DYNAMICS OF TEENAGER *VERBAL ABUSE* BEHAVIOR IN THE MOBILE LEGEND GAME

Ririn Dwi Putri, Dias Beneficia, Rizqi Mutqiyyah

PSDKU Kampus 5 UNESA

Jl. Maospati-Barat No. 357-360 Maospati, Magetan, Jawa

Timur Email : ririnp00000@gmail.com

Abstrak
Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana remaja menggunakan kekerasan verbal saat bermain game Mobile Legends. Kekerasan verbal sering muncul dalam konteks permainan, dimana pemain menggunakan bahasa kasar yang dapat memicu agresi dan gangguan emosional. Teori yang dianggap dalam penelitian ini adalah Teori S.O.R (Stimulus-Organism-Response). Teori ini menjelaskan bagaimana stimulus luar mempengaruhi organisme remaja dan menyebabkan respon tertentu. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode desain penelitian kualitatif yang dimana partisipannya mengisi kuisioner yang ditujukan kepada remaja yang berumur lima belas sampai dengan dua puluh satu tahun. Namun hasil kuisioner masih banyak remaja yang sering mengalami maupun menggunakan kekerasan verbal yang dipicu oleh berbagai banyak hal.

Kata Kunci : Kekerasan Verbal, Remaja, Mobile Legend, Teori SOR

Abstract

This research aims to find out how teenagers use verbal violence when playing the Mobile Legends game. Verbal abuse often appears in the context of games, where players use harsh language that can trigger aggression and emotional disturbance. The theory considered in this research is the S.O.R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) Theory. This theory explains how external stimuli affect the juvenile organism and cause certain responses. This research uses a qualitative research design method in which participants fill out questionnaires aimed at teenagers aged fifteen to twenty-one years. However, the results of the questionnaire show that there are still many teenagers who often experience or use verbal abuse which is triggered by various things

Keyword : Mobile Legend, Teenager, SOR Theory, Verbal Abuse

INTRODUCTION

Technology advances rapidly every day, particularly digital technology. The combination of computer and communication technologies has created information technology offering various advantages for exchanging information across the globe. This technology is commonly known as digital technology or the internet (Danur,2019). The presence of digital technology assists individuals in carrying out various activities, such as shopping, transportation, studying, communicating, and many others. All of these activities can be performed using just a single smartphone. Beyond these aspects, technological advancements are also experienced in the entertainment sector. One of the entertainment channels frequently utilized by individuals through digital technology is online gaming. Online games are games accessible to multiple players whose devices are connected via an internet network (Nisrina Fatin, 2020). They allow more than one person to play simultaneously over an internet connection using dedicated platforms such as computers, consoles, or smartphones (Novriali, 2019). Online gaming is a technology genre featuring mechanics that connect players according to a specific game model (Surbakti, 2017). It is highly popular among students, many of whom spend considerable amounts of time playing. One particularly popular online game among students is Mobile Legends.

Mobile Legends: Bang Bang is a mobile online game currently enjoying immense popularity, making it one of the most played games in Asia. Similar to *Arena of Valor*, *League of Legends*, and *PUBG*, it stands out as one of the most sought-after online games today. The game can induce addictive tendencies among fanatical players, who are willing to spend hours playing it. Players typically strive to reach higher rank tiers starting from the bottom: Warrior, Elite, Master, Grandmaster, Epic, Legend, Mythic, Mythical Honor, Mythical Glory,and Mythical Immortal. Moonton was established in 2014 by Justin Yuan and released its first game, *Magic Rush*. In 2016, Moonton launched its newest game, *Mobile Legends 5v5*. Over time, *Mobile Legends* has continued to grow. Four years after its initial release, Moonton's flagship title successfully became one of the most popular games in ASEAN (Nawawi et al., 2021). *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* regularly introduces diverse features with each update. One notable addition related to communication is the in-game chat system.This feature allows players to communicate with one another, both in the lobby and during matches.Interactivity occurs when players send messages using quick chat—a feature previously unavailable in *Mobile Legends*. The inclusion of this feature prompted the researchers to analyze how two-way communication unfolds when adolescents utilize the quick chat feature in *Mobile Legends*. Since its launch, Moonton has added numerous features to the game. Because matches involve two teams of five members each,communication tools were integrated to facilitate strategy coordination for winning matches. These communication features have become increasingly varied; based on the authors' observations of in-game features, there are at least three available types: text chat typed directly by players, live voice chat via microphone, and template-based instant chat (quick chat) selectable according to need (Ananda et al., 2022).They elaborate that the features supporting virtual communication variations in *Mobile Legends*voice chat, chat box, and quick chat give players the impression of being in the same room together.

However, alongside the growing number of players, various concerns have emerged regarding its social impact, particularly on adolescent attitudes and behaviors (Mar'ie & Fahyuni, 2021). *Mobile Legends* serves not only as entertainment for adolescents but also forms a dynamic virtual community where player interaction constitutes an essential part of the gaming experience (Rohman, 2018). Intense in-game interaction can significantly influence adolescents' social and moral development, potentially leading to toxic behavior (Rani et al., 2018). *Mobile Legends* facilitates interaction among players, providing an in-game chat feature in this team-versus-team format to make communication easy. Consequently, effective team communication

can lead to victory. In terms of messaging, game developers grant users freedom of expression, censoring only phrases deemed offensive, rude, or containing hate speech. However, players often bypass these filters by replacing letters with visually similar numbers. This ease and freedom of communication create new problem areas, especially in virtual environments where players are represented only by names and photos that can easily be falsified. The chat feature provided by the developer becomes an arena for real-time communication that can yield both positive and negative outcomes.

This study examines how adolescents engage in verbal abuse while playing *Mobile Legends*, concentrating on the psychological impact of social interaction and in-game communication. Unlike the study by Valentina et al.(2018), which broadly examined the overall impact of online games on adolescents' social behavior, this research places greater emphasis on the specific use of verbal abuse and the psychological effects stemming from social interaction and communication in *Mobile Legends*. Valentina et al. focused on online game addiction among adolescents, specifically investigating Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) and its negative impacts on social life, academic performance, and mental health. They used surveys to collect data from active adolescent gamers, analyzing the relationship between addiction levels, academic achievement, and mental health. Their findings indicated that gaming addiction can disrupt academic performance, heighten anxiety and depression, and lead to social isolation. Although the present study also examines online game addiction, it focuses more heavily on the social factors triggering that addiction. A similarity to Valentina et al.(2018) lies in the research methodology: both studies employ a qualitative approach focusing on phenomenological events within the researchers' surrounding environment. Despite their differing research foci, both studies demonstrate that excessive online gaming carries serious consequences for adolescents' social lives. This paper presents an updated perspective on verbal abuse in *Mobile Legends*, focusing specifically on adolescents as the target demographic.

Inevitably, many teams suffer from minimal communication during gameplay, preventing them from achieving victory. Teams are formed in two ways: by teaming up with acquaintances or through automated matchmaking by the server. Communication proves more challenging in random matchmaking, particularly when paired with underage teammates, which influences how players communicate. Various factors drive changes in online gamers' communication behaviors, stemming from specific motives for playing (Wijaya, 2019). Engaging in online gaming can also yield negative non-material consequences. One major impact is addiction to *Mobile Legends*, which can cause players to neglect daily activities and potentially harm their psychological well-being. Harsh and inappropriate language frequently surfaces during game interactions, not only in Indonesia but globally (Andri & Andy, and Kurniawan 2018). Furthermore, online gaming can lead to the neglect of real-world responsibilities, leaving players trapped in the game world to complete tasks at the expense of time that should be spent studying.

Recently, the researchers have frequently observed adolescents uttering toxic words while playing *Mobile Legends*. Toxic behavior reflects poor character, often influenced by environmental factors, and inflicts negative effects on others. In *Mobile Legends*, toxic behavior commonly arises when a teammate plays poorly,feeds, goes away from keyboard (AFK), or due to differences in nationality, ethnicity, or religion. A "feeder" refers to a player who intentionally plays poorly during a match, while "AFK" denotes the act of leaving a match while it is in progress. Toxic behavior typically manifests as mocking or ridiculing struggling players, feeders, or individuals of different backgrounds—whether by criticizing gameplay, hurling profanities, or insulting their families, religions, or countries. Given the prevalence of verbal abuse among adolescents in *Mobile Legends*,what are the forms and intensity

of this verbal abuse? Left unchecked, such bad behavior among adolescents threatens Indonesia's image as a friendly, polite nation. This toxic behavior requires dedicated research to mitigate future negative impacts. Socialization processes within games must be carefully monitored to prevent harsh interactions leading to verbal abuse. Socialization is essential for achieving mutual understanding; unfortunately, playing *Mobile Legends* often leads players to swear or direct verbal abuse at teammates or opponents. Swearing and verbal abuse typically occur during gameplay when players feel frustrated frustration that may stem from losing, incompetent teammates, or an already bad mood (Alfirahmadita Jeani,2020).

Verbal abuse is defined as excessive scolding, swearing, and ranting using harsh words toward someone, causing emotional distress to the recipient. Both the speaker and the recipient experience negative consequences if harsh words become part of daily speech. Verbal abuse is also recognized as emotional blackmail, involving direct and indirect manipulation where perpetrators threaten and punish victims if their demands are not met. It is considered a subtle form of violence in communication; while it produces no immediate physical effect, repeated verbal abuse causes emotional pain and disappointment. Based on this context, the authors are interested in conducting a study titled **"The Dynamics of Adolescent Verbal Abuse Behavior in Mobile Legends."** *Mobile Legends* has the potential to become a virtual battlefield where toxic behaviors such as verbal harassment and intimidation can occur (Valentina et al., 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of how this online game shapes adolescent behavior, particularly regarding involvement in toxic practices that can affect their mental health and moral well-being.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design incorporating questionnaires with specific criteria and a phenomenological study approach. Phenomenology is a research approach based on an individual's lived experiences and how they perceive and assign meaning to that phenomenon. Questionnaires can be utilized in qualitative research to gain a more complex understanding of a phenomenon. Qualitative research questionnaires are crafted by researchers to give respondents the opportunity to explain their perspectives or experiences.

Participants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling technique a sampling technique carried out by considering specific criteria comprising 12 adolescents as primary participants. Adolescents were chosen as primary participants based on the following inclusion criteria:

1. Adolescents aged 15–21 years, as individuals at this age are considered capable of communicating effectively, making independent decisions, and cooperatively providing information due to their ability to evaluate their own actions.
2. Adolescents experiencing online gaming addiction, defined as those who play online games 4–5 days a week (Akbar, 2020), with a time intensity categorized as online gaming addiction consisting of playing online games for more than 2 hours per day (Pande & Marheni, 2015).

The primary instrument in this study is the researcher, commonly referred to as the human instrument (Wekke,2019). Supporting instruments include a questionnaire featuring structured question items prepared by the researcher. The questions are answered by the adolescents based on their lived experiences and knowledge. A literature study was also conducted to reinforce existing empirical facts.

Data analysis follows the stages outlined by Sugiyono: data display (formatted as transcripts), data reduction (selecting key points or keywords relevant to the research topic), and conclusion drawing (synthesizing findings into thematic categories). The researcher strictly respects participant autonomy by maintaining the confidentiality and security of all provided information. Verbal abuse behavior in the online gaming domain, such as *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*, represents a compelling phenomenon to investigate, particularly among adolescents. In this game, players interact not only through gameplay mechanics but also via verbal communication, which can influence their emotional and social atmosphere.

For the analysis phase, the researcher devised an interview guide, collected data, and performed data analysis independently to understand how toxic communication processes unfold virtually during *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* gameplay. First, a list of questions was constructed based on the research focus.Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) behavior theory, toxic behavior is classified as overt behavior, as it occurs when an individual responds through concrete actions.

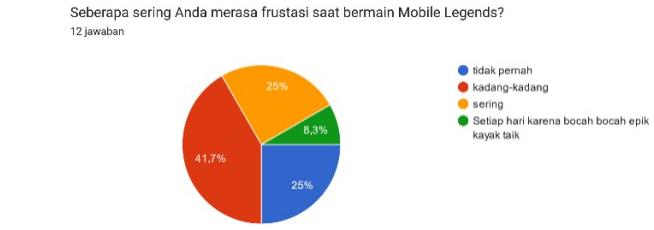
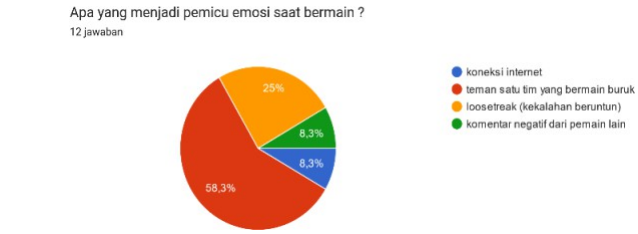
S-O-R theory, social-cognitive theory, and interactional communication theory serve as theoretical frameworks to understand the verbal behaviors exhibited by adolescents in *Mobile Legends*. The S-O-R framework,introduced by Albert Mehrabian (1976), explains how external stimuli (e.g., in-game interactions) affect the organism (adolescents) to produce a specific response. In *Mobile Legends*, intense verbal harassment can trigger strong emotional reactions from players. The external stimulus refers to inter-player interactions in the form of comments or insults expressed via text chat or live voice chat. Internal processing of these stimuli (e.g., anger or frustration) can, in turn, heighten aggressive behavior both inside and outside the game.

This theory posits that when adolescents receive stimuli involving verbal abuse, they process it internally,resulting in verbal aggressive behavior or other emotional reactions such as disappointment or anger. For instance, if a player feels unfairly criticized or harassed, they may resort to harsh language or retaliate with insults.

FINDINGS

Harsh words provide a sense of relief for *Mobile Legends* players. Regarding verbal abuse, all informants in this study stated that they frequently experience verbal harassment. All four informants reported often feeling frustrated while playing *Mobile Legends*. The main triggers for this frustration include poor internet connections, teammates lacking match control, consecutive losing streaks, and negative comments from other players.

Aspek	**Hasil (%)**
Form of verbal abuse	

Causes	 -  -
Impacts	

Bentuk Verbal Abuse	**Ungkapan**
Animal Names	Verbal abuse using animal names is often carried out to insult or demean someone by calling them terms with negative connotations, such as *"anjing"* (dog) and *"babi"* (pig).
Trending Swear Words	The use of harsh words has become a trend on social media, ultimately creating a new norm where verbal abuse is perceived as a valid way to communicate.
Body Parts	Expressions often involving sensitive body parts are used to express frustration as a means to convey deep emotion.

English Profanities	The status of English as an international language has made its swear words more widely recognized and used; in fact,English profanities are often considered milder when used to express emotions.

Sarcasm	Sarcasm used to belittle, insult, or attack someone can be categorized as a form of verbal abuse.

DISCUSSION

Mobile Legends is a highly popular MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) mobile game. *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* players, commonly referred to as "ML Players," originate from various age groups and backgrounds. They are divided into different skill tiers, ranging from beginners to experienced players. The majority of *Mobile Legends* players share an interest in competition and teamwork to achieve victory. They frequently form groups or join teams to play alongside friends or other players worldwide. ML players often focus on developing gameplay skills, making strategic hero selections, and maintaining good team coordination during matches. While some players choose to play casually, others adopt a more serious approach to participate in tournaments or team competitions. Additionally, some players are active in online communities, sharing strategies, tips, and tricks through social platforms and gaming forums. Overall, the *Mobile Legends* community is dynamic and continuously evolving alongside new content releases and game updates.

The forms of verbal abuse commonly encountered in *Mobile Legends* stem from toxic player behavior. Toxicity is understood as the expression of negative emotions by hurling harsh, sarcastic, or overly critical remarks at other players. Frequently used profanities include offensive animal names, English swear words, and trendy phrases popularized by streamers and subsequently imitated by viewers. Players often experience frustration and heightened emotions during matches due to various factors. Poor internet connection is a major trigger,disrupting focus and hindering teammates due to high latency or lag—the delay between a player's action and the on-screen response. Lag can also result from inadequate device specifications when running high graphics settings. An unstable internet connection leads to lag and disconnections, frequently triggering player anger and ruining the overall gaming atmosphere. Poor connectivity reduces gameplay quality, resulting in player dissatisfaction and potentially decreasing time spent playing.

Furthermore, *Mobile Legends*' automated solo-queue matchmaking system can result in consecutive losing streaks (lose streaks). Prolonged losing streaks negatively impact player motivation and self-confidence,potentially degrading overall in-game performance. Losing streaks are unavoidable for most players, as the system is designed to maintain a sense of challenge. However, this often triggers emotional outbursts because players feel their efforts yielded no rewards. This frustration can be mitigated by taking breaks during sessions or playing alternative game modes. The emotional toll of frequent losses also leads individuals to blame teammates, which can escalate into toxic comments from opponents.

Sarcasm in comments represents a form of negative feedback intended to hurt someone's feelings. This includes sharp taunts, ridicule, or harsh remarks aimed at insulting others—often uttered by frustrated or angry players. In *Mobile Legends*, this typically occurs when a player performs poorly and frustrates teammates who view them as a burden to the team, prompting ridicule and mockery. According to the research findings, the social impacts depend on how individual players handle these situations. Positively, constructive communication builds team cooperation and secures easier victories. Negatively, emotional players frequently resort to harsh words and hate speech. Beyond verbal abuse, frustrated players may engage in disruptive behaviors, such as revealing teammate locations to opponents via text chat, intentionally feeding

kills to the enemy team, intentionally remaining idle to leave roles unattended, or abandoning ongoing matches altogether a practice known as AFK (Away From Keyboard).

Toxic player behavior creates an unpleasant environment, diminishing enjoyment and comfort for others.Encouraging positive attitudes, cooperation, and healthy engagement within the gaming community is crucial. Another characteristic of toxic individuals is a disregard for personal boundaries; while individuals maintain boundaries in social interactions, toxic players ignore them to seek attention from those around them. Sarcastic toxicity harms team performance by disrupting the focus and motivation of targeted teammates. Additionally, toxicity creates internal tension, reduces cooperation, and contributes to a negative overall experience. Maintaining sportsmanship and positive communication enhances joint gameplay, whereas toxicity hurts both the team and the broader community. According to Schafer, a forensic psychologist and author specializing in human behavior analysis, sarcastic toxicity functions as a form of verbal abuse that can negatively impact an individual's mental well-being. Below are the empirical data regarding cynicism-based toxic behaviors in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* collected by the researchers.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the phenomenon of verbal abuse behavior among adolescents playing *Mobile Legends*.Adolescents aged 15 to 21, who regularly play the game, serve as the primary subjects demonstrating that the use of harsh words, sarcasm, and taunts frequently occurs, particularly when encountering frustration-inducing situations. Triggers such as consecutive losing streaks, lag caused by poor internet connections, and poor teammate performance stand out as the primary factors driving negative emotions. The highly competitive gaming environment also heavily influences players' moods. In pursuit of rankings and victories, many players vent their emotions through the available in-game communication features, including the chat box, voice chat,and quick chat. Freedom of expression on this platform often lacks adequate moderation, allowing toxic behavior to flourish and disrupt the overall gaming experience.

The impact of this behavior affects not only victims of verbal abuse but also perpetrators. Victims frequently experience emotional distress, anger, or a loss of motivation to play. Conversely, perpetrators unintentionally reinforce their aggressive patterns, which risks carrying over into real-life interactions. On a broader scale, the gaming community becomes hostile, diminishing overall enjoyment and fostering conflict that degrades team collaboration. This study utilized a qualitative research design with participants completing questionnaires based on specific criteria alongside a phenomenological approach—meaning the inquiry was grounded in individuals' lived experiences and how they perceive and assign meaning to the phenomenon.

Multiple stakeholders must take concrete actions to address this issue. Educating young players on the importance of healthy communication during gameplay is essential. Game developers are also expected to build features that mitigate harmful behavior, such as warning systems or automated profanity filters.Furthermore, player communities should be encouraged to cultivate a culture of sportsmanship that prioritizes teamwork and respect for opponents. Through these measures, *Mobile Legends* and similar games can evolve into entertainment spaces that are not only enjoyable but also foster positive social and emotional development among players.

REFERENCES

Akbar, H. (2020). Penyuluhan dampak perilaku kecanduan game online terhadap kesehatan remaja di SMA Negeri 1 Kotamobagu. *Community Engagement and Emergence Journal (CEEJ)*, 1(2), 42–47.

Alfirahmadita Jeani, S. M. (2020). Peran bahasa dalam komunikasi pembelajaran matematika secara online pada masa pandemi Covid-19. *Jurnal Pendidikan Matematika*, 8(3), 153–165.

Ananda, B. F., Achmad, Z. A., Alamiyah, S. S., Wibowo, A. A., & Fauzan, L. A. (2022). Variasi komunikasi virtual pada kelompok pemain game Mobile Legends. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 12(1), 18–34.

Danur, M. (2019). Perkembangan dan transformasi teknologi digital. *Infokam*, 15(2).

Goenawan, M. A. (2017, August 23). Sampai kapan Mobile Legends digandrungi? *DetikInet*.https://inet.detik.com/games-news/d-3611597/sampai-kapan-mobile-legends-digandrungi

Kustiawan, A. A., & Andy. (2018). *Pengaruh game online dan tindakan pencegahan*. Media Grafika.

Mar'ie, F., & Fahyuni, E. F. (2021). Analisis pengaruh game online terhadap perilaku keagamaan remaja.*Oasis: Jurnal Ilmiah Kajian Islam*, 5(2), 42–52.

Nawawi, M. I., Pathuddin, H., Syukri, N., Alfidayanti, Saputri, S. P., Ramdani, M., Jun, M., & Marsuki, I. (2021).Pengaruh game Mobile Legends terhadap minat belajar mahasiswa/i Fakultas Sains dan Teknologi UIN Alauddin Makassar. *Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial Budaya*, 3(1), 48.

Nisrina Fatin. (2020). Pengaruh game online terhadap motivasi belajar siswa. *Jurnal Edukasi Nonformal*, 116.

Novriali, E. (2019). Kecanduan game online pada remaja: Dampak dan pencegahannya. *Buletin Psikologi*,27(2), 148–158.

Pande, N. P. A. M., & Marheni, A. (2015). Hubungan kecanduan game online dengan prestasi belajar siswa SMP Negeri 1 Kuta. *Jurnal Psikologi Udayana*, 2(2), 163–171.

Rohman, K. (2018). Agresivitas anak kecanduan game online. *Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi*, 2(1).

Surbakti, K. (2017). Pengaruh game online terhadap remaja. *Jurnal Curere*, 1(1).

Valentina, E., & Sari, W. P. (2018). Studi komunikasi verbal dan nonverbal game Mobile Legends: Bang Bang.*Jurnal Koneksi*, 2(2), 300–306.

Wekke, I. S. (2019). *Metode penelitian sosial*. Gaung Persada Press.

Wijaya, S. P. (2019). Komunikasi virtual dalam game online (Studi kasus dalam game Mobile Legends). *Jurnal Koneksi*, 3(1), 261–267.