PROFANITY WORDS USED IN ONLINE MOBILE GAMES AMONG YOUNG ADULTS DURING COVID19

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Abstract
Most industries are still impacted by the COVID19 epidemic, which was spreading around the globe. Since then, mobile online gaming has become a dominant leisure for young adults as it amuses millions of players. Along with this progress, profanity words are used without restrictions among them. It is an obscene language that at times can be useful to convey strong emotions. However, profanity words used may cause a conflict that cost more than what its usefulness is worth for. This qualitative study is conducted to explore profanity words used in an online mobile game, to find out why players use profanity and to see to what extent does the online mobile game itself is involved in causing profanity. The study utilized a semi-structured interview based on Saarinen's interview guide. The data were collected from seven respondents and analysed using the conventional content analysis approach. The result of the study reveals that the respondents consider words with sexual, derogatory terms, animal's name, family, nationality and religion topics as profanity. The study also confirms that how the game works could also influence the use of profanity by overvaluing a certain aspect of the game, access to other players' profile and role-playing.
Keywords: *online mobile games, profanity words, young adults, covid19*

INTRODUCTION

The background of this study is based on the researcher's interest regarding the underlying reasons behind the use of profanity in online mobile games, which stemmed from the researcher's own experience from being both a user of profanity when playing online mobile games and also as a victim of other players' profanity.

Though numerous studies have been done on toxic behaviour like Toxic Behaviour in Online Games (Saarinen, 2017) and Exploring Cyberbullying and Other Toxic Behaviour in Team Competition Online Games (Kwak et al., 2015). There is only one research that directly addresses the linguistic aspect of it; Linguistic Analysis of Toxic Behaviour in an Online Video Game (Kwak & Blackburn, 2014).

According to Kwak and Blackburn (2014), the volume of communication throughout a match in League of Legends (LoL) is not uniform. They noticed that there is a trace of transition from the non-toxic language (normal language) to the toxic language (profanity) of the players who play LoL. This could mean that some factors can influence the players who are labelled as 'toxic players' to use toxic language or profanity when playing the online mobile games themselves. Though Kwak and Blackburn have explained about 'how' and 'when' such transition occurs in their research, they did not describe 'what' caused it and 'why' it happened in detail. Therefore, there is a need to explore those questions.

The use of profanity when playing online games is one of the unique problems that we, in our interconnected society currently face. This problem can pose a threat to our society. Because the use of profanity when playing online mobile games will not only affect the one who uses it but also to people who read it through the in-game chat, the people who can hear it directly through the voice chat and the people who are simply exposed to their profanity by just being near them when they play.

The linguistic aspect of toxic behaviour, profanity, is an area that is not well explored, especially the one that exists while playing online games that are designed for mobile devices. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the profanities when playing online mobile games, the reasons why players use it and how the mobile game itself causes profanity to emerge.

Thus, the researchers want to ask these questions and having these objectives.

Research Questions and Research Objectives

	Research Questions	Research Objectives
1	What are the profanities that exist in an online mobile game?	To explore the profanities that exist in an online mobile game.
2	Why do players use profanity?	To find out why players use profanity.
3	How does an online mobile game cause profanity?	To what extent an online mobile game is involved in causing profanity.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The design of this study is qualitative study. The qualitative method is a well-perceived methodology when exploring a previously underexplored new topic or to ascertain and theorize issues (Jamshed, 2014) and interview is one of the most common methods in collecting data in qualitative research (Gill et al., 2008). Gill also pointed out that "interviews can be used to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and motivations of individual respondents." Gill further elaborates that there are three types of research interview, which are the structured interview, semi-structured interview and unstructured interview.

The total sample of this study is seven respondents who were recruited through a nonprobability sampling method, which is the convenience sampling method. The respondents are selected based on the criteria that the researcher has set in chapter 1, which are the player has to have played MLBB for at least a year and able to speak English or Bahasa Indonesia.

The method of the interview that this study will use is the semi-structured interview. This method was chosen due to the fact that this study used Saarinen's (2017) interview guide. To obtain the consistency that is needed to give qualitative research reliability, there is a need to repeat the methodology to obtain ontologically similar data. The researcher modified the aforementioned guide to suit the research questions/objectives of this study and conduct a pilot test on X1 and X2 to ensure the reliability of the guide and its validity. The test result produced data that the researcher needed for this study and the data obtained from the test is also similar enough with each other to ensure reliability.

The researcher collected the data by interviewing 7 MLBB players. They were coded as X1 till X7. The data collection span for approximately 2 weeks from 28th of December, 2019 to 7th of January, 2020.

The data collected through the interview was transcribed manually with the help of ExpressScribe 7.02 software and OTranscribe website for ease of audio replayability. The transcription was done with the

verbatim method; however, the researcher did not transcribe lengthy explanations about a term or a question and the topics that are not related to the study due to the constraint of time. Except for X1, where the researcher transcribes his interview completely with the verbatim method. This was done to measure the researcher's transcription speed, which was slower than what the researcher expected. Hence why the researcher decided to forego some explanations and unrelated topics. For the transcription that was done in Bahasa Indonesia, the researcher translated only the lines that were used in chapter 4. However, the researcher left some grammatical errors and some words untranslated to preserve the nuance of the line. Then the researcher conducted a content analysis of the transcribed data and looked for interesting themes that could fit with this study research questions/objectives. Those themes are collected by reviewing the respondents' response through identification and interpretation of the common recurrence within their response. Those themes then later inputted to the google sheets for ease of comparison. Lastly, the researcher analysed the pattern amongst those themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

i.   What are the profanities that exist in an online mobile game?

According to Saarinen (2017), "toxic behaviours like cheating, griefing, flaming (harassment) and scamming were found to be very common in online games, sometimes even everyday phenomenon." Saarinen also noted that flaming is especially common in online games as all of Saarinen's respondents have reported that they have witnessed toxic behaviour in online games. To make it clear, flaming is an act of sending insults, often with profanity or other offensive languages (Flaming Definition, n.d.). This is in-line with what the researcher found in the data, as all of this study respondents also have reported that they have witnessed other players using profanity frequently.

In term of which words that are considered as profanity by the respondents, English words like fuck, shit, bitch and twat are considered as profanity by the respondents. For the Indonesian words, words like bocah (child), ade (kid), tolol (stupid), bodoh (stupid), anjing (dog) and babi (pig) are considered as profanity by the respondents. This is in-line with Reilly (2020), Reilly stated that taboo words or profanities are often connoted with body parts, bodily acts, gender and disease. Reilly also noted that taboo words or profanities are a bit more abstract than concrete. Which explain why English words like bitch and twat, and also Indonesian words like bocah, ade, tolol and bodoh that do not connote to body parts, bodily acts, gender and disease, to be considered as profanity by the respondents, as they refer more to an abstract theme like intelligence and behaviour. This is also supported by another finding in the previous chapter since the researcher found that the topic or the object of the profanity words are mostly about animal's name, sex, derogatory terms (stupid, childish, idiot etc), family, religion and nationality. However, profanity that directly addresses family, religion and nationality are rarely mentioned by the respondents, since those words are probably too offensive for them to say. Except for anjing and babi, which has some connection to the Islam religion that will be discussed in the following paragraph.

"English is rife with taboo terms formed through combinatorial processes with religious terms (e.g., goddamn) and other extant taboo words" (Hughes, 1998; Mohr, 2013, as cited in Reilly et al., 2020).

This is not wholly in-line with what the researcher has found in the data. X1 and X6 did mention the word 'motherfucker' in lines 75 and 67 on their respective interviews, but none of the respondents mentions a compound word with a religious term in it. Even the word 'God' cannot be found in any of the interview transcriptions, only the Indonesian word of God, 'tuhan' is ever mentioned and that can only be found in X2's interview. However, Indonesian words like 'anjing' and 'babi' do have some connection to the Islam religion. Since dog's saliva and all of the pig's parts are considered as 'haram'

in Islam, which means that it is considered as impure and forbidden by the Islamic law to be consumed. This may be caused by the fact that all respondents are Indonesian, since it is the country with the largest Muslim population in the world (Muslim Population by Country 2020, n.d.) and because of that the concept of impurity is considered as taboo among the Indonesians.

For profanities that are in a sentence form, there seems to be some kind of tendency of making the profanities more personal like in the example given by X3 and X4 in table 1.3 on chapter 4. In X3's examples, he makes the profanities look more personal by adding the word 'you/your', as for X4's examples, he criticizes the actions of other players. This is in-line with Saarinen (2017) finding that getting personal is a qualifying factor for a behaviour to be considered as toxic behaviour. Which is also in-line with another finding for why they consider those words profane. The respondents stated why they consider words as profanity is because it is already rude, harmful and they consider it as a personal attack on them.

According to Pinker (2007), there are 5 types of profanity if categorized with what purpose do those profanities serve. From the data that the researcher has collected, the most common types of profanity based on Pinker's definition are the abusive, emphatic and dysphemistic. What is interesting about this finding is that the abusive swearing is often mentioned together with the emphatic or dysphemistic swearing in table 1.4. Emphatic swearing is a profanity that is intended to draw attention to a certain thing, while dysphemistic swearing is a profanity that is intended to convey that the speaker thinks negatively about the subject. From the definitions of these two profanities, you could see that these two profanities seem to have some use in communication. Since, taboo words or profanity has the capability to convey the emotional force of the speakers more effectively than the normal inoffensive words (Pinker, 2007), which is useful in a competitive setting like playing against other human players in a team-focused online mobile game. Moreover, as we can see in table 1.3, most of the profanities are also usually simple yet powerful. Hence, the reason why abusive swearing (profanity that is intended to harm) is often mentioned in table 1.4. may probably because if it is viewed from the listener's perspective, all profanity is harmful to them. Thus, it could mean that the respondents may consider emphatic or dysphemistic swearing that they encounter in the game as abusive swearing.

ii.   Why do players use profanity?

The researchers found that there are 4 reasons why players are using profanity while playing MLBB. Those reasons are, a bad team, unmet expectations, venting frustration and simply just habit.

The first reason exists because of MOBA games in general value teamwork and social interaction. However, if there is a problem with the social interaction between the players, it will impair communication and group cooperation (Kou & Gui, 2014). Thus, leading to a conflict between the players. The second one is affected by the first reason. When you play a game, it is normal for a player to want to win and when such expectation is not met, that player may feel frustrated or displeased. Kwak et al. (2015) stated that a lower-team cohesion leads to lower performance and lower performance have a negative effect on the player's expectancy to win the game. Hence, its connection with the first reason. Kwak et al. (2015) also pointed out that when a player is losing the game, he will search for someone to blame, someone other than himself. Which is also supported by the data that has been collected and Kou & Nardi (2013) finding that flaming, by extension the usage profanity, occurs the most when a team is losing the game. They also noted the same thing as Kwak as they found 1 or more players blame other players whom they believe have lower performance than they expected. This is in-line with Suler's (2004) definition of toxic inhibition where people release their dissatisfaction online with less restraint.

"Two-thirds of our swearing data are linked to personal and interpersonal expressions of anger and frustration, which seem to be the main reason for swearing." (Jay, 2009). This is in-line with the third reason where a player uses profanity to vent his anger due to the toxic inhibition since people feel

less restrained to release their frustration in an online environment (Suler, 2004). This use of profanity is also in-line with the description of one of the types that Pinker (2007) mentioned, which is the cathartic swearing, which is a swearing that is used in response to pain. According to Stephens et al. (2009), swearing increases one's tolerance of pain, an increase of heart rate and the decrease of how much pain perceived by a person. He also pointed out in the same study that these effects may occur because swearing can activate a person's fight-or-flight response while also nullifying the connection between one's fear of pain and pain perception. Stephens et al. (2018) also found that swearing also increases strength and power performance. Though it is unclear whether such effects are beneficial for playing MOBA or video games in general, it seems that when a player uses profanity for venting their anger might be beneficial for restoring their focus and increase their performance.

For the fourth reason, Jay (2009) said that numerous cases of taboo word or profanity usage are just casual conversational habits (e.g., This CD is fucking/bloody great) when there is no clear social motive other than fitting other people informal use of them. This is in-line with X4's view that has been described in the previous chapter, which also fit Pinker's (2007) description of idiomatic swearing. This focus on the use of profanity for the sake of only informality is also supported by another Stephen's finding that the pain tolerance effect when swearing, decrease in effectiveness as habitual swearing frequency increased (Stephens & Umland, 2011). Due to the decreased effect of pain tolerance when swearing habitually, it made sense that a person who swears habitually to use profanity, not as a tool to vent their frustration, but as a sign of informality and friendliness. Though the more worrying aspect is if swearing becomes a habit, then there is a possibility that a person who habitually swear to be more resistant to profanity in general. Thus, resulting in them swearing more often and using profanity that has a worse impact like one's regarding religion when they are under a stressful environment due to the reduced pain tolerance effect of profanity. Like a drug addict who uses drugs more often or seeks a more powerful drug due to their body increasing tolerance of drugs.

iii.   How does an online mobile game cause profanity?

To answer this question, the researcher selects some themes that he could find from the data that he has gathered. Those themes are team-building, the queueing mechanic and role-playing.

The first one that the researcher is going to discuss is the team-building aspect of MLBB. Though it has been said over and over again that MLBB or MOBA games genre in general, value teamwork. Then how do we come to the conclusion that the game-mechanic of MOBA games genre value teamwork? According to Dubbelman (2016), game-mechanic is the most powerful narrative device that a game designer could use. Since game-mechanic could deliver a narrative, that means it could deliver a meaning that can be processed by the players. As mentioned in the previous chapter, MLBB is a multi-player game and the same could be said to other MOBA games in general. The fact that its game-mechanic required multiple human players, moreover one that divides 10 people into two teams of 5 people, communicates to the players who played it that they have to work together to win the game. Hence why teamwork is valued highly by MLBB. Furthermore, MLBB has a game-mechanic called 'hero role' mechanic. As the researcher has mentioned in the previous chapter, the hero role mechanic is a mechanic that dictates which role a hero may belong to in accordance with their characteristics, and each role has their own strengths and weaknesses. This game-mechanics basically says to the players that "if you want to win, your team should have a balanced pick of hero roles that could cover each other's weaknesses". Since each role has things that they are good at and bad at, it creates a more task-oriented association between players of the same team. Hence why team-building is important in MLBB since it helps with tasks distribution within a team. However, this importance of teamwork and team-building can create tension between players the moment there is someone who just

refused to cooperate or a player who failed to play their role properly. Since, "in task-oriented associations, the relationship among players is somewhat impersonal and social bonding does not necessarily exist. Thus, toxic players might not feel a sense of a team and feel no qualms about harassing teammates who are hurdles to winning rather than recognizing enemies for beating his team." (Kwak et al., 2015).

Another theme that the researcher will discuss is the queueing mechanic of MLBB. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is a game-mechanic that dictates how a player or a group of players could find other players to play with. A player may choose to solo queue or to play with his acquaintances with the group queue. According to the data that the researcher has gathered, the researcher found that profanity is more prevalent in the solo queue than in group queue. From what the researcher could deduce from the gathered data, the reason why profanity is more prevalent in the solo queue instead of the group queue is because of a lack of social cues and anonymity. This is because reduced social cues and anonymity people are less likely to behave properly online (Kiesler et al., 1984). Which is also in-line with the solipsistic introjection and invisibility proposed by Suler (2004). Then why would the group queue have more social cues and less anonymity? This is because those who play in the solo queue can start the match-making process immediately and once enough players are gathered, the hero picking process or draft pick will promptly start. Once the draft pick begins, the player who plays in the solo queue will not be able to check the profile of the players they grouped with. Hence, making the team-building process harder as that player needs to guess what role that other players prefer to play. It is different from the group queue, as the player who starts the group queue needs to invite other people to play with to even start the match-making process. Since the draft pick has not begun yet, that player could still access other players' profiles and when they invite them, they can choose to view that profile or not. If they choose to view it, they can gain information about which role does that player like and how good that player is. These pieces of information become a helpful social cue when the draft pick began and made the team-building process smoother. Thus, less profanity.

The last theme that will be discussed is role-playing. As mentioned in the previous chapter, even though MLBB cannot be considered a game of the RPG genre, it still has some role-playing element inherent to its game-mechanic. This is especially true for the hero role mechanic that we have discussed earlier. While the 4 out of 7 respondents denied that they feel any sort of connection with the character they play as, all of the respondents reported to feel some degree of pain when their character received damage. Moreover, that perception of pain seems to differ between the role that a player plays. It is as if they become a different person with a different tolerance of pain when they switch their roles. This is similar to Consalvo et al. (2016) finding that players are aware that their avatar is not themselves, but as an empty vessel for themselves. However, Consalvo et al, also noted that the players are still empathetic with the avatar that they have made. This is also in line with Cook et al. (2017) finding that their respondents were able to experience the game storyline through the perspective of their protagonists by putting on game character roles behaviours and ways of thinking. If we think that the available roles in MLBB's hero role mechanic as an empty vessel and the players as the water that fills the vessel, then it made sense that the players act according to their role like how the water's shape in a vessel is influenced by the shape of the vessel itself. This is similar to De Wildt & Aupers (2018) finding where they found that a non-religious player will reconsider the validity of religion when playing as a religious character and vice versa. It is also similar to another Cook et al. (2017) finding that their respondents experienced the game they were playing by taking the characteristics of the character in that game. This also explains what the researcher had explained in the previous chapter that a player may use profanity differently depending on what role they play.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has contributed to the study of toxic behaviour by exploring what profanities that exist in MLBB, why players use them and how MLBB's game-mechanic affect it. As for the study of toxic behaviour, this study contributes by confirming that there is a connection between the use of profanity and the game-mechanic itself.

The implication that this study has for the reader is to provide insight into how complicated profanity is in an online mobile game that is MLBB. Though, this study will have a stronger implication on a reader who is also a player of MLBB. As mentioned in the previous chapter and as what we have discussed in this chapter, we can see that there are many factors that could cause people to use profanity. The most prevalent among them is teamwork and how MLBB's game-mechanic apply it. By knowing this, the reader who is also a player of MLBB should now be able to understand that by trying to compromise with an uncooperative player and helping a player who is having a difficult time adjusting to his role can improve their chance of winning and lessen the chance of profanity occurring during a match, which is a better solution than blaming an under-performing player and having a discord with an uncooperative player.

This study may also have some implications to the game developer who are looking to make a team-based online game without it being laced with their players' profanity. Since this study serves as a reminder to the game developer that a small aspect of their game-design could have a great impact on their players. Like how a player who plays solo queue cannot freely access other players' profile once the hero role picking process has begun could raise the chance of profanity occurring in the match that follows after the hero role picking process ended.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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