

The Construction of Social Identity Through Digital Games Mobile Legends Bang Bang

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Abstract. SIT (Social Identity Theory) has been extensively used to study group identity and its implications in a variety of contexts, but SIT's relevance has gotten less attention in digital gaming. The article examines how the digital game Mobile Legends Bang Bang constructs social identity based on the observation outcomes attributed to gaming identity through the phenomenon of digital gaming. A qualitative approach guided the data analysis in this research. Moreover, this study gathers data using online questionnaires and interviews with five participants of Mobile Legends Bang Bang's players. The analysis indicates that Mobile Legends Bang-Bang has contributed to the construction of social identity, which is associated with aspects of existing social networks and virtual communities while generating new forms of cultural activity.

Keywords: digital games, gamer, mobile legends, social identity, virtual community

Abstrak. SIT (Teori Identitas Sosial) telah banyak digunakan untuk mempelajari identitas kelompok dan implikasinya dalam berbagai konteks, tetapi relevansi SIT kurang mendapat perhatian dalam permainan digital. Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana game digital Mobile Legends Bang Bang mengkonstruksi identitas sosial berdasarkan hasil observasi yang dikaitkan dengan identitas game melalui fenomena game digital. Analisis data dalam penelitian ini berpedoman pada pendekatan kualitatif. Selain itu, penelitian ini mengumpulkan data melalui aktivitas virtual dan mewawancarai lima partisipan dari pemain Mobile Legends Bang Bang. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa Mobile legends Bang Bang secara umum telah menemukan identifikasi positif dalam mengkonstruksi identitas sosial, yang dikaitkan dengan aspek jaringan sosial yang ada, dan komunitas virtual sekaligus juga menghasilkan bentuk-bentuk aktivitas budaya baru.

Kata kunci: game digital, pemain permainan, mobile legends, identitas sosial, komunitas virtual

INTRODUCTION

Games have the potential to be a form of social interaction. Players can contact, communicate, and enjoy with other people in a game (Domahidi et al., 2014). In addition, gaming has the effect of promoting non-gaming social activities that appear to players to be entirely meaningful. Social activities include gaming gatherings, discussion groups, and online community platforms. As a result, the truth that playing games are a regular occurrence for a specific social group authorizes these "indirect" social activities. Thus, gaming starts within existing social networks.

In the popular media, digital gaming is portrayed as an antisocial activity detached from the normal surroundings of daily life. Interestingly, only a tiny portion of players consider themselves gamers (Shaw, 2012). Regarding to identification, digital games differentiate from other forms of media. Digital games, like other forms of media, allow individuals to explore their identities and express

themselves (Murphy, 2004; Papacharissi, 2011). However, compared to other media types, gaming allows for a more direct expression of someone's identity. Indeed, it would also be difficult for somebody who utilizes social networks to refuse that they will be a "social networker" people who play digital games can deny being gamers. As a result, when exploring gamer identity, it can be studied how a medium provides opportunities for identification that are not common in other forms of media.

Mobile Legend Bang Bang is a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) established and presented by a Moonton developer. This digital game can be played on Android and iOS mobile platforms. The game starts with two opposite teams fighting to take the opponent's base and destroy it while protecting their base for command of a path between the bases, which is divided into three lanes: top, middle, and bottom. Minions are characters that spawn at team bases and fight enemies and towers while following the three lanes to the rival team's base. Each team consists of five people, and each of them is responsible for their hero avatar. Heroes are divided into six categories: fighter, assassin, marksman, mage, support, and tank. In the match, the players can engage others via online communication (e.g., chats or voice calls) to form temporary performance groups or to become affiliates of more stable social relations defined as communities. In Mobile Legend Bang Bang, a gamer's identity can be precious to them, which may correspond with their good self-perception. This phenomenon is described using the Social Identity Theory (SIT).

Social Identity Theory (SIT) has already been largely applied to the study of group identity and its implications in various contexts. However, SIT's relevance to digital gaming has received less attention. The procedures by which someone's sense of self is identified by association with a particular social forum are defined by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity theory focuses on the mechanisms controlling the relationships between groups and individuals. It is defined as "that part of an individual's self that is generated from his understanding of his participation in social groups social groups, as well as the quality and expressive significance attached to that participation." (De Grove et al., 2015).

In summary, social identity theory aims to identify and discover when persons see themselves as individuals or members of groups. The SIT also examines how individual and social identities impact personal perspectives and behavioral aspects. For instance, identifying with a particular social forum, such as gamers, is a description of people in terms of the external categorization of their identities. Social identity enables individuals to portray themselves socially and significantly contributes to a sense of belonging and worth.

A gamer's identity is socially shaped. Orme (2016) asserts that sociality strongly influences gamer identity. Contribution to virtual communities can provide a new source of social capital, a personal resource comprised of connections with others formed through social interactions. Moreover, games provide an opportunity for identity expression, experimentation, and a means of accumulating social capital (de Grove et al., 2015). Identity suggests similarities or differences, indicating individuality and group affiliation (Buckingham, 2008). According to social identity theory, social groups influence an individual's identity, even though the connection is reciprocal (Neys et al., 2014). Meus et al. (2002) found that peers and friends were very important in developing a person's identity. This means that you shouldn't underestimate the role that peers and friends play in how gamers build their identities. As a result, it is possible to argue that self-identification as a gamer is impacted by the amount of social connection encountered while playing games or the impact of gamers on the instantaneous social network.

O'Connor et al. (2015) researched social identity in digital games. Their primary data sources were players of MMOGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Games). They carried out the study using qualitative semi-structured interviews with World of Warcraft (WoW) players to represent their experiences of the MMOG's social relationships. Their study's findings indicate that MMOG players can build gaming communities. In the game, almost every participant used or supplied social support, and several provided or accepted supportive care on a larger scale. Players and guild members were identified as gamers. Some of the informants identified themselves as WoW players. O'Connor et al. illustrate the benefits of a psychological sense of community (PSOC). Another previous study regarding social identity in digital games was conducted by Linda K. Kaye (2015). She shows how the football simulation game Football Manager improves the way players build their social identities outside of the game. Her primary data sources were Football Manager players, designed to allow her to conduct a thorough investigation of their impressions of the game, both in terms of gameplay and concerning its capabilities in their larger social situations.

Moreover, Romadona (2019) conducted another study on social identity construction in video games. His primary data sources were community members of the online game Clover. He presents the research using qualitative methods, with data collection techniques being observed and participant interviews. His research findings focus on the process of representation used by participants and can result in a new identity that informants use in the virtual community online game, Clover. In his study case, several external factors influenced the formation of new virtual identities, including the social environment, reference groups, and idol figures. Besides, he found a connection between the amount of time spent playing online games in a day and social relationships in real life and cyberspace.

This research is different from the previous research above because we scrutinize how the digital game Mobile Legends Bang Bang has positive identification as a medium for constructing social identity through the phenomenon of digital gaming. By concentrating on how people identify themselves as gamers, this study demonstrates, based on interview transcripts, that their interests in the construction of social identity in the medium exists in relation to some aspects, such as promoting the gamers' identity and the social networks while also generating new forms of cultural activity, and how the game encourages players to feel a sense of virtual community affiliation and promotes positive shared experiences between players through Mobile Legends Bang Bang. As a result, the recent case can provide a fascinating perception of the social capabilities of the game and its role within its players' social narration and identities. It seems likely that Mobile Legends Bang Bang is a useful game that helps players form their identities, which could have positive effects on society.

As part of a larger qualitative analysis of social relationships, the current study attempted to respond to five research questions: How do Mobile Legends players identify their identity as gamers? What are the aspects of Mobile Legends that can build the gamer identity? Do Mobile Legends players identify as Mobile Legends players or as ordinary players only? What are Mobile Legends players' experiences of establishing social networks with other Mobile Legends players in building their gamer identity? And how does Mobile Legends player construct their gamer identity through the virtual community? The study also aimed to uncover the variety of ways through which digital gaming has been interpreted in terms of social identity in everyday life. A gamer identity will be emerged and be managed to maintain in relation to the wider cultural perspective as well as the players' everyday social situations.

METHOD

A qualitative approach in the form of analysis was chosen for this research to guide the data gathering and analysis. The key aspects of qualitative research in examining the literature are that the participant is the main instrument that interprets the literature sparingly. The study is descriptive, which means it is developed using words or images rather than numbers, and the process is more important than the result because conceptions are established by literature. The researchers used a method that has recently become popular because it collects data through virtual fields, which is a research method that tries to describe and construe objects indirectly in a way that is true to reality based on largely similar behavior observed. Virtual field spaces encourage players to participate in identity development or to attempt different identities compared to "orthodox" field research. This method is perfect for this study because it lets people be both participants and observers. This way, researchers can get both general and specific information from the people taking part in the study.

In this data collection method, the following methodological tools for virtual tracing are discussed: taking notes, microanalysis, and the use of questions using an online survey in Google Form. The researchers conducted online interviews with five (5) people selected from Universitas Brawijaya, both active alumni and students who have used Mobile Legends Bang Bang online games for at least one year. The respondents were collected based on gender, age, playing frequency, rank or tier, genres used, and other questions related to the topic. Age was measured as a constant variable in years. The mean age of respondents was around 18–27. To evaluate playing frequency, respondents were asked the number of times they played digital games. In qualitative research, interviews are one of the most important sources of gaining knowledge about how individuals perceive, feel, and construe the social environment (Creswell, 2012). The descriptive method is executed because the information is presented in a descriptive manner. Materials include digital game applications, gaming videos, textbooks, papers, articles, manuscripts, interview transcripts, etc. This research was mostly about a specific game app called Mobile Legends Bang Bang.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis began following the interview and occurred concurrently with data collection. Table 1 provides an overview of the relevant participant descriptions for Mobile Legends Bang Bang. The descriptions are categorized by age, gender, play frequency, rank, or tier. All participants achieved their respective ranks through ranked play. There are eight sequences in the rank, from lowest to highest. The ranks are Warrior, Elite, Master, Grand Master, Epic, Legend, Mythic, and Mythical Glory.

Table 1 The list of Mobile Legends Players Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Hour/Day	Rank/Division
RAD	23	Male	1-2 hours	Mythical Glory
LKP	18	Male	1-2 hours	Mythic
NZ	23	Male	2 hours	Epic
MWPA	27	Male	1 hour	Epic
AJZ	21	Male	1-2 hours	Mythical Glory

Mobile Legends as a Medium for Promoting the Gamer's Identity

In a game, goals are a crucial factor; they figure out what the player has to do in order to win the game and provide the player with a sense of achievement and progression. Goals are what a player wants to accomplish during a game and are generally measurable. That is, depending on which goals we use, the goals are entities that can be measured. Gamers have various goals in playing games. In general, gamers play not only because they want to, but also because they enjoy the game, and it has become a passion for them. It demonstrated how gamers' experiences are highly self-motivated and they constantly appear to have a rational expectation of winning when participating in an online game. Furthermore, after playing games, social connections tend to become stronger and gamers can work hard and earn optimistic expectations, such as an epic victory, which is a common situation discovered by experienced gamers in which they finalize a task that was originally thought to be nearly impossible.

Gaming has traditionally been assumed of as a joyful activity; however, it has increasingly taken on the characteristics of leisure, such as perseverance, knowledge and skills, benefits, and unique identities. The concept of "gamer" is typically used to express a person who enjoys playing video games. In academic studies, players, such as a member of minority groups, are equally labeled as gamers based on their behavior (Royse et al., 2007; Schott & Horrell, 2000). How people identify themselves as gamers, is not the same as who counts as a gamer. Identifying allows us to distinguish how one might be classified externally from how one describes someone's own identity.

Excerpt 1

"Sebagai gamer. Secara pribadi, saya senang bermain Mobile Legends. Selain ingin menghilangkan stres, game ini juga rutinitas untuk menjalankan hobi saya." (LKP, 18)

"As gamers. Personally, I like playing Mobile Legends. Besides wanting to relieve stress, this game is also a routine to carry out my hobby." (LKP, 18)

Excerpt 2

"Sebagai gamer, karena pada dasarnya saya suka main game. Saya main sejak zaman playstation 1 (crash bandicot), playstation 2 (GTA SA, WE, PES), dan desktop gaming since 2017 (Metal Gear Solid V, GTA V, Pro Evolution Soccer 2018- 2022, WRC, TEKKEN 7, Injustice, The witcher, etc). Begitu juga dengan Mobile Legends yang sedang saya suka saat ini." (RAD, 23)

"As a gamer, because basically, I like to play games. I've been playing since the days of PlayStation 1 (crash bandicoot), PlayStation 2 (GTA SA, WE, PES), and gaming desktops since 2017 (Metal Gear Solid V, GTA V, Pro Evolution Soccer 2018- 2022, WRC, TEKKEN 7, Injustice, The Witcher, etc). Similarly, I'm currently enjoying Mobile Legends." (RAD, 23)

Some respondents were more likely than average to identify as Mobile Legends Bang Bang players due to their enjoyment of the game. LKP (18) contended in this interview that he is a "gamer," even though he plays games as a daily routine and hobby. Oversimplified assumptions that playing certain types of digital games automatically identifies a person as a gamer has obscured the other reasons a person may or may not have this identity. RAD (23) identifies himself as a gamer based on the frequency of his participation. He states that he has been a gamer since the days of PlayStation 1, PlayStation 2, and gaming desktops beginning in 2017 until the release of Mobile Legends Bang Bang in 2018. In this instance, the frequency of play was the most significant indicator of whether a person considered themselves a gamer, although youth and a preference for the most popular game genres

were also regarded as significant indicators. Play frequency was a significant indicator of whether participants implemented the "gamer" concept with their friends in terms of developing the concept of "gamer" in their social life.

The various interpretations of the term "gamer identity" in other relevant studies, reconstruct people's perceptions of the category. In several studies, someone's perspectives of how involved a player is in the gameplay and affiliated community are influenced by their previous expectations and experiences towards a variety of motivation factors such as personal gaming performance, the believability of video games, participation in-game stories, escapism, and enthusiasm, as well as moral self-reaction (al Mawalia, 2020). In this case, someone's perceptions of how one's gaming habits relate to their personality are the most significant characteristic of gamer identity construction toward those stereotypically believed to constitute gaming (De Grove et al., 2015). The concept of socially constructed identity is crucial to comprehend that our identities are flexible when thinking about who we are or what others think of us. The study of people's daily routines is useful in this case because it demonstrates how gaming, whether digital or not, plays an essential part in social life.

Excerpt 3

"Menurut saya, tier atau tingkatan rank seperti legend, terutama mythic itu dapat dijadikan sebagai identitas diri dimana semakin tinggi tingkatan rank seseorang itu menunjukkan bahwa mereka berada di kasta tertinggi. Disamping itu juga dapat menjadi suatu kebanggaan diri sendiri apalagi untuk ikut turnamen." (MWPA, 27)

"In my opinion, tiers or ranks such as epic, legend, and mythic can be used as a means of self-identity, where the higher a person's rank level indicates that they are in the highest caste. Besides that, you can also be proud of yourself specially to join the tournament." (MWPA, 27)

This case illustrates how important online social communities are to players, with their ranks being a significant aspect of their online identities. MWPA (27) assumes that ranking in Mobile Legends can be connected to a gamer's self-identity. The Ranked Game option will be available when the account reaches level eight and has at least six heroes. The ranked game is a three-month seasonally competitive match mode in which the players will be designated to one of seven divisions that are managed from the lowest to the highest: Warrior, Elite, Master, Grand Master, Epic, Legend, and Mythic. Warrior is the lowest division, while Mythic is the highest in the game.

Based on interviews with MWPA (27), the rank division has a significant impact on one's ability to identify their identity as a "gamer", especially in Mobile Legends Bang Bang. In this game, players will be paired with enemies and allies who are in the same or near a certain ranked division as them. When players in the ranked game mode win a match, they will be awarded one star; otherwise, if they lose a match in the ranked game, they will lose one star. As most of these games are team-based, players earn rank and battle points by contributing to the group's efforts. The more they achieve in-game, the higher their social rank among the players. The competitive nature of the games, which all have well-established and publicly available ranking systems, means that within the game, an individual's ranking carries with it social and skill status. In this case, being a part of the high-ranked teams for these players was great pride that was used as a motivational boost for players, and this can be categorized and promoted as an identity. This represents various motivations of player models in the hopes of describing why individuals play games, which games they play, and how they play. Therefore, it makes sense if behavior and personality can identify their identity.

Mobile Legends as a Medium to Construct Gamer Identity Through Social Network Features

The identity of a gamer is a social construct. Orme (2016) points out that sociality has a big influence on gamer identity. The digital game Mobile Legends Bang Bang is a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) mobile game which is based on the possibilities of computer networks. In most online multiplayer online games, players are empowered to interact with each other. Participation with others is necessary to a game's advancement, or the game may be possible that the game will be based on player competition.

Typical online games are played relatively alone, without the need to communicate directly with other players. However, not only is social networking a great motive for playing multiplayer games, but it also provides additional contexts for the promotion of social identity. This is evident in the variety of communication modes available in most multiplayer games. Text, images, and sound can all be used to communicate in a single game. A game may also provide tools for two-person interaction as well as group and community communication. This can be called a social identity network. A social identity network is an online resource for constructing a person's identity based on the involvement of other users. All of the information that individuals provide is automatically validated by the network.

Some of the participants are identified as Mobile Legends players. These participants spent their free time playing Mobile Legends Bang Bang. The players also participated in other aspects of gaming culture, such as listening to video game music and wearing skins and accessories with designs inspired by games. Furthermore, in Mobile Legends Bang Bang, there were several social features that could be separated into two major categories. The first category includes social elements that are a part of gameplay. These features are viewable profiles, long-term achievements, spectating matches, hero leader boards, punishment or karma systems, photo albums, and likes. Then, the second group includes social elements that happen outside of the core gameplay. These features are personal or group inbox rooms; adding friends; community or squad; and affinity.



Figure 1 Mobile Legends Affinity [Mobile legends Application]

Excerpt 4

"Saya memilih dikenal sebagai pemain Mobile Legends dibanding permainan lainnya karena selain permainannya menyenangkan, Mobile Legends juga ada fitur-fitur yang unik, salah satunya 'Affinity', dimana fitur tersebut mengidentifikasi diri kita yang terhubung dengan orang lain sebagai partner/pasangan, brothers, besties, confidants dengan bermain bersama" (RAD, 23)

"I prefer to be known as a Mobile Legends player compared to other games because apart from being fun, Mobile Legends also has unique features, one of which is

'Affinity.' This feature identifies ourselves as connected with other people as partners or lovers, brothers, besties, confidants by playing together." (RAD, 23)

The excerpt above indicates that identity as a "gamer" is constructed by social elements. RAD (23) confirms that he would rather be known as a "gamer" of Mobile Legends Bang Bang than any other games. In addition to having fun playing, Mobile Legends has unique features for him. There are many kinds of features, and they are usually classified based on their characteristics or underlying goals rather than the types of game play they contain. Based on the interview, RAD (23) mentions the type of features that can be categorized in the construction of social identity. This feature is known as Affinity. Affinity in Mobile Legends Bang Bang is a system that can build intimacy with other people or collaborate by interacting with your friends and finishing the game with them (figure 1). Each player will gain +6 familiarity if they finish the match in rank mode together. +3 in classic mode and +2 in all other modes. When a player's familiarity reaches 150, they can form an affinity with a friend. Either player can initiate a request for affinity as partners or lovers, brothers, besties, or confidants, which must be approved by the other. This feature is in the social section on the Mobile Legends Bang Bang player account page. This identification permits us to deconstruct how one could be classified and how one might be characterized. A method based on identification recognizes that a person can identify with such a wide range of social categorizations. This point of view also offers a way to deal with the problems of identity, gameplay, and game modeling by labeling players based on their actions or giving certain identity categories more weight than others.

The respondent is a personal gamer who has developed a broad sense of self through self-categorization and negotiation with others. In such situations, the gamer identity is a self-perception-based preference for how to interact and conduct oneself. As a consequence, socio-cultural indicators such as the individual's insertion into gamer identity in social connections, social classes, and the broad social environment influence gamer identity in public perception of the position (de Grove et al., 2015). As a result, this identity is probably assumed not only by enjoying the games but also by assigning value to each other, demonstrating, and interacting with their knowledge, and showing who we are. In other situations, according to Grooten and Kowert's study (2015), the identity processes symbolized by avatar conception can contribute to the formation of connections within a gaming identity. The identity elements of the virtual in-game space introduced in this study are primarily concerned with elements of character design and online multiplayer relationships. In-game, the gamer's identity matches up to his or her virtual characterizations represented by the avatar. The conception of avatars permits the analysis of secondary identities and role models in the context of digital games.

Excerpt 5

"Starlight sih, soalnya aku sendiri member Starlight. Jadi Starlight itu bisa langsung pakai kaya misalnya skin eksklusif, avatar border khusus, trus banyak rewards juga, jadi terkesan keren gitu pas yang lain gak punya, kita punya" (NZ, 23)

"Starlight, because I'm a Starlight member. So, Starlight members can immediately use things like exclusive skins, special avatar borders, and lots of rewards too, so it looks cool when the others don't have them, while we have them." (NZ, 23)



Figure 2 Starlight Member Benefits and Price List [Mobile Legends Application]

Apart from RAD (23), participant NZ (23) also presented another social element in Mobile Legends Bang Bang. He mentions that the Starlight Member feature can construct social identity. Starlight Member is a premium feature in the Mobile Legends Bang Bang provided by Moonton, which is located on the Starlight page in the Mobile Legends Bang Bang application (figure 2). Players who become Starlight members are thought to be cooler because they do not play for free. This feature is available in the form of a subscription. To enjoy its benefits, it is necessary to pay a certain amount of money. The benefits of being a Starlight member include the ability to obtain exclusive and premium characters, heroes, or skins; avatar borders; battle points; and rewards or gifts. Other benefits of being a Starlight member are freely changing weekly free heroes/skins; getting an additional 10 Protection Points when losing a match; getting an exclusive membership icon that can be shown to other players.



Figure 3 Starlight Member Privilege [Mobile Legends Application]

According to NZ (23), the goal of becoming a Starlight member is for people to learn more about the accomplishments of gamers and to receive recognition. Exclusive and premium characters, exclusive skins and avatar borders, and other rewards have an attraction to the players themselves (figure 3). Starlight members can show their different identities as players or as social objects in any part or outside of gameplay. This feature identifies symbolic values to which members can refer in identifying and proving their belonging. Starlight members also deliver symbols to illustrate their status and privilege in the game. In Mobile Legends Bang Bang, it is common practice to allow the avatar or profile to wear a specific symbol once the Starlight member. This can be used to convey identification while differentiating an individual from other players.

Mobile Legends as a Medium to Construct Gamers Identity in Virtual Community

The general populace is very concerned with social identity. A person can become a part of a broader group in a virtual community (Hall, 1996). In gaming terms, examining one's favorite video games

can supply a commonality for interaction. By presenting common experiences, playing games with others can help to boost relationships. They share information with one another, form channels, share thoughts, and cheat, among other things. These kinds of affiliations can be assumed to be forms of community (Bryce & Rutter, 2006). Gamers can use the information and symbolic devices to develop entirely new community images, specifically when the community members haven't ever met in person or can be thought of as a virtual community. In contrast to communities of presence, a gaming community would be used to summarize imagined community formation processes aided by gaming elements. Mobile Legends Bang Bang can be viewed as a form of interaction between unknown people, with the potential to generate meaningful social ties.

The presence of a virtual community in online digital games brings up the idea of a virtual identity. Nevertheless, it is impossible to completely comprehend gaming identities without considering their unique relevance to digital games. Individuals can explore virtual identities within the gaming environment while communicating in digital environments. Social identity can be used to illustrate one's social position in relation to others and helps to increase the sense of belongingness and self-esteem. In addition, identity in cyberspace has no bounds. People may never meet someone with whom they are connected online. Because there are a lot of people in the virtual space, people must make up new identities.

Some participants reported identifying themselves as members of the Mobile Legends Bang Bang virtual community. Nevertheless, the nature and significance of these social identities varied greatly. The participants also mentioned a Mobile Legends community, and they assumed there was something that connected Mobile Legends Bang Bang players with each other, even virtually.

Excerpt 6

"Saya bergabung dengan komunitas Mobile Legend CROT (Critical of Thinking), yang beranggotakan lima orang. Ya, saya menganggap adanya komunitas ini dapat memberikan saya identitas sebagai seorang pemain Mobile Legends meskipun secara virtual. (AJZ, 21)

"I joined the Mobile Legend CROT (Critical of Thinking) community, which consists of five people. Yes, I think the existence of this community can give me an identity as a Mobile Legends player even though virtually." (AJZ, 21)

AJZ (21) identifies himself as a gamer when joining a Mobile Legends community, CROT (Critical of Thinking). For him, joining the community can construct a social identity, even virtually. The gamers have gathered to illustrate their affiliation in a virtual community, which is a significant factor in someone's identity. In this case, the term "gamer" is explained in more detail and seen how it's used in the virtual gaming community to describe individual and interpersonal identities. This will include a discussion of what it implies to be a gamer and who is a gamer, and the implications of the concept for both players and society. A few people also call themselves "gamers" to show that they are part of the online gaming community.

Making decision to identify as a gamer is a significantly distinct process from being labeled as a gamer by an external source. As a result, there are numerous significant distinctions between someone who plays digital games but does not consider themselves a gamer and someone who does make the identification. According to Hall (1966), identification with a specific community is the individual's self-definition rather than classifications based on dynamic meanings of identity attributed externally. This social identity (how somebody describes oneself in relation to others) is a "component of

the individual's self-concept." Individuals who self-identify as gamers adopt a group-specific personal identity, which includes individual characteristics, interests, and perspectives in addition to a social or group identity.

Excerpt 7

"Ya, adanya komunitas ini menjadi lebih seru apalagi saat bermain, karena kami satu kelompok dapat membuat strategi dan mengomunikasikannya saat bermain. (NZ, 23)

"Yes, the existence of this community becomes more exciting, especially when playing, because we as a group can make strategies and communicate them while playing." (NZ, 23)

The participants NZ (23) confirm that the existence of a community can identify its identity through communication within the group, such as making playing strategies. According to NZ (23), it gets more exciting because players can assist teammates and establish a collective sense of "togetherness" in these game-related experiences. Having the ability to discuss digital games with other people not just allows you to identify as a gamer at different times, but also improves friendships and helps each other. When players are using the Mobile Legends Bang Bang game application, technology can affect their thoughts and behaviors. Furthermore, the Mobile Legends game includes a messaging and voice feature that allows players to communicate and engage. This communication has the potential to contribute to virtual communication, which empowers friendly relationships to form a community in cyberspace.

Using Social Identity Theory (SIT), the researchers can distinguish two major social levels. On the one hand, there is a society that is deeply entrenched in its culture. Moreover, there is also the single gamer, who has a broad self-image that is transformed by self-characterize and is individually discussed with others in social circumstances. In these situations, the gamer's identity is an alternative to communicating and accomplishing tasks individually. As a result, the identity of a gamer is vulnerable to sociocultural indexes such as the participant's involvement in social connections, social circles, and the whole social circumstances.

Excerpt 8

"Iya, gabung. Awalnya iseng nyoba apply fitur squad di aplikasi Mobile Legends, dan ternyata asik juga. Selain nambah pengalaman dan ilmu baru, tetapi juga forum berdiskusi mulai strategi permainan, bahkan diluar permainan. Trus semacam ada kebanggan juga sih" (LKP, 18)

"Yes, join. At first, it was fun to try to apply the squad feature in the Mobile Legends application, and it turned out to be fun too. In addition to adding new experience and knowledge, there is also a discussion forum starting game strategies, and even outside the game. Then it's kind of proud to have a squad." (LKP, 18)

In line with NZ (23), LKP's (18) experiences are also motivated by assisting teammates and establishing a collective sense of "togetherness". LKP's (18) experience in joining virtual communities certainly adds new friends, experiences, and new knowledge inside and outside the gameplay. The connections that take place, such as the impression of LKP (18) informants, frequently take place in the virtual world. Aside from the method, the hero characters used in the virtual space have an effect that will access the various potentials for creating identities in the community without fear of being punished or hated (Tychsen et al., 2006). In this context, Mobile Legends provides a space for players to show their existence and build their identity in the community. Furthermore, there

are game-related online groups with community members where players can communicate. Game forums are prominent places for gamers to exchange their gameplay experiences; in-game review discussion boards are where players recommend games to other players. In game-specific discussion forums, gamers can talk about anything related to a game, including how they think other players should play.

Excerpt 9

"Iya, saya join komunitas virtual Mobile Legends dari facebook karena masa pandemi gini lebih mudah dan luas. Iya, sebagai identitas juga apalagi untuk mengikuti turnamen gitu, status kita jadi lebih meyakinkan dan terpercaya:)" (MWPA, 27)

"Yes, I joined the Mobile Legends virtual community from Facebook because this pandemic period is easier and wider. Yes, as an identity, especially for participating in tournaments, our status becomes more convincing and reliable:)" (MWPA, 27)

The participant MWPA (27) confirms that he joined the virtual community of Mobile Legends Bang Bang from Facebook. He mentions that joining the virtual community is easier and wider than the offline community, especially during the pandemic COVID-19. Besides, MWPA (27) was also found to be a part of identifying himself as a member of the community, and he states that his skill was related to the player's social position inside the community. He believes that joining a virtual community will boost his confidence and allow him to participate in tournaments. A gamer has an inherently social and skill status within the game. This social status has been properly researched in a variety of contexts within the virtual community. Despite the fact that one community is virtual and the other is not, the motivations for participation are broadly the same: to feel connected, socialize, and be identified. By simply selecting a group, a player chooses to identify and participate in that community's social norms (Aupers, 2007). Players are associated with one another in enriching and meaningful ways. The communities in which a player takes part reflect their virtual, or sometimes actual, identity. In addition, communication with other gamers is one of the motivators for continuing to play, and it may have a positive impact on a player's social capital. In another relevant study by O'Connor, she provides qualitative data that reveals that this sense of community is founded on the games' commonality, with players from all sectors of life able to meet, whether online or offline and connect over the game.

According to study results on social identity construction, the virtual community is a critical area for gamers to construct and enhance their identities. In Mobile Legend Bang Bang, the foundation of a virtual community is a partnership, team building, and collaboration goal, and participants can be an extension of one's identity. A virtual community can also help gamers improve their identities through social reinforcement and community feedback. Identification in a virtual community prompts us to consider identity achievement. Identity achievement, according to Abrams, explains how players can position themselves within a community (Abrams, 2001). In Mobile Legends Bang Bang, gamers would be acknowledged for their contributions to the game's objectives. The gamers feel at ease knowing that the other players are in the same room as them, a virtual community. Criteria can include, for example, the amount of knowledge about online gaming and its clues, gaming experiences in particular, or the ability to participate in in-game communication and hold conversations on the most recent gaming topics. If a person does not meet those criteria or does not play the "proper" games, he or she may face the issue of not being permitted to be referred to as an accurate gamer in the face of the gaming community. A gamer's identity is determined by how they perceive themselves as delegates of the gaming community, which leads to the conclusion that

identification with the gaming social circle is characterized by socially constructed characterizations of the gamer's impression within the general public as well as how strongly an individual opposes or upholds these interpretations. The conduct of social stereotypes itself suggests the distinctiveness of gamers' social identities.

CONCLUSION

The research illustrates how the digital game Mobile Legends Bang Bang provides room for identity construction and how social and community identification can influence an individual's identity. However, players are also establishing a social network while also creating new forms of cultural expression and relationships with the virtual communities to create positive experiences through Mobile Legends Bang Bang. The term "gamer" refers to more than just someone who enjoys playing games; it points to a multifaceted social identity encompassing intimate, social, and virtual environments. In this way, gamer identity exists because it is a part of virtual communities and goes beyond gaming into everyday life.

Moreover, this research has some limitations. This research only had five informants selected from Universitas Brawijaya, both active alumni and students who have been using Mobile Legends Bang Bang online games for at least one year. Because of this, similar research method can be used in the future with more people.

This research also conveys suggestions regarding to the use of Mobile Legends Bang Bang for the construction of social identities. At this point, the researchers show that forming cultural opinions on the digital game Mobile Legends Bang Bang can be valuable and not trivial. Hopefully, readers can investigate the topic further and should be aware that digital games, mainly Mobile Legends Bang Bang, gain a deeper understanding of what makes digital games such an essential part of people's lives. This advancement has enabled game developers to create engaging, worthwhile, and incredibly detailed cultures in which players can interact and participate in communities, as well as experiment with factors themselves that may not have been pleasant in real life. The different effects on gamer identities and cultures are looked at in this study. This helps us understand that these constantly changing social and cultural processes outside of gaming will start to create value as gaming becomes a normal part of life.

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