# Conditions leading to addiction and avoidance of massively multiplayer online role playing games (*MMORPGs*) among game addicts

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## ABSTRACT

Interviews with 23 massively multiplayer online role-playing games (*MMORPG*s) addicts revealed that they were addicted to the games because they lacked worthwhile activities, *MMORPGs* offer online game features and deep online experience, they were interested in technological trends and gained personal satisfaction from playing *MMORPGs*, and due to their exposure to the game through the mass media, peers and relatives. Respondents said that playing *MMORPGs* is advantageous because it recreational entertaining; enhances interaction and socialization among peers and new acquaintances; promotes knowledge and improves players' computer skills; neutralizes mood and relieves stress; serves as an escape from problems; improves self-confidence and develops self-expression; enhances trading skills and provides business opportunities; improves English communication skills; provides bragging rights among gamers; and it provides deeper online experience. However, *MMORPGs* are disadvantageous because they negatively affect gamers' health, academic performance and analytical skills, relationship with peers, friends and family; these games expose them to deceit, distrust, cheating and sham; leads to financial setback; and develops negative personality among players.

Respondents said that they quit playing due to the monotony and software flaws of the *MMORPGs* and the games' financial, time and health effects. Other reasons cited

were their diversion of their attention to other activities and influence of people they consider significant to them. To quit playing, respondents re-oriented their priorities, diverted their attention, sought guidance from significant others, and set themselves to quit the game. When they quit *MMORPGs*, they felt that they were able to improve management of their finances, became mature, and improved their academic performance, family and peer relationship, and health conditions.

## INTRODUCTION

As the media environment changes, questions arise about people's construction of new media in their daily lives. New media is the interconnection of mediated communication technology with digital computers. The advancements of new media have led to the rising popularity of online or Internet games. These games refer to virtual games in which players interact and compete over the Internet (Chang *et al*., 2006). Among the popular computer online games, the massively multiplayer online role-playing games (*MMORPGs*) are an established yet growing genre of games that are immensely popular. *MMORPGs* are new games that are purposefully designed to encourage interactions among players. Ducheneaut and Moore (2004) affirmed that hundreds of players now interact daily through *MMORPG* chat channels which allow for communication across distances within a game server. They explained that playing computer games is not a solitary activity but more of a social experience. Furthermore, due to the convergence of virtual worlds, games, social networking, and rich Internet applications, these online games have become popular in gamers' immersive experience.

In the Philippines, the popularity of online games has influenced many game adopters (Toral, 2007). Existing data show that 75 percent of young Filipino Internet users are online gamers. Based on data, *RAN online*, *Ragnarok*, *Audition* and *Wardraft DOTA* are the most popular *MMORPGs*.

Researchers reported that online games have negative effects on the gamers. Data indicate that kids who play violent video games showed an increase in emotional arousal- and a corresponding decrease in activity in brain areas involving self-control, inhibition and attention. Putnam (2000) opined that the time spent with relatively passive and disengaging media has sacrificed people's quality time spent for vital community-building activities. This is not to mention the fact that online gamers,

especially children and adolescents, spend an excessive amount of time playing online games and consequently give up important real life activities (Ming and Wei, 2006).

Over the last years, a number of studies on *MMORPG*s have been conducted. However, to date, there is a limited qualitative research that provides richer perspectives on the use of these online games. According to Given (2008), qualitative research aims to explore the human elements of a given topic, while specific qualitative methods examine how individuals see and experience the world. Qualitative approaches are typically used to explore new phenomena and to capture individuals' thoughts, feelings, or interpretations of meaning and process. Qualitative research also takes an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

In the Philippines, there are reports on *MMORPRGs* addiction. However, only a few studies have been conducted on the issue. Moreover, no study was able to present a visual model that explains the conditions leading to addiction and avoidance of *MMORPGs* gamers. Aiming to fill this gap in the research-based literature, this qualitative study generated a theory grounded on data from the field, especially in the actions, interactions and social process of *MMORPG* addicts.

## METHODS

### *Participants, setting and research design*

This qualitative study was conducted in the cities of Ormoc and Baybay. In these cities, *MMORPG* addicts have been reported. This study followed the grounded theory approach, a qualitative research approach first articulated by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967).

### *Entry into the field*

When prospective participants were contacted, the purpose and the scope of the study were reviewed and an appointment was made for an in-depth interview. The informed consent for human subject was discussed

Table 1. Typology of *MMORPGs* addiction among respondents

| Typology | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Preoccupation | Persistent thoughts of the activity or performance of the activity. |
| Tolerance | Need for increased time spent on the activity to achieve satisfaction or diminished reward for the same amount of time spent on the activity. |
| Loss of control | Inability to control, stop or diminish the behavior. |
| Withdrawal | Restlessness or irritability when prevented from partaking in the activity. |
| Continuance despite adverse consequences | Lying to friends or family about extent of involvement with activity; committing illegal acts to sustain activity; refreshing on others to finance activity. |

in detail at the beginning of the interview. Likewise, the respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the information they would provide. After the participants signed the informed consent, the in-depth interview commenced. It was recorded using the analog tape recorder. .

## Informants and sampling procedure

Informants were determined using the snowballing sampling technique. Since this study required *MMORPG* addicts as respondents, the first step for recruiting informants was to ascertain his/her addiction to *MMORPGs*. *MMORPG* players qualified as respondents when they showed symptoms of impulse control disorder in Table 1.

## Data gathering and analysis

This study used unstructured in-depth interviews to collect the data. Data were recorded using an analog tape recorder, transcribed verbatim and were encoded in written documents. Data consisted of an 8-hour and 45 minute audio recording, at most 40 minutes per informant. The

grounded theory analysis suggested and explained by Strauss and Corbin (1998) was applied in the analysis of data. .

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Participants' profile*

Results showed that about two-fourths (73.91%) of the respondents belonged to the young age bracket. More than a fourth (26.09%), middle aged. With regard to their place of origin, more than half (52.17%) were residing at Baybay, Leyte and almost one-half (47.83%), at Ormoc City, Leyte. Only one (4.35%) was married. The rest were single (95.65%).

Regarding their educational background, three fifths (60.87%) were on college level and more than one-fifth (21.74%) were in the high school. Only four respondents graduated from college. Most of them (73.91%) played online and offline games for 1-5 years. Nearly one-fourth (21.74%) played for 6-10 years. One respondent reported that he played online and offline games for 20 years. Online was the most played (12.04%) game. *Flyff* followed (8.33%) and an offline game *Counterstrike* (8.33%). Least played games were *Dark Eden* (0.93%), *Khan* (0.93%), *Lineage* (0.93%), *Mage Fight* (0.93%), *Hero* (0.93%), *Tibia* (0.93%), *Oz World* (0.93%), and *Monster and Me* (0.93%).

*Conditions leading to addiction and avoidance of MMORPGs*

This study generated a grounded theory model showing the conditions leading to addiction and avoidance of *MMORPGs* among game addicts (Fig. 1). Analysis of the data revealed various causal conditions leading to addiction, the consequences of playing *MMORPGs*, reasons for avoiding *MMORPGs*, strategies used to avoid *MMORPGs* and consequences of avoidance.

*Causal conditions*

Analysis of the informants' accounts showed four conditions that led to *MMORPGs* addiction (Table 2). Among these conditions is the lack of worthwhile activities. This is best exemplified by the case of

**Causal Conditions of Addiction**

- Lack of worthwhile activities
- Online game features and the deep online experience *MMORPGs* offer
- Gamers' interest in technological trends and personal satisfaction
- Exposure to the game through the mass media, peers and relatives

Addiction to **MMORPGs**

**Causal Consequences of Playing *MMORPGs***

**POSITIVE**
- A source of income
- Sense of accomplishment
- Stress reliever
- Improves knowledge and communication skills

**NEGATIVE**
- Affects human health
- Poor academic performance
- Affects relationship among peers, friends and family
- Exposure to negative traits (e.g. deceit, distrust, cheating and sham)

**Reasons for stopping addiction**

- *MMORPGs'* monotonous characteristics and game software defects
- Financial, time and health effects
- Diverted attention and influenced by significant others

**Strategies for stopping**

- Re-orienting priorities
- Diverting attention
- Seeking guidance from significant others
- Self-determination to quit

**Consequences of stopping addiction**

- Improvement in financial management
- Maturity in dealing with things
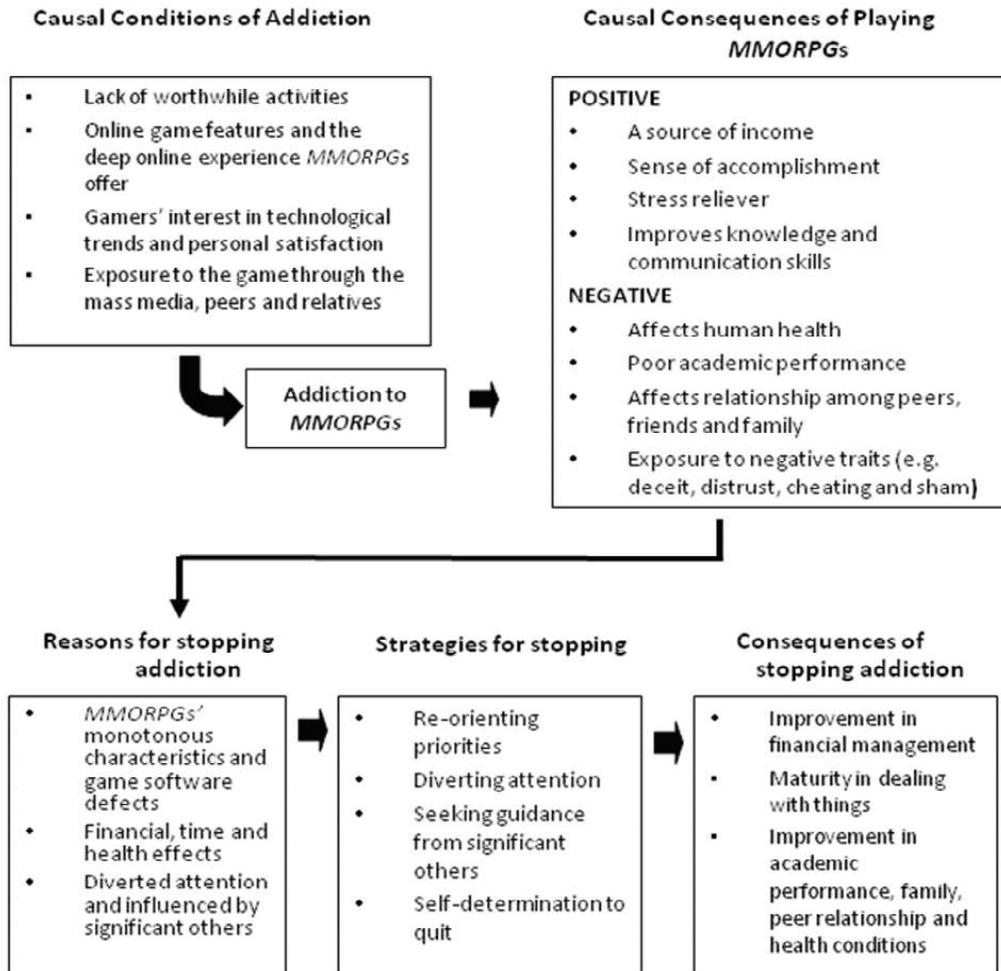- Improvement in academic performance, family, peer relationship and health conditions

Fig. 1. Theoretical model of the addiction and avoidance of *MMORPGs* among game addicts

Table 2. Conditions leading to *MMORPGs* addiction reported by respondents

| Conditions leading to addiction | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Lack of worthwhile activities | When players have minimal or less things to do, they tend to play these online games. |
| Online game features and the deep online experience | *MMORPG*s offer Gamers are attracted to features like game competition, graphics, visual effects, buy and sell features, trading and dealing. Interaction and the deep online experience in the game heighten their interest. |
| Gamers' interest in technological trends and personal satisfaction | Gamers like to be updated with the new trends so as not to be outdated. The bragging and authoritative rights enable them players to feel personal satisfaction. They can also praise themselves whenever they have a superior character in the online game. |
| Game adopters' exposure to game through mass media, peers and relatives | Gamers have started online gaming since they had exposure into it when they were still young. TV advertisements, friends and relatives also enticed them to play. |

"Ralphzody's" (not real name) who said that he started to get hooked to online games when he had few things to do.

Informants revealed that they were attracted to features like game competition, graphics, visual effects, buy and sell features, trading and dealing. This is best exemplified by the case of "Sevenknives" (not real name) who believed that playing the computer is more interesting than doing other things. The stories in online games drew him more to play, and the trade features hooked him to the games. Some of the game characters with higher levels and sophisticated items can be sold, so this persuaded him to spend more time playing.

Interaction and other features that contribute to higher online experience also led game addicts to be hooked to *MMORPGs*. An example is the case of David who played *MMORPGs* for four years. He explained

that in online games, they get the chance to interact with many people, chat with them and be entertained, and establish new friendships.

Promotional items like discounted game cards and online game rates attracted potential game adopters. Interaction and deep online experience in the game heightened their interest. This feature diverted gamers' attention, thus letting them escape from their problems. Through the game, players learned how to strategize to outdo their opponents in the game. All these encouraged them to repeat the gaming experience.

Another condition is the excitement and recreation that playing *MMORPGs* contributes. A case in point is that of Julie who played games for 8½ years. According to her, she was encouraged to play because of the excitement she feels whenever she plays the game, especially that chat channels are available in the game. She confided that she feels like she is out of this world every time she plays the game.

*MMORPGs* can divert gamers' attention from real life problems. A good example is the case of "Ralphzody" (not real name) who played games for almost 20 years. He revealed that most gamers are imaginative and that their imagination lies with the game play. According to him, all people have artistic talents and some like to divert their attention. There are times that they do not feel thinking most especially when they encounter real life problems.

Wing, who played *MMORPGs* for almost four years, stressed that her interests in artifacts, gods and goddesses drove her to play the game. She said that she is amazed by these artifacts. "Renz" (not real name), on the other hand, indicated that he did not want to be outdated with the new and advanced technological trends, so he played and got hooked with the game.

Gamers also emphasized that peers and close friends also influenced them to play online games. Marlon, who got hooked to *MMORPGs* for four years, reported that his close friend persuaded him to go with him and play at Internet cafes. He also said that whenever he plays, his friend would pay for him.

Media exposure was another factor that led some gamers to play *MMORPGs* and be hooked to it. "Kenji" (not real name) who had been addicted with online games for one-and-a-half years said that TV commercials introduced him to the game. He was attracted when he

glanced at the sophisticated game features. Moreover, the Internet attendants encouraged youngsters, including him, to play in their computer shop. When the Internet Café has many players, the higher was its income.

Most of the gamers started playing games since they were young. "Renz" (not real name) experienced playing Ninetendo and Playstation since he was still a grader. This was the main reason why he got hooked to online games. When computer games existed he diverted his attention to these games from the conventional Playstation game he played before.

## Perceived positive effects of playing MMORPGs

Data showed that *MMORPGs* addicts have experienced positive effects of online game playing. The thematic analysis revealed ten themes of these effects (Table 3).

**Theme 1: Playing *MMORPGs* is recreational and entertaining.** Online gamers said that *MMORPGs* playing is recreational and entertaining. This idea is contained in the following phrases, for fun, pleasure, past time [France, line 45], *lingaw mi bahala'g napildi* (we're entertained even if we lose) [Renz, line 22], *di ko kapuyon inig duwa* (I don't feel tired while playing) [Renz, line 41], *lingaw ka* (you'll be entertained) [Job, line 32], *enjoyment sa duwa ba* (the joy of playing) [Nonoy, line 20], *di siya kaayo hago* (It's not strenuous) [David, line 38], and *dili mi laayan sa amo time* (we don't get bored) [Didz, line 18]. The quotes below explain why online gamers consider the *MMORPGs* as recreational interesting:

> *"Kay ang advantage lingaw. Mao ra tingale na. Murag ibutang nato nga stress reliever pud to. Kay mura'g ibutang nato kanang, so mao na lingaw ka magkinatawa ka."* (It entertains and relieves stress. That's why you are entertained and you keep on laughing while playing.) [Job, lines 40-42]

**Theme 2: Playing *MMORPGs* enhances interaction and socialization among peers and new acquaintances.** Respondents indicated that online game playing enhances interaction and socialization among peers and new acquaintances. This theme is rooted from the

Table 3. Perceived positive effect of playing *MMORPGs*

| Positive Effect | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Playing *MMORPGs* is recreational and entertaining | Playing MMORPGs entertains and provides them with a pleasurable experience. |
| Playing MMORPGs enhances interaction and socialization among peers and new acquaintances | Interaction among online and offline game friends grew deeper by playing *MMORPGs*. Socialization with old friends and new acquaintances widened due to such game features as online chatting and game guilds. |
| Playing *MMORPGs* promotes knowledge and improves players' computer skills | In *MMORPGs,* chatting is used to connect with other online gamers. This enables them to improve their typing speed and computer skills. Gamers learn topics on Chemistry, Religion, chivalrism. |
| Playing *MMORPGs* neutralizes mood and relieves stress | When they play *MMORPGs,* gamers' mood is neutralized and their stress relieved. |
| Playing *MMORPGs* serves as an escape from problems | *MMORPGs* lessen worries in "real life" problems. Mind is focused on the game, thus letting them to escape from their problems. |
| Playing *MMORPGs* improves self-confidence and develops self-expression | *MMORPGs* game play enables gamers to develop their self-expression. Playing maximizes the chances of knowing their real identities. Socialization during the game improves their confidence to deal with other gamers. |

phrases *magka-jam mi kanang magduwa* (we can jam while playing) [Renz, lines 18-19], meet new friends [Gilbert, line 10], *makig-socialize* (socialize with other players) [Kenji, lines 14-17], *mag fellowship* (have fellowship with other players) [Wing, lines 13-18], *imung circle of friends mabag-o na* (you will have a new circle of friends) [Sevenknives, lines 38-42], *more friends through chatting* [Colai, lines 20-21] and *magka-chat jud ka actually* (you can chat) [Job, lines 5-7]. The following quote explains the theme that *MMORPGs* playing enhances interaction and socialization:

Table 3. Continued...

| Positive Effect | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Playing *MMORPG*s enhances trading skills and provides them income | *MMORPG*s involve the use of characters that can be sold during auctions and trading. Other gamers found the game an avenue for earning money. Game characters acquiring big levels are often sold to other gamers. |
| Playing *MMORPG*s improves English communication skills | *MMORPGs* quests and other features let the gamers search for new English phrases and words. This enables them to learn new things while playing. Moreover, since online chatting could be internationally based, gamers are required to communicate with each other gamers in English. This, therefore, improves heir English communication skills. |
| Playing *MMORPGs* provides bragging rights among gamers | Bragging rights are the prerogative of the gamer to praise himself for his superior traits. Gamers often brag for the high character level they have achieved, making them feel that they are above other gamers. |
| Playing *MMORPGs* provides deeper online experience | Interaction among other gamers in *MMORPGs* exposes them to deeper online experience. |

*"Ang positive sad kay daghan kog ma-meet. Like naa man mi guild sa Tantra. Ang among Raja, which is bali kanang leader leader sa guild. Kay kuan kanang ang members sa akong guild kay magtapok tapok panagsa. Naay taga Davao, Palawan. Kung maglaag og Cebu, "Ali kay kuan basta ing-ana. Mag fellowship. Mao jud toy pinaka-active nako nga days."* (The positive effect is that I get to know more friends like what I had in the Tantra guild. We have a guild and sometimes we get together with our Raja, our leader, and other members. Members come from Davao, Palawan and if we go to Cebu, they invite us.) [Wing, lines 13-18]

**Theme 3: Playing *MMORPGs* promotes knowledge and improves players' computer skills**. This emerged from the phrases knowledge in the computer, typing [Kenji, lines 39-42], *maka-know ka sa technology* (you will know about technology) [David, lines 33-35], *daghang mahibaw-an* (you'll learn many things) [Elgin, lines 24-25], and *makakuha kag mga knowledge* (acquire knowledge) [Zare, lines 49-9]. Online gamers' perceived effects are based on the testimonials below:

*"Naa man sad uban nga positive. Syempre mas kuan ka, mas maka-know ka sa technology…Murag maka-advance ka sa uban nga mga most technology nga pagduwa. Mga virtual gaming."* (There are also positive effects. Of course, you will know more about technology…You'll get advanced skills in technology like virtual gaming.) [David, lines 33-35]

**Theme 4: Playing *MMORPGs* neutralizes mood and relieves stress.** Some of the online gamers reported that playing *MMORPGs* neutralizes mood and relieves stress. This meaning is in the phrases *i-neutralize akong mood* (neutralizes my mood) [Ralphzody, lines 10-16], and *ma-relieve ako stress* (relieves my stress) [Ralphzody, lines 37-42]:

*"Bisag Finals kay magduwa ko. Pagkahuman ana kay naa na ko sa mood mag-study. It's my way nga i-neutralize akong mood. Kuntahay na-pressure ko, murag na-bad trip ko sa school. Ah magduwa ko, kung magduwa man ko dili ko magduwa og one hour."* (I play even during the final examinations and, after that, I feel like studying. It's my way of setting my mood. For instance, if I'm pressured and I'm in a bad trip, I will just play. But when I play it will not take me an hour. My mind is set on the task.) [Ralphzody, lines 10-16].

**Theme 5: Playing *MMORPGs* serves as an escape from problems.** Online gamers' conception that playing *MMORPGs* serves as an escape from problems are evident in these phrases, *ma-wise gyud* (so you become wise) [Sevenknives, lines 34-41] and *dili ko mag-worry* (I will not worry) [Ralphzody, lines 7-13]:

*"Maka-ingun ko nga advantage gyud kay kuan. Pag mag-face ko og mga prolems. Real problems. Kay murag ma-feel nako nga murag ako mind kay murag naa ra ko sa RPGs ba. Dili ko mag-worry, dili ko madismaya. Then ang uban, kuntahay muabot ang time nga murag rainy days, human madismaya lang. Ang uban gani kay mag-suicidal. Ako pag muabot ako time nga ing-ana nga murag sa uban kay murag kuan na ba end of the world na sa ila. Pag muabot gani na sa ako, ang muabot sa ako mind kay RPG ra. Ako mind nga ma-set ba siya, nga murag naa ra ko sa RPG."* (I can say that it is advantageous. When I have problems, I feel like my mind set is focused on *RPGs.* I will not worry and feel dismayed unlike those who feel dismayed when "rainy days" come and others even commit suicide. If others think that it's the end of the world when problems come, for me, I just think of RPGs. My mind will be set like I am existing in *RPGs.*) [Ralphzody, lines 7-13]

**Theme 6: Playing *MMORPGs* improves self-confidence and develops self-expression.** According to the respondents, playing MMORPGs improves self-confidence and develops self-expression. This can be gleaned from the following phrases: *ma-express ako self* (express myself) [Ralphzody, lines 27-28], *know your real identity* [Ralphzody, lines 31-32], *gigawas akong kalagot* (release my anger) [Homer, lines 34-37], and *ni-improve bitaw ang kanang imung self-confidence* (self-confidence was improved) [Zare, lines 43-44]. The following lines support this theme:

*"Unya usa pa ka positive, kanang makuan sad ka mahibaw-an nimu kung unsa gyud ka. Kay sa online man gud mabuhat man gud nimu bisag unsa. Ang uban magmura ba ka ug tawo, ing-ana ba ka nga type. Pero kuan , mao lagi kung mao nay imu inner you ba, pwede na nimu mabuhat sa online kay anyway wa may makahibaw."* (Another positive effect is that you will really know who you are because in online you can do everything. Others may malign other people. But if that's the inner you, you can do that because anyway no one will know. ) [Sevenknives, lines 46-6]

**Theme 7: Playing *MMORPGs* enhances trading skills and provides income.** This theme was conceptualized based on the phrases, *murag merchant* (merchant like) [Job, lines 11-14], usually trading skills [Job, lines 12-15], *conversing kanang during deals* (conversing during deals) [Franz, lines 39-41], *uban makakwarta* (others can get money) [Homer, lines 7-9], and *ibaligya ra pud nimu in peso* (you can sell it in peso) [Nonoy, lines 39-41]:

*"Ang mahalin siguro nako kay 1.5 to 2 times akong magasto. Kay once nga mag-boot ko ang ako characters mamunit og mga items then i-convert og mga money then ibaligya ra pud nimu in peso."* (I could actually earn 1.5 to 2 times the money I've spent. Because once I boot, my characters pick items then it will be converted into money and sell it in peso.) [Nonoy, lines 39-41]

**Theme 8: Playing *MMORPGs* improves English communication skills.** Another theme that surfaced was on learning from the online games, such as the English communication skills. This can be gleaned from responses: *mapractice kag English* (you can practice English) [Job, lines 28-29] and *magbasa ka* (you read) [Homer, lines 36-40]:

*"Diba ang uban naa may quest, magbasa ka ana. Then makasabot ka. Unya naa kay word nga wa mahibaw-an. Akong pangitaon dayon sa Google. Makaingun ko nga ang game educational."* (There are quests in which you get to read. Then you will understand phrases that you are not familiar with. I search it immediately in Google so I can say that the game is educational.) [Homer, lines 36-40]

**Theme 9: Playing *MMORPGs* provides bragging rights among gamers.** Another interesting result is the theme that *MMORPGs* playing provides bragging rights. Bragging rights, according to the Urban Dictionary (2009), is the prerogative to praise oneself for possessing a superior characteristic among gamers. In this case, the *MMORPG* gamer acquires this authority because of the higher character level attained than those others having low characters obtained. This conception is entrenched in the phrases *proud gamay* (proud a little) [Homer, line 13] and *more on bragging rights* [Franz, lines 45-3]:

*"Sa klaro pa nga storya mamugas jud ko. Basta murag more on bragging rights ang akoa ba."* (Apparently, I really strive to compete and outdo other [online] gamers just for the bragging rights.) [Franz, lines 45-3]

**Theme 10: *MMORPGs* provides deeper online experience.** Online gamers consider the game play as a deeper online experience. This theme is rooted from the phrases, *higher pa nga experience* Nonoy, lines 18-21] and *maka-teach nimu og kuan sa life* (can teach something about life) [Nonoy, lines 24-29].

*"Kay diha ka, maka-teach nimu og kuan sa life. Kay example sa kanang scam. Naay uban nga wa pa kaagi og mga, diha ko first naka-experience og ma-scam ka. Example papaliton ka og items, then ang worth sa imung napalit kay dili diay kuan, murag dako kaayo imung nagasto ana nga item. Diha nimu makit-an ang positive side og negative side pud. Nailad ka, ma-hack ka. Hackon imung account."* (You will be taught lessons in life. For example, I've experienced to be scammed. You will be traded with items not based on its exact amount and you have spent more than that. You can view the positive side and negative side of it. You are shammed, hacked. Your account will be hacked.) [Nonoy, lines 24-29]

*Perceived negative effects of playing MMORPGs*

Based on the responses gathered from the *MMORPGs* addicts, there are negative effects of playing *MMORPGs* (Table 4). Through a systematic analysis, these responses were categorized into themes.

**Theme 1: Playing *MMORPGs* affects health.** These perceived negative effects were divided into three subthemes. Subtheme 1a is that playing *MMORPGs* contributes negative health effects. This conception is indicative of some of the phrases such as *musakit akong mata* (my eyes aches) [Renz, lines 40-44], *na-admit man ko* (I was admitted) [Renz, lines 10-11], *masakiton ko sa una* (I was sickly before [when I played MMORPGs heavily]) [Kenji, lines 39-44], *na-hospital* (hospitalized) [David, line 17], and *nadaot* (damaged) [Loverboy, lines 13-14]:

Table 4. Perceived negative effects of playing *MMORPGs*

| Negative Effects | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Playing *MMORPG*s affects human health. | Playing *MMORPGs* affect human health. v |
| a. Playing *MMORPG*s contributes negative health effects. | Game addicts reported ulcers, eye irritation, weak immune system and headaches as effects of *MMORPG*s playing. |
| b. Playing *MMORPG*s alters food/eating and sleeping habits. | Time spent in online game playing exceeded more than the times spent for other worthwhile activities. |
| c. Playing *MMORPG*s contributes second-hand illness. | Playing *MMORPGs* contributed to occurrence of diseases like dengue fever. |
| Playing *MMORPG*s affects academic performance. | Some gamers did not attend classes, others have lost their scholarship due to poor academic performance. |
| Playing *MMORPGs* affects relationship among peers, friends and family. | Friends and family relationships were affected due to excessive online game playing as gamers were unable to spend quality time with family, friends and peers. |
| Playing *MMORPG*s exposes gamers to deceit, distrust, cheating and sham. | *MMORPGs* exposed gamers to deceit, distrust, cheating and sham. |
| Playing *MMORPG*s contributes financial setback. | Money for food is spent for playing *MMORPGs.* |
| Playing *MMORPG*s develops their negative personality. | Exposure to trash talk and more bragging and authoritative rights. |

*"Human inig ang negative, murag kadugayan musakit akong mata. Kanang musakit akong mata mamuwa, mudako akong eyebags sa sigeg duwa. Human sakit ang tiyan kanang gutom kay kanang dugay ko muoli."* (The negative effect is that my eyes had irritation. My eyes ached, inflamed, and my eye bugs grew bigger because of playing. Since I go home late, my stomach ached when hungry.) [Renz, lines 40-44]Subtheme 1b is Playing *MMORPGs* alters eating and sleeping habits. According to the online gamers, *MMORPGs* alter food, eating and sleeping habits. This theme is entrenched from the following phrases: *maka-disturbo* (disturbance) [Kenji, lines 31-36], *dili gyud ko kakaon* (I can no longer eat) [Eleazar, lines 40-42], *kwarta ako lang iduwa* (spend money for playing) [Homer, lines 10-17], *tulog way tarong* (lack of sleep) [Ivan, lines 15-17], and *way kaon-kaon* (missing meals) [Elgin, line 1]. The following quotes are well emphasized in the testimonials given by some of the respondents:

*"Unya, usa pa ka negative effect maka-disturbo siya sa imung food habits, paniudto murag makuan na lang nimu ba. Din a nimu maatiman imung pagkaon kay malingaw naman kag sigeg kuan kay mukaon pa ka basig nay mupuli unya mukuan na lang ko, muhuwat na lang kog pila ka-hours."* (Another negative effect is on the alteration in your food habits. You can no longer give time for eating because you get entertained. And when you eat, perhaps someone will occupy your seat in the café so I would have to wait for many hours before I could play.) [Kenji, lines 31-36]

Subtheme 1c is *MMORPGs* playing contributes second-hand illness. This is based on the report of the respondents that online gaming causes second-hand illness such as dengue:

*"Ambot kay kadtong nasakit ko ato. Unsa man to actually dengue. Na-confine ko'g kanang two weeks sa hospital, murag one month na ko hapit na-absent. Mao to ning-stop ko'g one sem, then hapit naman to midterm then gi-advisan ko nga magleave of absence ra. Pero wa naman pud ko ganahi adto nga kurso. Ang ila ingun at okay nakuha to nako ing-ana kay usahay after, dengue diba dengue carrying mosquito kay morning*

*man na mugawas. Basta ingun sila nga, maka-feel pud ko nga way proteksyon ang Internet café pud ba. Close man na kay aircon pero ang ila ato, i-open nila inig kaadlawon inig close ang mga lamok naa ra sa ilalum. Inig kabuntag nay mga manuwa sa ilang café nay mga lamok. Ambot kung mao ba to, pero man to ang reason tingale."* (I was confined in the hospital for about two weeks due to dengue fever. I got absent from school for about a month, so I decided to stop schooling for one semester. It was almost midterm that I was advised to file a leave of absence. However, I didn't like the course. My parents told me that I got the dengue fever because the dengue-carrying mosquito went out in morning and the Internet café. The café was closed because it was airconditioned. However, at dawn, the aircon was switched off to save on electricity. So, they opened the café. When they closed the door, mosquitoes stayed under the computer units. There were players in day. There were mosquitoes, too. Although I'm not sure if that's really the cause of my dengue fever, I tend to believe it was.) [Franz, lines 26-35]

**Theme 2: Playing *MMORPGs* affects academic performance and decreases analytical skills.** *MMORPGs* affected online gamers' academic performance and analytical skills were affected by *MMORPGs*. This conception is embedded in the phrases *cramming* [Wing, lines 9-10], *di na gyud ka musod* (you no longer attend) [Sevenknives, lines 33-34], *nag-cutting class* (cutting class) [Colai, lines 31-32], *subject ron gi-drop* (dropped subject now) [Homer, lines 11-12], *academic* [Ivan, lines 10-12], and *capability to analyze* [Ralphzody, lines 45-1]. These meanings are embedded in the quotes below:

*"Sa una, kuan ko College scholar ato ko sa una. Pero kadtong na-addict na ko, academic A na lang ko. Free tuition na lang."* (I had a college scholarship but when I got addicted I became an academic A scholar. In this scholarship, I enjoyed free tuition fee only. Unlike in my previous scholarship that I enjoyed free tuition fee, book allowance of P200, a monthly stipend of P300.) [Kenji, lines 26-28]

*"Usahay di na gyud ka musod. Musud ra ka og buntag human pagkahapon ana. Mao nay side effect."* (Sometimes, you no longer attend

classes or attend the morning classes only. That's the side effect.) [Sevenknives, lines 33-34]

**Theme 3: Playing *MMORPG*s affects relationship among peers, friends and family.** Gamers reported that their relationship with peers, friends and family are also affected by playing *MMORPGs*. This theme is obvious following phrases:  *Murag others na* [Gilbert, lines 15-16], *Relationship* [Kenji, lines 1-6], *mag-tell lies ka* [Kenji, lines 1-6], and *maigo ang imung family*  (family relationship is affected) [Homer, lines 7-9]. The quote embodies this meaning:

*"Relationship. Usahay siyempre ay mukuan gud ka kung magpagabi-i ka, magpabuntagay. Ang-ang isulti nimo, "Ma mukuan ko, di sa ko muoli karun kay magduwa ko". Siyempre magkuan ka, mag-tell lies ka usahay nga, "Ma naa mi ngari group project." Nakabuhat ko ana."* (Regarding relationship, sometimes you stay outside late at night. Don't tell me that you will tell me that you tell your mother honestly ("Ma I can't go home yet because I will play online games.") *Of course, you will lie* ("Ma we are doing a group project.") I've done that.) [Kenji, lines 1-6]

**Theme 4: Playing *MMORPG*s exposes gamers to deceit, distrust, cheating and sham.** This conception is rooted from the phrases *di naman ka mu-trust* (you no longer trust) [Sevenknives, lines 38-39], *mailad* (cheated) [Homer, lines 36-37], and *mangawat, mangilad* (steal, to cheat) [Nonoy, lines 32-40]. The following testimonial verifies this theme:

*"Na-experience na nako tanan. Maka-experience kag mangawat, mangilad. Daghang mangilad sa kuan, magbaligya. Example nag-vend ang isa ka kuan, ka yang kanang magvend kay blacksmith man og kanang merchant. Magvend sila og ang ilang style is example ang usa ka item 9 million. Extrahan nila og usa ka digit ba. Dili nimu mabantayan kay labi na kung nagdali-dali ka og palit. Naa to extra digit diay ang kuan. Imbis nga 9 million, 90 million na. Pagpalit nimu wan a ka kabantay nga kuan. Murag ing-ana pud ba. Daghang mga kuan, maghuwam og kwarta tapos*

*dili iuli. Murag ing-ana ba, ma-experience gud nimu didto."* (You can experience stealing, cheating. These are common in online games. Example, someone vends those blacksmith and merchant. Most of their styles are to add an extra digit to the amount so you can hardly recognize since you are in a hurry to purchase. Example was in a 9 million-item where the extra digit was added so it became 90 million. Another experience is when someone borrows money from you and it is not returned.) [Nonoy, lines 32-40]

**Theme 5: Playing *MMORPGs* contributes financial setback.** Online gamers consider *MMORPGs* as a contributor to financial setbacks. This meaning is couched in the phrases *Di na makapalit* (you cannot buy) [Jereme, lines 6-7], *Usik kaayo* (it's a waste) [Eleazar, lines 21-22], and *value money* [Marlon, lines 35-36]. The following responses verify this meaning:

*"Mas dako ang negative. Mahutdan na og allowance. Di na makapalit sa imung gusto kay gihatag nimu sa computer."* (It has more negative effects, including using up your allowance. You can no longer buy something you want because you allot it to computer games.) [Jereme, lines 6-7]

*"Unya usahay mahutdan og bawon, wa nay pamilite."* (Sometimes, my allowances are spent for playing; there's nothing left anymore for my fare.) [Loverboy, line 30]

**Theme 6: Playing *MMORPGs* develops their negative personality.** Online gamers regarded *MMORPGs* playing as developing negative traits in them. Most of these relate to trash talking, boastfulness and negative behaviors:

*"Ang positive is supposed to be positive at a certain level lang diba. So na-boast gamay akong self-esteem kay ako ra jud usa ngadto. Then ganahan pud ko mailado ba. Nailado ko pero nasobrahan ra pud. Na-develop ang ako character nga hambugiro."* (The effect is positive, to some extent.  My self-esteem was boosted. I loved playing because I became popular.  However, I also became so boastful.) [Franz, lines 6-9].

Table 4. Reasons for stopping *MMORPG*s addiction

| Reasons for Avoiding *MMORPGs* | Description |
| --- | --- |
| *MMORPGs'* monotonous characteristics and game software flaws | For a long time that gamers have been playing, they felt that the games are monotonous and boring. Others quit playing because of disappointments over the software. |
| Financial, time and health effects | Online gamers realized that the time and money spent for playing were time and money wasted. Playing was already draining their pockets, so they decided to minimize, if not quit from playing. Fear of health hazards, such as eye irritation, stomach aches, ulcers, hand ailments and others also deter the gamers to continue their gaming activity. |
| Diverted attention and influenced by significant others | Parents, family and friends advised gamers to stop playing *MMORPGs.* One game addict decided to stop after hearing a message from a pastor. Gamers also found an alternative way to spend their time on more productive activities, thus make them avoid playing *MMORPGs.* |

## *Reasons for avoiding MMORPGs*

Informants in this study have quit playing *MMORPGs* for a number of reasons (Table 4). One reason is the *MMORPGs'* monotony game software flaws. Gamers found out that *MMORPGs* are already monotonous and boring. The case story of "Sevenknives" (not real name) explains this boredom. His main reason for quitting the games is that he found them boring for the many years he allotted for playing. He came to realize the bad effects of the online game.

The case of "Loverboy" (not real name) also highlighted some factors leading to avoidance of *MMORPGs* addiction. For five years, he was addicted to the games called, *Conquer, Guns, War rock, MU, Flyff* and

*Ragnarok.* On many occasions, he did not anymore attend classes and spent the money allotted for food. His friends encouraged him to play these games to the point that they were already indulging in game gambling. Worst was when he failed from all the subjects during his freshman year in high school, a reason why it took him almost six years to finish high school. He stopped the games in 2007 when one online game vanished at an instant. He invested much for his game character and its disapperance disappointed him so much. He was irritated by that experience so he tried to avoid any online games and focus his attention on his studies.

Another factor that led gamers to avoid addiction was their realization of the games' financial, time and health effects. "Didz" (not real name), who had been addicted with *Ragnarok, MU* and *Flyff* for four years admitted that he was unable to focus his on his studies due to his game addiction. He considered gaming as the main factor why failed to complete his 4-year Animal Science degree on time (it took him 6 years to finish his degree). Last year (2008), he stopped playing online games and diverted to offline games. He realized that online games are endless and can be accessed anytime he wants to. "Renz" (not real name) devoted five years playing *MMORPGs* and he considered himself addicted with the games. According to him, he spent 3-10 hours playing *MMORPGs*. According to him, he was already lying to his mother regarding school payments and cellphone loads. He asked money from his mother and lied that he paid it for school contributions. He said that excessive game playing caused eye irritation and stomach aches and had been admitted to the hospital due to ulcers. He failed his subjects because of his persistent use of online games. Considering these, he decided to stop playing online games. He feared that his ulcers would recur and be admitted in the hospital again.

There were cases where a gamer just realized the need to avoid *MMORPGs* addiction. An example is the case story of Julie who played online and offline games for almost eight-and-a-half years. She did not recognize the addiction until people around noticed. Her friends her as online game addict. told her that her online gaming was already an addiction. Whenever she was deprived to play the games, she felt

Table 5. Strategies for avoiding *MMORPGs* addiction

| Strategies | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Re-ordering of priorities | Gamers created timetables for activities and made it sure that each activity is achieved on time. They also indulged in activities that provided them with extra income. Instead of paying for games, gamers put their money for food. |
| Diverting attention | Gamers diverted their attention from gaming to other more relevant activities.   They spent more time to worthwhile activities, e.g. sports, Bible study, school activities, personal development. |
| Seeking guidance from significant others | Advice and guidance from other people played a big role in stopping some gamers' activities. |
| Self-determination to quit | Reflecting on the negative consequences of his/her gaming activity, the gamer started to realize whether or not gaming is beneficial. To avoid the temptation, gamers stayed away from Internet cafes offering *MMORPGs*. |

disappointed. She decided to stop in an instant when a gospel message delivered by a pastor struck her conscience so much.

## *Strategies for stopping MMORPGs addiction*

Considering these reasons or conditions leading to avoidance *MMORPGs*, four strategies emerged based on the gamers' responses. These strategies included re-ordering of priorities,  diverting attention, seeking guidance from significant others, and  self-determination to quit (Table 5).

"Kenji" (not real name) liked level up games that hooked him to the games. As a strategy to avoid *MMORPGs* addiction, he forced himself to do things that he really wanted: buying T-shirts, foods and other personal items. Instead of allotting money to these games, he now prefers to buy clothes for himself because most of his shirts are already old for him. He began to realize that his game addiction led him to spend all his money intended for food and hand outs in school on *MMORPGs*.

"Wing" (not real name) tried avoiding the game and stopped last semestral break of 2008. She realized now that most of her money is allotted for food, unlike before. She also started saving money to buy things for personal use. This is one strategy for her to avoid the *MMORPGs* addiction. However, "Wing" said her boyfriend helped her stop plying the game. Now, she spends more quality time with her boyfriend because, according to her, she feels better being with him compared to playing online games. When he is with him, she is inspired to study thus, diverting her attention. She added that now she is taking care of someone real, instead of intangible game characters. Another strategy to avoid addiction was emphasized by "Sevenknives" who is now minimizing playing games due to higher computer rental. His attention got also diverted to Bible study so he thinks less of games. His interests started to shift, thus leading him to totally avoid *MMORPGs* addiction.

Some have engaged in activities which can generate income rather than getting hooked to games. Homer's experience is a best example since he started to divert his attention -- i.e. to encoding job in an Internet café. This makes him busy, thus forgetting *MMORPGs*.  In the case of "Didz", diverting his attention to table tennis and other games helped him avoid *MMORPGs* addiction. His relative also encouraged him to shift to strategic offline games because online games are endless. Though he still plays games, he started to play offline which makes him play a fewer time compared to playing online games.

 "Zare" (not real name) played *Ragnarok, Rakion* and *Guns Online* for one-and-a-half years. He got hooked to these games to the point that he had to work in an Internet café to earn money to play. To stop his addiction, firstly, he stopped working at the Internet café and saved money to earn. Pieces of advice from parents are of big help because they greatly influenced his decision.

Convinced by another respondent in this study, "Job", got addicted in that he always found ways just to play.  An example was when Microsoft Company, as part of their campaign against illegal software use, raided some of the Internet cafes in Leyte, including the café where they usually played. Because of this, "Job" and his friends went to other Internet cafes. During his junior year in college, however, "Job" decided to stop these games. He always reminds himself that these games are so endless so he

Table 6. Consequences of avoiding *MMORPGs* addiction

| Consequences | Description |
|---|---|
| Improved financial management | There are numerous benefits when it comes to time and financial management. One consequence is the establishment of business opportunity that could be supported by the gaming activity. |
| Maturity in dealing with things | Gamers became more mature in decision making after they have tried to quit *MMORPG*s. They also started to be active in worthwhile activities after quitting *MMORPG*s. |
| Improvement in academic performance, family/peer relationship and health conditions | After quitting *MMORPGs,* gamers have improved their academic performance and health conditions. They can now spend quality time with their family and friends. Also, they are not anymore led to lie. |

can avoid playing from it again.

## *Consequences of MMORPGs avoidance*

Gamers' responses emphasized various consequences of their own strategies for avoiding *MMORPGs* addiction. These consequences were compressed into three: 1) improved financial management; 2) maturity in dealing with things; and 3) improvement in academic performance, family/peer relationship and health conditions (Table 6).

When "Kenji" started to stop *MMORPGs* addiction, he observed positive changes in his life. Now, that he has stopped *MMORPGs*, his academic performance has improved and is expecting to regain his scholarship. His relationship with his parents became closer.

David now is able to give attention to his health after being hospitalized for excessive game playing. Now, he is taking much rest and his health is improving. Likewise, Eleazar, after minimizing *MMORPRGs*, no longer feels eye irritation and headaches. He started to allot money for his food, not on computer games.

IMPLICATIONS

While respondents reported a number of positive effects of online gaming, they also reported negative effects including effects on their eating and sleeping habits, and academic performance. This result is consistent with the findings of earlier studies conducted by Yee (2008), Meerkerk (2006), and Young (2004), invariably underscoring the need for interventions to minimize the effects of playing *MMORPGs*. Thus, concerned authorities should take the needed steps as soon as possible.

One way is to integrate the pros and cons of online gaming into the school curriculum. These topics may be included in the subjects on character education and on science and technology. At the elementary level, presenting scary stories on the ill-effects of online game addiction and drawing lessons from these stories may help convey the message that online game addiction may not be exciting at all. For high school and college students, presenting them with video documentaries that feature testimonies of the negative effects of online game addiction the causes of this addiction should awaken these potential online users of the deleterious effects of adopting these games. Likewise, some concerned organizations should also start implementing campaigns to help children and youngsters on their gaming habits. The campaign may be implemented through the use of communication materials.

It was observed that some of the respondents stayed in the Internet cafés for a couple of days and nights. This finding highlights the fact that the Internet café operators seem not to mind about the welfare of their customers, especially the students and young gamers. Local government units may be able to help by implementing activities that will ensure that establishments offering online games will exercise a sense of social responsibility. This means that if Internet café staff observe youngsters who are already playing *MMORPGs* excessively, they take the initiative of calling the attention of the parents or school authorities. One way to do this is by requiring applicants for Internet café operation to undergo a seminar prior to issuance of a business permit.

To divert children and youth's attention from excessive online game

playing, various institutions in their communities could conduct youth and children development programs that can redirect their attention from these online games. Parents still have a big role in guiding their children's online gaming by providing and explaining to them the potential effects of online game addiction. They may work hand in hand with school teachers in guiding their children and students.

Among the benefits reported from online gaming is learning. Likewise, among the reasons why respondents in this study got hooked to these games was the feature the games offered. Instructional technology developers may harness these potentials in improving learning by making the lesson conducted via technology entertaining and exciting. Achieving this requires the cooperation of educators and game designers.

The lack of "something interesting and exciting to do" has been reported as among the reasons for online game addiction. Unfortunately, most of the victims of online game addition are students. Schools are, therefore, called on to design and implement programs that can respond to the changing interests of the students. In student dormitories and boarding houses, for instance, ideas may be elicited from residents as to the activities they think will be fun and enjoyable.

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