

# Positive effects of online games on the well-being of working adults

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## Abstract

As of January 2024, about 86.98 million Filipinos use the internet with adults aged 25–34 forming the largest group of online gamers, while also representing a large portion of the employed population (27.3%). Balancing work and life demands requires substantial energy, with the Philippines reporting the highest employee burnout in Southeast Asia (70.71%), linked to depression, anxiety, and stress among those working 40–50 hours weekly. Consequently, working adults increasingly seek accessible stress relief, with online gaming offering emotional rest, social connection, and personal growth. This qualitative study explored the positive effects of online gaming on working adults' well-being. Six participants (4 males, 2 females) from the National Capital Region were interviewed via Google Meet. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis showed that gaming supports emotional regulation, stress relief, self-expression, enjoyment, relaxation, and reward. It also fosters relationship-building, communication, social networking, and cognitive and creative skills such as problem-solving and strategic planning. Challenges like shallow online interactions and potential social disengagement were noted. The findings suggest online gaming can be a positive outlet for well-being when paired with healthy habits such as emotional management, prioritization, and time management.

**Keywords:** *online gaming, internet gamers, well-being, online gaming benefits*

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## 1. Introduction

In this contemporary world, technological advancement and the internet have grown significantly, and gradually becoming integral elements of daily life. In the Philippines, as of January 2024, 86.98 million people are reported to be internet users (Kemp, 2024). The internet has become a tool for many purposes, especially entertainment. According to Katatikarn (2024), with 96.4% of internet users across devices, the Philippines reported the highest penetration of online gaming. Adults aged 25–34 were reported to have the highest percentage (38.92%) of engagement in online games (Statista Research Department, 2024; Kemp, 2024), despite being identified as the age group with the highest employment rate (27.3%) (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020).

These rates continue to escalate, prompting many researchers to investigate the role of online gaming in daily activities. Interestingly, contrasting findings have emerged across multiple studies: most focus on online addiction and its negative health effects, while studies exploring its positive impacts, particularly in the Philippine context, remain limited. For instance, Bhatia et al. (2023) reported adverse effects such as tension, headaches, poor vision, decreased user performance, and social isolation resulting from excessive use. However, a study by Arbeau et al. (2020) presents a contrasting view, describing online gaming as an “overwhelmingly positive, rewarding experience shaped by social interactions with others in the game.” Their findings, based on participants aged 17–34, suggest that as games provide greater opportunities for positive social interaction, detrimental effects may be mitigated, thereby opening greater potential benefits.

Despite the evident stigma surrounding the adverse effects of online gaming, alongside the substantial increase in its usage (Pietersen et al., 2018), this paper aims to identify research gaps regarding online gaming as a potential contributor to the well-being of adults, the age group reported to be the most actively engaged. It also considers the local context of the phenomenon to provide a more accurate perspective.

Most studies on online gaming focus on health effects among adolescents aged 12–17 (Bhatia et al., 2023; Arbeau et al., 2020; Labana et al., 2020), leaving other populations underexplored. This study examines the online gaming experiences of working adults and their positive impact on well-being by considering their narratives, habits, and reasons for casual engagement. Specifically, it addresses: (1) how online gaming affects well-being, (2) its role

in social interactions and relationships, and (3) the personal insights and growth gained from gaming.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1. Online Gaming***

As the years pass, the number of online games being developed continues to grow rapidly, matching, and at times even exceeding, the number of users. The Philippines has been identified as the top country with the highest number of online gamers worldwide (Bashir, 2023). As this community expands, so does the variety of online games, including the mainstreaming and diversification of genres. Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA), Role-Playing Games (RPG), First-Person Shooter (FPS) games, and Real-Time Strategy (RTS) games are among the most popular types (Seatongue, 2024). Moreover, each genre has been found to offer specific positive effects for gamers. RPGs are associated with the development of social skills such as leadership, creativity, and relationship building (Jang, 2011; Hussain et al., 2014; Winardy, 2024). MOBA games promote simple gameplay, easy social connections, and competitive challenge (eSports) (Morris, 2019). FPS games contribute to improved quick decision-making (Oscarido et al., 2023), while RTS games enhance cognitive flexibility and rapid information processing (Glass et al., 2013).

In general, people engage in online gaming for various reasons, including opportunities for social connection, personal enjoyment, and the improvement of real-life skills. According to Hussain et al. (2014), feelings of community belonging, collaboration, and relationship building sustain player engagement, alongside elements such as challenge, progression, and rewards (Deng, 2024). However, these positive effects are often overlooked, limiting their potential applications. Persistent stigmas surrounding online gaming have contributed to the scarcity of local studies on its positive impacts. Thus, these gaps form the focus of the present research.

### ***2.2. Well-being of Working Adults***

Balancing work and personal responsibilities requires significant energy and effort. Across Southeast Asia, the Philippines has the highest percentage (70.71%) of employees experiencing burnout, which is associated with severe levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, particularly among those working 40–50 hours per week (Aziz & Ong, 2024). Poor working

conditions, such as excessive workloads, discrimination, and job insecurity, continue to threaten employee well-being (World Health Organization, 2024). Furthermore, achieving work–life balance is increasingly difficult, largely due to cultural expectations emphasizing work as a means of fulfilling social and familial obligations. Some working adults who assume the *tagasalo* role, referring to a family member who feels disproportionately responsible for the well-being of the entire household, experience heightened sensitivity, stress, and internal anxiety (Go Tian-Ng & Umandap, 2023). Additionally, rising inflation and the increasing cost of goods have placed further financial strain on employees, which intensifies stress and negatively affecting their mental health (Veith, 2024).

As stress and pressure management become more critical for working adults, many seek avenues for relaxation and stimulation. According to Iacovides and Mekler (2019), online games provide players with relief from stress, opportunities to process intense emotions, avenues for social interaction, and support for personal growth, even serving as a coping mechanism during periods of existential uncertainty. Similarly, Wa and Balakrishnan (2023) found that IT employees reported feeling less stressed, more competent, and more enthusiastic about their work after engaging in gaming. While these studies highlight some of the causes and effects of online gaming, individual experiences must also be considered. As noted by Pietersen et al. (2018) and Iacovides and Mekler (2019), gaming holds different meanings and functions for different individuals. For this reason, this study also explores personal narratives, gaming habits, and motivations for engagement.

The significant burdens carried by working adults, including diverse and complex responsibilities, have substantial effects on their well-being. However, limited research has explored the constructive potential of online gaming, allowing negative perceptions to persist. Therefore, this study aims to provide a foundation for understanding the positive effects of online gaming on working adults while accounting for their unique experiences.

### ***2.3. Effects of Online Gaming on an Individual's Well-being***

Online gaming has often been framed as negatively impacting individual behavior. Marques et al. (2023) identified escapist motivation as one of the primary reasons for playing virtual games and the strongest predictor of Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD). In addition, several studies have shown a significant correlation between higher levels of playtime and poorer psychological well-being (Goh et al., 2019; Hartanto et al., 2021; Przybylski &

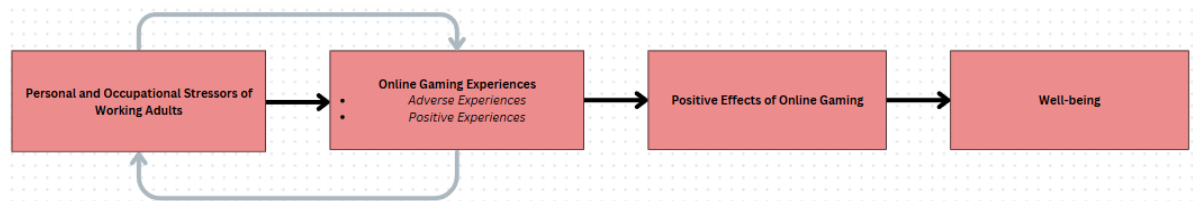
Weinstein, 2017a; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). However, it is important to note that these studies often focus on individuals who are already addicted to gaming and/or engage in excessive gaming.

Although 29.9 million gamers in the Philippines were reported to have Online Game Addiction (OGA) and have consequently become the focus of many research findings (Labana et al., 2020), the remaining 60 million gamers (Katatikarn, 2024) have yet to be thoroughly investigated. Limited research has explored active gamers who engage in gaming within acceptable time limits, particularly within the local context. One such study by Li et al. (2023) identified themes including meeting the need for personal growth and satisfying the need for social life, both of which positively describe participants' experiences with online gaming. These findings highlight how online gaming can relieve stress, promote happiness, help individuals overcome personal shortcomings, enhance self-awareness, foster achievement and self-realization, expand social networks, encourage teamwork, and improve learning ability and interest in learning. Similarly, Jones et al. (2014) emphasized that "to flourish is more than the absence of mental disorder but rather a combination of feeling good and functioning effectively, resulting in high levels of mental well-being," and noted that online gaming can generate positive affect and enhance social functioning, thereby supporting mental health and well-being. Therefore, this research explores the relatively underexamined link between online gaming and its positive effects on the well-being of working adults.

## 2.4. Conceptual Framework

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual framework of the study*



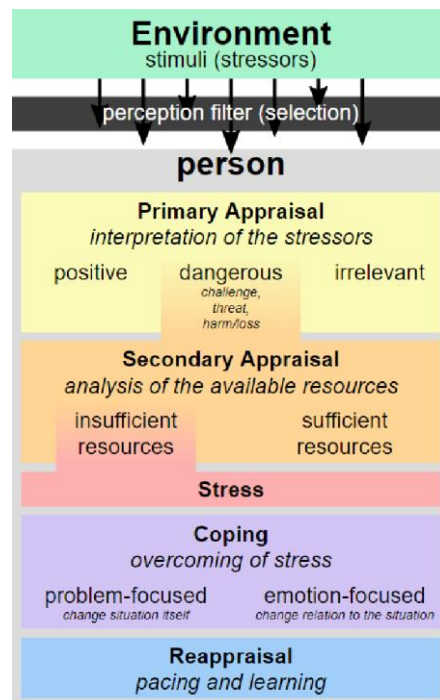
Working adults face various occupational and personal stressors, such as poor work environments, financial concerns, burnout, depression, stress, and anxiety (Aziz & Ong, 2024; WHO, 2024; Go Tian-Ng & Umandap, 2023). These challenges often lead them to engage in

online gaming as a means of emotional relief, stress escape, social connection, and personal growth (Iacovides & Mekler, 2019; Wa & Balakrishnan, 2023). This engagement can result in positive outcomes, including enhanced leadership, creativity, relationship building, and improved decision-making, all of which contribute to overall well-being (Li et al., 2023; Jones et al., 2014; Jang, 2011; Hussain et al., 2014; Winardy, 2024; Oscarido et al., 2023). However, excessive gaming may lead to unhealthy escapism, poor work–life balance, and lower psychological well-being, thereby hindering these potential positive outcomes (Goh et al., 2019; Hartanto et al., 2021; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017a; Twenge & Campbell, 2018).

## 2.5. Theoretical Framework

**Figure 2**

*Stress and Coping Theory*



**Source:** Lazarus and Folkman (1984). [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Transactional\\_Model\\_of\\_Stress\\_and\\_Coping\\_-\\_Richard\\_Lazarus.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Transactional_Model_of_Stress_and_Coping_-_Richard_Lazarus.svg)

This study is grounded in the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1988), which conceptualizes stress as a dynamic interaction between the individual and the environment. The theory explains how individuals appraise stress through primary, secondary, and reappraisal processes, and how they cope using problem-focused, emotion-focused, or appraisal-focused strategies (Janse, 2025).

In this study, the personal and occupational stressors experienced by working adults are viewed as environmental pressures, while online gaming is considered a coping mechanism that helps regulate stress and promote well-being. Thus, the theory is appropriate as it provides a framework for understanding stress appraisal, coping through gaming, and its potential positive effects on well-being (Janse, 2025).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

This study utilized a phenomenological research design to understand, describe, and interpret human behavior and the meanings individuals make out of their experiences (Ayton et al., 2023). The design was appropriate because it allowed the researchers to examine how working adults perceive and interpret the role of online gaming in relation to their well-being. By focusing on participants' narratives and personal accounts, the research sought to capture the essence of their gaming experiences and how these experiences influence their emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

#### 3.2. Participants of the Study

The study involved six (6) Filipino working adults aged 25–34 in NCR who actively engage in online gaming. This sample size aligns with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which emphasizes in-depth exploration using small, homogeneous groups (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). NCR was chosen due to its urbanized environment and role as a center of business and technology. Participants were selected through snowball sampling, which may have introduced homogeneity bias. Although the study aimed for gender balance, only 4 males and 2 females were included due to time constraints. Analysis focused on participants lived experiences rather than demographics to maintain neutrality.

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the participants, which includes their basic information and current occupation. The study utilized the participants' preferred alias for the presentation of data to maintain their anonymity and confidentiality.

**Table 1**

*Demographic profile of the participants*

Alias	Age	Sex at Birth	Occupation
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Hellboy44	33	Male	Sales Promoter
Celleste	28	Male	Product Manager
Nicko	32	Male	IT Technical Architect
SleepyAsh	25	Female	Administrative Assistant
Nam	27	Female	Sales Manager
Juzz	25	Male	Behavioral Therapist

### ***3.3. Instrumentation and Data Gathering Process***

The study utilized a semi-structured interview format consisting of ten (10) main questions, validated by licensed professional teachers, along with corresponding follow-up questions. The interviews were conducted one-on-one via Google Meet. Participant recruitment was carried out through Facebook to identify eligible individuals.

Participants were then provided with a consent form containing all necessary information relevant to their participation, including a demographic questionnaire. During the interview, participants were asked to turn on their cameras to facilitate clearer verbal and nonverbal communication throughout the 30–45-minute session, in accordance with the data-gathering protocol.

After the interview, a debriefing session was conducted to help participants process their experiences and assess any potential distress. If participants felt uncomfortable or chose to withdraw, appropriate distress and data-gathering protocols were implemented, particularly under the Data Gathering Protocol Clause 3.6.6 on emotional distress.

### ***3.4. Data Analysis***

Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which explores individual lived experiences and their meaning-making processes (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Validity and reliability were ensured through member checking and expert thematic validation. Participants reviewed summarized transcripts and preliminary themes to confirm accuracy, and their clarifications were incorporated into the final analysis. Additionally, three faculty experts in qualitative research and psychology reviewed the coding, themes, and supporting excerpts to ensure clarity, coherence, and consistency with the participants' narratives.

### 3.5. Research Ethics

The conduct of this study was approved and granted clearance by the Philippine Normal University. It poses no risk to participants, and data gathering protocols ensured security and confidentiality. Participants were given aliases to maintain anonymity, and interviews were conducted virtually for their convenience. After each session, distress and interview protocols were followed to uphold participants' rights and well-being. All data were handled in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173), with raw data securely stored in a protected Google Drive accessible only to the researchers. Participants were fully informed about the study's nature, purpose, benefits, and expected outcomes prior to giving consent.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the finalized themes, subthemes, and their corresponding descriptions derived from the IPA. Sample statements from the transcriptions are included to provide deeper insights into the participants' experiences.

### 4.1. Effects of Online Gaming on the Well-being of Working Adults

Working adults expressed that online gaming is a tool for emotional and mental regulation, a source of enjoyment and personal fulfillment, a social outlet, and affects their mood and stress levels based on the game context and genre.

**Table 2**

*Generated codes, categories and themes on the effect of online gaming experience on well-being*

Participant	Response (Emic)	Codes (Conceptual Themes)	Category (Clustered Themes)	Superordinate Themes
Celleste	"Decrease in stress levels mostly. It can be a way to just turn my brain off since very technical job so usually you just want to dumb down without having to brain rot on your phone so that's another way to just turn off your head for the meantime"	Stress relief	Gaming as a form of Relaxation  Gaming as Stress Reliever	Gaming as a Tool for Emotional and Mental Regulation
Nicko	"It's a stress outlet that brings back happiness. The joy from playing with your kids is different, but gaming gives a unique kind of relaxation and fulfillment."	Emotional relaxation	Gaming as Stress Reliever	

Participant	Response (Emic)	Codes (Conceptual Themes)	Category (Clustered Themes)	Superordinate Themes
			Gaming Induces Happiness	
			Gaming as a form of Relaxation	
Nicko	“In games, it's really about fun. If you enjoy what you're doing, you're happy. That's how I see it—fulfilling and rewarding.”	Enjoyment from gaming Personal Fulfillment	Gaming for Entertainment  Gaming as a Reward	Gaming as a Source of Enjoyment and Personal Fulfillment
Juzz	“When I play, I forget about work stress. It's become my way to prepare for the next day and get ready to work again—it's part of my routine now.”	Mental Reset	Gaming for Entertainment	
Nam	“Sometimes, you get to express yourself through the game. If you're frustrated, that's where you can let it out or vent.”	Emotional Expression through Gaming	Gaming as a form of Self Expression	Gaming as a Social Outlet
Sleepyash	“Online gaming is a form of bonding, especially when you play with others. It becomes a way to connect and interact with people, and it also helps improve communication.”	Social Bonding	Gaming for Relationship Building	
Nam	“We just choose—do we want to get frustrated today? If we want to, we'll play something competitive. But if we just want to chill because we're tired or don't feel like thinking, then we'll play a relaxing game.”	Selecting games based on mood or energy	Mood and Stress is Dependent on Game Genre	
Nicko	“Of course, toxicity is always present in games. If you've played online, you know there are racist and rude players—it's unavoidable. But it's part of the game. When you play online, you meet all kinds of people, including rude ones. How you handle it is what matters. Instead of getting stressed, we just laugh it off. It's part of the experience—you meet good and bad people”	Emotional regulation in response to online toxicity	Mood and Stress is Dependent on Game Genre	Impact of Game Context and Genre on Experience

***Gaming as a tool for emotional and mental regulation.*** Beyond simple entertainment, gaming appears to function as a psychological recovery space where working adults

temporarily detach from the demands of work and personal responsibilities. This suggests that gaming may operate as an emotion-focused coping strategy, allowing individuals to regulate stress and restore their emotional balance after demanding work routines.

***Gaming as a source of enjoyment and personal fulfillment.*** Gaming may function not only as entertainment but also as a form of restorative leisure, enabling individuals to recharge psychologically. As noted by Deng (2024), engaging in fulfilling leisure activities can contribute to well-being by promoting relaxation, motivation, and emotional recovery.

***Gaming as a social outlet.*** Consistent interaction through gaming appears to foster connection and collaboration, supporting previous findings that shared digital activities can strengthen interpersonal relationships (Hodge, 2022; Hussain et al., 2014; Morris, 2019). Within the context of working adults with demanding schedules, gaming may therefore serve as an alternative social space that facilitates relationship maintenance and emotional connection.

***Impact of game context and genre on experience.*** This finding suggests that the impact of gaming on well-being may depend not only on the game itself but also on the player's emotional awareness and self-regulation. When individuals are mindful of their emotional state and select games that match their needs or mood, gaming may enhance positive experiences while minimizing potential negative effects associated with competitive or stressful gameplay.

#### ***4.2. The Role of Online Gaming in Working Adults' Social Interactions and Relationships***

According to working adults, engaging in online games allows them to create meaningful relationships, enhance their socialization skills, expand their avenues for interaction, engage in shallow and neutral interactions, and experience the negative effects of purely online gaming socialization.

**Table 3**

*Generated codes, categories and themes on the role of online gaming in social interactions and relationships*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Response (Emic)</b>	<b>Codes (Conceptual Themes)</b>	<b>Category (Clustered Themes)</b>	<b>Superordinate Themes</b>
Celleste	"Online games have allowed me to reconnect with some friends I haven't socialized with in more	Outlet for reconnection	Establishes Authentic and	Creates Meaningful Relationships

Participant	Response (Emic)	Codes (Conceptual Themes)	Category (Clustered Themes)	Superordinate Themes
Nam	than five years...It is basically my primary way of socializing with people.”		Effective Relationships	
	“In the family, it's still the same, nothing's changed. Or let's say, it's even deeper now, especially with my sibling and my spouse. Because I get to play with them more. I can relate more to what they're doing... I've had more interaction with my spouse and sibling now because we're playing the same games.”	Builds Stronger Connection	Strengthens Relationships	
Celleste	“I actually express myself more via Discord than being face-to-face, going out in public”	Self-expression	Self-expression	
Sleepyash	“When I was in school, my social life wasn't that great. Unlike in gaming, where I was able to express myself more.”		Self-expression	
	“I guess my communication skills really got boosted. Like, I became more of an ambivert. When I'm with my friends, I'm an ambivert. With friends, that's when I'm more expressive, unlike with colleagues. Since you don't spend as much time with colleagues like you do with friends.”	Self-expression Enhanced Communication Skills	Improves Communication Skills	Increased Socialization Skills
Juzz	“Since there's communication in online games, the people I play with are completely strangers, but I can still socialize with them. They do contribute to my social life because of the communication. It also helps improve my social skills”	Establishing Social Connections Enhanced Communication Skills	Improves Communication Skills	
Hellboy44	“In online games, sometimes the kids I play with in COD are really funny. It's just like that... It helps relieve stress sometimes, especially when you're up against kids—it makes you feel young again. Sometimes, when the kids are on your team, you just go along with their vibe and join in on whatever they're into.”	Social adaptation and shared enjoyment	Opportunity to Interact with Diverse people	Expanded Avenues for Interaction

Participant	Response (Emic)	Codes (Conceptual Themes)	Category (Clustered Themes)	Superordinate Themes
Celleste	<p>“I’ve met close friends through gaming. I have one friend whose partner she literally met through Super Mecha Champions. And yes, it’s mostly because of online gaming that I was able to meet a lot of new people, specifically through gaming.”</p>	Meeting diverse people	<p>Opportunity to Interact with Diverse people</p> <p>Broadens Social Circles</p>	
Nicko	<p>“For me, until now, I’m still not used to it. I still don’t like facing people... But gaming gave me a way to meet other people without having to do that face-to-face introduction, like “Hi, I’m so-and-so.” I don’t have to introduce myself that way. From there, we just played together, and before I knew it, we became friends.”</p>	Social connection without face-to-face interaction	<p>Opportunity to Interact with Diverse people</p> <p>Broadens Social Circles</p>	
Hellboy44	<p>“It’s not really like you’re meeting someone deeply, you know? They’re more like co-players. It’s different from online games where you just meet people during specific times when you’re playing. It’s still different from real friendship, of course.”</p> <p>“It’s hard to interact with other people, especially since we all have different life situations. Like when it comes to work, it’s tough to invite them to play a game. Everyone’s got their own schedule and priorities, so it’s not always easy to ask someone to join in.”</p>	Distinction between gaming connections and offline friendships	Surface-level Online Relationships	Shallow and Neutral Interactions
Juzz	<p>“I really prefer personal relationships over online ones because the engagement is just different when it’s face-to-face, or with someone you really know in person. It’s different from meeting someone through online games or because you both play the same game. The engagement feels more open when you’re with a friend in real life, compared to just an online connection.”</p>	Preference for face-to-face relationships	Limited Engagement from Dissimilar Interest	

Participant	Response (Emic)	Codes (Conceptual Themes)	Category (Clustered Themes)	Superordinate Themes
Nam	“When you focus too much on online games, you can lose your social life, right? Before, I used to enjoy outdoor activities. But when I started learning to play online games, with my husband who was already a gamer before that. We ended up staying at home. So, it felt like we kind of lost our social life. Because I made online friends, but I also lost time with my real-life friends. If I wasn’t playing online games, I’d be out more, spending time with my friends... I’d have more interaction with my friends than with my family.”	Social disconnection due to excessive gaming	Real-life Social Disengagement	Negative Effect of Pure Online Gaming Socialization

***Creates meaningful relationships.*** Gaming may function as a shared social activity, which allows individuals to maintain relationships despite the time constraints associated with work responsibilities. The ability to communicate regularly while participating in a common activity may therefore support relationship development and emotional closeness.

***Increased socialization skills.*** Frequent communication with other players may contribute to the development of communication and interpersonal skills. In this sense, online gaming may provide opportunities for individuals to practice social engagement, which can later extend to interactions in other contexts.

***Expanded avenues for interaction.*** Gaming provides opportunities to form friendships with people initially met online. Over time, these interactions may develop into meaningful connections. This highlights how gaming platforms may function as digital communities, enabling individuals to build relationships based on shared interests and collaborative experiences.

***Shallow and neutral interactions.*** While gaming can foster meaningful connections, it can also produce surface-level interactions that lack long-term engagement. Participants also expressed uncertainty regarding the authenticity of some online relationships, as individuals may present filtered or limited versions of themselves in digital spaces. Differences in interests may also limit individuals’ opportunities to connect with others.

*Negative effects of pure online gaming socialization.* Although gaming can facilitate social interaction, excessive involvement may lead individuals to prioritize online relationships over in-person connections. This finding highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between online engagement and real-life interactions to ensure that gaming continues to support rather than hinder social well-being.

### 4.3. Insights and Growth Working Adults Gained from Online Games

Working adult online gamers shared experiences related to learning and self-regulation. They developed specific skills and emphasized the importance of maintaining healthy gaming habits.

**Table 4**

*Generated codes, categories and themes on the personal insights and growth gained from online gaming*

Participant	Response (Emic)	Codes (Conceptual Themes)	Category (Clustered Themes)	Superordinate Themes
Celleste	“The reason why I picked up an instrument in the first place was because of the online game called O2 Jam from early 2000s. So, that's one major skill that I learned just from gaming. I guess, when arranging music, it influences me[navigating influence sa akin] so that I can apply it to how I actually create music as well”	Development of Musical Skills	Enhances Artistic Capabilities	Skills Developed from Online Gaming
	“I mean, also, I guess if it's one thing from online gaming, it's also a good storyteller. And some games are based on real events, especially history, especially war. And there have been some games that portrayed the war, those specific events very well and allows to give a perspective of, oh, this is how it was like during this particular time. So, it also teaches me about some history that I might not have been familiar with”	Learning through game narratives	Acquire Historical Knowledge	
Nicko	“For example, in logic-based games, like puzzle games, you can apply the skills you gain, especially if you're in IT. It helps you develop programs and make decisions, like figuring out how to get from point A to point B, and then to point C”	Cognitive skill development	Honed Problem-solving and Logic	

Participant	Response (Emic)	Codes (Conceptual Themes)	Category (Clustered Themes)	Superordinate Themes
Nam	“Maybe when it comes to strategy, your mind really works on how to defeat the enemy. It’s similar in the real world—figuring out how to achieve your goal step by step to succeed. It’s about strategy and teamwork, because in those games, teamwork is key to winning.”	Strategic thinking	Honed Decision Making and Strategic Planning	
Sleepyash	“Before, when I didn’t play online games, I wasn’t really the type to meet new people. But now, I’m more open and not as shy anymore. I guess I’ve adapted my behavior with my online friends to the real world.”	Builds Connections	Honed Socialization and Collaborative Skills	
Nicko	<p>“The skills I’ve gained from online gaming have been a huge factor in helping with work. Especially when it comes to handling stress... Then, another important skill is how you think. It’s a big factor. Also, you shouldn’t let yourself get stressed out by your opponents or co-players. It’s all about controlling your emotions. Sometimes you win, sometimes you don’t.”</p> <p>“I think they just need to balance their life and gaming. Because, after all, too much of anything is bad. So, it’s all about finding that balance... balancing the time you allot for gaming and other things. Priorities still matter. You have to set your priorities straight. Life isn’t just about gaming.”</p>	<p>Stress management and emotional regulation</p> <p>Managing gaming and life priorities</p>	<p>Emotional Management</p> <p>Effective Prioritization and Time Management</p>	Healthy Gaming Habits
Sleepyash	<p>“For me, gaming is just a stress reliever. I don’t take the games too seriously. It’s just a game. Because I’ve noticed that a lot of people develop anger issues because they take it too seriously.”</p> <p>“Game moderately. Everything really needs balance, and that includes gaming. Because if you overdo it, your mental health can really be affected”</p>	<p>Stress relief</p> <p>Moderation in gaming</p>	<p>Emotional Management</p> <p>Effective Prioritization and Time Management</p>	
Hellboy44	“For me, online gaming is really just a way to relieve stress. It’s not something I take too seriously. It’s	<p>Stress relief</p> <p>Effective prioritization</p>	Emotional Management	

Participant	Response (Emic)	Codes (Conceptual Themes)	Category (Clustered Themes)	Superordinate Themes
	just for fun. Of course, when it's work time, I can always cancel the game and focus on my responsibilities. Gaming is just a way to unwind, nothing more."	between gaming and responsibilities	Effective Prioritization and Time Management	
Juzz	"Time management is crucial because gaming can have a big effect, especially if it's the only thing you're focused on, or if you can't balance it properly. If you don't manage it well, it can negatively affect your life, especially if you start prioritizing gaming over other important things"	Effective time management	Emotional Management Effective Prioritization and Time Management	

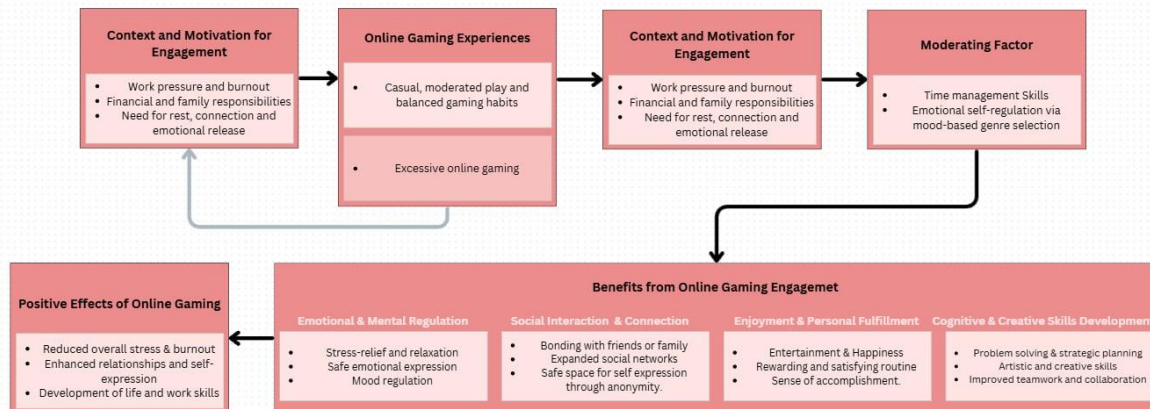
***Skills developed from online gaming.*** Games based on historical contexts were described as providing learning opportunities, allowing players to gain knowledge while engaging in immersive experiences. Similarly, many participants emphasized that solving in-game challenges requires logical thinking and quick decision-making, skills they found useful in real-world situations. Previous research also supports the idea that gaming environments can promote cognitive skills such as problem-solving and strategic thinking (Glass et al., 2013). These findings suggest that online gaming may contribute to personal development by fostering both cognitive and social competencies.

***Healthy gaming habits.*** Learning to regulate emotions while gaming was perceived as beneficial not only during gameplay but also in other areas of life. Participants noted that managing frustration or competition within games helped them develop greater emotional control when dealing with real-life challenges. This highlights that the positive effects of gaming on well-being may depend on moderate and mindful engagement.

Evidently, online gaming does not entirely result in negative implications (e.g., Mehroof & Griffiths, 2010; Zhu et al., 2021; Bhatia et al., 2023; Goh et al., 2019; Hartanto et al., 2021; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017a; Twenge & Campbell, 2018), as several studies have suggested. Instead, this study shows predominantly promising results, which not only support studies linking the positive effects of online gaming to well-being but also highlight realistic findings regarding the potential negative effects of engaging in online gaming.

**Figure 3**

*Framework developed from the findings of the study*



As shown in Figure 3, the framework explains how working adults' engagement in online games positively affects their well-being. Their motivation to play stems from stressors such as work pressure, burnout, financial and family responsibilities, and the need for rest, connection, and emotional release. These factors lead to moderate and balanced gaming, regulated by time management and emotional self-regulation. As a result, they gain benefits including emotional and mental regulation, social connection, enjoyment and fulfillment, and cognitive and creative development, supporting the conclusion that online gaming positively impacts well-being.

The working adults experience improved well-being through online gaming, which serves as a tool for relaxation, stress relief, and happiness (Pine et al., 2020), as well as enjoyment and personal fulfillment (Arbeau et al., 2020). It also functions as a social outlet for self-expression and relationship-building (Arbeau et al., 2020; Jo et al., 2024; Ducheneaut et al., 2004). However, effects vary by game type, with music, role-playing, and survival horror games linked to greater psychological benefits, while multiplayer online battle arena games show lower effects (Hazel et al., 2022). These findings align with Li et al. (2023) and Jones et al. (2014).

Online gaming also enhances social interaction by fostering meaningful relationships through communication, strengthening ties with friends, family, and co-players, improving social skills, and offering low-pressure interaction spaces (Granic et al., 2014; Chiu et al., 2004; Croes et al., 2021; Lai & Fung, 2019; Kaye et al., 2017; Bacchini et al., 2017). However, some interactions remain superficial, as players may hesitate to share personal concerns (Uz &

Cagiltay, 2015), maintain surface-level connections (Lai & Fung, 2019), or set boundaries with colleagues. Excessive engagement may also lead to social disconnection or reliance on gaming as an escape, particularly among those with social anxiety (Giola et al., 2022). Still, gameplay duration does not necessarily harm well-being and may even be associated with higher affective well-being (Johannes et al., 2021).

Additionally, online gaming helps develop skills such as creativity, historical knowledge, problem-solving, decision-making, and collaboration (Granic et al., 2014), alongside improved attention, spatial skills, and mental rotation (Green & Bavelier, 2012). It also supports communication, engagement, and lifelong learning (Gee, 2003; Turkay & Adinolf, 2012; Granic et al., 2014). Moreover, working adults gain personal insights, including emotional regulation, healthy gaming habits, and effective time management (Li et al., 2023; Pine et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2014). Responsibility further protects against negative effects, as those who balance obligations are less likely to develop gaming addiction (Kaya et al., 2023).

## 5. Conclusion

This study highlights the positive psychological and social effects of online gaming among working adults in NCR, offering a more balanced perspective against its commonly emphasized negative aspects. It shows that online gaming supports emotional regulation, stress management, motivation, social bonding, self-expression, and personal development. The findings support the idea that, when practiced mindfully, online gaming can enhance psychological resilience and happiness while fostering skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, and creativity. However, its effects depend on the gaming context and genre, emphasizing the need for intentional and disciplined use.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the literature by framing gaming as a meaningful activity that promotes well-being and social connection, serving as both a coping mechanism and an avenue for personal growth. Practically, it suggests that online gaming can be considered in discussions of stress management and work–life balance, especially when used in moderation. However, the results should be interpreted with caution due to the small, context-specific sample. Future research is recommended to include more diverse participants and to examine factors such as game type, frequency, and workplace environment.

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This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines set by the authors' university. The conduct of this study has been approved and given relative clearances by the Philippine Normal University.

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