



**ONLINE GAMES AMONG ADOLESCENTS:
A STUDY OF TIME DISPLACEMENT ON FAMILY,
ACADEMIC AND RELIGIOUS OBLIGATIONS**

BY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the online game playing phenomenon and its effects on family, academic, and religious obligations among Muslim adolescents between the ages of 13 and 15 in the Gombak district, Selangor. This study was guided by three research questions, which were: (1) Why do students play online games? (2) What is the state of the online gaming phenomenon among Muslim pupils attending lower secondary schools in Gombak? (3) Do online gaming patterns displace the time otherwise spent on family, education and religious obligations? Time Displacement Theory (Putnam, 1995) was used as the theoretical framework of the study. Given the nature of the study which sought to better understand the phenomenon of online gaming among adolescent Muslims, it seemed befitting to undertake a methodology that capitalized on threads of conversation to yield rich and meaningful data. Focus group interviews were conducted with informants representing the three age groups: Age 13 (Form 1), 14 (Form 2) and 15 (Form 3). Online gaming activity is said to be prevalent among adolescents thus justifying the selection of this age group as participants in the study. The analysis of the three focus group interviews yielded 11 salient themes which were: (1) Reasons and Motivation, (2) Sense of Achievement, (3) Wherewithal, (4) Bond of Attachment, (5) Cynosure of Mind (6) Parents Awareness, (7) Online gaming popularity, (8) Online games versus academic, (9) Sense of chronemics, (10) Truancy, and (11) Time displacement. The results confirmed that online gaming has displaced time for family, academic and religious obligations.

الملخص

يتمثل الغرض من هذه الدراسة في مناقشة ظاهرة ممارسة الألعاب على الإنترنت، ومعرفة آثارها على الجوانب الأسرية، والأكاديمية والدينية بين المراهقين المسلمين الذين تتراوح أعمارهم بين ثلاثة عشرة وخمسة عشرة سنة في منطقة جومباك، بولاية سلانجور، وقد قامت هذه الدراسة على ثلاثة أسئلة بحثية، والتي تمثلت في الآتي: (1) لماذا يقوم الطلاب بممارسة الألعاب على الإنترنت؟ (2) ما حالة هذه الظاهرة - ممارسة الألعاب عبر الإنترنت - بين التلاميذ المسلمين الذين يدرسون في مدارس التعليم الثانوي في منطقة جومباك؟ (3) هل تؤثر أنماط الألعاب عبر الإنترنت لديهم على الوقت الذي يقضونه مع الأسرة والوقت المخصص للتعلم والالتزامات الدينية؟ وقد تمّ استخدام نظرية قتل الوقت ل (بوتنام 1995) باعتبارها إطاراً نظرياً لهذه الدراسة، ونظراً لطبيعة هذه الدراسة التي سعت إلى فهم أفضل لظاهرة الألعاب عبر الإنترنت لدى المسلمين المراهقين، فقد ظهرت ضرورة استخدام منهجية قائمة على الاعتماد على إجراء المحادثات؛ وذلك من أجل إنتاج بيانات ذات قيمة علمية، وقد تمّ إجراء مقابلات جماعية مع الرواة الذين مثلوا الفئات العمرية الثلاثة: ثلاثة عشرة سنة (النموذج 1)، وأربعة عشرة سنة (النموذج 2)، وخمسة عشرة سنة (النموذج 3). ودائماً ما يقال: إنّ ممارسة الألعاب عبر الإنترنت تكون أكثر انتشاراً بين المراهقين، الأمر الذي يبرر لنا اختيار هذه الفئات العمرية باعتبارهم عينة للدراسة، وقد أسفرت عملية تحليل المقابلات الجماعية التي ركزت على هذه المجموعات الثلاثة على محاولة الكشف عن أحد عشر موضوعاً، تمثّلت في الآتي: (1) الأسباب والدوافع، (2) الإحساس بالإنجاز، (3) الوسائل اللازمة، (4) روابط المرفقات، (5) التطلّع العقلي، (6) وعي الآباء، (7) شيوع الألعاب على الإنترنت، (8) اللعب على الإنترنت في مقابل التحصيل الأكاديمي، (9) الشعور بالجاذبية البصرية، (10) الغياب الدراسي، (11) إضاعة الوقت. وقد أكدت النتائج أنّ الألعاب عبر الإنترنت تؤدي إلى إضاعة الوقت المخصص للعائلة ولعملية التحصيل الأكاديمي وللواجبات الدينية.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion; it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication).

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Supervisor

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Sciences

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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This work is dedicated to my beloved family members:

My eternal love

Muhaimin Sumadi

My angels

Luqmanul Hakimin, Nurul Fauzana and Muhammad Maliqi

My parents

Hj. Ab. Aziz Hj Sharkini & Hjh. Nazah K. Hasyim

My in-laws

Hj. Sumadi Said & Hjh. Suyatin Maryo

My sisters

Faizah & Zakiah

.....for their endless love, prayers, faith and encouragement.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The online game is a game which allows many players, regardless of their country of origin to play simultaneously on a game server via the internet. The online game is not merely a game but it develops gradually into self-contained three-dimensional societies. Online games have started to attract the interest of all walks of life as there are different types of games to suit all age groups since they were made available to internet users in the early 1990s. The gaming industry had exploded by the late 1990s. Manufacturers such as Sony and Microsoft competed with one another to incorporate sophisticated and interactive features in their games (Young, 2009) so as to attract more internet users to get hooked on these games. In fact, playing online games is said to be the most popular entertainment on the internet. This phenomenon is supported by the advancement of internet technologies which have played a major role in popularizing the games, resulting in an increase in the market value of online games to US\$12.9 billion in 2005, which is predicted to reach US\$29 billion by 2016 (DFC Intelligence, 2011).

The Internet World Statistics (2014) reported that nearly 18 million of the Malaysian population were internet users in 2012, and this is expected to reach to 25 million by 2015. This number represents approximately a 23 per cent increase from 2012. According to Kapahi, Ling, Ramadas and Abdullah (2013), Malaysian youth internet users were susceptible to internet addiction, but it depended on the individual's intentions and self-discipline. They added that there were three main activities which contributed to internet addiction, (1) excessive gaming; (2) online

sexual preoccupation, and (3) emailing or texting. Soh, Yan, Ong and Teh (2012) found that 90 per cent of the youths in urban areas in Malaysia were using the internet. The study revealed that, “Chinese youths used the internet more frequently, had more experience and were online for twice the duration of Malays and Indians (16 hours a week for the Chinese compared to 7 hours for the Malays and Indians).” (p. 81). A study by Freeman (2013) of 156 youths revealed there was a fair level of internet addiction to online games among Malaysian youths.

The increment of online games worldwide total revenue indirectly reveals the increased number of online game players around the globe. Results of previous studies showed that internet and online gaming could be addictive (Chen & Chang, 2008; Ng & Hastings, 2005; Wan & Chiou, 2006; Young, 2009), which may affect time spent with family (Gustavo, 2006; Shim, 2007; Young, 2009), academic performance (Chen, & Tzeng, 2010; Chuang, 2006; Griffiths, Davies, & Chappel, 2004; Wan & Chiou, 2006), and time spent for other significant activities (Choo, Gentile, Sim, Li, Khoo, & Liao, 2010; Young, 2009).

Some studies of online games suggested adolescents were the most vulnerable group to be addicted due to the interactive and competitive nature of the games (Liu & Peng, 2009). Furthermore, according to Young (2010) the three-dimensional features provided a social aspect that does not exist in offline activities, which increases the possibility of addiction among players.

Discussion of the concept of time is always relevant to any sphere of human life. It is understood that the time spent on one thing will affect the time that would otherwise be spent on other things. Knowing that time is a critical factor in a human life, one should always spend time wisely and be responsible for time (mis)management. Time has always been a major factor in our daily routines simply

because we have only 24 hours a day. This means time spent on an activity obviously cannot be spent on other areas (Gustavo, 2006; Lee & Kuo, 2002; Nie, Simpsen, Stepanikova & Zheng, 2004; Shim, 2007; Steinkuehler, 2011). Displacing time that should be spent on other worthwhile activities is a wasteful use of time. However, it is acknowledged that adolescents and teenagers who grow up in this era have to endure the many challenges brought about by the internet which may significantly affect their time in the different phases of their socialization.

It is anticipated that problems will arise if a new activity such as playing online games takes away time allocated for more important activities such as fulfilling academic and family obligations. A number of studies have found adverse effects of playing online games on academic performance (see Chuang, 2006; Wan & Chiou, 2006; Chen, & Tzeng, 2010), and family relations (e.g. Gustavo, 2006; Shim, 2007; Young, 2009). This is disturbing if not controlled wisely as family is the main socialization agent for young people to shape their attitudes and behaviors (Lee & Kuo, 2002). Furthermore, families are needed for emotional and financial support for young people before they live independently (Young, 2009).

A review of 30 empirical research studies by Kuss and Griffiths (2012) indicated that gaming addiction among adolescents did exist. As the addiction developed, those who were addicted would eventually increase their amount of time online to prepare, organize and play the games (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012). Another study (Lo, Wang, & Fang, 2005) found that the percentage of teenagers spending time playing online games and spending longer hours in internet cafes was higher compared with the percentage of time that they reported spending in schools and other related activities. Perhaps, to excel in the games they played, it was crucial for them to spend a significantly higher amount of time playing, which if not controlled,

may affect their sleeping routine, off-line relationships, meals, school activities and other responsibilities. According to Young (2009), this condition could lead to health problems as they deprived themselves of sufficient rest and proper nutrition that their body needed.

Islam not only emphasizes the importance of time in our lives, but also reminds the ummah how to value it. This is because each minute that passes by is an opportunity gone as the loss of time cannot be compensated for. Allah The Almighty keeps on reminding the Muslims in the Holy Quran of the importance of time by making a very firm statement which says,

By the token of time. Verily man is in deep loss. Except those who believe and do righteous deeds and advise each other to tell the truth and patience. (Surah Al-Asr.103: 1-3).

This surah was sent as a warning to believers not to waste time and to discipline themselves by giving value to the importance of time. It is clearly written that human beings would be in deep lost, except these four groups: the believers, those who do good deeds, those who advised each other to tell the truth and those who are patient.

Performing prayers five times a day is compulsory for Muslims, and those who do not fulfill this requirement are regarded as disbelievers. As has been mentioned earlier, online game players usually spend long hours entertaining this hobby of theirs. There is a possibility that their preoccupation with games may lead them to neglect their main duty towards Allah. This attitude should be hindered as prayer is a gift from Allah to his believers to enable them to experience a spiritual ascension; a chance for the believers to communicate with Him. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said,

The first thing about which a man is going to be questioned on the Day of Judgment is prayer. If his prayers are found to be sound, all his other reactions will be sound as well. If his prayer is not sound, all his remaining actions would be spoiled. (At-Tabrani)

This hadith shows us how important prayer is for Muslims. That is why prayer is deemed a pillar of Islam (Al-Baihaqi). *Ulama* noted that Muslims lose their time for remembering Allah when they are in a state of *ghaflah*. Basically, *ghaflah* means negligence; the sin of forgetting Allah. Indeed getting addicted to online games is a source of this *ghaflah*.

The contention of this study was to further widen the understanding of how online games might displace important activities in a Muslim student's life. It was also hoped that the study would be able to identify online gaming patterns and the reasons that secondary school students in selected schools in Gombak, Malaysia play the games.

Summarily, this section talks about online games and their development since the advent of the internet in the early 1990s. The global online games phenomenon has also affected Malaysian Muslim users, especially adolescents. Previous research results showed that online games have displaced time allocation for family (Gustavo, 2006; Shim, 2007; Young, 2009), academic activities (Chen & Tzeng, 2010; Choo et al., 2010; Gentile, 2009; Young, 2009) and religious obligations (Ruslan, 2011) in students' lives, which means, time allocation for family, academic and religious obligations are reduced automatically.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

This section discusses the problem statement of the research which includes: (1) online games and family relations; (2) online games and academic obligations; (3)

online games and time; and (4) online games and Islam. It is important to discuss these four points in order to understand the effects of online games on an adolescent's life.

The rise in the number of online game players throughout the globe has stimulated research on how these games have affected and benefited gamers' daily routines. Many of the studies on online gaming have concentrated on its addictive qualities (e.g. Chen & Chang, 2008; Ng & Hastings, 2005; Peters & Malesky, 2008; Wan & Chiou, 2006; Young, 2004; Young, 2009). It is argued that immersion in online gaming is one of the reasons that gamers become addicted (Huvila, Holmberg, Ek, & Wulff, 2010; Yee, 2006). Online games are also seen as a psychological escape from real life problems (Young, 2009) and have become a way to run away from stresses and pains (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Young, 2009).

Wang, Chen, Lin, & Wang (2008) explained that "adolescents who have suffered discouragement or failure in real life may derive consolation through communication with online peers and communities, or find encouragement by winning online games," (p. 179). For some adolescents, making friends and interacting in the virtual world is one of the ways to cope with interpersonal problems in their (real) lives; while winning games may allow these adolescents to win respect, recognition and reputation among (fellow) virtual friends, and this may help them to fulfill their need for self-realization. According to Young (2009), adolescents who endure poor relationships with others use the virtual world as a safe place to make friends and socialize. Earlier, Wang, Chen, Lin and Wang, (2006) identified that not only external and internal problems in an adolescent's life contributed to the excessive time period spent on playing online games, but that authoritarian parenting styles are found to contribute to this problem among high school children in China. To some

extent, some parents purposely used the online game as a “digital babysitter” as a way to keep their children entertained (Wood, 2008). In a way, parents may be contributing to the excessive time spent on game playing among adolescents.

1.2.1 Online games and family relations

Results from previous research proved that playing online games has disrupted time allocation for family obligations (Gustavo, 2006; Shim, 2007; Young, 2009). To some extent, addicted gamers become angry and violent when parents try to put some limits or stop them from playing. Gustavo (2006) suggests families that spend time and do activities together enjoy a higher quality of communication and experience less family conflicts. It is important to sustain good and harmonious relationships in our family life as Islam is a religion that prioritizes the maintenance and preservation of family ties and kinship. The importance of maintaining family relations is mentioned in quite a number of surahs in the Al-Quran.

Be careful of your duty to Allah by Whom you demand one of another and to the ties of relationship; surely Allah ever watches over you. (Surah An-Nisa.4:1)

And those who break the covenant of Allah, after its ratification and sever that which Allah has commanded to be joined, and work mischief in the land, on them will be far away from Allah’s mercy and for them is the evil home (hell). (Surah Ar-Rad. 13:25)

The extent to which Islam detests deteriorating relationship between family members and the punishments that await those who sever the relationships can be gauged from the following hadith:

There is no sin more deserving of having punishment meted out by Allah to its perpetrator in advance in this world along with what He has for him in the next world than oppression and severing family ties. (At-Tarmizi)

1.2.2 Online games and academic obligations

A student's primary obligation is to learn. They are required to complete homework given by teachers and are expected to revise what they have studied in school in order to support their learning. Sometimes they need to attend curriculum activities organized by the schools. But previous studies show that students start to neglect academic obligations once they engage in online games (Chen & Tzeng, 2010; Choo et al., 2010; Gentile, 2009; Young, 2009).

Engagement in game playing has been found to disrupt students' main focus in academic obligations. Previous studies show that students start to neglect academic obligations once they are engaged in online games (Chen & Tzeng, 2010; Choo et al., 2010; Gentile, 2009; Young, 2009). Sometimes excessive game playing may affect a student's sleeping routine, which leads to health problems (Young 2009), resulting in absence from school and low participation in class. If this situation should continue, it could affect academic performance, which later on might affect a student's future.

1.2.3 Online games and Time

Addiction to online games has been identified as one of the causes of internet addiction (Block, 2008). The addiction has proven to have implications for the players; unfortunately, the negative consequences tend to be higher than the positive ones (Choo et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2008; Young, 2009). The most obvious negative consequence is related to time management (Cummings & Vandewater, 2007; Wood, 2008). Cummings and Vandewater (2007) found that online game play has changed adolescents' daily time management. It has reduced by 30 per cent their time for reading and they have 34 percent less time for doing homework. Wood (2008) pointed out that poor time management skills and avoidance of other problems are some of the

possible reasons for excessive time spent in playing online games. If more time is spent on playing online games, this means time for other activities has to be sacrificed. This situation is parallel to Time Displacement hypothesis which posits that if a person starts a new activity, time spent in other activities has to be reduced (Putnam, 1995). In this case, if a student starts to play online games, there is a possibility that he/she would reduce the time that is supposed to be spent on other more important activities such as family relations, and academic and religious obligations.

Previous research on the effects of the internet and online games on family relations and academic obligations have shown mixed results. Even though in some studies these activities have been found to be negatively correlated to family communications and relations (Gustavo, 2006; Shim, 2007; Young, 2009), and academic obligations and performance (Chen, & Tzeng, 2010; Chiu et al., 2004; Chuang, 2006; Frangos, Frangos, & Sotiropoulos, 2011; Peukert, Sieslack, Barth, & Batra, 2010; Smyth, 2007; Wan & Chiou, 2006), there are some studies that found otherwise. According to Cummings and Vandewater (2007), the time spent for playing online games did not interrupt the time spent interacting with family and friends, while a study by Wen, Kow, and Chen (2011) revealed that in fact online games helped to enrich family time by providing conversational topics for family members.

Investigating time spent for online games is important to the Muslim ummah since there is a lack of study in the literature covering the phenomenon of online gaming from the perspective of religion, especially from the Islamic perspective. Muhammad, Nadeem, Hameed, Mobeen and Rahim (2011) indicate that time is the most important resource in life and if it is not used properly, “there is no way to recoup the loss of time” (p. 290). This statement shows how meaningful every second

in our lives is and that time is priceless. Time management is important in students' lives as they need to focus on their studies and to maintain their grades. If a student starts to play online games and spends a significant amount of time on it, it would affect the time allocation for other activities.

1.2.4 Online games and Islam

Players of online games come from different backgrounds, regardless of their religion. However, in Islam every single thing that we do is accountable, therefore the question of whether game playing is permissible or not is important and valid. Kamali (1998) discusses an Islamic legal maxim which says, "the norm in regard to things is that of permissibility. Permissibility in other words is the natural state and will therefore prevail until there is evidence to warrant a departure from that position. The conclusion (to be) drawn is (that) we are allowed to utilize the resources of the earth for our benefit and that unless something is specifically declared forbidden, it is presumed to be permissible", (p. 2). There are a number of issues associated with game playing which concern the teaching of Islam such as pure enjoyment and defiance of religious obligations.

Enjoyment in playing online games happens to distract people from fulfilling other obligations, especially in performing religious duties. Players tend to be ignorant and continue playing even though they have heard the *azan* (Saifuddin, 2009). Allah SWT mentioned about distraction in the Holy Quran saying,

O you who believe, your riches and children must not divert you from the remembrance of Allah. And those who do that are the losers. (Surah Al-Munafiqun. 63:9)

Even though the surah talks about children and richness, Muslim clerics agree that this surah also refers to all enjoyments which could distract from fulfilling duties towards The Creator.

The above discussions have shown how time plays a very important role in our daily routines. That is why we have to organize the use of time in order not to waste it with unimportant matters. Previous studies on online games have not included the Islamic perspective since most of the studies were conducted by non-Muslim scholars. Since the previous studies were done in different countries, this study aims to investigate the same variables in Malaysia, more specifically in one of the schools in Gombak District, where more than 95 percent of the students are Muslims. Furthermore, since there has been a lack of online games research from the Islamic perspective, in a way, this research hopes to fill in the gap and could be used as a reference for future research.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study's main objective was to investigate the issue of playing online games and its effects on family relations, academic performance and religious obligations among Muslim adolescents, with Time Displacement Theory as the main theoretical framework underpinning the study.

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To understand the reasons why students play online games
2. To explore the phenomenon of online gaming among adolescent Muslims attending a lower secondary school in the Gombak area
3. To investigate whether online gaming patterns have displaced the time spent on family, education and religious obligations.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main question addressed in this study was whether online games displace time allocated for family, education, and religious obligations. The specific questions asked were:

1. Why do students play online games?
2. What is the state of the online gaming phenomenon among Muslim pupils attending lower secondary schools in Gombak?
3. Do online gaming patterns displace the time otherwise spent on family, academic and religious obligations?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The issue of online games has been at the center of scholars' interest since the inception of these games on the internet. The focus has been more on its addictiveness and effects on society and social institutions. Scholars have also touched on the area of how time spent on playing online games could increase or decrease the time spent on other activities. However, this area has yet to be rigorously studied, particularly in Malaysia.

Even though this topic has been addressed by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, only a little effort has been taken to examine the relationship between online games and religion, especially from the Islamic perspective. Thus, it is hoped that the findings of this research will add to the literature and to shed light on whether religiosity mediates online gaming activities among Muslim adolescents, and to make an inroad for future research in this area.