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## INTENTION TO PLAY E-SPORTS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### Abstract:

Filling the void from advancements in technology and internet availability, university students are newly discovering online sports. This study aims to ascertain the elements that affect e-sports intention, specifically enjoyment, escapism and social interaction. A validated structured questionnaire using Google Forms was distributed to 51 individuals in the e-sports community at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI). Frequency and percentages as descriptive statistics were utilized in SPSS software for data analysis. The findings reveal that participants engage in e-sports mainly because of their enjoyment and social interaction, with lesser emphasis on escapism. The findings shows that student e-sport intention was more focused into both gaming and watching live-streamed games. Through the research, we will understand psychological well-being and risks in E-sports that will help develop preventive interventions for educational institutions to promote responsible gaming. This implies to governors of learning institutions, those who make laws for education and other sectors, and people who participate in electronic sports that e-sports need to be taken seriously as a significant and attractive feature.

### Keywords:

E-sports, University Student, Social Interaction, Escapism, Enjoyment

## Introduction

Recently, the rising embrace of e-sports among college scholars has received much attention. The underlying reasons behind this pattern are advances in technology and the availability of fast internet connections. As a result, e-sports have become easier to access for students (Newzoo, 2023). E-sporting refers to competitive video gaming where players engage individually or as part of a team in organized competitions, thus giving them entertainment, social interaction opportunities, and a sense of belonging (Gilardi & Martin, 2023). This interest has been further fueled by sites such as Twitch and YouTube Gaming that act as platforms through which they can view various pieces and participate; hence creating an active community for themselves.

The whole idea of e-sports has attracted great attention from people but some problems have still to be resolved. One of the major problems is the risk to academic performance because over-playing takes students away from books affecting their daily lifestyle and grades negatively (King et al., 2020). Moreover, prolonged gaming may give rise to health complications like eye strain, bad positioning, and a sedentary lifestyle thus putting serious risks onto one's body (Van Rooij et al., 2020). In addition, e-sports' competitive nature sometimes contributes to increased levels of stress, use of inappropriate words in communication as well as other issues such as cyberbully among others (Kowert et al., 2021). Therefore, these are issues that can only be dealt with by encouraging healthy gaming behaviours and showing awareness regarding the dangers involved when playing video games.

This study's goal is to investigate the factors that influence why university students, especially in Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), choose to engage in e-sports aspects such as enjoyment, escapism, and social interactions. Identifying these factors is important for understanding what psychological benefits e-sports have and the dangers and problems students experience from its popularity (Griffiths et al., 2020). The objective of this study is to find out the factors that drive people into e-sports and how such participation affects their education and social life. The study will also go further to recommend ways through which safe and responsible gaming may be promoted across educational institutions (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2022).

In recent years, e-sports have become an integral part of student life in higher education institutions worldwide (Mohan Low & Digital Content Development, MDEC, 2023). The community and personal development opportunities that e-sports offer are significant, with students engaging in e-sports not just for entertainment but also for socializing and forming connections with peers (Taylor, 2022). E-sports clubs and teams have been established in many universities, providing students with a structured environment to practice, compete, and develop skills that are transferable to other areas of life. However, the balancing act between gaming and academic responsibilities remains a critical issue, necessitating a deeper understanding of students' intentions and behaviors related to e-sports.

Quantitative research methodology has been deployed in this inquiry, with the use of a structured questionnaire to collect data from a purposive sample of 51 students representing the UPSI e-sport community. The data was processed through SPSS software before undergoing comprehensive analyses on levels of enjoyment, escapism, and social interaction experienced by e-sporting students. This way, an understanding can be deduced about how e-sports influence the students' lives; thus, informing educators, legislators, and e-sporting

aficionados on some aspects (Funk et al., 2022). The results obtained may guide interventions and policies that encourage healthy participation while minimizing possible adverse effects of playing these types of games.

### **Literature Review**

The e-sports industry in Malaysia is rapidly expanding with the support of both the government and the private sector. Numerous e-sports events across the country are attracting large crowds and participants, contributing to the market's continued growth. Recognizing the appeal of e-sports to young people, the government has approved the creation of infrastructure and programs to promote the sport (Khaw, 2022).

### ***Definition Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL)***

Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL) has been recognized as a viable solution to various educational issues, including the teaching of history (Gilardi & Martin, 2023). Traditional teaching methods often result in student apathy, while gamified approaches can increase engagement and motivation. Similar principles apply in the context of e-sports, where interactive and competitive elements can enhance the learning experience (Beyond Gaming, n.d.).

### ***E-sports among Malaysian University Students***

At the university level, many intercollegiate e-sports tournaments provide undergraduate students with the opportunity to showcase their talents and compete against their peers, fostering university pride and student unity. Malaysia also hosts international and local e-sports tournaments that attract participants and spectators from around the world. These large-scale events highlight Malaysia's position as a transnational centre for e-sports. In addition, e-sports has been incorporated into traditional sports competitions such as the South East Asian (SEA) Games, where Malaysia competes regionally and celebrates its best performers (All E-sports News, 2024).

### ***University E-sports Clubs***

Several universities in Malaysia have established e-sports clubs where students can train and compete in a structured and organised environment. These clubs organise in-house competitions, run training sessions, and facilitate student participation in large-scale events, contributing to the development of e-sports talent at the grassroots level (Khaw, 2022).

### ***Initiatives by Various Authorities***

Various organisations are committed to creating a safe foundation for e-sports. Government efforts focus on supporting the e-sports industry and allocating policies and funding for its development. Educational institutions incorporate e-sports into after-school programmes to promote a balanced approach to gaming and learning. The private sector has improved the performance of e-sports tournaments and platforms to support competitive gaming, in addition to building infrastructure (Beyond Gaming, n.d.).

### ***Escapism and E-Sports Intentions***

Escapism has been identified as a significant predictor of e-sports intentions among university students, as it provides an avenue for individuals to disconnect from daily stressors and immerse themselves in alternate realities. Recent studies have found that the desire to escape reality enhances engagement with e-sports, as students often seek entertainment that offers

distraction and relief from academic pressures (Park, 2023; Hamzan, 2020). The interplay between escapism and gaming motivations suggests that students are more likely to engage in e-sports when they perceive it as a form of escapism, providing both psychological relief and enjoyment (Hamzan, 2020; Park, 2023).

### ***Enjoyment and E-Sports Intentions***

Enjoyment plays a crucial role in shaping e-sports intentions among university students, with studies highlighting that the level of enjoyment directly correlates with their intention to participate in e-sports activities. Research indicates that when students find e-sports engaging and entertaining, they are more likely to increase their participation (Park, 2023; Hamzan, 2020). Moreover, the social aspects of enjoyment, such as competing with peers, further amplify the desire to engage in e-sports, creating a compelling loop between enjoyment and increased e-sports intention (Park, 2023).

### ***Social Interaction and E-Sports Intentions***

Social interaction significantly influences university students' intentions to engage in e-sports, as it fosters a sense of community and belonging among players. Studies have shown that the collaborative and competitive nature of e-sports encourages social bonds, which can enhance students' intentions to participate (Hamzan, 2020; Park, 2023). Additionally, the findings suggest that social interaction not only improves the gaming experience but also encourages continued engagement, as students are more likely to play e-sports when they can interact with friends and peers during gameplay (Hamzan, 2020; Park, 2023).

### ***Intention to Play E-Sports***

One of the main reasons students are attracted to e-sports is the enjoyment they derive from this exciting and challenging activity. E-sports provide a form of escapism, allowing students to relax and temporarily divert their attention away from academic pressures and daily stresses. Social interaction is another key factor; e-sports enable students to connect with like-minded individuals, promote teamwork, and build social networks. This aligns with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which suggests that social influences significantly impact behavioural intentions (Khaw, 2022).

### ***Theory of Planned Behaviour***

This study used the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to understand the influential aspects of students' intentions and attitudes towards e-sports. According to TPB, a person's behaviour is influenced by their intention to carry out an activity, which is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. This assessment aims to provide insight into students' motivations and behaviours in relation to e-sports (Gilardi & Martin, 2023).

### ***Methodology***

This study employed quantitative methodology to gather and analyze data on the intentions and motivations of university students regarding e-sports. A structured questionnaire was designed with close-ended questions that have been adapted from Supplementary Document S1 Hong Kong Baptist University the Theory of Planned Behaviour-Based Esports Intention Questionnaire (TPB-Esport-Q). The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms for ease of access and convenience. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections: Section A and Section B. Section A consisted of 10 items seeking demographic information from the respondents. The answers for this section are displayed in the form of a chatbox, thus making

it very user-friendly for the participants to fill out, ensuring that the necessary demographic data concerning age, gender, academic background, and gaming experience are collected.

The range of topics for Section B was extensive, including 18 questions that represented four major constructs. The rationale for selecting these constructs was based on their potential to address some of the reasons why learners perceive e-sports. The items in this section are evaluated using a four-point Likert Scale, with respondents' answers ranging from 1 for "Strongly Disagree" to 4 for "Strongly Agree." This scale was selected to capture the level of intensity with which respondents' feelings and attitudes toward each construct could be perceived, as it would allow fine-grained analysis of their motivation and behaviours.

The questionnaire has been validated by three experts. The percentage of agreements between experts are; enjoyment (75%), escapism (70%), social interaction (81.25%), and intention (87.5%). The percentage of agreements, it shows that the questionnaire was assisted in sharpening the questions in terms of making them clear, relevant, and appropriately capturing the constructs of interest. A pilot test was also conducted to establish the reliability and dependability of the questionnaire by following the steps used in calculating Cronbach's alpha, which is a measure of internal consistency. The enjoyment subscale consisted of 5 items ( $\alpha = .918$ ), the Escapism subscale consisted of 4 items ( $\alpha = .851$ ), the social Interaction subscale consisted of 4 items ( $\alpha = .869$ ), the E-Sports subscale consisted of 5 items ( $\alpha = .907$ ) and the overall subscale consisted of 18 items ( $\alpha = .969$ ). From this analysis, we can conclude that the overall Construct of items is Good.

The study targeted members of the e-sports community from a UPSI, employing purposive sampling to select participants. A total of 51 respondents have been collected as a sample. The Data collection was analyzed using SPSS software. The results were interpreted utilizing descriptive statistics like percentage, mean, frequencies along standard deviation.

The high values of Cronbach's alpha indicate that the item in each construct tends to measure the same underlying concept every time proving the scale to be reliable. The high values of Cronbach's alpha indicate that the item in each construct tends to measure the same underlying concept every time; thus, proving the scale to be reliable.

This study focused on the e-sports community at Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) and employed a purposive sampling method in selecting its participants. This was done so that only individuals relevant to the objectives of the study, like those actively involved in e-sports, were selected as respondents. Fifty-one responses to these items were sufficient for preliminary analyses. The data collected via the questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS software. In the summarization and interpretation of this data, descriptive statistics used percentages, means, frequencies, and standard deviations. The descriptive statistics gave a clear overview of demographic profiles for the respondents and the responses in items on the Likert scale. The research approach enabled an in-depth analysis of central tendencies and variability in data about students' enjoyment, escapism, social interaction, and intentions related to e-sports.

**Table 1: Value of Cronbach's Alpha and Number of Items**

| Construct / Section | No. Items | $\alpha$ |
|---------------------|-----------|----------|
| Enjoyment           | 5         | .918     |
| Escapism            | 4         | .851     |
| Social Interaction  | 4         | .869     |
| E-Sports Intention  | 5         | .907     |
| Overall             | 18        | .969     |

### Results and Findings

There are four constructs of intention to play e-sports among university students which, are enjoyment to play e-sports construct, escapism on playing e-sports game construct, social interaction toward e-sports game construct, and intention to play e-sports game construct displays the responses of 51 students on five items measuring their enjoyment of playing e-sports game, their use of e-sports games as a means of escapism, their social interactions related to e-sports and their intentions regarding future e-sports participation. Each construct consists of specific items rated on a 4-Likert scale, where 1 represents "Strongly Disagree", 2 represents "Disagree", 3 represents "Agree" and 4 represents "Strongly Agree". The tabular form includes the number of respondents (N) which are students, mean (M), Level (Low (L) / Moderate (M) / High (H)), and standard deviation (SD) for each item. The level of each construct (Low, Moderate, and High) in this study will be determined based on the mean scores of the responses as follows:

- Low (L): Mean score between 1.00 and 2.00 indicates a low level of agreement.
- Moderate (M): Mean score between 2.01 and 3.00 indicates a moderate level of agreement.
- High (H): Mean score between 3.01 and 4.00 indicates a high level of agreement.

### Respondents' Demographic Information

The demographic of respondents' information, such as Gender, Level of Academic, Game Device, Number of E-sports Games Joined, and Daily playing Hours (per day), are considered as the demographical variables of the students for this research. This also includes the categories, frequency, and percentage for each variable in the tabular form below.

**Table 2: Demographic of Respondents Information**

| Variables / Characteristics            | Categories      | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                          | Male            | 29        | 56.9%      |
|                                        | Female          | 22        | 43.1%      |
| <b>Level of Academic</b>               | Diploma         | 18        | 35.3%      |
|                                        | Undergraduate   | 25        | 49%        |
|                                        | Postgraduate    | 8         | 15.7%      |
| <b>Game Device</b>                     | Console         | 5         | 9.8%       |
|                                        | Mobile          | 44        | 86.3%      |
|                                        | PC              | 25        | 49%        |
|                                        | PlayStation     | 5         | 9.8%       |
|                                        | Game box        | 1         | 2%         |
|                                        | Nintendo Switch | 4         | 7.8%       |
| <b>Number of E-sports Games Joined</b> | None            | 21        | 41.2%      |

|                                      |                   |    |       |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|----|-------|
|                                      | 1 to 5            | 21 | 41.2% |
|                                      | 5 to 10           | 4  | 7.8%  |
|                                      | 10 and above      | 5  | 9.8%  |
| <b>Daily playing Hours (per day)</b> | 1 hour and less   | 16 | 31.4% |
|                                      | 1 to 2 hours      | 14 | 27.5% |
|                                      | 2 hours and above | 21 | 41.2% |

Based on Table 2, this table represents the demographic information of students for the study. The demographic of respondents' information, such as Gender, Higher Institutions, Level of Academic, Game Device, Number of E-sports Games Joined, and Daily playing Hours (per day), are considered as the demographical variables of the students for this research. Among the respondents with a higher proportion of participants in this study are 29 male students equal to 56.9% and 22 female students equal to 43.1% only. Most participants in this study are UPSI students with a total of 40 students equal to 78.4%, and the remaining 21.8% from 11 other university students. The majority of the students are 25 undergraduate level students equal to 49%, 18 diploma level students equal to 35.3% and the less is from 8 postgraduate level students equal to 15.7%. Most of the 44 students equal to 86.3% prefer using a mobile phone device to play games while the remaining use others device such as 25 students prefer using a PC device equal to 49%, 5 students prefer using Console or PlayStation device equal to 9.8%, 4 students prefer using Nintendo Switch device equal to 7.8%, and the least 1 student prefer using Game box device equal to 2%. 21 students equal to 41.2%, have either not joined any e-sports games or have joined between 5 to 10 while 5 students have joined e-sports between 10 and above equal to 9.8%. And lastly, regarding the daily playing hours, 21 students equal to 41.2% like to play for 2 hours or more per day, while 16 students equal to 31.4% like to play for 1 hour or less, and the least 14 students equal to 27.5% like to play for 1 to 2 hours per day.

#### *i. Enjoyment Play E-sports Construct*

**Table 3: Enjoyment to Play E-sports Construct**

| Items                                     | N  | M    | Level (L/M/H) | SD   |
|-------------------------------------------|----|------|---------------|------|
| 1. I enjoy playing e-sports.              | 51 | 3.57 | H             | 0.67 |
| 2. I feel interested in playing e-sports. | 51 | 3.59 | H             | 0.67 |
| 3. Playing e-sports makes me happy.       | 51 | 3.49 | H             | 0.76 |
| 4. Playing e-sports is very pleasant.     | 51 | 3.53 | H             | 0.64 |
| 5. Playing e-sports is a lot of fun.      | 51 | 3.55 | H             | 0.70 |

Note: The level of High (Mean range from 3.01- 4.00), Moderate (Mean range from 2.01 - 3.00), and Low (Mean range from 1.00 - 2.00)

Based on Table 3, the enjoyment of playing e-sports construct displays the responses of 51 students on five items measuring their enjoyment of playing e-sports games. The first item “I enjoy playing e-sports.”, a mean score is 3.57 with a standard deviation of 0.67, which falls into the high category, indicating that students strongly agree with this statement. The second item, “I feel interested in playing e-sports.” has a mean score of 3.59 and a standard deviation of 0.67 and also falls into a high category, indicating strong agreement among students with consistent responses. The third item, “Playing e-sports makes me happy.” has a mean score of

3.49, placing it in the high category and indicating that students generally agree that playing e-sports games makes them happy. However, the slightly higher standard deviation of 0.76 shows more variability in responses. The fourth item, "Playing e-sports is very pleasant." has a mean score of 3.53 and a standard deviation of 0.64, falling into a high category and demonstrating that students find playing e-sports games very pleasant, with consistent responses. The final item, "Playing e-sports is a lot of fun." has a mean score of 3.55 and a standard deviation of 0.70, placing it in the high category and indicating strong agreement among students that playing e-sports is fun, with moderate consistency in responses.

**ii. Escapism on Play E-sports Game Construct**

**Table 4: Escapism on Play E-sports Game Construct**

| Items                                                                 | N  | M    | Level<br>(L/M/H) | SD   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----|------|------------------|------|
| 1. I play e-sports because it helps me to forget about daily hassles. | 51 | 3.35 | H                | 0.77 |
| 2. I play e-sports because it makes me forget real life.              | 51 | 2.96 | M                | 0.98 |
| 3. I play e-sports because it helps me escape reality.                | 51 | 2.94 | M                | 0.93 |
| 4. I play e-sports to forget about unpleasant things or offenses.     | 51 | 3.29 | H                | 0.83 |

Note: The level of High (Mean range from 3.01- 4.00), Moderate (Mean range from 2.01 - 3.00), and Low (Mean range from 1.00 - 2.00)

Based on Table 4, the escapism on play e-sports game construct shows the responses of 51 students on four items measuring their use of e-sports as a means of escapism. For the first item, "I play e-sports because it helps me to forget about daily hassles." the mean score is 3.35 with a standard deviation of 0.77. This mean score falls into a high category, indicating that students strongly agree that playing e-sports helps them to forget about the daily hassles, with relatively consistent responses. The second item, "I play e-sports because it makes me forget real life." has a mean score of 2.96 and a standard deviation of 0.98. This score falls into a moderate category, indicating that students moderately agree that playing e-sports makes them forget about real life. The higher standard deviation indicates more variability in responses. In the third item, "I play e-sports because it helps me escape reality.", the mean score is 2.94 with a standard deviation of 0.93. This mean score is also falls into the moderate category, indicating that students generally agree that playing e-sports helps them escape reality, with moderate variability in the responses. The final item, "I play e-sports to forget about unpleasant things or offenses." has a mean score of 3.29 and a standard deviation of 0.83. This mean score falls into a high category, indicating that students strongly agree that playing e-sports helps them forget unpleasant things or offenses, with consistent responses.

iii. *Social Interaction Toward E-sports Game Construct*

**Table 5: Social Interaction Toward E-sports Game Construct**

| Items                                                        | N  | M    | Level (L/M/H) | SD   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----|------|---------------|------|
| 1. I play e-sports because I can get to know new people.     | 51 | 3.06 | H             | 0.90 |
| 2. I play e-sports because I can meet many different people. | 51 | 3.06 | H             | 0.90 |
| 3. I play e-sports because it is a good social experience.   | 51 | 3.12 | H             | 0.93 |
| 4. I play e-sports because gaming gives me company.          | 51 | 3.00 | M             | 0.94 |

Note: The level of High (Mean range from 3.01- 4.00), Moderate (Mean range from 2.01 - 3.00), and Low (Mean range from 1.00 - 2.00)

Based on Table 5, the social interaction toward e-sports game construct shows the responses of 51 students on four items measuring their social interactions related to e-sports. For the first item, “I play e-sports because I can get to know new people.” the mean score is 3.06 with a standard deviation of 0.90. This mean score falls into a high category, indicating that students strongly agree that meeting new people is a moderately important aspect of their e-sports experience. The second item, “I play e-sports because I can meet many different people.” has a mean score of 3.06 and a standard deviation of 0.90. This score falls into a high category, indicating that students strongly agree that e-sports facilitates exposure to diverse individuals. In the third item, “I play e-sports because it is a good social experience.”, the mean score is 3.12 with a standard deviation of 0.93. This mean score falls into the high category, indicating that players strongly agree that e-sports offers a positive social experience. The final item, “I play e-sports because gaming gives me company.” has a mean score of 3.00 and a standard deviation of 0.94. This mean score falls into a moderate category, indicating that students moderately agree that gaming provides them with companionship.

iv. *Intention on Playing E-sports Game Construct*

**Table 6: Intention on Playing E-sports Game Construct**

| Items                                      | N  | M    | Level (L/M/H) | SD   |
|--------------------------------------------|----|------|---------------|------|
| 1. I plan to continue playing e-sports.    | 51 | 3.29 | H             | 0.67 |
| 2. I intend to play e-sports next week.    | 51 | 2.98 | M             | 0.93 |
| 3. I intend to play e-sports next month.   | 51 | 3.04 | H             | 0.85 |
| 4. I intend to play e-sports next year.    | 51 | 3.06 | H             | 0.90 |
| 5. I will make an effort to play e-sports. | 51 | 3.16 | H             | 0.76 |

Note: The level of High (Mean range from 3.01- 4.00), Moderate (Mean range from 2.01 - 3.00), and Low (Mean range from 1.00 - 2.00)

Based on Table 6, the intention of playing e-sports game construct displays the responses of 51 students on five items measuring their intentions regarding future e-sports participation. For the first item, “I plan to continue playing e-sports.” the mean score is 3.29 with a standard deviation of 0.67, which falls into the high category, indicating that students strongly agree that

students generally have a strong intention to persist with continuing playing e-sports games. The second item, “I intend to play e-sports next week.” has a mean score of 2.98 and a standard deviation of 0.93, falling into the moderate category, indicating moderately agree that students intend to engage in e-sports next week. The third item, “I intend to play e-sports next month.” has a mean score of 3.04 with a standard deviation of 0.85 placing it in the high category and indicating that students strongly agree to continue participating in e-sports next month. The fourth item, “I intend to play e-sports next year.” has a mean score of 3.06 and a standard deviation of 0.90, falling into a high category and indicating that students intend to participate in the upcoming year. The final item, “I intend to play e-sports next year.” has a mean score of 3.16 and a standard deviation of 0.76, placing it in the high category and indicating that students have strong agreement and commitment to putting effort into engaging in e-sports.

**Table 7: Correlation of Enjoyment, Escapism and Social Interaction with E-Sports Intention**

| Items              | Pearson Correlation Value | P      |
|--------------------|---------------------------|--------|
| Enjoyment          | .429                      | 0.00** |
| Escapism           | .339                      | 0.1*   |
| Social Interaction | .449                      | 0.00** |

Notes: \*\* significant at  $p < 0.00$ , \* significant at  $p < 0.05$

### ***Escapism and E-Sports Intention***

There is a significant positive correlation between escapism and e-sports intention, with a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.429,  $p < 0.01$ . HO1 was rejected. This suggests that as escapism increases, e-sports intention tends to increase as well.

*HO1- There is no significant relationship of Escapism with E-Sports Intentions among UPSI's students.*

### ***Enjoyment and E-Sports Intention***

A moderate positive correlation exists between enjoyment and e-sports intention, indicated by a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.339,  $p < 0.05$ . HO2 was rejected. This implies that higher enjoyment levels are associated with greater e-sports intention.

*HO2- There is no significant relationship of Enjoyment with E-Sports Intentions among UPSI's students.*

### ***Social Interaction and E-Sports Intention***

There is a strong positive correlation between social interaction and e-sports intention, with a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.449,  $p < 0.01$ . HO3 was failed to accept. This indicates that greater social interaction correlates with an increased intention to engage in e-sports.

*HO3- There is no significant relationship of Social Interaction with E-Sports Intentions among UPSI's students.*

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This research sheds light on the preferences of university students towards taking part in e-sports, focusing on enjoyment, escapism, and socialization. It has been noted that the level of

enjoyment was high as students found the e-sports games quite interesting and entertaining. While escapism through e-sports was instrumental in relieving stress from the mundane activities of life, it did not cause complete detachment from the real world. In addition to that, participants emphasized that positive social experiences were an interaction that was enhanced by these sports. There was, however, a relatively high intention to play these games, suggesting that such activities are very much part of students' leisure pursuits.

The positive and moderate relationship of escapism and e-sport intentions suggests a robust link between escapism and the intention to engage in e-sports. As individuals seek escape through gaming, their intention to participate in e-sports rises, aligning with Hamzan (2020), who discusses how escapism can drive gaming behaviors.

A moderate correlation of enjoyment and e-sports intentions indicates that increased enjoyment in gaming activities correlates with higher e-sports intention. This supports Park (2023), which emphasizes enjoyment as a critical motivator for engagement in gaming and e-sports.

Meanwhile, the strong correlation of social interaction and e-sports intentions signifies that social interaction is a key factor in influencing e-sports intention. This reinforces findings in existing literature suggesting that community and social dynamics in gaming enhance player engagement and intentions to participate in e-sports.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. Although this study has provided important findings, there are some limitations that should be noted. The first limitation concerns the research sample, as the study was limited to students of UPSI, thereby limiting the wider applicability of the findings in the empirical world. Future studies should aim to include a more diverse and heterogeneous sample of males and females from different institutions and regions in order to enhance the external validity of the results. Furthermore, this paper has not sufficiently covered the contradictory effects of involvement in e-sports addressing some issues such as academic challenges and addiction issues which deserve thorough inquiry. The implications section is another significant aspect that needs enhancement as it is at the moment vague especially for educators, policymakers, and e-sports organizers on what they should do. It should also be pointed out that there are limits to this study due to reliance on self-reported data as all the data collection was done using only Google Forms. Enriching the future investigations with the critiques offered here will enable a deeper understanding of the place of e-sports in the lives of students.

Engaging in e-sports serves as a coping mechanism for students, allowing them to escape from real-world stresses and anxieties. This escapism can lead to increased attachment to virtual environments, enhancing the overall gaming experience (Pal & Arpnikanondt, 2023). Enjoyment is a critical factor influencing the intention to participate in e-sports. Students derive satisfaction and pleasure from gaming, which boosts their inclination to engage in these activities (Hamzan, 2020). Social dynamics play a significant role in e-sports, as they foster community and connection among players. This social interaction not only enhances enjoyment but also increases the likelihood of students participating in e-sports. Together, these factors create a compelling environment that encourages university students to engage more deeply in e-sports (Wilis & Parningotan Manik, 2022).

In general, the results are beneficial for game developers and educators who intend to harness the more positive features of e-sports. For instance, game developers can use the fact that students enjoy highly interactive social activities as a guide to developing better and more interesting games. On the other hand, these insights are useful to teachers in ensuring that there is healthy level of e-sports integration in learning, which encourages healthy practices, such as gaming for a purpose, and helps people in the community bonding.

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