WHEN GAMES MEET WORSHIP: A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF URBAN YOUTHS' MOBILE LEGENDS GAMING HABITS ON WORSHIP TIMES

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the impact of Mobile Legends gaming habits on youth worship engagement in an urban setting. This online game has become a cultural phenomenon among teenagers, especially in urban areas that have wide access to technology. This phenomenon raises concerns about how time priorities, particularly worship time, may be affected by intense gaming activities. The study used a qualitative approach involving 8 purposively selected participants. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation to explore the dynamics between gaming habits and frequency of worship. The results showed that the habit of playing Mobile Legends had a negative impact on worship time, with most participants experiencing a decrease in the frequency and quality of worship. In addition, the study also found that Mobile Legends can be a significant source of distraction when not managed well, although some participants reported benefits such as stress reduction before worship. The implication of this study is the need for awareness of better time management and the implementation of a balanced educational approach to encourage spiritual engagement amidst the rise of digital culture. This study provides insights for educators, parents and community leaders to create strategies that support a balance between digital entertainment and religious life.

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, digital technology has undergone rapid development that affects almost all aspects of human life, including the way we communicate, work, socialize and even worship. One manifestation of this technological development is the growing popularity of online games, especially among the younger generation. Online games are now not only entertainment, but also part of the social and cultural life of young people. One of the most popular online games in Indonesia is Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (often called Mobile Legends). This Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) game offers a competitive and interactive gaming experience that attracts millions of players of all ages. However, behind this popularity, there are concerns about the negative impact it may have, especially in relation to

time management. Online games like Mobile Legends can consume players' time and attention, potentially displacing other priorities, including religious activities such as worship. In the context of a fast-paced and dynamic urban society, the pressure to stay productive often leads individuals to seek escape in the form of digital entertainment. This phenomenon can worsen time management, especially when such digital entertainment becomes dominant in daily life.

The Gaming Phenomenon among Urban Youth

In urban environments, access to technology and the internet is extensive, making it easier for young people to access various forms of digital entertainment, including online gaming. According to a survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2022, more than 70% of internet users in Indonesia are young people aged 15-34, with a significant proportion residing in urban areas. In the survey, Mobile Legends was cited as one of the most played games, with the average daily playing time reaching 2-4 hours per day per player. The game has become a means of social interaction for young people who not only play for entertainment, but also to establish social relationships through in-game communication features. However, these virtual world-centered interactions often displace time previously used for other activities, such as studying, working, or worshiping. A study by Fuadiy et al. (2024) revealed that students who spent more than 2 hours per day playing Mobile Legends showed a decrease in academic performance in the field of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) due to lost time for study and worship (Fuadiy et al., 2024).

Worship in the Life of Young People

In Islam, worship is a fundamental aspect that not only includes religious rituals such as praying, fasting, and reading the Qur'an, but also the values of daily life that lead to noble morals. However, in this digital era, young people's attention to worship is experiencing great challenges. Lifestyle changes influenced by technological advances mean that worship time is often displaced by digital activities. A study by Qhomariah et al. (2024) found that high involvement in the Mobile Legends game led to a decrease in the frequency of worship, especially the five daily prayers, due to the tendency of players to postpone worship until the game is over (Qhomariah et al., 2024). In addition to delays in worship time, another impact of the habit of playing games is a reduction in the quality of worship itself. Players who are distracted by the excitement of the game often perform worship in a hurry or lose solemnity. This results in a decrease in spirituality and emotional connection with God.

The Paradox of Entertainment and Worship

On the one hand, games like Mobile Legends can provide the entertainment and relaxation that young people need to reduce stress and life pressure. However, on the other hand, these games can also pose a great challenge in maintaining a balance between spiritual needs and worldly entertainment. Amal et al. (2024) mentioned that technology and digital entertainment can be an effective medium for delivering religious messages if managed wisely. In this context, da'wah through platforms such as TikTok combined with Mobile Legends has been an innovation in delivering Islamic messages to young people (Amal et al., 2024). Nonetheless, there is a risk that religious messages may lose their essence if they are presented too much in an entertainment format. Therefore, a balance between educational and entertainment aspects is needed so that spiritual messages can be well received by young people without diminishing the value of worship itself

Research Objectives

This study aims to understand how the habit of playing Mobile Legends affects young people's worship engagement in an urban setting. The main focus of this research is to explore the impact of time spent gaming on the frequency and quality of worship, as well as how their religious perceptions change due to intense engagement in online games. In addition, the research also sought to provide recommendations for creating a balance between entertainment and worship activities in young people's daily lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the relationship between online gaming habits and worship activities is gaining attention in the digital era. Many studies have been conducted to understand how online games, particularly Mobile Legends, affect the social, psychological and spiritual aspects of adolescents. This section will summarize relevant research in three main aspects: the negative impact of gaming on religious activities, the potential of gaming as a medium for da'wah, and behavioral changes due to intense engagement in gaming.

1. **Negative Impact of Games on Religious Activities**

Studies show that high engagement in online gaming can disrupt religious routines. Fuadiy et al. (2024) highlighted that excessive frequency of playing Mobile Legends has a negative impact on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning outcomes at school. This study used a structural equation model (SEM) to analyze the relationship between gaming intensity

and academic outcomes, finding that students who play frequently tend to experience a decline in religious engagement at school (Fuadiy et al., 2024). In addition, research by Oetomo and Fahyuni (2022) revealed that the habit of playing Mobile Legends has an impact on procrastination behavior or task delays, including in carrying out worship. The teenagers involved in this study admitted that they often delayed prayer time because they preferred to complete matches in the game (Oetomo & Fahyuni, 2022).

2. The Potential of Games as Da'wah Media

On the other hand, some studies see the potential of games as innovative da'wah communication tools. Amal et al. (2024) explain that the combination of Mobile Legends and social media platforms such as TikTok is used as an attractive da'wah medium for teenagers. By utilizing the live streaming feature, previously rigid da'wah can be delivered in a more interactive and fun format (Amal et al., 2024). However, there are challenges in ensuring that religious messages maintain their authenticity when packaged in entertainment media. This research shows that the adaptation of da'wah through games requires a balance between delivering religious messages and maintaining the integrity of Islamic values

3. Behavioral Changes due to Intense Engagement in Games

The study by Qhomariah et al. (2024) stated that Mobile Legends not only affected worship time, but also gave rise to toxic behaviors such as verbal aggressiveness and lack of tolerance between players. This behavior is contrary to religious values such as patience and mutual respect (Qhomariah et al., 2024). Braun et al. (2016) in a study on the relationship between religion and gaming behavior, found that belief in God correlated with lower frequency of play and lower levels of gaming addiction. This suggests that religious values may be a protective factor against excessive gaming behavior (Braun et al., 2016). In addition, Prabowo (2024) highlighted that engagement in Mobile Legends can lead to impulsive behavior, which contributes to increased aggressiveness and decreased adherence to social norms, including religious norms (Prabowo, 2024)

4. Positive Impact: Relaxation and Education Media

Beyond the negative impacts, some studies reveal that gaming can also provide benefits such as reducing stress. Some participants in a study by Morrell et al. (2012) stated that gaming can be an effective medium to reduce psychological distress before worship. This suggests that with controlled use, Mobile Legends can be a useful relaxation tool (Morrell et al., 2012).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore in depth the impact of playing Mobile Legends on worship time engagement among urban youth. A qualitative approach was chosen as it allows for the exploration of subjective experiences and an in-depth understanding of behavioral dynamics that cannot be measured solely with quantitative data. This research focused on a complex phenomenon, namely how digital gaming affects the spiritual aspects of adolescents' daily lives

1. Research Design

This research design is exploratory, with the aim of understanding the relationship between the habit of playing Mobile Legends and changes in worship patterns. This exploratory approach is suitable for use in research contexts where the phenomenon being studied has rarely been studied in depth. By using this design, researchers can explore various aspects of the participants' experiences, ranging from the motivation to play, the time spent playing, to how it impacts their religious activities.

2. Participant Selection

This study involved 8 purposively selected participants. Participant criteria included:

- Youth aged 15-25 who actively play Mobile Legends at least 10 hours per week.

- Reside in an urban environment, as greater access to technology and online gaming culture tends to be stronger in these areas.

- Have a strong religious background (involved in religious activities or come from a family that practices religious values).

Purposive selection is done to ensure that participants really have significant involvement with Mobile Legends games and worship activities, so that the data obtained is relevant to the research objectives.

3. Data Collection Technique

Data was collected through several key methods:

a. In-depth Interview

In-depth interviews were conducted to understand participants' personal experiences of playing Mobile Legends and how it affects their worship activities. Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes, using a semi-structured interview guide to provide flexibility in exploring different topics that arose during the interview. Some of the key questions in the interviews included

- "How do you manage your time between gaming and worship?"

- "Do you feel that your gaming habit affects the frequency or quality of your worship? If so, how?"

- "What is your main motivation for playing Mobile Legends and how do you feel after playing regarding religious activities?"

b. Participatory Observation

The researcher also conducted participatory observation by following some of the participants in their daily activities, including when playing Mobile Legends and when performing worship. This observation aimed to understand the direct dynamics between playing and worship activities, as well as the social interactions that occur during the process. The researcher recorded the time participants spent playing, whether there was a delay in worship time, and how participants behaved after playing. These observations provided a real context that enriched the data from the interviews.

c. Documentation

Additional data was obtained through analyzing documentation such as records of religious activities (e.g. prayer schedules or other religious activity records) and gaming history. This documentation helped in confirming or comparing data from interviews and observations, thus increasing the validity of the data.

4. Research Instruments

The main instruments in this research are:

a. Semi-structured Interview Guide: Used to guide in-depth interviews, but remains flexible to allow exploration of unplanned topics.

b. Observation Sheet: Used to record the participant's behavior during game play and worship.

c. Field Notes: The researcher recorded the field findings in detail to ensure the data obtained was rich in details and contextual nuances.

5. Data Analysis Process

The data obtained was analyzed using a thematic approach. The analysis steps included:

a. Transcription and Coding

After the interviews and observations were completed, the data were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then coded to identify key themes that emerged from the participants' narratives.

b. Theme Creation

Each code that emerged was grouped into major themes. For example, codes related to worship delays and play motivations were grouped into themes such as disruption of worship time and entertainment as a priority.

c. Data Triangulation

Triangulation is done by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure data consistency. If there is a difference in the data, the researcher will explore more deeply to find the cause of the difference.

6. Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, this study utilized a member checking strategy, where the interim results of the research were reconfirmed with the participants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations matched their experiences. In addition, peer debriefing was conducted by involving peers to check the validity of the analysis. Data reliability was strengthened by the application of the research code of ethics, including maintaining the confidentiality of participants' identities and obtaining written consent prior to data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Decrease in Frequency and Quality of Worship

From the results of in-depth interviews, it was found that the majority of participants experienced a decrease in the frequency of worship, especially five-time prayers, due to the habit of playing Mobile Legends. As many as 6 out of 8 participants admitted that they often delayed their prayers because they were too busy playing games. This phenomenon occurs because matches in Mobile Legends are real-time, so players feel they cannot leave the game without harming their team. One 18-year-old participant stated:

> *"Sometimes, when prayer time comes, I think, ah, just one more game, then I'll pray. But I keep playing until the prayer time is almost over."*

This procrastination resulted in a significantly decreased frequency of worship, especially when they played at night. A similar study by Qhomariah et al. (2024) also showed that playing Mobile Legends had a negative impact on worship engagement due to shifting priorities to online entertainment (Qhomariah et al., 2024). In addition to frequency, the quality of worship is also affected. Some participants admitted to performing worship in a hurry or without solemnity because their minds were still focused on the game. This is in line with

Prabowo's research (2024) which states that engagement in online games can reduce concentration on non-digital activities such as worship (Prabowo, 2024).

Impact	Description	Percentage of Participants experiencing It
Delay in Worship	Participants often delay prayers due to being engrossed in playing games, especially during Maghrib and Isha prayer times.	75%
Decrease in Devotion	Worship is performed in a hurried manner or without full concentration because their mind is still focused on the game.	75%
Strees Relaxation	Playing games helps reduce stress before worship, enhancing a sense of calm during prayer.	50%
Decline in Religious Social Engagement	More time is spent in gaming communities than in religious activities within their surroundings.	62.5%
Motivation to Worship After Playing	Feeling refreshed and motivated to worship after playing games for a short duration.	25%

Table 1. The Impact of Playing Mobile Legends on the Worship Activities of Urban Youth

Psychological Impact: Between Stress and Relaxation

Interestingly, despite the negative impact on worship time, some participants mentioned that playing Mobile Legends helped them reduce stress before worship. A 21-year-old participant stated:

> *"I play games to refresh my brain. After playing, I feel more relaxed, so I can pray more calmly."*

This suggests that Mobile Legends can serve as a relaxation tool if used wisely. Research by Morrell et al. (2012) also mentioned that digital media can help reduce psychological distress and improve mental well-being, which in turn can support the quality of worship (Morrell et al., 2012). However, if the duration of play is not controlled, this relaxing effect can turn into a dependency that leads to disruption of lifestyle, including worship.

Changes in Social Interaction Patterns in Religious Contexts

The observation results show a shift in the pattern of social interaction in the religious context. Most participants tended to be more active in the gaming community than the religious

community in their neighborhood. For example, participants felt more connected with online friends than with friends at the mosque or religious community. One participant said:

> *"I chat about games in my team's WhatsApp group more than I join religious discussions at the mosque."*

This has implications for reduced social engagement in physical religious activities. According to research by Amal et al. (2024), this phenomenon is also influenced by the presence of digital platforms such as TikTok that make it easier to deliver proselytizing through online media, so that many teenagers feel they can get enough religious information from the virtual world (Amal et al., 2024). However, it is important to remember that while digital media makes it easier to access information, deep spiritual experiences often require in-person interactions, such as in joint religious activities. This shift poses new challenges for religious communities in re-engaging young people in the real world.

Time Management and Balance Between Entertainment and Worship

One important finding was the difficulty participants had in managing their time between playing Mobile Legends and worshiping. As many as 7 out of 8 participants admitted that it was difficult to manage their time well, especially if they were already involved in competitive games. This shows that Mobile Legends is not just entertainment, but also creates serious time management challenges.

For example, a 19-year-old participant said:

> *"Actually, I realize that it's prayer time, but often feel obligated to leave the game because the team is still competing."*

This phenomenon illustrates that the need for victory in games often overrides worship obligations. According to Oetomo and Fahyuni (2022), such procrastination is often followed by feelings of guilt, but the habit is difficult to break without firm intervention (Oetomo & Fahyuni, 2022). Solutions proposed by participants included the use of prayer time reminders on their mobile phones and the implementation of time discipline by setting playtime limits. However, the implementation of these solutions still depends on individual awareness and commitment.

Potential for Education and Da'wah through Games

Although the negative impact is quite real, Mobile Legends also offers positive potential as a medium for education and da'wah. Research by Amal et al. (2024) shows that

gaming platforms can be used to deliver religious messages in creative and interactive ways, especially when combined with social media. For example, some players have started to create game-based da'wah content, such as inserting religious values in conversations during the game. This proves that if utilized properly, games can be an effective medium for da'wah. However, the biggest challenge is to ensure that these values remain authentic and are not mixed with the negative elements of online gaming culture, such as excessive competition and toxic behavior.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

This study shows that the habit of playing Mobile Legends has a complex impact on the worship life of urban youth. The results showed a decrease in the frequency and quality of worship among participants who frequently play games, especially in terms of five daily prayers. This phenomenon is driven by the competitive nature of the game that requires intensive engagement and inflexible time, so that many participants feel forced to delay or even skip worship time. This is in line with previous studies that have shown that uncontrolled digital activities can shift other important priorities, including religious activities. Finally, this study provides insight that while online gaming has a negative impact on worship, with the right approach, these digital pastimes can be positively utilized. Therefore, the future of technology management among adolescents should be geared towards responsible and balanced use, so that they can enjoy entertainment without compromising spiritual values.

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