



## **Speech for Fun, Fury, and Freedom: Exploring Trash Talk in Gaming Stations**

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### ***Author's contribution***

*The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Anchored on the Neuro-Psycho-Social Theory of Speech of Jay (2000), this study explored trash talk in gaming stations and investigated how gamers perceive this form of verbal aggression as part of their gaming experience. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, informal observation, and recordings of gamers' verbal interaction. Trash talk expressions were classified using the typology of Jay (2000) and Ivory et al. (2017), while interview responses were analyzed thematically using the procedure of Creswell (2013). Findings reveal that trash talk expressions include insults, slurs, swears, threats, and commands. These expressions are perceived as inherently part of the gaming culture where they play multiple functions, such as to heighten the fun, distract opponents, help release anger, and provide gamers a sense of power and freedom. Moreover, trash talk, which is largely attributed to peer influence, is generally considered inoffensive by gamers. These qualitative findings shed light on some research and pedagogical possibilities.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gaming is one of the most popular pastimes that hooked millions of people, young and adult, around the world. With the advancement of communication technology, gaming culture has evolved from a solo form of entertainment into an interactive social activity where people can play, interact, and compete with others using personal computers, mobile phones, and other digital devices through the internet [1]. This innovative shift has popularized multiplayer online games and has led to the prevalence of professional esports competitions. Unlike solo gaming, multiplayer online games allow gamers to experience the excitement of true competition, provides an opportunity for teamwork, and make distant gaming interaction possible [2].

However, while online gaming communication has advanced gaming culture and experience, it has also brought about ethical setbacks for the growing population of online gamers. Online communication has been used as a venue in expressing aggressive antisocial behavior within a diverse community of gamers. Online toxicity, such as perpetrating, experiencing, and witnessing hateful, vulgar, or toxic messages have been largely observed in online gaming platforms [3,4], which have become prevalent tools for cyberbullying [5,1]. Consequently, offensive language in online gaming is the most reported reason for complaint [2] and a factor why some quit gaming [6].

Such aggressive use of toxic language in gaming, and other competitive contexts, is popularly known as trash talk. Trash talk is defined as disparaging, taunting, or boastful comments to intimidate and distract opponents [7,8] and to motivate oneself [9]. Trash talk has been in sports for decades [10], since it is associated with increased self-efficacy and performance among athletes [9]. Trash talk in gaming has been largely attributed to observation and exposure to aggressive gaming language [11-13], especially that profanity is largely present in the majority of top-selling game content [14]. On the other hand, other studies claim that the anonymity afforded by online communication leads to hostility and aggression among gamers. The detached nature of online gaming and the anonymity it provides have encouraged players to engage in trash talk.

Online communication triggers the lowering of gamers' inhibitions, which manifest in aggressive behaviors. Such disinhibition is fueled by online gamers' non-disclosure of personal data, invisibility, and lack of eye contact [3,1,15]. This online sense of anonymity allows gamers to display verbal aggression and hostility without the fear of its direct social consequence.

While studies attribute aggressive online gaming behavior to gamer's disinhibition afforded by online sense of anonymity, the use of trash talk is also observed in gaming stations where gamers are present and no longer anonymous. This observation implies that disinhibition occurs even outside online communication and suggests that while online gamer's anonymity triggers verbal aggression, the use of trash talk may also be attributed to and influenced by other multiple agents surrounding the gamers and their environment. Hence, this study explored trash talk as used by non-professional online gamers in gaming stations. Specifically, the study dealt with the following questions: (1) What are the 'trash talk' expressions used by gamers in gaming stations? and (2) How do gamers perceive these expressions as part of their gaming experience? The findings of this study would provide valuable insights about gamers and their behavior. While trash talk is considered socially and culturally taboo in local communities, it is vital to explore its nature and conventions from the perspective of the gamers for rational judgment and, if necessary, appropriate intervention initiatives.

### 1.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Neuro-Psycho-Social (NPS) Theory of Jay [16], which is designed to account for why and how a speaker uses curse words. This theory sees cursing as a behavior that is purposeful and rule-governed, rather than chaotic, meaningless, or random. The goal of the theory is to generate rules that underlie concepts of appropriateness, offensiveness, and humor. The NPS Theory provides a three-dimensional model of a person's knowledge of cursing, which develops as a person matures. An individual's knowledge depends on personal experience, psychological makeup, and on the culture in which he or she is raised. As such, a person's style of cursing will be the product of both shared and private

experiences. Each of the NPS factors takes time to develop and evolve in one's life, as each factor depends on maturation and experience.

The Neuro-Psycho-Social Theory of Jay [16] provides the backbone of this study which aimed at exploring the trash talk expressions and investigating how gamers perceive these expressions as part of their gaming experience. The neurological processes and psychological motives of speakers, as well as the sociocultural environment surrounding them are the key elements of the theory that guided the researcher in understanding trash talk in the gaming context.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study used a qualitative research approach particularly an exploratory case study to capture relevant data. A case study research design will allow the researchers to focus on a specific area or situation for an in-depth analysis based on multiple sources of information [17].

### **2.2 Participants**

Ten (10) Filipino non-professional gamers from three (3) gaming stations participated in the study. The researcher employed purposive sampling in selecting the participants. The participants were male gamers who are 18-22 years old; who spend at least fifteen (15) hours per week playing DotA (Defense of the Ancient); and who are verbally active or aggressive when gaming. The researcher conducted an initial survey with the owners, bystanders, and gamers in the gaming stations to identify gamers who have the characteristics based on the criteria set by the researcher. The identified gamers were then invited to participate in the study. Though the participants were from three gaming stations, they are treated as a single case since they share similar characteristics evidenced in the sampling technique used.

### **2.3 Instruments**

The researcher used an interview protocol, audio recorder, and observation note as data gathering tools. The interview protocol was used to guide the researcher in conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants. The audio-recorder was utilized to record the series of interviews and the interaction of the gamers while gaming. The observation note was used in

recording field notes during the informal observation conducted by the researcher.

### **2.4 Data Collection**

After the stations and gamers were identified, the researcher collected data from multiple sources: audio-recording, informal observation, and semi-structured interviews. The utterances of online gamers as a group were audio-recorded for ten (10) random days, one hour per day. Though gamers were informed and were asked permission to record their utterances, they were not aware as to when or how it would be done so their behavior and exchange of words would not be conditioned or modified. Informal observation of the participants was also conducted for three days in a separate time the audio recordings were done. The researcher made field notes to capture the relevant data about the study subject. Lastly, a semi-structured interview was conducted by the researcher with each participant to determine the trash talk expressions and the perception that gamers hold about trash talk in gaming. The interview with each participant lasted for 11-15 minutes. The researcher interviewed the participants until data reached saturation.

### **2.5 Reflexivity**

The researcher is a non-gamer. He believes that one's use of language is largely influenced by his/her environment, a manifestation of the kind of language he/she is exposed to. Though the researcher holds a certain level of tolerance to profanity, he does not support the use of foul language, especially in the context where it is intentionally used to slander or cause harm. Further, the researcher does not subscribe to the use of extremely ill verbal attacks in gaming stations particularly when used by young gamers who might think that foul language is acceptable in all contexts.

### **2.6 Data Analysis**

The researcher used the typology of Ivory et al. [18] in classifying the trash talk expressions and referred to Jay [16] on what constitutes trash talk. The interview transcripts, on the other hand, were analyzed thematically using the procedure of Creswell [17]. The researcher generated initial codes by giving meaning to the interview responses of the gamers; Coding was done manually by making margin notes on the interview transcripts. The researcher, then,

identified themes or patterns based on the list of identified initial codes. The identified themes were presented to and checked by the gamers for member-checking. Field notes were used to verify and back up identified themes and patterns. The researcher then developed naturalistic generalizations and presented a description of the study subject. He thoroughly reviewed the generalizations along with the themes that emerge from the analysis. Finally, the findings of the analysis were submitted to an expert in applied language studies for validation.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 'Trash Talk' Expressions in Gaming Stations

The 'trash talk' expressions fall into five categories, namely, insults, slurs, swears, threats, and commands. These expressions encompass the vernacular, Filipino, and English language with the use of informal, slang, taboo, and even vulgar language.

##### 3.1.1 Insults

Online gamers have a rich repertoire of words and ways to describe, label, and mock a gamer and his gaming performance. Insults are usually used by the advancing gamer to insult the opponent or by the losing gamer to taunt a poor performing teammate. Some of these expressions are directly addressed to the gamer and/or the virtual character. Insults commonly associate poor gaming ability with poor intellect. Extracts that illustrate these expressions are:

*"pota ka, noob mo"* [fuck you, you're noob];  
*"kagbubulok, nastress naman ak saim"* [idiots, you're stressing me out];  
*"tanga ka, tanga"* [you're fool, fool]; and  
*"mga bungog at kontra"* [we're fighting with idiots].

Other intellect-based derogatory terms are the Filipino slang *"bobo"*, *"gago"*, *"ungas"*, *"tanga"*, *"tarantado"*, and the vernacular terms, like *"bulok"*, *"bungog"*, *"dumol"*, which are variants of the local slang for idiot, stupid, foolish, or ignorant. This finding concurs with the claim of Suganob-Nicolau [19] that the swear words of young learners were related to intellect-based terms. Some gamers also use the expressions *"noob"*, a gaming jargon which means novice or newbie, and *"feeder"*, which refers to a gamer whose virtual hero easily dies in a game. Other local expressions used to mock gamers are

*"hagas"* [feeble], *"hadok"* [coward], *"maluya"* [weak], and *"inutil"* [useless]. Extracts illustrating these expressions are:

*"nga demonyo, hadok"* [damn, such a coward];  
*"inutil ka"* [you're useless]; and  
*"gihagasi nga hayop"* [you're so freakin' lame].

Some gamers use ironic expressions to insinuate sarcasm and mockery. This happens when a gamer praises an opponent who is losing the game. These sarcastic remarks are often followed by waves of laughter and screams. Similarly, using irony is a strategy to achieve a humorous conversational witticism as illustrated in the jokes of the Filipino comedian Vice Ganda [20]. Examples of ironic expressions used by gamers are:

*"gitindihi adto, pare"* [that was dope, man];  
*"diba, gilistuhi iton mag dota"* [told you, he plays DotA so well]; and  
*"kalisto nimo huh"* [you're damn good].

Some insults that highlight weak gaming skills come in a form of questions to accentuate doubt over the opponent's ability. These expressions are used to denigrate the opponent's gaming skills without explicitly saying it. Some mocking questions are:

*"maato ka pa?"* [are you still gonna fight?];  
*"yan lang ba ng skills mo?"* ["is that only what you've got?"]; and  
*"are you joking?"* [are you joking?].

Exchange of some insulting remarks intends to provoke laughter. Gamers sometimes go beyond the gaming context to poke fun at and taunt other gamers. Jdetawy, [21] explains that similar to humorous swearwords, this form of insults is idiomatic and playful, not abusive and offensive. Some of these insults, which are game-irrelevant, are often used to make fun of other gamers to lose their "cool". Extracts that illustrate these expressions are:

*"piyos ka"* [you're uncircumcised];  
*"pangit ka"* [you're ugly]; and  
*"pan-os mo"* [you stink].

In most local communities, to be uncircumcised is to be the object of ridicule and disdain. An uncircumcised male is believed to be physically weak and unable to produce children [22]. Thus,

when a gamer is unable to play well, other gamers insinuate that this comes from the weakness of being uncircumcised.

### 3.1.2 Slurs

While insults aim to mockingly describe other gamers, slurs attack opponents using remarks with derogatory reference to a certain group. These remarks use offensive metaphors that have insensitive reference to people of different race, gender, sexual orientation, and mental condition. Common slurs among gamers have reference to people with mental illness. Gamers may be labeled using the expressions “*brain-damaged*”, “*mongoloid*”, and the local term “*siraulo*”, which means mentally ill. Poor performing gamers are also associated with being “*babayi/daraga*” [woman/lady] and “*bakla*” [gay]. Some gamers are also mockingly told that they are abandoned with insensitive reference to orphans. These remarks insinuate a degree of mockery or bantering attitudes toward people of different backgrounds and orientation. Some extracts containing slurs are:

“*mongoloid nga hayop*” [he’s a fucking retarded];  
 “*nagdidinaraga ka naman*” [you’re acting girly again];  
 “*bakla kam nga duha*” [you two are gay]; and  
 “*wara ka nanay/tatay*” [you’re orphaned];

Expressions containing insensitive reference to disfavored people and groups are also discussed in other studies [23,24,21,25,18,26]. Contrary to the study of Ivory et al. [18], slurs related to race and religion are not present in the trash talk utterances of the gamers.

### 3.1.3 Swears

Swears are utterances used to express varied extreme emotions – from the frustrations of losing points to the ecstasy of winning the game. Jdetawy [21] explains that this type of swearing is not directed to other people. It is used to express personal emotions, such as anger, shock, and frustration. Swearwords are sometimes used in venting emotion, with no bad intention. These expressions, which are considered formulaic and are expressed with automaticity, are not taken in its literal sense. Their meaning greatly varies as to the context when the expression is uttered. Swearwords could be so generic and flexible that they could be used in any context akin to how the words

“*damn*” and “*crap*” are used. Similarly, the word “*fuck*” can be used in multiple settings [21]. Considering its emphatic nature, they are often expressed with intensity accompanied by minimal non-verbal gestures. Further, a swearword can stand as a solo expression to express anger or surprise and can also be used as a sentence enhancer, where it is embedded in other derogatory expressions to intensify the message [26].

Though gaming trash talk is rich in swearing, numerous swearwords are derived from some key expressions. The word “*demonyo*”, for instance, a common local swearword that literally means evil/demon, comes in many variants, such as “*deputa*”, “*deputik*”, “*demuntris*”, “*demunjo*”, “*munyo*”, “*nga demon*”, and “*demongkag*”. Some expressions that contain these swearwords are:

“*demonyo, bias an uyag*” [fuck, the game is biased];  
 “*depota, buhi pa adto*” [crap, it’s still alive];  
 and  
 “*munyo, naigo ak*” [damn, I got hit].

“*Putang ina mo*” is another swearword commonly used in gaming stations. It is a Filipino profane expression which literally means “*your mother is a whore*” or the Filipino counterpart of English profanity “*you’re a son of a bitch*”. Such expression is meant to show anger, displeasure, frustration, joy, or surprise [27]. “*Putang ina mo*” comes in various forms, like “*putangina*”, “*tangina nanay mo*”, “*pucha*”, “*siya ay putangina mo*”, “*pota ka*”, and “*putang ina niyo*”. In the gaming context, this expression is seldom taken in its literal sense. Filipinos commonly use this expression as a variant of the word “*fuck*” [28]. Parreno [29] claims that “*putang ina mo*” does not offend hearers as compared to a situation when one’s mother is directly named a slut. Some extracts that use these swearwords are:

“*putang ina, giboringi nga uyag*” [crap, this game is so boring];  
 “*puta ka, pagmadalagan na,*” [fuck, you better run];  
 “*depota na, ginpatay ak*” [damn it, I got killed];  
 and  
 “*puta, kahinay sa mouse*” [shit, the mouse works slow].

“*Fuck*” is another swearword typically used in gaming stations. Other common variants of this swearword are “*pakshet*” [fuckshit], “*pakyu*” [fuck you], “*pakyu bitch*” [fuck you, bitch], “*pakyu ka*”

[fuck you], “*what the fuck*”, and “*what the fuck you doing*”. In most cases, gamers localize pronunciation by producing the sound of /p/ instead of /f/ in the word “fuck”. Some extracts containing these expressions are:

“*pakshet, ay sin cheat*” [fuckshit, don’t cheat];  
“*fuckin’ bitch, hain kana?*” [where you at fuckin’ bitch?]; and  
“*pakyu ka, sama mo pa nanay mo.*” [fuck you, you can even bring your mom with you].

Moreover, some of these swearwords are a compound of two profane words. For instance, “*deputa*” is supposed to be a portmanteau of the words “*demonyo*” [evil] and “*puta*” [whore], while “*pakshet*” is a localized compound of the words “*fuck*” and “*shit*”. The apparent use of English swearwords is indicative that gamers borrow trash talk expressions from models. Finn [30] also explains that Asian and Arab students prefer to swear more in English due to social constraints in their own societies.

### 3.1.4 Threats

Threats are used by a gamer to inform his opponents of his planned or approaching attacks. They are used to let the opponent know his intention to inflict pain, injury, damage, or other hostile action usually to the virtual character, and not to the gamer. They aim to threaten and distract opponents or to merely imply that a gamer is under control and advancing in the game. To intensify the impact of threats, they are accompanied by other profane expressions and are expressed in a villainous tone. Examples of threats are:

“*human ka niyan*” [I’m gonna finish you];  
“*hinahanap ka na, gago*” [you’re being chased, asshole];  
“*tapalan kikaw niyan*” [I’m gonna slap you];  
and  
“*patay ka, mapatay ka niyan*” [you’re gonna die].

Threats are also found in the utterances of online gamers as illustrated by Ivory et al. [18] who classified threats as direct and indirect. It was found out that threats are used by a small minority of online gamers as compared to other profane expressions [18].

### 3.1.5 Commands

These are the imperatives in the gamer’s utterances which aim is to put the opponent

under control, to insult an opponent, or to ridicule poor-performing teammates. They are often used by the advancing gamer to show superiority over the other gamer. Such imperatives are not meant to be followed since compliance means surrender or poor performance. Commands are often addressed to the gamer, yet the action is expected to be done by the virtual character or the avatar. By saying these expressions, the gamer inflicts authority over the other gamers. Extracts containing commands are:

“*magpakita ka, hunghang*” [show yourself, idiot];  
“*takbo, gonggong*” [run, asshole]; and  
“*bulos, bulos*” [fight back, fight back].

Though some commands are addressed to the virtual character, others seem to be directed to the gamer. Expressions that directing someone to go home, to shut up, and to stop gaming appear to be directly addressed to a gamer. Some extracts illustrating these expressions are:

“*sus, liya gad*” [shut the fuck up];  
“*pan-os mo, pagmauli boy*” [go home boy, you stink]; and  
“*putang ina mo, wag ka nang magdota*” [fuck you, stop playing dota].

These expressions are referred to by Goddard [25] as imperative formulas. Swear words, like “hell” or “fuck” are commonly inserted in the imperative frame to make the message sound more demanding, urgent, or angry.

## 3.2 Perceptions of Online Gamers on Trash Talk

The gamers who were interviewed hold the following perceptions on trash talk as part of their gaming experience:

### 3.2.1 Trash talk is inherently part of the multiplayer gaming culture

Gamers perceive trash talk as an integral part of the gaming culture. Swearing and name calling are normalized in gaming stations since everybody displays such linguistic behavior. It is the style of interaction that gamers are regularly exposed to when they play in gaming stations. A gamer shared, “*I use these [swear] words whenever I play with them [friends] and these words are normal for us. It is of your disadvantage if you can’t tolerate them (G5).*” Another gamer said, “*That’s how we do it here*

[game station]. *It's the nature of gamers, young and old, they talk trash. Rules would be of no use (G3).*" Moreover, some even believe that swearing is a universal gaming language. A gamer said, *"We're used to swearing while gaming. Perhaps, gamers everywhere talk that way (G2).*" Another gamer shared, *"In almost everything that happens on screen, we swear (G7).*" He further explained that when a gamer lost a game, he would swear out; when one won a game, he would also swear out. Swearing is present in almost all aspects of gaming; hence, gamers believe that it is inherently part of the gaming culture and experience. Similarly, trash talk as a form of verbal aggression is largely observed in sports [10,7,31]. In fact, swearing is not limited to athletes, as coaches and fans also swear [32].

### 3.2.2 Trash talk is attributed to peer influence

Gamers claim that the use of trash talk in gaming stations is attributed to peer influence. Profanity is what they regularly hear from other gamers who happen to be their friends and acquaintances. This finding is evident in the response of a gamer who said, *"We [gamers] use it [trash talk] as a result of observing other DotA players. We just copy what most gamers are saying (G6).*" This response supports the claim of another gamer who explained, *"At first, I just hear it (trash talk) from my friends. Eventually, it comes out of my mouth naturally when I'm gaming (G2).*" Jdetawy [21] explains that swearing among adolescents and teenagers is influenced by the language of the people surrounding them and is further triggered by the notion that the use of swearwords implies independence and maturity. This finding also supports the claim of NPS Theory of Jay [16] that the presence of a model is one of the causal factors that prompts a person to curse. Moreover, other gamers claim that they intentionally imitate such use of language to get along with other gamers. *"Of course, we have to get along with others [gamers]. You'd sound indifferent if you talk discreetly (G8),"* a gamer explained. These responses imply how gamers adjust to secure a sense of belonging by using the language of their peers. This finding concurs with the claim that gaming is an effective way of heightening a sense of social belonging with friends [33], and swearing promotes social cohesion [23,24]. Fägersten [34] also posited that social swearing simulates casual conversation, reduces social distance, and creates the illusion of intimacy.

### 3.2.3 Trash talk heightens the fun

While others find trash talk threatening, toxic, and destructive, some gamers make fun out of it. Cursing using profane expressions, accompanied by their clever play of language, makes gaming interactive and fun. Exchange of comical insults adds flavor to their gaming experience. One gamer said, *"It's just for fun. We play games to have fun; We make use of those [profane] words just to have fun. That's what we look for in gaming (G10).*" Another gamer explained, *"...especially if we're having a party, that's when I and my friends belong to the same team, we always tease one another. It's fun (G4).*" Naming the gaming session as "party" implies the fun that comes with the game. Furthermore, gaming without trash talk is considered boring and does not hype up or excite gamers. The noise that gamers create adds to the overall thrill. One gamer said, *"It's boring when you play with gamers who are too serious and don't swear (G7).*" Since playing online games is their pastime, they prefer to make it loud and fun by using the language that they enjoy. Another gamer said, *"Talking trash is fun. Teasing and annoying each other make us laugh. We become unmindful of the time (G2).*" Surprisingly, trash talk, which is considered a source of online toxicity [2-4] and a tool for cyberbullying [5,1], is perceived to be a part of creating a bond among gamers by making gaming casual, interactive, and fun. Perhaps, the relationship among gamers and the medium of interaction contribute to such opposing views on trash talk. Gamers who communicate through online platforms and those who interact in a gaming station are surrounded by different environmental factors, hence, their response to profanity in gaming varies.

### 3.2.4 Trash talk serves as an emotional outlet

Multiplayer online games allow gamers to experience varied extreme emotions – from the ecstasy of winning to the shame of losing the game. Trash talk is often a manifestation of gamer's burst of emotions. Gamer's dismay and frustration with poor-performing gamers are commonly expressed using taunting and denigrating words. A gamer said, *"[By using trash talk] I could express what I feel towards another player, especially if they could not play well (G5).*" Another gamer said, *"I could express my complaints about a player, especially those who could not get it right away (G9).*" This perception agrees with Jay [16] and Jdetawy [21] who affirm that swearing expresses the

speaker's emotional state used to express anger or to release tension or stress. Swear words are related to private and interpersonal expression of outrage and dissatisfaction [16]. Sukanob-Nicolau [19] also claims that anger was the main reason why young learners swear at someone. A gamer shared, "*Whenever I'm in trouble at home, I go to gaming shop, play DotA, and talk trash to release my anger (G4).*" Loud and aggressive exchange of language also helps gamers release emotions from issues outside the gaming context. Swearing allows gamers to release frustrations or anger without fear. This practice explains why some gamers find trash talk to have a calming effect. A gamer shared, "*It [trash talk] calms me down (G4).*" This finding agrees with the hypothesis of Vingerhoets et al. [24] that swearing produces catharsis effect, which results in a relief of stress and stability of someone's emotions [21].

### 3.2.5 Trash talk is a game tactic

Gamers believe that trash talk boosts one's energy and, thus, improves gaming performance. Gamers become more eager to win when provoked by derogatory words. A gamer said, "*Whenever I hear those words, I want to prove to other gamers that they are wrong, so I play better (G6).*" Another gamer said, "*[I use talk trash] to have more energy, that way, I'll have a better performance (G1).*" This perception supports the claim that trash talk among athletes results in increased self-efficacy and improved performance [9]. Moreover, other gamers use trash talk to distract opponents. Shouting and cursing are believed to destroy an opponent's focus and, thus, give gamers more possibility to advance in the game. One participant said, "*Sometimes, we intentionally annoy the opponent to distract him and ruin his performance, to put his mind off the game (G6).*" Taunting opponents and mocking their skills is a gaming strategy to agitate opponents to have them lose their focus and to make them feel incompetent. Trash talk in the sports context is also employed as a game strategy than merely a means of insulting opponents [31]. The purpose of trash talk during competition is to distract opponents by elevating their emotions [7]. McDermott [8] also confirmed the ability of trash talk to negatively affect the game performance of a competitor.

### 3.2.6 Trash talk provides a sense of power and freedom

Gamers feel power or a sense of authority whenever they swear. They feel that they are in

control and superior over their opponent when they throw derogatory remarks. One gamer said, "*It feels good to swear. It feels like you're a king (G2).*" He compared himself to a king whenever he is engaged in trash talk; it makes him feel good about himself. Another gamer explained, "*It's like, whenever we say those [profane] words, we feel that we are more skilled and dominant than other gamers (G9).*" Shouting boastful remarks or throwing denigrating words to other gamers is a way of affirming oneself and one's gaming ability. This finding supports the claim of Vingerhoets et al. [24] that swearing is used to express dominance, to gain attention, or to make the speaker sound macho. On the other hand, swearing is also associated with enjoying a sense of freedom. Some gamers claim that what they like about trash talk is that they are free to use the language that they want without fear of getting judged or reprimanded. Most gaming stations are tolerant of such use of language and it gives gamers the liberty to curse. A gamer said, "*It's the only place (gaming station) where I could talk trash. I can't do it at home or school. So, sometimes it feels good to have the freedom to express yourself, especially if you are really into the game (G3).*" This statement concurs with the observation of another gamer who said, "*What's good about it [trash talk] is that you can say whatever you want to say and how you want to say it. We're free to do it (G10).*" The sense of power and freedom that gamers feel when they swear encourages them to engage in trash talk while gaming.

### 3.2.7 Trash talk is generally inoffensive

Most gamers who were interviewed generally consider trash talk inoffensive and harmless in the gaming context. They see it as a nonpersonal attack or a friendly form of teasing. They claim that they know when to stop and what topics would trigger physical violence. Contrary to the societal concept of trash talk, these gamers barely perceive trash talk as a form of bullying, harassment, or abuse. When asked if they are offended when they are verbally attacked, a gamer said, "*No, I'm used to hearing those words. It's your loss if you take it personally (G3).*" Another gamer explained, "*We don't mean whatever we say during the game. Sometimes we swear since we are carried away with the flow of the game. But it doesn't mean that we say it against other gamers (G8).*" One gamer, however, shared his observation that derogatory expressions sometimes injure gamers emotionally especially when verbal attacks cross



the line. He explained, "*There are gamers who talk extremely ill. They would even involve your family or parents (G7).*" This perception implies that while most gamers find trash talk harmless, a few see it as an offensive gaming lingo [35]. This perception of gamers on trash talk supports the finding of Jay [23] that swearing is a common conversational practice resulting in no obvious harm. Evidence of harm is present in harassment and discrimination, but there is little evidence of harm resulting from swearing. Vingerhoets et al. [24] also suggests that if swearing is used in appropriate contexts, the risk of being subjected to negative reactions of others is less likely. Contrary to reports associating trash talk to online toxicity [2-4] and cyberbullying [5-1], gamers who opt to play in game stations observe that trash talk is, in most cases, harmless and inoffensive in gaming.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the trash talk expressions used by non-professional gamers in gaming stations and investigated how gamers perceive these expressions as part of their gaming experience. Findings reveal that trash talk expressions, which include insults, slurs, swears, threats, and commands, resonate in gaming stations. They are expressed in varying volume and intensity and are accompanied by minimal body language. The commonly used expressions are sometimes modified or embedded in other utterances to create a certain effect. For instance, gamers use irony to elicit sarcasm and humor, questions to euphemize mockery, and metaphors to insinuate insult. This clever play of language implies that the exchange of swearwords could be a gamer's way to show off wit and creativity, rather than to intentionally slander or cause harm.

Moreover, contrary to the societal perception that labels trash talk as antisocial, offensive, and destructive, gamers generally use it as a means to make gaming fun, casual, and interactive. Trash talk is barely seen as a form of harassment or abuse, but rather a unique style of interaction among gamers. Such perception implies that while trash talk expressions denote negativity and toxicity, the way these expressions are interpreted is contextual. In multiplayer gaming, which is competitive in nature where gamers are overwhelmed by the forces from the virtual and real world they dwell in, trash talk generally serves a purpose and is, therefore, accepted. As perceived by the gamers, trash talk

is a form of interaction that heightens the fun, expresses gamer's fury, and creates a sense of freedom in the gaming context. These functions that trash talk fulfills are some of the agents that make gamers tolerant to aggressive language. Other factors like permissive environment, relationship among gamers, topic of interaction, familiarity with the gaming space, and competitive and casual nature of gaming may have also contributed to aggression-tolerant gaming culture and may have perhaps triggered gamers' lack of inhibition to display verbal aggression. These factors indicate that gamers share distinct norms and conventions which are essential components in understanding their behavior.

Finally, the findings suggest that more than conforming to shared gaming culture, some gamers use trash talk to fulfill specific human needs, such as the need to belong, to win and dominate, and to enjoy a sense of power and freedom. Deviation from what is perceived correct and appropriate makes gamers feel free from the restrictions set out by norms and standards of their home, school, and society. Boasting and spewing profanity that sounds denigrating may also be a gamer's way to feed his/her ego. Trash talk, therefore, seems to take a vital part in addressing larger personal issues, like the need for affirmation, attention, and validation, which are perhaps lacking in the lives of some gamers. As provided in the NPS Theory of Jay [16], the use of trash talk in gaming stations is influenced by the psychological motives of the gamers and sociocultural environment surrounding them.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

To have a deeper understanding of trash talk among gamers, researchers are encouraged to investigate the display of verbal aggression at home, school, or community as an effect of swearing in gaming stations; explore the trash talk themes/topics that trigger physical violence among gamers; and investigate the factors that influence the use of trash talk among gamers of different background and orientation. A quantitative approach is also suggested to determine the degrees to which the qualitative findings of this study have manifested.

Moreover, it is suggested that trash talk or swearing be introduced in language education to expose students to these expressions and to inform them the context in which these

swearwords are used and what communicative functions they fulfill. Such academic initiative would develop among students the proper attitude toward people who swear and would curtail the stereotype that labels these people as uneducated, antisocial, and disrespectful. Awareness and education about trash talk would also teach students to appropriately respond to swearing in a specific context.

### CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

A letter of permission was sent to the owner of the gaming stations prior to the conduct of the study. Written consent was also secured by the researcher from the participants who are of legal age and whose identity was treated with confidentiality. Voluntary participation was employed, and gamers were informed about their right to refuse to participate or to withdraw their participation at any point in the data collection procedure.

### COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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