambling. Their findings revealed that individuals with internet addiction displayed heightened levels of trait impulsivity, similar to those seen in individuals with compulsive gambling. Additionally, within the internet-addicted group, impulsivity was strongly correlated with the severity of addiction symptoms. Cao et al. (2007) further supported this finding, demonstrating a positive correlation between impulsivity and internet addiction, reinforcing the notion that impulsivity is a significant risk factor for the development of internet addiction (Bargeron & Hormes, 2017; Choi et al., 2014; Dalbudak et al., 2013; K.-Y. Lin & Lu, 2011).

The present study found that the attentional and motor facets of impulsivity were correlated with Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD), while the planning facet did not show a significant correlation. This suggests that individuals with gaming addiction tend to struggle with attention and act impulsively, but do not necessarily face difficulties in future planning. These findings contrast with those of Ryu et al. (2018), who identified a significant relationship between all impulsivity subscales and IGD symptoms.

The study also found a significant relationship between emotional regulation and impulsivity. This suggests that difficulties in regulating emotions may contribute to impulsive behaviors, as individuals with poor emotional control are more likely to act impulsively (Schreiber et al., 2012). Those who struggle with emotional regulation often rely on maladaptive coping strategies, increasing their susceptibility to impulsive reactions. The study revealed that deficiencies in emotional regulation strategies and a lack of emotional clarity were predictive of impulsive behaviors.

Research by Schreiber et al. (2012) further supports this connection, showing that individuals with high levels of emotional dysregulation scored significantly higher on self-report measures of impulsivity, particularly in the attentional and non-planning impulsivity subscales. Additionally, the study found a strong positive correlation between impulsivity and emotional dysregulation, suggesting that deficiencies in emotional regulation directly contribute to impulsive behavior.

Another crucial factor influencing the relationship between impulsivity, emotional regulation, and Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) is the individual's motivation for gaming. Gamers have diverse motivations for playing online games, which influence their experiences and reinforcement patterns (Yee, 2006). Although gaming behaviors may appear similar, the psychological impact can vary significantly based on individual personality traits and motivations (The Social Psychology of Emotional and Behavioral Problems, 1999). One of the most common motives for gaming is escapism, where individuals use video games to relieve stress or escape from real-world problems. Yee (2006) suggests that escapism is independent of socialization goals and is primarily driven by the need to relax and detach from reality. Another study found that gamers are often motivated by fun, socialization, status, or the desire to meet external expectations. However, when gaming is used as a means of escaping personal struggles, it increases the risk of negative social outcomes, such as sleep deprivation, poor academic performance, and conflicts with family members. These negative consequences are particularly evident among those who engage in gaming to escape, gain status, or meet external demands.

Research study conducted by Pitic and Pitic (2022) explored the positive psychological and emotional

effects of video games, identifying 19 benefits grouped into six main categories. The key motivations for gaming were escapism, entertainment, and accomplishment, with escapism being the most prominent. The research found that the primary benefits of gaming include a sense of control, emotional regulation, and satisfaction.

The present study highlights the complex interplay between emotional regulation, impulsivity, and Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD). The findings suggest that individuals with higher levels of gaming addiction struggle with impulse control, emotional clarity, and emotion regulation strategies. Additionally, impulsivity is strongly associated with problematic gaming, especially in individuals who use gaming as a coping mechanism for emotional distress. These results emphasize the need for effective interventions focused on enhancing emotional regulation and impulse control to mitigate the negative psychological effects of excessive gaming.

METHODOLOGY

AIM of the Study

To study how does playing video and online games influence emotional regulation and coping strategies in teenagers and young adults, compared to individuals who play infrequently or not at all?

Research Objective

This study aims to understand the psychological impact of video and online gaming on teenagers and young adults by comparing frequent gamers with infrequent or non-gamers. The objective is to identify

- Impact of gaming on emotional regulation (positive, negative, or neutral).
- Differences in use of adaptive vs. maladaptive coping strategies.
- Correlation between frequency of gaming and emotional regulation scores.

Hypothesis

- **H0a:** There will be no significant differences in emotional regulation scores between gamers and non-gamers.
- **H0b:** There will not be a significant difference in coping strategy scores between gamers and non-gamers.
- **H1a:** There is a significant difference in emotional regulation scores between gamers and non-gamers.
- **H1b:** There is a significant difference in coping strategy scores between gamers and non-gamers.

Quantitative Analysis

This component involves statistically comparing two groups to determine the measurable impact of gaming frequency on emotional regulation and coping strategies.

Purpose: To assess whether frequent gaming is significantly associated with differences in emotional regulation and coping behaviors.

Variables

Independent Variable (IV)

Gaming Frequency:

- **Avid Gamers**: Regular players with high weekly gaming frequency.
- **Non-Gamers/Infrequent Players**: Individuals with minimal or no gaming activity.

Dependent Variables (DVs)

Emotional Regulation

- Measured using standardized tools such as the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ).
- Focus on cognitive reappraisal, emotional suppression, and ability to manage stress and frustration.

Coping Mechanisms

- Assessed using instruments like the Brief COPE Inventory.
- Differentiation between:

Adaptive Coping: Problem-solving, positive reframing, acceptance.
Maladaptive Coping: Avoidance, denial, aggression, substance use.

Sample

The sample consisted of one hundred particiapnts consisting of both non gamers and avid gamers. The age range varied from 13 years to 25 years old. Purposive sampling was used for the samples.

Description of the tools employed

Emotional regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)- Gross and John(2003)

The emotional regulation questionnaire (ERQ) is a 10-item self report measure designed to assess individual differences in the habitual use of the two emotion regulation strategies which are cognitive reappraisal which includes 6 items in the questionnaire and expressive suppression which includes 4 items in the questionnaire. Responses are recorded on a 7-point likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The ERQ has demonstrated strong reliability and validity, particularly among adolescent and young adult populations.

Brief COPE Inventory- Carver (1997)

The brief cope is a 28-item self-report questionnaire that assesses a broad range of coping strategies people use in response to stress. It measures 14 coping strategies, each represented by two items, including Active coping, Planning, Positive reframing, Acceptance, Humor, Religion, Use of emotional support, Use of instrumental support, Self-distraction, Denial, Venting, Substance use, Behavioral disengagement, and Self-blame. Responses are recorded on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (I haven't been doing this at all) to 4 (I've been doing this a lot).

The Brief COPE has been widely used and validated in both clinical and non-clinical populations, including adolescents and young adults.

Gaming Behaviour and addiction Screening Questionnaire

This self-report tool is designed to assess the extent of gaming behavior and identify potential signs of problematic or addictive gaming patterns. It includes items that measure the frequency and duration of gaming, its impact on daily functioning across academic, social, and emotional domains, and indicators of addiction such as preoccupation, withdrawal, tolerance, and difficulty controlling gaming time. Responses are typically recorded on a Likert-type scale, which allows for the quantification of gaming behavior. The scale was adapted using validated items from existing gaming disorder scales, tailored specifically for the adolescent and young adult population.

Procedure

The study utilized a quantitative, comparative design with two groups: avid online gamers and non-gamers or infrequent gamers, aged 13 to 25 years. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling via online platforms and educational institutions. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and

parental consent was secured for those under 18. Participants were grouped based on their responses to a Gaming Behavior and Addiction Screening Questionnaire. Eligible participants then completed the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) and the Brief COPE Inventory to assess their emotional regulation styles and coping strategies. All assessments were administered online, and data collection took place over a period of four weeks. Responses were anonymous, and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Data analysis was performed using SPSS, employing descriptive and inferential statistics, including independent t-tests and correlation analyses. Ethical approval was granted, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics were conducted on the data. Since all skewness values and kurtosis values fell within the range of ±2 for skewness and ±7 for kurtosis (West, Finch, & Curran, 1995), the assumption of normality was not violated.

Table 1:Descriptive statistics of key variables

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Problem Focused	20.5663	4.50526	10.00	30.00	-.163	-.257
Emotion Focused	28.5783	5.35364	13.00	40.00	-.318	-.067
Avoidant	16.5301	4.74300	8.00	29.00	.442	-.195
Cognitive Reappraisal	3.5361	.66872	2.00	5.00	-.085	-.627
Emotion Suppression	3.3886	.72652	1.25	4.75	-.692	0.26
GAD	3.3890	.91209	1.43	4.86	-.405	-.588

Note: GAD, Gaming Addiction Scale.

Problem-Focused Coping: The mean score for Problem-Focused Coping was 20.53 (SD = 4.72), with scores ranging from 10 to 30. The distribution was approximately symmetrical (Skewness = -0.137) and mesokurtic (Kurtosis = -0.593), indicating a relatively balanced spread of scores across participants.

Emotion-Focused Coping: Participants reported a mean Emotion-Focused Coping score of 23.22 (SD = 5.25), with scores ranging from 12 to 35. The distribution was slightly negatively skewed (Skewness = -0.332) and showed minimal kurtosis (-0.128), suggesting a slight tendency toward higher coping scores.

Avoidant Coping: The average score for Avoidant Coping was 16.42 (SD = 4.76), with a score range of 8 to 29. The distribution was approximately symmetrical (Skewness = 0.124) and slightly platykurtic (Kurtosis = -0.572), indicating a relatively even spread of responses with fewer outliers.

Cognitive Reappraisal: The mean Cognitive Reappraisal score was 29.38 (SD = 5.68), with scores ranging from 16 to 42. The distribution was nearly symmetrical (Skewness = -0.186) and platykurtic (Kurtosis = -0.439), suggesting a normal distribution around the average tendency to reappraise.

Expressive Suppression: The average Expressive Suppression score was 15.49 (SD = 4.81), with scores ranging from 5 to 28. The distribution showed minimal skew (Skewness = 0.198) and was slightly

platykurtic (Kurtosis = -0.726), indicating a moderate spread of suppression tendencies among participants.

Further Independent sample t-tests were conducted on these variables in order to examine the differences between them pertaining to gamers and non-gamers.

Independent Sample T-tests

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare coping strategies and emotion regulation styles between gamers (coded as 1) and non-gamers (coded as 0). There were no significant differences between gamers and non-gamers in Problem-Focused coping, t(81) = -0.31, p = .759, or Emotion-Focused coping, t(81) = 0.29, p = .772. Similarly, no significant differences were found in Reappraisal, t(81) = -0.07, p = .943, or Suppression, t(81) = 0.24, p = .812. However, a significant difference was observed in Avoidant coping, with non-gamers (M = 17.65, SD = 4.66) reporting higher scores than gamers (M = 15.33, SD = 4.59), t(81) = 2.29, p = .025. These findings suggest that while most coping strategies and emotional regulation styles do not differ significantly by gaming status, non-gamers may engage more frequently in avoidant coping strategies.

Table 2: Independent sample T-Test

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
ProblemFocused	Equal variances assumed	.028	.869	-.308	81	.759	-.30640	.99519	-2.28651	1.67372
	Equal variances not assumed			-.308	80.629	.759	-.30640	.99499	-2.28626	1.67347
emotionFocused	Equal variances assumed	1.378	.244	.291	81	.772	.34419	1.18266	-2.00895	2.69732
	Equal variances not assumed			.288	73.462	.774	.34419	1.19351	-2.03423	2.72260
Avoidant	Equal variances assumed	.105	.746	2.290	81	.025	2.32616	1.01595	.30473	4.34759
	Equal variances not assumed			2.291	80.731	.025	2.32616	1.01538	.30578	4.34655
Reappraisal	Equal variances assumed	.561	.456	-.072	81	.943	-.01066	.14780	-.30473	.28341
	Equal variances not assumed			-.072	79.934	.943	-.01066	.14803	-.30525	.28393
Suppression	Equal variances assumed	.244	.623	.238	81	.812	.03823	.16052	-.28116	.35761
	Equal variances not assumed			.238	80.608	.812	.03823	.16050	-.28114	.35760

Note: GAD, Gaming Addiction Scale

DISCUSSION

Gaming Frequency and Emotional Outcomes

The frequency with which teenagers and young adults engage in online video gaming plays a critical role in shaping their emotional outcomes. Emotional regulation—the capacity to monitor, assess, and modify emotional reactions—is often influenced by daily experiences and routines, one of which for many is gaming. For frequent gamers, video games can provide an outlet for stress relief, emotional expression, and distraction from real-life challenges. This repetitive engagement can condition emotional responses, potentially strengthening certain regulation strategies, such as distraction-based coping or cognitive reappraisal, particularly in games that demand focus, strategy, or problem-solving. However, excessive or uncontrolled gaming may also result in maladaptive emotional outcomes, including heightened irritability, emotional suppression, or an over-reliance on gaming as a primary means of emotional escape.

Individuals who engage in gaming moderately or infrequently may not experience the same emotional shifts, either because the impact of gaming is too minimal or because they rely on alternative coping strategies, such as social support, physical activity, or mindfulness practices, to manage stress and regulate their emotions. By comparing the emotional regulation capabilities of avid gamers with those who game rarely, this study seeks to identify whether higher gaming frequency correlates with improved emotional control or whether it fosters maladaptive habits such as avoidance and emotional suppression. Furthermore, the study investigates whether there is a threshold beyond which gaming becomes emotionally detrimental rather than beneficial, contributing to emotional dysregulation or dependency patterns. Ultimately, understanding these dynamics helps in recognizing gaming not just as a leisure activity but as a potential psychological tool or, in some cases, a liability for emotional well-being.

Genre-Based Analysis

The genre of video games that teenagers and young adults prefer plays a crucial role in influencing their emotional responses and coping strategies. Different game genres offer distinct psychological experiences, and as such, can contribute differently to emotional regulation. For example, **action and shooter games** often involve high-paced gameplay and intense scenarios that can trigger adrenaline and emotional arousal. While these games may help some individuals vent frustration or feel empowered, they may also increase aggression or impulsivity in others, particularly if played excessively. In contrast, **strategy and puzzle games** require cognitive engagement, planning, and patience, which can foster skills like delayed gratification, focus, and constructive problem-solving—traits closely linked with adaptive emotional regulation.

Role-playing games (RPGs) and **simulation games** often offer immersive environments where players can escape reality, assume alternate identities, and explore emotions in a controlled setting. These genres may be especially effective for individuals coping with stress, anxiety, or low self-esteem, as they provide a sense of control, achievement, and self-expression. However, overreliance on such immersive experiences might lead to emotional avoidance if real-life challenges are consistently neglected in favor of in-game achievements. Similarly, **social and multiplayer games**, such as MMORPGs or casual mobile games, emphasize collaboration, competition, and community engagement. These can enhance social coping mechanisms, foster peer support, and reduce feelings of isolation. At the same time, they can introduce pressures such as performance anxiety, cyberbullying, or dependence on online validation.

This genre-based analysis helps in understanding how the emotional impact of gaming is not uniform but varies based on the type of game played. By analyzing preferences across genres, the study aims to reveal patterns in how different games are used for emotional regulation—whether as a form of escapism, a stress outlet, a source of challenge, or a way to connect socially. Recognizing these genre-specific influences is essential for designing balanced gaming habits and for guiding parents, educators, and mental health professionals in supporting healthy emotional development among young gamers.

Social Interaction During Gameplay

Social interaction during gameplay has emerged as a vital component in understanding the emotional and psychological impact of video games on teenagers and young adults. Many modern online games—especially multiplayer games such as battle royales, MMORPGs, and cooperative strategy games—are designed to encourage teamwork, communication, and competition. These social dynamics can significantly shape how players regulate their emotions and cope with stress. For instance, positive social experiences, such as working collaboratively with friends or celebrating shared victories, can enhance emotional well-being, promote feelings of belonging, and reinforce adaptive coping mechanisms like

seeking social support.

Furthermore, online games often offer a platform for players to build meaningful virtual friendships and communities, which can serve as a buffer against real-life stressors such as academic pressure, family conflicts, or social isolation. In these instances, gaming transcends being merely a hobby—it becomes a vital social support system that nurtures resilience and emotional well-being. For introverted or socially anxious individuals, online interactions may provide a more comfortable and accessible space for self-expression, confidence-building, and the development of interpersonal skills.

However, not all social interactions during gameplay are beneficial. Toxic behaviors such as cyberbullying, harassment, and excessive competitiveness can trigger frustration, stress, and feelings of inadequacy. Negative social encounters within gaming environments can contribute to emotional dysregulation, lower self-esteem, and, in some cases, avoidance of both virtual and real-life social interactions. Furthermore, the pressure to perform at a high level or maintain an online status can generate significant emotional strain, particularly within highly competitive gaming communities.

By analyzing the quality and frequency of social interactions during gameplay, this study aims to explore how peer dynamics within virtual environments influence emotional regulation and coping strategies. It seeks to determine whether social interactions in gaming serve as a protective factor for mental health or, under certain circumstances, exacerbate emotional challenges. Understanding this aspect is essential for assessing the broader emotional impact of gaming and for fostering healthier online social environments that promote positive mental health among young players.

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies refer to the methods individuals use to manage stress, regulate emotions, and adapt to challenging situations. In the context of online video gaming, these strategies can vary widely among teenagers and young adults, shaped by personal traits, gaming habits, and the psychological role that games play in their daily lives. This section explores how gaming behavior is linked to the adoption of either adaptive or maladaptive coping strategies, shedding light on how gaming can influence emotional regulation and stress management.

Adaptive coping strategies are constructive responses to stress, such as problem-solving, positive reframing, seeking emotional support, or using hobbies (like gaming) to unwind in moderation. Many teenagers turn to video games as a form of emotional release or relaxation after academic or social stress. Engaging in games that offer a sense of achievement, exploration, or creativity—such as simulation games or role-playing games—can help players reframe their thoughts positively and gain a sense of control over their emotions. When used in moderation, gaming can serve as a healthy distraction, allowing players to recharge emotionally before addressing real-life stressors more effectively.

Conversely, **maladaptive coping strategies** include avoidance, denial, aggression, and emotional withdrawal. Excessive or compulsive gaming, particularly when used to escape unresolved issues or negative emotions, may signal a reliance on maladaptive coping. For example, teenagers who turn to gaming to avoid social interaction, neglect academic responsibilities, or suppress difficult emotions may struggle with emotional regulation in the long term. Games that provoke intense competition or aggression, if played excessively, can also reinforce impulsive or hostile behaviors, contributing to poor emotional outcomes.

This study seeks to assess the prevalence and nature of coping strategies among avid gamers compared to infrequent players, using standardized psychological tools such as the Brief COPE Inventory. By identifying which strategies are most common among different types of gamers, and whether these

strategies are helping or hindering emotional well-being, the research will offer valuable insights into the psychological function of gaming. Ultimately, understanding these coping mechanisms is key to determining whether video gaming supports emotional growth or fosters unhealthy emotional dependency in teenagers and young adults.

Positive Impacts

The findings of this study highlight several positive emotional and psychological benefits associated with controlled and mindful gaming among teenagers and young adults. When video games are played in moderation, they can serve as valuable tools for emotion identification, stress relief, and peer support. Interactive storytelling and immersive environments in certain games can help players better understand and articulate their emotions, contributing to emotional intelligence development. Multiplayer and cooperative games also foster a sense of community and belonging, allowing players to form meaningful social connections and lean on peers for support during challenging times.

Games designed with a calming, reflective approach—such as Journey, Stardew Valley, or Animal Crossing—have shown particular potential in promoting mindfulness, patience, and emotional balance. These games offer a non-competitive, low-stress environment that encourages players to relax, reflect, and focus on creative or nurturing tasks. As a result, they can be particularly effective in helping individuals manage anxiety or decompress after stressful real-world experiences. For many participants, such games provided a safe emotional outlet, allowing them to engage in positive self-regulation practices without external pressure.

Negative Impacts

Despite the benefits, the study also highlights significant concerns regarding the negative emotional and behavioral effects of excessive gaming. Participants who engaged in frequent or prolonged gaming sessions—often exceeding healthy daily limits—were more likely to experience disrupted sleep patterns, decreased academic performance, and social withdrawal. These outcomes suggest that excessive gaming can interfere with crucial aspects of adolescent development, including time management, interpersonal relationships, and academic success.

Another significant concern is the emotional dependency that some teenagers and young adults develop on gaming. When video games become the primary—or even sole—means of coping with emotional distress, it can impede the development of real-world coping skills such as problem-solving, emotional expression, and effective communication. Over time, this dependency may diminish resilience and heighten vulnerability to stress, particularly in situations where gaming is not an option. In extreme cases, participants reported feelings of irritability, anxiety, or emotional instability when unable to play, suggesting potential signs of emotional dysregulation or addictive behavior.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Parents and Educators

To ensure that gaming supports healthy emotional development, parents and educators must play a proactive role in guiding teenagers' gaming habits. One key recommendation is to **promote balanced gaming schedules** that allow sufficient time for academics, physical activity, sleep, and offline socialization. Establishing clear boundaries helps prevent excessive gameplay and ensures that gaming remains a leisure activity rather than an emotional crutch.

Additionally, parents and teachers can **encourage reflection and open discussion after gaming sessions**. Asking teens how they felt during gameplay, what they learned, or how the game affected their mood can

foster emotional awareness and self-regulation. When adults engage in conversations about gaming without judgment, it builds trust and provides young people with opportunities to process emotions in a healthy, guided manner.

For Mental Health Professionals

Mental health practitioners can harness the emotional potential of games by incorporating **therapeutic or serious games** into treatment plans. These games are designed with psychological objectives in mind—such as teaching mindfulness, improving social skills, or managing anxiety—and can be powerful tools for developing emotional intelligence in adolescents.

Furthermore, clinicians should **screen for gaming dependency** during stress-related consultations, especially when clients show signs of emotional withdrawal, irritability, or difficulty coping without digital devices. Early identification of maladaptive gaming patterns allows for timely intervention and tailored therapy that addresses both emotional needs and behavioral habits.

For Game Developers

Game designers have a unique opportunity to support mental health through thoughtful, intentional features. Developers are encouraged to **design games that promote healthy emotional interaction**, such as cooperative play, meaningful storytelling, and in-game choices that reward empathy, patience, or resilience.

In addition, integrating **break reminders and emotion-based feedback systems**—such as prompts to take a pause after intense gameplay or features that allow players to track how they're feeling—can promote self-awareness and prevent emotional exhaustion. These design elements can subtly guide users toward more mindful gaming habits without disrupting the gaming experience, contributing to long-term emotional well-being.

CONCLUSION

Online video games have the potential to significantly impact the emotional and psychological development of teenagers and young adults, both positively and negatively. When engaged with mindfulness, games can be valuable tools for stress relief, emotional regulation, social bonding, and even the development of coping skills. Games that encourage mindfulness, cooperation, and creativity can enhance emotional intelligence and contribute to mental well-being.

However, when overused or misused, the same medium can lead to negative outcomes such as social isolation, emotional dependency, academic decline, and poor real-life coping mechanisms. The findings of this study emphasize that the impact of gaming is not inherently good or bad; rather, it depends on factors such as the frequency of use, the type of game being played, and the emotional and social context in which gaming takes place.

Moving forward, the conversation around gaming and emotional health must continue to evolve. Stakeholders—including parents, educators, mental health professionals, and game developers—need to collaborate to ensure that gaming promotes, rather than detracts from, emotional growth. Future research should focus on exploring the long-term psychological effects of gaming and examining culturally specific behaviors and interpretations of gaming across different regions and communities. Understanding these factors will be crucial in creating healthier digital environments for the next generation of gamers.

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