

Online Gaming Engagement of Professionals

Ralph Lyndon F. Quilla^{1*}, James L. Paglinawan, PhD²

¹Master of Science in General Science Education, Central Mindanao University Musuan, Bukidnon, Philippines

²Associate Professor IV, Central Mindanao University Musuan, Bukidnon, Philippines

*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS.2026.110400109>

Received: 18 April 2026; Accepted: 23 April 2026; Published: 12 May 2026

ABSTRACT

Gaming online now fits naturally into how many workers spend their free time, especially in the Philippines, where fast-growing esports meet the realities of mixed office-and-home jobs. Instead of interviews, researchers used open questions sent through Google Forms during March 2026, gathering detailed answers from 15 working adults who play games regularly. Participants were between 25 and 45 years old, came from fields like tech support, customer service abroad, and teaching, selected carefully using private Facebook gaming communities reached by message. What people said around 2,000 lines of personal reflections was studied closely following a clear six-step method created by Braun and Clarke back in 2006. Patterns emerged around why they played, how often, what drew them in, along with effects on energy, mood, and daily life balance. From start to finish, the process focused on real experiences without adding assumptions or generalizations about gamers everywhere. Most people talked about escaping stress gaming helped them unwind when pressure built up at work. Mobile Legends was not just a pastime, it became a way to clear their heads after long hours. Instead of small talk around the water cooler, they leaned on group chats inside games. Those moments filled gaps left by working alone from home. Yet some noticed sharp focus during play often led to exhaustion later. Late nights bled into mornings, making balance hard to keep. Notifications pulled attention back even after logging off. This mix showed how games could support well-being or interfere with routine. Light involvement linked to better mood, according to local findings. Heavy use carried downsides like patterns seen elsewhere when tech blurs personal limits. Research across regions backs this tension between recovery and disruption in modern jobs. Among the country's 43 million players and a fast-growing industry (YCP Solidiance, 2020; Statista, 2025), this work fills key holes in how professionals are studied through personal stories. Instead of fixating on young people and dependency myths, it reveals deeper real-life insights. Tools allowing users to manage their own habits emerge here, alongside office strategies for healthier tech use. Long-term studies also gain importance balancing gains against risks as Southeast Asia moves further into digital life.

Keywords: online gaming, professionals, work-life balance, thematic analysis, Filipino gamers, escapism, productivity, esports Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Despite its reputation as mere leisure, playing games online now serves as both connection hub and daily ritual for many Filipino workers. With more than 43 million people regularly logging in, the country's market climbs fast nearly 13 percent each year driven largely by smartphone hits such as Mobile Legends and competitive gaming fever (YCP Solidiance, 2020). Around the world, similar shifts appear; better web access pushes multiplayer experiences to the forefront of digital culture (Statista, 2025). Yet within this growth, office employees are weaving virtual play into everyday life, quietly altering how they balance job demands and personal time since remote setups became common.

Though progress has been made, knowledge remains incomplete about how professionals engage with online games, games that might ease tension but also wear down efficiency through long playtimes and missed duties (Moraleja & Lopez, 2024). In the Philippines, research rarely digs into whether views on gaming shape

psychological health or job results among young workers; many shows moderate use alongside strong performance, sparking interest in mental wellness strategies (Moraleja & Lopez, 2024). From a global angle, too much gaming links to weaker focus, broken sleep patterns, and emotional withdrawal yet accounts for just part of why work output slips (Kamali & Maruthavijayan, 2025).

Young adults in the Philippines showed signs of gaming dependence when under emotional strain during the pandemic, especially those aged 18 to 24 research by De Leon and colleagues from 2022 highlights this trend. In a different setting, findings from Laguna point toward deep game engagement affecting how people feel mentally and perform daily tasks, according to Moraleja and Lopez's 2024 analysis Beyond national borders, repeated evidence shows excessive play interferes with job output and personal connections at work, prompting suggestions for structured digital well-being initiatives. Work-life conflicts intensified during isolation periods in India, where individuals struggled to manage impulses despite efforts to stay balanced, as noted by Amin and team. By early 2026, each reference remained reachable online, together supporting deeper exploration through open-ended methods focused on real-life professional stories.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research used a qualitative descriptive method to examine how professionals engage with online games, drawing on personal accounts shared freely by participants. By focusing on firsthand narratives, it revealed detailed understandings of reasons, behaviors, and effects free from fixed frameworks (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Well suited to its purpose, the design helped surface subtle patterns within real-world settings.

Participants and Setting

Some of the people involved were 15 randomly chosen workers between 25 and 45 years old, playing games online regularly each logging at least five hours per week. Although picked deliberately, they varied widely by job type: some worked in tech, others handled outsourced tasks, taught school, or filled similar roles. Based across cities in the Philippines, these individuals already spent time together in closed Facebook groups made for employed gamers. Contact began over Facebook Messenger, reaching them where daily routines naturally unfolded inside familiar online spaces tied to both work and play.

Research Instruments

The research instrument was a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire comprising 12 carefully crafted prompts designed to elicit rich, narrative responses on online gaming engagement among professionals. This format balanced guided focus with participant freedom, promoting depth over quantification while aligning with qualitative standards for exploratory inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Developed by the researcher based on literature gaps (e.g., Moraleja & Lopez, 2024), it underwent pilot testing with three non-participant professionals to refine phrasing for clarity, cultural sensitivity (e.g., referencing local games like Mobile Legends), and relevance to work contexts yielding a Cronbach's alpha equivalent of thematic consistency post-refinement.

The instrument was divided into four thematic sections mirroring the study's objectives, administered via Google Forms for accessibility:

Gaming Habits and Patterns (3 items): Captured frequency, preferred platforms, and routines.

1. How many hours per week do you typically spend on online gaming, and how does it fit into your work schedule (e.g., breaks, evenings)?
2. What online games do you play most (e.g., Mobile Legends, Valorant), and what draws you to them?
3. Describe a typical gaming session: When, where, and with whom?

Motivations and Benefits (3 items): Explored positive drivers and outcomes.

1. In what ways does gaming help you manage work-related stress or unwind?
2. How does social interaction in multiplayer games impact your professional life (e.g., networking, relaxation)?
3. Share an example where gaming improved your mood, focus, or relationships.

Challenges and Impacts (3 items): Probed negative aspects and trade-offs.

1. What difficulties arise from balancing gaming with work responsibilities (e.g., fatigue, distractions)?
2. How does gaming affect your productivity, sleep, or next-day performance at work?
3. Describe any instances where gaming interfered with deadlines or personal life.

Strategies and Reflections (3 items): Assessed coping and future-oriented insights.

1. What strategies do you use to prevent gaming from negatively affecting your work (e.g., time limits, apps)?
2. How has your gaming engagement evolved since starting your professional career?
3. What advice would you give to fellow professionals about online gaming?

Items drew from established frameworks like the Gaming Engagement Scale adaptations and work-life balance models, ensuring construct validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Pilot feedback prompted adjustments, such as adding "hybrid/remote work" qualifiers for Philippine relevance. Response format encouraged 100-300 word elaborations per item, with optional file uploads for screenshots/logs. Trustworthiness was enhanced through clear instructions, anonymity assurances, and a debriefing section linking to gaming wellness resources.

Data Collection Procedures

Participants were contacted via Facebook Messenger after expressing interest in gaming-related posts; informed consent was obtained digitally before sharing the questionnaire link (Google Forms). Responses were collected asynchronously over two weeks in March 2026, with follow-up reminders sent to boost completion (response rate: 75%). Raw data included text entries, anonymized immediately upon receipt.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) rigorous six-phase thematic analysis framework, applied inductively to the 2,500 words of textual responses from 15 participants. This iterative, reflexive process ensured themes emerged directly from participants' lived experiences rather than researcher preconceptions, enhancing credibility in qualitative inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Analysis was conducted manually using Microsoft Excel for coding transparency, with the researcher maintaining an audit trail of decisions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount, aligning comprehensively with the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173), American Psychological Association (APA) ethical standards (2020), and best practices for qualitative research involving digital data collection. Informed consent was secured digitally through a comprehensive Google Forms preamble that explicitly detailed the study's purpose, procedures, expected 20-minute time commitment, minimal foreseeable risks such as temporary emotional recall of gaming habits, potential benefits including contributions to workplace wellness knowledge, precise data usage limited to thematic analysis without external sharing, and unequivocal rights to withdraw at any point without repercussions or explanation. This process achieved a 100% consent rate prior to questionnaire access. Anonymity and confidentiality were rigorously maintained by assigning pseudonyms (P1-P15) in place of any

personal identifiers, disabling IP tracking in Google Forms, and storing all raw responses exclusively on a password-protected Google Drive folder secured with two-factor authentication, accessible solely to the researcher, with a commitment to permanent deletion five years post-publication. To prevent coercion, participation remained entirely voluntary with no incentives offered, and recruitment messaging via Facebook Messenger emphasized effortless opt-out options like simply ignoring or unpinning posts. Protections for potential vulnerabilities included a dedicated debriefing section at the questionnaire's end, linking to accessible local resources such as the Department of Health mental health hotlines and Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation guidelines on responsible gaming. The researcher maintained a reflexivity journal to explicitly document and mitigate personal biases, such as prior gaming experience, ensuring analytical neutrality. Data integrity was upheld by preserving raw responses unaltered, permitting quote edits only for grammatical clarity with bracketed notations for transparency, and conducting a self-audit against Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) standards. These multifaceted protocols not only safeguarded participant welfare but also respected Filipino cultural values of *pakikisama* (harmonious relations) in research interactions.

Scope and Delimitation

The scope of this study was precisely delineated to examine self-reported online gaming engagement exclusively among 15 urban Filipino professionals aged 25-45 who engaged in at least five hours weekly of multiplayer mobile or PC games such as *Mobile Legends* or *Valorant*, with a targeted focus on their motivations including escapism and social aspects, resultant impacts on productivity and work-life boundaries, and employed self-regulation strategies within the context of hybrid or remote work environments, as captured through digital questionnaires administered in March 2026. This narrow framing facilitates deep, theory-building qualitative insights into moderate engagement patterns pertinent to the Philippine digital leisure landscape. Delimitations, as intentional boundaries established by the researcher, encompassed a purely qualitative methodology excluding any quantitative instruments like standardized addiction scales (e.g., *Internet Gaming Disorder Scale*) or objective verification tools such as app trackers; recruitment limited to self-selecting, tech-savvy individuals from Facebook gaming groups, thereby omitting non-social media users; a strict emphasis on multiplayer genres while excluding single-player titles or console-based gaming; and a cross-sectional snapshot design precluding pre-post interventions or causal attributions. Limitations inherent to the design included the small sample size's urban concentration primarily from Metro Manila and Laguna regions, constraining generalizability to rural, older, or blue-collar professional populations; susceptibility of retrospective self-reports to recall inaccuracies or social desirability biases despite mitigation via member checking; and the asynchronous digital collection format's absence of non-verbal cues that interviews might capture, such as tonal nuances. Collectively, these scope parameters and delimitations honed the inquiry's precision on professionals' authentic voices, purposefully directing avenues for future expansions like mixed methods approaches incorporating diverse demographics or physiological measures, while candidly acknowledging the interpretive subjectivity intrinsic to idiographic qualitative paradigms.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of responses from 15 Filipino professionals revealed four primary themes capturing their online gaming engagement: escapism and stress relief, social connectivity, productivity trade-offs, and boundary challenges. These emerged inductively from ~2,500 words of open-ended data, with high prevalence across participants (aged 25-45, diverse sectors like IT and BPO).

Escapism and Stress Relief (93%, n=14): Gaming served as a primary decompression tool post-work, with phrases like "quick matches erase deadline burnout" (P3) dominating descriptions of mental reset.

Social Connectivity (80%, n=12): Multiplayer dynamics fostered virtual communities, countering remote work isolation; e.g., "Guild chats are my real social life" (P7).

Productivity Trade-Offs (73%, n=11): Moderate sessions enhanced focus ("one-hour flow states sharpen my code," P5), but excess led to "brain fog" next day.

Boundary Challenges (67%, n=10): Work-play overlap via notifications blurred lines, often resulting in late nights and fatigue (P9: "Breaks turn into marathons").

Theme	Prevalence	Key Sub-Code	Example Quote
Escapism & Relief	93%	Mental reset	"Mobile Legends unwinds me" (P12)
Social Connectivity	80%	Virtual bonds	"Team voice beats loneliness" (P2)
Productivity Trade-offs	73%	Flow vs. fatigue	"Short games boost output" (P4)
Boundary Challenges	67%	Notification pulls	"Late play kills mornings" (P11)

These results highlight how online gaming cuts both ways for working adults. Local studies back this up playing now and then lifts mood and sharpens focus, especially among younger Filipinos (Moraleja & Lopez, 2024). Still, spending too much time on games often leads to stress. Much like during India's strictest pandemic months, some workers turned to virtual worlds to manage daily strain (Amin et al., 2022). Yet trouble arises when real life blurs into screen time, a pattern seen worldwide where blurred lines hurt job output (Kamali & Maruthavijayan, 2025). Here, players showed discipline setting personal limits on playtime a contrast to younger groups often studied. While past work focuses on teens, this fills space around working adults riding the wave of esports growth locally (YCP Solidiance, 2020). Connection through teams' eases loneliness tied to remote setups, hinting at healthy blending into job environments. Yet answers depend on what people say about themselves, possibly skewed by city-centered samples. Later efforts might cross-check responses using actual game records or workplace figures. Workplace gaming rules could help balance gains and risks especially where regular pauses during workday tasks mix with efforts that support mental ease through tech use. These ideas take shape differently across Southeast Asia, revealing how local settings reshape what well-being means when play enters professional life.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative descriptive study has illuminated the multifaceted nature of online gaming engagement among Filipino professionals, revealing its dual role as both a vital source of escapism, social connectivity, and cognitive rejuvenation, and a potential disruptor of productivity and work-life boundaries. Through thematic analysis of rich narrative data from 15 urban participants aged 25-45, four core themes emerged escapism and stress relief (93% prevalence), social connectivity (80%), productivity trade-offs (73%), and boundary challenges (67%) demonstrating how moderate, self-regulated gaming integrates into hybrid work routines to counter burnout and isolation yet risks fatigue and distraction when unchecked. These findings resonate with and extend local Philippine scholarship, such as Moraleja and Lopez (2024), by shifting focus from youth addiction paradigms to professionals' nuanced, adaptive strategies amid the nation's esports boom (YCP Solidiance, 2020), while echoing international evidence on digital leisure's work-life tensions (Amin et al., 2022; Kamali & Maruthavijayan, 2025). Theoretically, this research bridges gaps in qualitative explorations of adult gaming in Southeast Asian contexts, contributing vivid, participant-centered insights that enrich digital wellness discourse and underscore the need for culturally attuned models of technology integration. Practically, it advocates for empowered self-regulation through time-bound sessions and notification management, alongside workplace innovations like structured gaming breaks and wellness programs to harness benefits while mitigating harms. By foregrounding professionals' authentic voices, the study not only informs policy amid the Philippines' 43 million-strong gaming market (Statista, 2025) but also lays groundwork for sustainable digital habits in an evolving professional landscape. Future investigations should pursue longitudinal mixed-methods designs incorporating objective gaming metrics, employer performance data, and broader demographics including rural and blue-collar workers to enhance generalizability and causality assessments. Ultimately, fostering intentional online gaming engagement promises enhanced psychological resilience and equilibrium, positioning it as a constructive element of modern professional life rather than an inadvertent adversary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Professionals: Establish personal gaming boundaries, such as time limits (e.g., 1-hour sessions post-work) and notification muting during tasks, to maximize stress relief while curbing fatigue. Track engagement via apps

to self-monitor patterns, fostering self-regulation as evidenced in participant strategies. Seek peer accountability through gaming guilds focused on balanced play.

For Workplaces: Integrate digital wellness programs offering guided gaming breaks to harness social connectivity benefits, mirroring successful hybrid work initiatives. Train managers on recognizing overuse signs and promote flexible schedules accommodating moderate gaming, drawing from local productivity studies (Moraleja & Lopez, 2024).

For Future Research: Conduct longitudinal studies tracking gaming's long-term effects on professional cohorts, incorporating gaming logs and employer metrics for triangulation. Expand to rural Filipino professionals and single-player genres to broaden generalizability beyond urban multiplayer contexts.

For Policymakers: Develop national guidelines on digital leisure in the Data Privacy Act framework, subsidizing esports wellness campaigns amid the Philippines' gaming boom (YCP Solidiance, 2020). Collaborate with platforms like Facebook for responsible gaming prompts targeting working adults.

REFERENCES

1. Amin, K. P., Griffiths, M. D., & Dsouza, D. D. (2022). Online gaming during the COVID-19 pandemic in India: Strategies for work-life balance. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 20(1), 296–302. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00358-1>
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7351552/>
2. American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000165-000><https://apastyle.apa.org/products/publication-manual-7th-edition>
3. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
4. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE. <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/thematic-analysis/book248481>
5. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/qualitative-inquiry-and-research-design/book246896>
6. De Leon, J. M., Cabrera, J. A., & Fernandez, K. T. (2022). Assessment of gaming addiction and perceived psychological distress among Filipino young adults during COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Education and Management*, 9(1), 29–46.
7. <https://www.ijem.com/assessment-of-gaming-addiction-and-perceived-psychological-distress-among-filipino-young-adults-during-covi>
8. Kamali, R., & Maruthavijayan, S. (2025). Impact of online game addiction on employee productivity and work-life balance. *International Journal of Research Trends and Social Sciences*, 10(26), 1712–1720.
9. <https://ijrtssh.com/2025/10/impact-of-online-game-addiction-on-employee-productivity-and-work-life-balance/>
10. Moraleja, M. P. O., & Lopez, E. R. (2024). Online gaming engagements, mental well-being, and work performance among young professionals: Basis for psychosocial intervention program development. *The Research Probe*, 4(2), 58–66. <https://doi.org/10.53378/trp.1224.139>
11. https://iiari.org/conference_article/online-gaming-engagements-mental-well-being-and-work-performance-among-young-professionals-basis-for-psychosocial-intervention-program-development/
12. Statista. (2025, January 26). Online games – Philippines. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/outlook/amo/media/games/online-games/philippines>
13. YCP Solidiance. (2020). *The next level: The rise of esports in the Philippines*. YCP Solidiance. <https://ycp.com/insights/whitepaper/the-next-level-the-rise-of-esports-in-the-philippines>