

QUEENS BEHIND THE SCREEN: VIOLENT DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT ADDICTION AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR AMONG FEMALE ADOLESCENTS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Debates about the effects of consuming violence in entertainment have been long-standing, especially among the younger generation. The evolution of technological advancement makes violent digital entertainment more prevalent, making passionate consumers desensitised to negative values as well as aggressive behaviour. Moreover, the issue of addiction to violent digital entertainment is increasing across countries. A recent trend shows that female adolescents' engagement in violent digital entertainment is also rising due to its attractiveness. Hence, this study aims to explore violent digital entertainment engagement and addiction among female adolescents in Malaysia. This study utilises a quantitative approach through an online survey among 209 female adolescents in Malaysia. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by exploring female adolescents' engagement and addiction to violent digital entertainment in three aspects, which are individual, social and family ecosystems. The findings of this study revealed that self-motivation ($p < 0.01$, $r = 0.293$), social media influence ($p < 0.01$, $r = 0.390$), and peer influence ($p < 0.05$, $r = 0.150$) have significant positive relationships with aggressive behaviour. Notably, parental monitoring has no significant relationship with aggressive behaviour ($p > 0.05$). This finding portrayed that aggressive behaviour among female adolescents was mostly influenced by social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, X (formerly known as Twitter), and others. In addition, they have a high interest in engaging with violent digital entertainment, which influences their aggressive behaviour. As adolescents are very close to their friends, their engagement in violent digital entertainment is influenced by their peers. This knowledge extension helps future research in exploring this aspect through various attributes. Other than that, the findings of this study also would inform academics, agencies, researchers and other parties regarding the current situation and status of adolescents' behaviour regarding their participation, engagement, and addiction to violent digital entertainment. Hence, this scenario requires immediate action by government agencies and relevant parties, including parents, teachers, and societies, as the engagement in violent digital entertainment among female adolescents in Malaysia is rising. Hence, this study goes beyond the priming effect of violent digital entertainment. If this issue persists, it will lead to many other social problems among adolescents in Malaysia.

Keywords: Female adolescents, violent digital entertainment, addiction, aggressive behaviour

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, internet users among children have grown by 155% between 2016 and 2020 (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2023). Various functions of the internet provide conveniences to humanity. In fact, it has into a full-fledged competitive industry by utilising technological advancement for creativity and innovation. However, this advancement also makes violent digital entertainment more prevalent. This is evident from a preliminary study by Abd Jamil et al. (2021), which found that streaming platforms or over-the-top, are the most preferred form of entertainment for the majority of female adolescents in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Hence, female adolescents in Malaysia are not excluded from the dangers of engagement and addiction to violent digital entertainment. Consumers of violent digital entertainment, regardless of gender, can be desensitised to the negative values depicted in entertainment, which promote aggressive behaviour.

While some types of violent digital entertainment manage to gain huge supporters, careers such as those of violent video game players, streamers, and content creators are mushrooming. Violent digital entertainment becomes profitable for both the entertainment industry and individuals. For instance, these careers already involve young women as champions in high-profile violent video game tournaments like Fortnite and PUBG (Memoli, 2023). Additionally, there is also a women's league in violent video games as a move toward women's empowerment. Therefore, this recent trend shows that women's engagement in violent digital entertainment is rising due to the attractiveness of violence as an entertainment genre (Jayanth, 2014). Another interesting trend for Malaysian gamers is that the average money spent amongst younger females (RM127) was found to be more than double

that of males (RM54), indicating a new generation of invested female gamers in the country (Coda, 2023). This trend would attract more younger women and female adolescents to engage in violent digital entertainment. Unregulated engagement in violent digital entertainment might cause these female adolescents to view their surroundings aggressively.

Other than that, violence in entertainment makes adolescents feel that practising verbal aggression, such as swearing, is an acceptable norm in Malaysia (Hoong et al., 2020). Time spent watching screen violence is often associated with increased bullying and cyberbullying among both boys and girls. Moreover, the issue of addiction to violent digital entertainment is increasing across countries. Therefore, debates about the effects of consuming violence in the form of entertainment have been long-standing, especially with the younger generation. However, considering the fact that females are less likely to commit violent crimes, this may account for the lack of research attention given to this group. Hence, this study aims to explore violent digital entertainment engagement and addiction among female adolescents in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Female Adolescents and Violent Digital Entertainment—Both adolescents and adults can have high interest and be addicted to violent digital entertainment. This is because users who engage with violent digital entertainment can gain pleasure from active engagement with violent digital entertainment such as violent video games (Anadolu Agency, 2019). Moreover, the trend in literature often explores how violent digital entertainment depicts acts that tend to justify violence and portray women as sexual objects. This would contribute to stereotypes and violence against women across generations. In addition, literature in this context often highlights the higher involvement of male adolescents in violent digital entertainment than females. However, in this contemporary age, female adolescents too are increasingly drawn to explore and engage with violent digital entertainment. Female adolescents nowadays have equal access to various innovations in gadgets and digital entertainment. Moreover, violent digital entertainment provides escapism, thrills, and competitive experiences, which have managed to attract female adolescents (Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2019; Biolcati et al., 2021).

A study in Eastern Finland by Kahila et al. (2022) found that girls, too, experience gamer rage while engaging with violent video games due to in-game failures, other players' actions, technical problems, and out-of-game interruptions. Violent video games have also been found to affect female adolescents' mental health (Chaudhari, 2019). In the Malaysian context, a 14-year-old Malaysian adolescent went missing, only to discover that she ran away from Kuala Lumpur to Johor Bharu to meet her PUBG friend (Fong, 2022). The future has arrived, revealing that Malaysian women spend twice as much as men on popular violent video games in Malaysia, namely (1) Mobile Legends: Bang Bang; (2) PUBG Mobile; and (3) Call of Duty: Mobile (Lim, 2023).

Impact of Addiction to Violent Digital Entertainment Among Young Females—The obsession with violent digital entertainment among females in the international arena is prevalent. For instance, there was a fan of serial killers and Chucky who, since childhood, had stabbed her boyfriend 22 times and giggled afterwards (Moran, 2023). She adorned her bedroom wall with multiple serial killer photos and collected 'decorative' daggers, which eventually became weapons. In another case, a 15-year-old Indonesian fan of horror and thriller movies, including Chucky, was curious about the act of murdering and eventually killed her 6-year-old neighbor without feeling guilty (Harian Metro, 2020). Additionally, there was a recent case involving a 23-year-old South Korean woman obsessed with murder films who finally committed a strategic murder. She had looked for victims for months, then pretended to be the mother of high school students in need of an English tutor. Out of curiosity, she murdered and stabbed the victim more than 100 times (Mao, 2023). Hence, it is equally important to delve into the prevalence of excessive female adolescent engagement with violent digital entertainment, which could potentially lead to aggressive behavior.

Factors influencing engagement in violent digital entertainment

Social media—Social media platforms facilitate connections among people who may share common interests or backgrounds and even enable the extension of real-life connections. According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (2020), in their Internet Users Survey conducted in 2020, 93.3% of people on the internet use social media, with Facebook having the highest number of users, followed by YouTube and Instagram. The ubiquity of the internet and pervasive use of social media, however, allow users to form social connections without having to expose their real identities (Allen et al., 2014). These platforms can easily be abused, causing other problematic behaviours such as addiction (Bányai et al., 2017). Moreover, online citizens can be more outspoken, especially those who oppose their opinions or interests, by acting defensively, which would lead to other problems such as harassment and bullying over the internet (Hameed & Irfan, 2021).

Self-Motivation—In discussing female adolescents' motivation to engage with violent digital entertainment, this study adopts three aspects of motivation, which are: (1) competence, where it is needed to enhance interaction between individuals and their environment; (2) autonomy, where it means one possesses more self-regulation towards their environment; and (3) relatedness, which refers to a sense of connectedness to the environment. These aspects of motivation are adapted from Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (2000). Other than that, the aspect of motivation in the context of this study is the proneness to seek sensation. It is a trait where one makes decisions without much consideration and enjoys possible risks that might lead to aggressive behaviour (Khoury-Kassabria et al., 2020). In support of this point of view, sensation-seeking has been found to be positively correlated with aggressive behaviour (Cui et al., 2016; Pérez Fuentes et al., 2016). Ultimately, adolescents are motivated to seek sensations by appreciating more violent digital entertainment such as violent movies, violent music, and lyrics, as well as violent pornography (Krcmar & Greene, 1999).

Peer influence—Friendship is an important influencing factor in understanding the behaviours of adolescents (Bauman & Fisher, 1986). According to Gallupe, McLevey, and Brown (2018), an adolescent has a tendency to shift their level of offence to their peer’s level just to be closer to a friend. In the context of this study, adolescents engage with violent digital entertainment to fit in with other adolescents who enjoy violent digital entertainment as well. This is due to a sense of belongingness, which includes a feeling of membership, a sense of influence or being influenced, a feeling of integration and fulfilment of social needs, and a shared emotional connection with a community (Kim et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2014). This study proposes that a sense of belonging among peers provides familiarity, which allows them to feel more connected and be able to express their interests better (Lieberman & Shaw, 2019). Moreover, other qualities of friendship that induce peer influence and improve social bonds among female adolescents involve shared initiation and experience among friends, collective decision-making, willingness to maintain and enhance social standing with friends, and doing activities together (Kanera et al., 2022).

Parental monitoring—There are multiple aspects of parental monitoring discussed in the literature; this study, however, restricted the discussion to two contexts: (1) active monitoring and (2) restrictive monitoring (PadillaWalker et al., 2019). Through active monitoring, parents explain, discuss, and evaluate in the sense of educating their adolescents about the content available online, the possible dangers, and important precautions, specifically in the context of this study, their digital entertainment use (Symons et al., 2017). At the same time, restrictive monitoring refers to limiting the activity by placing restrictions so that adolescents are not exposed to negative media. According to Beyens et al. (2022), there are four styles of restrictive monitoring: (1) autonomy-supportive style (providing appropriate rationale for their rules and adolescents’ perspective is seriously considered); (2) autonomy-restrictive or controlling style (providing strict and harsh rules); (3) inconsistent style (restrictions, regulation, and discussion are random and varied); and (4) permissive style (guidance and discussion are avoided with few rules and regulations).

METHODOLOGY

In gathering an overall view of female adolescents' aggressive behaviour, this study has undertaken a quantitative approach. This study distributed a self-administered online questionnaire among 209 female adolescents from all states in Malaysia (except WP Putrajaya). This sample was selected from among female adolescents who exhibit a preference for violent digital entertainment with aggressive tendencies. The selection criteria were applied through a filtering question placed before adolescents responded to the questionnaire in this study. The quantitative approach utilised in this study offers two advantages. Firstly, the gathered data can be generalised to the entire population of interest (Clark & Creswell, 2015). Hence, the findings can be generalised for the entire population, as the data encompasses all states in Malaysia. The second advantage is that the gathered data can provide comprehensive and holistic insights into data quality, covering various aspects such as gender, age, and region. Thus, it can be concluded that the quantitative measure employed in this study is generic, ensuring consistency in scrutinising aggressive behaviour among female adolescents due to addiction to violent digital entertainment.

The data collection process was conducted for three months, from November 5, 2022, until January 13, 2022, to ensure relevance. The data gathered from these adolescents was then analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25. Pearson Correlation Analysis was used in order to examine the relationship between factors influencing female adolescents’ engagement in violent digital entertainment (self-motivation, parental monitoring, peer influence, and social media influence) and aggressive behaviour.

FINDINGS

This study gathered 209 respondents in a nationwide survey consisting of female adolescents from the ages of 13 to 17 years old. The majority of respondents are 17 years old, with 89 respondents (42.6%). As for ethnicity, the majority are Malays with 163 respondents (78.0%), followed by Chinese with 23 respondents (11.0%), and Indians with 20 respondents (9.6%). Moreover, due to the diversity of Malaysia’s ethnicity, there are also others with three respondents (1.4%). As for region, the majority of the respondents are from the central region of Malaysia, which are WP Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, with 94 respondents (44.98%). This is because the use of gadgets and the internet is more widespread in these urbanised states.

Table 1: Profile of respondents

Profile	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age		
13	3	1.4
14	23	11.0
15	49	23.4
16	45	21.5
17	89	42.6
Ethnicity		
Chinese	23	11.0
Indian	20	9.6
Malay	163	78.0

Others	3	1.4
Region		
Northern	51	24.40
Southern	48	22.97
Central	94	44.98
East Coast	7	3.35
East Malaysia	9	4.31
Total	209	100

Prior to data analysis conducted Pearson Correlation Analysis, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed. The findings revealed that the items pertaining to each construct were loaded in the same dimension. Furthermore, all the constructs used in this study were deemed reliable because Cronbach's alpha values were all above 0.7. Following this, all analyses for testing parametric assumptions were satisfied: linearity was assumed between all independent variables and the dependent variable, and all data were normally distributed.

In fulfilling the research objective, Pearson Correlation Analysis was conducted to describe the strengths and direction of the linear relationship between two variables (Pallant, 2013). Hence, this analysis was conducted to establish the relationship between the factors (independent variable) and aggressive behaviour (dependent variable). Correlation Analysis is able to show (1) Linear relationship; (2) Strength/magnitude of the relationship. According to Cohen (1988), (a) Small = r (0.1-0.29); (b) Medium = r (0.3-0.49); (c) Large = r (0.5-1.0); (3) Direction of the relationship (positive or negative relationship). To find out if there is significant relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables, the p -value has to be smaller than 0.01 ($p < 0.01$). This study has found that only three independent variables have a significant positive relationship with aggressive behaviour: self-motivation, peer influence, and social media influence. Firstly, this study found that there is a relationship between self-motivation (IV) and aggressive behaviour, as the finding revealed a positive significance, ($p < 0.01$). However, the strength of the relationship is relatively small ($r = 0.293$). The next independent variable is peer influence, whereby it has a positive significant relationship ($p < 0.05$), with the strength of a low relationship ($r = 0.150$) with aggressive behaviour. In addition, social media influence has a positive significant relationship ($p < 0.01$), but the strength of the relationship between social media and aggressive behaviour was medium ($r = 0.390$). However, this study found that parental monitoring has no significant relationship with aggressive behaviour ($p > 0.05$).

Table 2: Pearson correlation analysis

Variable/Construct	Mean	Std Deviation	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Self-Motivation (IV)	3.0751	.74644	(0.885)				
(2) Parental Monitoring (IV)	2.9860	.83022	.220**	(0.838)			
(3) Peer Influence (IV)	3.1298	.82869	.500**	.168*	(0.877)		
(4) Social Media Influence (IV)	2.6950	.77945	.524**	.124	.488**	(0.829)	
(5) Aggressive Behaviour (DV)	3.0718	.67495	.293**	.041	.150*	.390**	(0.890)

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (1-tailed)

DISCUSSION

Research conducted in the past and contemporary ones revealed that children and adolescents can exhibit aggressive behaviour after exposure to violent forms of entertainment (Guo, 2022). However, these tendencies are more pronounced when they are addicted. Hence, the findings of this study reveal that female adolescents addicted to violent digital entertainment tend to display aggression primarily influenced by social media, followed by self-motivation and peer influence.

While violent digital entertainment was once predominantly engaged in by males, the trend is now changing (Jayanth, 2014). There is an increasing participation of females, including adolescents; however, this engagement remains discriminatory due to negative gender-related attitudes and behaviours exhibited by males towards females (Cross et al., 2020). In Malaysia, violent digital entertainment, such as movies featuring murder, fighting scenes, and the use of weapons, easily finds its way to theatres and Over-The-Tops (OTTs) like Netflix, Astro Go, and Iqiyi. For example, the popular series *Projek: High Council*, a locally produced action series with physical fight scenes based on a true story from one of the boarding schools in Malaysia, became a phenomenon among the young generations in the country. This study emphasises that violent digital entertainment can be a phenomenon, widely accepted and potentially addictive across society.

Social media can influence aggressive behaviour due to its easy access to violent digital entertainment and its content. The growing number of social media users, especially among children, has surged over the years (Bozzola et al., 2022). While social media is accessible through mobile devices, it enables female adolescents to fulfil their entertainment needs conveniently. Algorithms on these platforms are able to suggest multiple options for violent digital entertainment to these adolescents. Moreover, the popularity of certain violent digital entertainment can drive adolescents to align themselves with these trends, fostering a sense of belonging with communities with the same interest in entertainment (Pradiri & Hartini, 2020). This, in turn, facilitates mutual interactions

and connectedness among adolescents who share an interest in and addiction to violent digital entertainment (Winstone, 2021). The social media communities they participate in often consist of strangers. This risks them towards exploitation and manipulation, such as paedophilia, kidnapping, and child grooming. Additionally, exposure to aggressive behaviour on social media may normalise hostility and cyberbullying among female adolescents. Hence, this may shape the perception that a hating culture or cyberbullying on social media is deemed acceptable.

Beyond social media influence, female adolescents may be driven to engage in violent digital entertainment, which leads to aggressive behaviour due to self-motivation. Female adolescents, too, can be interested in violence as a genre, a facet that is not extensively discussed in the literature. Adolescents, regardless of gender, are in a phase of exploring identity and their environment. This exploration prompts them to make decisions about their interests in their capacities. Adolescents, including females, can be motivated by a desire for thrills and self-fulfilment, leading them to explore violent digital entertainment after encountering it online. Once adolescents find violent digital entertainment that suits their preferences, they will become attached to this genre. Socialisation with those who share similar interests further motivates them to explore violent digital entertainment, fostering a sense of belonging among female adolescents.

Moreover, a study by Puente and Lasen (2015) revealed that when females have a significant other who frequently engages in violent digital entertainment, they are motivated to explore and be the proxy player as well. This motivation often leads females to engage in and purchase more than men. Furthermore, 45% of gamers in the United States are women, making female users of violent digital entertainment predicted to experience significant population growth (Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2019).

Other than that, adolescence is a phase where they typically form friendships. Adolescents are at the age where they are driven to interact with their environment while strengthening their identity (Branje, 2022). Friends play a significant role during this developmental stage, especially in influencing adolescents' curiosity, encouraging experimentation (due to its perceived fun), and potentially leading to addiction to violent digital entertainment. Adolescents will first observe their peers' active engagement in violent digital entertainment, which then leads them to explore on their own. Moreover, word-of-mouth discussions about these genres among female adolescents and their peers who engage in violent digital entertainment can influence involvement. This indirect promotion of violent digital entertainment creates excitement and may ultimately lead to addiction.

Moreover, adolescents' friendships with their peers are not limited to school boundaries but also include peers in the neighbourhood and relatives. This is because they tend to associate with individuals who share similar attitudes and interests (Walters, 2020). Adolescents can discuss and seek each other's advice about violent digital entertainment preferences. Adolescents will interact more with peers as they have a better understanding due to their similar interests. However, this study has found that peer influence is on the weaker side compared to other factors. Although this study reveals that peer influence is comparatively weaker than other factors, it predicts that female adolescents are more likely to adhere to violent digital entertainment aligned with their preferences. Furthermore, these adolescents can engage with other individuals with similar interests through social media or any other networking platform.

Other than that, this study also found that parental monitoring does not contribute as a control mechanism for female adolescents' engagement in violent digital entertainment, which would cause addiction and aggressive behaviour. The findings from this study might contradict the notion that parental monitoring is one of the most effective control mechanisms for adolescents' negative behaviour. This study proposes three reasons. Firstly, the majority of respondents are female adolescents who are nearing the majority age, and parents tend to place higher trust in handling digital devices. The normalisation of using various technological advancements allows unlimited access to digital entertainment unless the parents control them. Furthermore, if the majority of the respondents are young adolescents, the study could potentially uncover different findings regarding parental monitoring. Secondly, parents might be facing certain constraints, such as work responsibilities, which impede their ability to monitor actively.

Additionally, most respondents and informants were in urban or suburban areas where parental working commitment is common. Thirdly, parents may lag in digital entertainment literacy, which could hinder their ability to understand the potential negative impacts it may cause. This can be attributed to the rapid advancements in technology, making it challenging for parents to keep up with the fast-paced changes.

Basically, female adolescents should be protected against all forms of aggression and violence, including violent digital entertainment. It is noteworthy that female adolescents are the mothers of our future generations. When female adolescents consistently engage in and become addicted to violent digital entertainment, they will be desensitised to negative values. This will drive female adolescents to view their world aggressively and allow acceptance of violence and aggression in shaping the future generation.

CONCLUSION

The real causes of problematic and aggressive behaviour among adolescents in Malaysia remain a complex discourse that is open for debate. The engagement in violent digital entertainment among female adolescents in Malaysia is rising. Hence, this study has explored limited but holistic factors leading to female adolescents' engagement and addiction to violent digital entertainment. Individual (self-motivation) aspects and sociological/social aspects (social media influence, peer influence, and parental monitoring) have been covered by this study in examining the causes of aggressive behaviour among female adolescents in Malaysia.

The key issue here is that female adolescents, too, consume entertainment for enjoyment, to fill their spare time, and to unwind. and sadness watching sad movies or listening to sad songs, and laughter while enjoying comedy films or content. These girls would actually feel the same. Despite studies finding that male adolescents have a higher tendency to exhibit aggression due to violent digital entertainment, this genre has gained popularity every day. The plot of violence in entertainment is always presented as brave, heroic, and helpful. Other than that, the choice of famous and attractive actors lead children and adolescents who are acting aggressively, triggers female adolescents to imitate aggressive actions and emotions. This study is able to fill the knowledge gap of female adolescents' interest towards engaging and addiction to violent digital entertainment in Malaysia. As the internet is only at their fingertips, female adolescents are interested, along with the influence of their friends and social media. Access to violent digital entertainment is easy, and this would allow female adolescents to find violent digital entertainment that are more enjoyable, then lured into addiction and foster aggressive behaviour. This is because, entertainment is often heightened through the user experience. When this aspect is enhanced, it will allow the users to feel that the entertainment is more immersive and exciting.

Thus, the emergence of various types of violent digital entertainment makes it increasingly relevant in the industry, especially in this rapid technological advancement age. People from all walks of life coexist with the evolvement of technology. Various forms of entertainment, including the ones with violence, become easier to access. Therefore, our female adolescents are more exposed to violent and aggressive values. Since addiction to violent digital entertainment can affect adolescents' health and well-being, the importance of this study is aligned with the international agenda, notably the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). SDG Goal 3 is one way to encourage good health and well-being among adolescents. Simultaneously, this study aligns with SDG Target 16.2, as this genre of entertainment has the potential to cause adolescents to be addicted and driven towards aggressive tendencies. Moreover, female adolescents who are aggressive also can be both perpetrators and victims of violence. Adolescents can get desensitised and form acceptance to aggressive acts easily. When this is allowed to happen, adolescents will perceive aggressive behaviour, which is a negative behaviour.

However, this study's findings have limitations, as the majority of female adolescents are from the central region, which is more suburbanised than other regions. The findings and discussions regarding this context could be more diverse if there were more female adolescents from other regions. If these aspects are not tackled and advancements are blindly accepted, violent digital entertainment will be the destructors of our younger generation and the future of our nation. This scenario requires immediate action by government agencies and relevant parties, including parents, teachers, and societies. If this issue persists, it will lead to many other social problems among female adolescents in Malaysia.

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