

**When PUBG is not just a game:  
An exploratory study of young Asian expatriates and maintaining social connections with  
those back home**

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WHEN *PUBG* IS NOT JUST A GAME: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF YOUNG ASIAN EXPATRIATES AND  
MAINTAINING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS WITH THOSE BACK HOME

**Abstract**

*PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* (hereafter referred as *PUBG*) is a multiplayer online game which was released in late December 2017. Since its release, *PUBG* has become a global phenomenon, and is now the 5th highest selling video game of all time. With its large user-base, *PUBG* outperformed all other games in Asian countries. In contrast to existing stereotypes, *PUBG* has been perceived to enhance social connection among young players. Social connection facilitated by group confrontation and the collaborative nature of multiplayer online games cannot be ignored but remains scarce in academic research. Parallel to that, the affordance of multiplayer online games as another form of social networking platform has provided young Asian expatriates more opportunities to acquire social connection, especially with those back home. By conducting in-depth interviews from a hermeneutical phenomenology approach, this study investigates the ways young Asian expatriates make use of the multiplayer online game *PUBG* to maintain existing long-distant social connections. The data was taken from ten in-depth interviews with young Asian expatriates who are active players of the researched game. A qualitative thematic analysis method was utilized to analyze the complete data. The analysis indicates three main emerging themes. The first theme, *emotional responses*, describes players' emotional engagement during game play with existing ties from their homelands. The findings indicate a centrality of positive emotional experience among gaming experience in a shared game with friends. The second theme, *Just a Game?*, narrates the participants' immersive involvement and their perceived social and cultural capital from gaming with friends from their homelands. The final theme of *uses and gratifications* reveals how young Asian expats socially benefit from their gaming behaviours and experiences.

The results of this study show the unique role of the multiplayer online game *PUBG* in maintaining social connections by providing an immersive social environment where expatriates and their long-distant ties can obtain emotional support, exchange social and cultural capital as well as obtain a shared identity regardless of geographical distances and different social contexts. In addition, this study has filled in the literature gap in examining expatriate social connections with existing ties from their home countries and further added to the research in the field of gaming. For gaming companies and creators, this research provides insightful findings related to gaming elements that can boost social outcomes.

**KEYWORDS:** *multiplayer online games, PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds, social connection, expatriates, uses and gratifications.*

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# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgement</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
1.1. Introduction and research problem.....	6
1.2. Research question.....	8
1.3. Academic relevance .....	9
1.4. Societal relevance .....	10
1.5. Chapter outline .....	11
<b>2. Theoretical framework</b> .....	<b>13</b>
2.1. Expatriates and maintaining social connection with those back home.....	13
2.2. Online video games and social connections .....	19
<b>3. Methodology</b> .....	<b>25</b>
3.1. Research design .....	25
3.2. Sampling and data collection .....	27
3.3. Operationalization .....	30
3.4. Data analysis .....	32
3.5. Validity and reliability .....	33
<b>4. Results</b> .....	<b>35</b>
4.1. Emotional responses.....	35
4.1.1. <i>Positive emotions</i> .....	35
4.1.2. <i>Reduced negative emotions</i> .....	39
4.1.3. <i>Unhelpful emotions</i> .....	41
4.2. Just a Game? .....	42
4.2.1. <i>Involvement and immersion</i> .....	42
4.2.2. <i>Social and cultural capital</i> .....	45
4.3. Uses and Gratifications .....	48
4.3.1. <i>Teamwork and cooperation</i> .....	48
4.3.2. <i>Social gaming</i> .....	49
<b>5. Conclusions</b> .....	<b>54</b>
5.1. Main findings .....	54
5.2. Theoretical implications.....	56
5.3. Societal implications .....	57
5.4. Limitations.....	58
5.5. Future research.....	58

<b>Reference .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Appendix I .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Appendix II .....</b>	<b>73</b>

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Introduction and research problem

### **Young Asian expatriates and maintenance of existing social connections from home countries**

In this era of more open borders, international mobility is common. Globalization and international labour mobility have given highly qualified individuals the opportunity to move to any country they desire. Several organizations, especially multinational corporations, send employees to their overseas offices, working as expatriates. Universities, like other institutions, are moving towards globalization, recruiting students from abroad. People who transfer to foreign country not only encounter unfamiliar cultures but sometimes also struggle with them for long periods of time.

Expatriates encounter numerous obstacles in the different cultural environment they move to: culture shock, social isolation, loneliness, homesickness, and differences in language, norms and customs, to name a few (Mendenhall, Dunbar, & Oddou, 1987). Stroppa and Spieb (2010) stress the high degree of isolation and uncertainty during expatriation. This sort of uncertainty is termed social uncertainty, which expatriates usually encounter when the social support from existing networks in home countries is no longer available (Fahr, Bartol, Shapiro, & Shin, 2010).

Asian expatriates, as the largest group of expatriates, have experienced high cultural shock and social uncertainty as they migrate to Western countries such as the United States (Yan & Berliner, 2013) and Germany (Pang, 2018), due to the cultural differences between the East and West. It is of great difficulty for Asian expatriates to establish social connections with citizens of host countries. Most of them feel incapable of building friendships and engaging with locals because of cultural differences (Yan & Berliner, 2013). Consequently, many Asian expatriates do not consider host nationals as their primary social network (Hattingh, Matthee, & Lotriet, 2013).

In order to cope with the cultural changes that involve establishing and maintaining social connections during their time abroad, Asian expatriates rely on social networking sites to obtain social support from existing ties from home (Nardon, Aten, & Gulanowski, 2015; Segumpan & Saludadez, 2017). Young expatriates, individuals who actively pursue career or higher educational-related goals in a country of which they are not a native citizen, are generally referred to as "connected migrants" (Diminescu, 2008). Diminescu (2008) states that most young expatriates rely on smartphones and social media to connect across geographical boundaries with pre-existing social networks (such as family and friends) and diaspora communities. Online social networking sites have provided consumers with a wide variety of potential channels for social connection, regardless of time and geographical differences (Bodle, 2010). Research of digital technology usage by expatriates is relatively scarce. Nonetheless, a few studies have concentrated solely on the

affordances of these technologies to encourage the maintenance of connections with homeland organizations (Cox, 2004; Kim & McKay-Semmler, 2013; Ogan & Ozakca, 2010). Other current studies suggest that expatriates often rely on emerging communication technologies to obtain social support. Many research on international students' internet consumption have shown that social networking sites play a major role in exchanging information and social resources, which mitigate negative emotions generated by living abroad (Mikal, 2011; Mikal & Grace, 2012; Mikal, Yang, & Lewis, 2014; Ye, 2006). Social networking sites also provide expatriates opportunities to stay connected with home-country social ties (Mikal, 2011; Mikal & Grace, 2012; Mikal et al., 2014).

While many studies have explored the ways expatriates use social networking sites and other communication platforms to obtain information which promotes social connection, there is a great potential to explore similar practices in other platforms such as multiplayer online games. For this reason, the focus in this thesis is exploring how young Asian expatriates use multiplayer online games to maintain social connection with pre-existing ties in their home countries.

#### **Multiplayer online games as a platform for maintaining social connections**

Computer and video games have grown to be nearly omnipresent in industrialized countries, therefore, became the topics for research across many areas of academic study. Playing computer games is becoming more and more a social experience (Gentile et al., 2009). Gamers are often described as those who gather in internet room, exchange skills and experiences to complete a game's objectives (King & Borland, 2003). As soon as computers could be interconnected, gamers were quick to exploit the prospect of living and playing in shared virtual worlds. Considering this new attention, researchers have focused on how these games function as social environments. When talking about game play, strategy and skill receive great attention from most designers and players, however, empirical studies have proven the important role of in-game social networks development in online video games, especially multiplayer online games (Williams, 2006; Zhong, 2011). Jia et al. (2015) have suggested to look at online video games, in particular multiplayer online games, as a form of online social networking platforms.

One of the most popular games at the time of writing is *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) (hereafter referred to as *PUBG*), a "winner-takes-all" team game based on the Japanese film *Battle Royale* (PUBG Corporation, 2017). This multiplayer online game (MOG) was officially launched in December 2017 and can be played on various platforms, including desktops, gaming consoles and smartphones. By reaching 100 million active players in 2019, *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) has witnessed explosive growth and has been named Google Play's Best Game of 2018 and Fan Favorite Game of 2018 ("PUBG global player base 2018 | Statista", 2020). In each game session, 100 players simultaneously parachute to a virtual map where each squad battles until only one team is left alive. *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) provides possibilities to

play solo or in squads of up to four people – there are no limits to what can be done. Unlike other multiplayer online games that require players to use external chat applications such as TeamSpeak or Discord, *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) provides a built-in voice chat channel that enables players to interact with their teammates without using an external application. Furthermore, *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) can team up players with their real-life friends regardless of geographical distance or connect players with people in same area. The game synchronizes existing social contacts from players' social networking sites, and allows players to effortlessly send matching invitations through connected accounts, such as WeChat or Facebook. Therefore, players can get to know who also plays this title among their pre-existing contacts. In the context of expatriates, these features offer special opportunities to facilitate a mutual topic with their friends in their home countries. Expatriates can easily keep in contact with families and friends back home through social networking sites like Twitter, Instagram or WeChat (Pang, 2018; Segumpan & Saludadez, 2017). Nonetheless, the topic of conversation between expatriates and their friends from home is rather limited due to the lack of mutual activity – it is mostly about keeping up with each other in everyday life. Mutually participating in the same game might generate a new topic of conversation. Instead of only asking “How are you doing these days?”, people who play the same game can discuss the game together, share experiences and therefore develop a robust conversation (Jansz, & Martens, 2005). Moreover, similar to other multiplayer online games, *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) has the ability to establish long-term bonds (Martončik & Lokša, 2016). As Lo, Wang and Fang (2005) argue, many people use such multiplayer online games to fulfil their social needs, which they unable to meet in their current social context. Therefore, it is worth noting that many are actively seeking social connection through this type of virtual yet highly social environment (Kowert & Oldmeadow, 2013).

Considering the discussed social context, the need for further research regarding the way young Asian expatriates use multiplayer online games to maintain pre-existing social connections from home is apparent.

## **1.2. Research question**

Although *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) is widely discussed among the video game industry, marketers and other field professionals in terms of its massive commercial success, in-depth academic research into *PUBG*'s pro-social benefits is still in its infancy. This project, thus, contributes to this field of research by exploring how *PUBG* facilitate social connections among the particular group of young Asian expatriates. Furthermore, *PUBG*'s unparalleled commercial success in the Asian gaming market, which will be further elaborated upon in section 1.4., prompts the need for further scrutiny. Considering these observations, the main research question is formulated



as follows: *“How do young Asian expats use the multiplayer online game PUBG to maintain existing social connections with others back home?”*

### **1.3. Academic relevance**

There have been numerous studies exploring the social relationships and connection of expatriates through digital platforms. However, the majority of these studies paid attention to the social connections and relationships with host-country nationals (Van Vianen, De Pater, Kristof-Brown, & Johnson, 2004; Farh et al., 2010) or within diaspora communities in host countries (Johnson, Kristof-Brown, Van Vianen, De Pater, & Klein, 2003). Only a few studies have solely discussed the other brand of expatriates' social connection, with their existing networks in their home countries. Considering the lack of in-depth understanding, it seems relevant to focus on how expatriates maintain social connections with existing network in their homelands.

Besides, previous studies have asserted the extensive use of communication platforms in bridging with other expatriates in the host country (Cohen, Underwood, & Gottlieb, 2000) or bonding with friends in their home country (Ong & Ward, 2005). In addition, a few scholars have suggested that gameplay can be used to reinforce, enhance or maintain real-life relationships (De la Hera, Loos, Simons, & Bloom, 2017; Alencar & De la Hera, 2018; Jansz & Martens, 2005). A few studies in a similar academic field have paid special attention to the use of multiplayer online games in relation to social connection (Coan, Mugellini, & Khaled, 2013; Cole & Griffiths, 2007). Considering the results of the studies, it seems relevant to explore the role of multiplayer online games as social networking platforms and their use by expatriates in maintain existing social connections.

Furthermore, academics have carried out several studies on online games and their social impacts on players (Kneer, Rieger, Ivory, & Ferguson, 2014; Ducheneaut & Moore, 2004). However, the study subjects are mainly adolescents. Little research has been done on the relation of online game and older groups, for instance, young expats. Moreover, whilst the quantitative research method is the most common research method in this field, the qualitative research method can provide insightful details on this special group, as they might express themselves better in an interview. There is a noteworthy part of emerging qualitative studies across a wide spectrum of the gaming field (Wolf & Perron, 2003). However, existing research is mostly guided by existing theories of motivation and is not directly focused on gaming experiences from the players' perspective. Among the few qualitative research that exclusively study players' personal gaming experiences, Sherry, Lucas, Greenberg, and Lachlan (2006) adapt a qualitative focus group approach to explore different gaming motivations with a sample of emerging adults (college students aged 18 to 22 years). This research reports several game gratifications, including competition, challenge, social

interaction, immersion and fulfilling fantasies. Kutner, Olson, Warner and Hertzog (2008) also conduct an interview focus group to study attitudes of adolescent boys and their parents towards violent games. With the same method design, Olson, Kutner and Warner (2008) extend the research with an additional sample from young boy's clubs. These qualitative studies provide an important foundation to study how video games are experienced by players. Such research is guided by a defined framework from established scholarly studies, such as asking motivation for choosing specific game genres, etc. In light of these insights, a more comprehensive analysis by a qualitative research method is of value. The current dissertation aims to build on these prior studies while focusing solely on the motivation to play with pre-existing social ties. This is an exploratory study, designed to assess players' self-reports of perception, to determine if previous research has been able to identify all the categories of meanings for players from an understudied group, and to identify possible novel interpretations of game experiences not previously identified. This thesis expects to contribute to the platform for a qualitative methodological study of game meaning in mainstream academic literature.

#### **1.4. Societal relevance**

Since its release in 2017, *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) has experienced explosive growth with 100 million active players out of 400 million players across platforms ("*PUBG* global player base 2018 | Statista", 2020). *PUBG* has outperformed all other games in Asian countries, especially in China with 52 per cent of the total number of active players globally, followed by South Korea and Hong Kong (Newzoo, 2018). This remarkable index has proven that *PUBG* is a phenomenon among Asian communities.

Notwithstanding its stereotype, this online multiplayer game has been recognized for creating social connections among young people and enabling them to share common interests (Malla, 2019). *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) presents players with an attractive gaming experience and a well-integrated communication channel with fellow players. These features enhance not only the gaming experience but also the engagement and the connection between players. Likewise, *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) contains an amusing set of titles of achievements and awards for its players, which encourages players to achieve and share with their friends. A recent commercial article (Malla, 2019) noticed the possibility of forming social connections by playing this multiplayer online game. The article showed evidence from a young Indian expatriate, who managed to reconnect with and maintain stable relationships with his old friends in his home country. This news article prompts a call to re-examine the use of online video games, in this case online multiplayer games, with regards to social connections.

Furthermore, Bowman (2018) has outlined the characteristics of multiplayer online games

such as *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) as highly social demanding. The author claims that the rise of new social phenomena, such as interaction and social connection in the MOGs environment, deserves more attention for the future of gaming studies. *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) as well as other current Massively multiplayer online (MMO) games is a highly pervasive topic among its customers and critics on various media channels, making this game a socially relevant topic. There is therefore a necessity for gaming companies to understand the central role of social elements in game designs and how to take advantage of this aspect to generate beneficial social outcomes. Research social aspects of video games provides valuable insights of how new media is being re-considered and integrated into everyday routines. While technology has often been viewed as intruding into our daily lives, this study explores the potential of gaming to become part of everyday life as gamers shape consumption to fit their lifestyles.

### **1.5. Chapter outline**

In order to provide a comprehensive answer to the research question and provide important elements to show the credibility and reliability of this dissertation, the complete structure of the paper is as follows. Following the “Introduction” chapter, the second chapter discusses the “Theoretical framework”, which provides an overview of relevant existing literature. Thereafter, the paper follows with “Methodology” and “Results” chapters. To sum up, the “Discussion and Conclusion” chapter critically analyses findings and assesses limitations as well as the implications of this current paper.

In the “Theoretical framework” chapter, background literature related to the research question will be discussed. A critical and thorough discussion about the main concepts presented and the related existing studies will be described. In detail, the chapter conceptualizes the two theoretical terms expatriate and social connection. Thereafter, the chapter discusses existing academic research on how expatriates maintain pre-existing social connections. Next, the chapter provides a critical discussion of the use of online games in relation to social connections with a link to expatriates. Within this chapter, several relevant concepts are described in relation to the research question, thereby constituting a framework for the operationalization process in the next chapter.

The third chapter concerns the “Methodology” process and an overview of the research design of the study. This chapter provides detailed descriptions and justifications of methods employed to answer the research question.. Thus, elaborated justification of qualitative approach and in-depth interviews is indicated. Thereafter, the choice of research design and data collection process are discussed. Additionally, a detailed explanation of the sampling process is presented in this chapter. The chapter is then followed by indication of thematic analysis. Furthermore, the

operationalization of the main concepts will be described in detail, with an exploration of the main concepts through the coding tree and the interview guide (see Appendix I and II). Furthermore, the credibility of the research will be justified by evaluating the appropriateness of the approaches and methods used for the analysis, and reflecting on the researcher's reflexivity and position relating to the research topic.

Chapter four will present the results of the analysis and give an interpretation in reflection to the discussed theoretical framework. Finally, in the last chapter of the thesis paper, "Conclusion", the main findings of the research are concisely presented in order to provide comprehensive but also cohesive answer to the research question. Furthermore, this chapter will also evaluate the theoretical framework and methodological approach employed in this dissertation. In addition, the academic and social relevance of the research will be addressed critically, especially in relation to the findings. Finally, the implications of the current research, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research, are presented.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Ultimately, the goal of this study is to develop a comprehensive understanding pertaining to the ways young Asian expatriates use the multiplayer online game *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) to maintain existing social connections from their home countries. Since the topic of research is relatively new, only a small number of directly related studies have been published. This section provides a thorough review of the background literature related to the research question in two main sub-sections.

Firstly, it is necessary to discuss the background literature of what constitutes an expatriate and the particularities of Asian expatriates. This is followed by a general overview of this theoretical field and related concepts. As Stroppa and Spieb (2010) affirm, expatriates suffer from high levels of stress and uncertainty during abroad transfer. For this reason, it is relevant to study existing studies of how expats usually connect to their communities in their home countries. These are especially relevant to this study as they not only help to understand the characteristics of young Asian expatriates, but also comprehensively highlight the missing literature gap between the current practices that is relevant to study in relation to multiplayer online games. Therefore, studies regarding this field of interest will constitute the first sub-section.

Secondly, as far as I am aware, no study has looked into the use of online video games by expatriates to maintain existing social connections. Therefore, the next sub-section will extensively review a combination of literature concerning the relation between online video games and social connection in order to make sense of expats' online video game usage and motivation.

### **2.1. Expatriates and maintaining social connection with those back home**

#### **Definition of expatriates**

This study researches the ways young Asian expatriates use the video multiplayer online game *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) to maintain existing social connection from home countries. Therefore, it is essential to discuss the definition of expatriate and further review the particularities of Asian expatriates.

Although seemingly a simple question, there are insights to be learned from the potential answers. For more than 50 years, the process of international relocation to a foreign culture has been the subject of extensive theoretical and empirical examination. Expatriates fall under the broad category of sojourners. Ward and Kennedy (1994, p. 331) conceptualize sojourners as “individuals who travel voluntarily to a new culture, usually for specific objectives such as educational and occupational opportunities, who view their residence in the new culture as fixed and finite, and who usually have expectations of returning to their country of origin.” Thus, it is important to understand the differences between sojourners such as expatriates and long-term

travellers such as immigrants and refugees. Expatriates have usually been sent by their employers to work for a certain period of time in a foreign branch of their company. They tend to leave that location once the purpose of their stay has been reached. This definition refers only to highly skilled technicians, professionals, and managers (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2005, p. 168). Kim (2001) also classifies individuals transfer to foreign country into two groups: long-term and short-term. The first group refers to immigrants and refugees who plan to stay in the host country permanently. On the other hand, short-term individuals are represented by foreign professionals and international students, who intend to return to their homeland, at least initially. Gatti (2009) also distinguishes expatriates from migrants based on the time spent abroad. Expatriates, according to the scholar, are driven to move to a foreign country for professional reasons or because they are seeking experience abroad. In comparison, Gatti (2009) refers migrants "are perceived as people who are obliged to leave their countries because of the tough life and work conditions in their homeland" (p. 2).

Beside incentives to move abroad for career reasons, Gatti (2009) suggests that expatriates typically obtain at least an undergraduate degree, are multilingual and have other experiences abroad. The distinction between expatriates and migrants is quite noticeable: they have different biographies, different ties with their country of origin, and different expectations of their host country and their future there (Gatti, 2009). Although some other literature mentions the distinctions between international students, immigrants and expatriates (Church, 1982), few studies have examined the significance of such variations between these groups. Provided that the gaps between foreign students and expatriates are small enough, the current paper delineates literature about international students as well as expatriates.

Accordingly, expatriates are defined as individuals who moved to the host country either as highly skilled professionals or highly educated individuals. In addition, the concept of expatriates also includes current and former students who are studying or studied in a higher education institution in the host country to get an undergraduate, graduate, or post-graduate degree. Hereinafter, expatriates will be referred as expats.

Furthermore, it appears highly beneficial to look specifically at the peculiarities of young Asian expats. This study was based on studies by Segumpan and Saludadez (2017) as well as Yan and Berliner (2013) that describe the characteristics of Asian expatriates. Yan and Berliner (2013) note that young Asian expats often move to the host country between the ages of 20 and 30. The researchers found a higher level of homesickness and social uncertainty after traveling to Western countries among this group than in other age groups within the community. This situation resulted from a general lack of appropriate language and high level of cultural differences between Eastern and Western cultures (Yan & Berliner, 2013). Segumpan and Saludadez (2017) and Pang (2018)

come to the conclusion that the majority of Asian expats rely on their social connections from their home countries as a primary source for social resources. This conclusion appears very insightful as it informs about certain behaviours of the young Asian expat group, which will be further investigated in the following sub-section.

### **Expats' social connections with others back home**

Social connection is the central theoretical concept within the research question. According to the literature, social connection can be conceptualized broadly as “a tie between the [individual] and significant other persons...that provides a sense of belonging, an absence of aloneness, “a perceived bond” (Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005, p. 119). It should be noted that, although Barber et al. describe social connection in the context of childhood, the generality of the definition implies that it could be widely extended to various age groups, including emerging adults. In addition, Barber et al. (2005) use the term social connection to describe various types of relationships, including relationships between parents and children, romantic relationships and relationships of friendships, which makes it especially applicable to the current investigation, which will examine social relationships in a broad social network among emerging adults. Brown (2010b) defines social connection as “the energy that exists between people when they feel they are seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance from the relationship” (p. 19). Although this definition is ambiguous as to the objective components of social connection, it is clear that Brown emphasizes the emotional bond of a relationship, and the concept of being close with another person. Moreover, the researcher seems to write about complexities in individual relationships, not the general state of one's social relationships. However, the current investigation is only interested in more specifically examining the qualities of one's overall social relationships, rather than the qualities of particular relationships. Nevertheless, in order to assess social connection in this research, it will be important to recognize the emotional connection between individuals, as this is an important component in Brown's (2010b) work. The numerous terms used to characterize aspects of social connection all emphasize different ways of conceptualizing social connection, but unfortunately, they are at times used interchangeably (Barber & Schluterman, 2008), and this contributes to ambiguity as to what social connection really is.

To clarify and objectify the concept of social connection, one of the aims of this thesis is to explore other potential facets that can, together, operationally describe the overarching construct of social connection. There are many ways to conceptualize social connection, such as network size (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010; Molho, Roberts, de Vries, & Pollet, 2016; Wang, 2016), emotional closeness (Selfhout, Branje, & Meeus, 2008; Wrzus, Hänel, Wagner, & Neyer, 2013; Wrzus, Wagner, & Neyer, 2012), and social support (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Baker, Harris, &

Stephenson, 2015). In order to conceptualize social connection in the context of expats, the following paragraphs will examine the sub-concepts of emotional closeness, network size, and social support in this respective order.

An essential facet of social connection is the perceived emotional bond experienced between individuals (Barber et al., 2005). To understand emotional bond, scholars (Barber et al., 2005; Dibble, Levine, & Park, 2012) suggest evaluating the emotional closeness within the relationship. Emotional closeness indeed happens to be conceptually related to the conceptualization of social connection through its focus on an emotional bond, and this provides a useful way of explaining part of the concept as described by Barber et al. (2005). In recent research, there is evidence that emotional closeness in emerging adults is repeatedly described in the context of romantic relationships (Castañeda, Wendel, & Crockett, 2015; Totenhagen, Curran, Serido, & Butler, 2013), and as such there is little to inform us about adult closeness in relationships more generally. While several existing studies explicitly examine emotional closeness outside of the context of emerging adulthood, conceptualization in this demographic group can be understood in a similar manner due to the consistency of findings in adjacent age groups, such as adolescence and young adulthood (Selfhout et al., 2009; Wrzus et al., 2013). According to the ground-breaking study by Marsden and Campbell (1984), emotional closeness indicates the intensity of social ties. In the context of expats, emotional closeness refers to the dyadic relationship between the expat and each partner in his or her personal network. Given the research by Wang (2002), emotional closeness appears to be associated with the frequency that the expat contacts his or her network partner within a limited time frame. The intensity of a relationship is characterized by mutual trust and attraction by the expat to his or her social partner. Scholars evaluate emotional closeness by distinguishing strong or weak social ties or identifying an individual's normal, core and significant relationships (Taylor, 2018). Each level of closeness provides individuals different form of social support (Taylor, 2018), which will be further discussed in the overview of social support.

In addition to emotional closeness, the number of important relationships reported by individuals, identified as network size, is also seen as an indication of the degree of their connection with others. In other words, network size plays a role in the degree to which individuals feel socially connected. The concept of network size is evaluated by two criteria: relationship quantity (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010) and relationship diversity (Molho et al., 2016). In the context of expats, relationship quantity indicates the number of social ties that one reports in his/her individual network during the cross-border assignment. Research on network size in relation to expatriation points out that larger network size stores more social support that allow expats to reduce social uncertainty (Wang, 2002). Therefore, these social ties can be host-country residents, peer expats in the host country or with home-country friends, colleagues, and relatives (Wang, 2002). However,



Wang (2002) also argues that networking with existing home ties does not generate as much social support as other parts of the expats' network due to long distance. Relationship diversity is defined as the social heterogeneity of the expatriate network (Wang, 2002), i.e. how the network consists of both host-country residents and peer expats or pre-existing relationships from the home country (cultural diversity), and the degree that the network is composed of both female and male partners (gender diversity). Moreover, relationship diversity also refers to the variety of relationship closeness in relation to the type of social tie, i.e., how many normal, core and significant relationships expatriates establish with each type of social tie. Rainie and Wellman (2013) claim that different parts of an individual network generate different sorts of social support. This idea constitute the focal point of the next paragraph.

In general, social support can be defined as "the availability of helping relationships and the quality of those relationships" (Leavy, 1983, p. 5). Prior research further suggests that social support is a "significant factor in reducing life-change stress and promoting positive health outcomes, including both physical and psychological well-being" (Ong & Ward, 2005, p. 637). Social support is closely linked to the concepts of emotional closeness and network size. As Thoits (2011) argues, different ties within an individual's network provide different types of social support. Gottlieb and Bergen (2009) distinguish social support in three forms: emotional, instrumental, and informational. Emotional support is based on mutual attraction between the support provider and the support seeker (MacGeorge, 2001). Emotional support refers to the perceived love, care and sympathy or giving encouragement. Additionally, emotional support often includes affirmation. This aspect of emotional support reaffirms the support seeker's abilities and beliefs in him/herself in stressful situations. Reaffirming relationships will be more helpful than those that are not. This type of emotional support is close to interpersonal affection and provides strong supportive connections. The second type of social support, informational support, offers the support seeker with required information, facts or advice to help solve their problems (Thoits, 2011). Instrumental support alludes to the "behavioural and material aid" that the support seeker pursues for practical tasks or problems (Thoits, 2011). Research on social support has various sources of social support such as families and friends, colleagues, organizations, etc. (Caplan, 1975). In the expat context, expats often receive emotional support from strong ties while weak ties are found to be more helpful in providing them with informational and instrumental support (Lin, 1983). In this research, the only sources for social support considered are existing networks from expats' home countries.

#### **Maintaining existing social connection from home countries**

When expats move to a foreign country, they carry with them a predominant set of beliefs, understandings, and behaviours from their native cultures, and often, with the stereotypes that these perceptions and actions are preferable and appropriate in the world (Bell & Harrison, 1996).

In other words, after spending much of their life in their home country, it is difficult and ambiguous for expats to adopt new norms, beliefs and behaviours that might be demanded by the host country's social environment. This uncertainty is higher when the perceived differences between the host and home country are larger (Black & Gregersen, 1991a). Among various contributing factors, Black and Gregersen (1991) recognize that a major cause of such uncertainty is that the emotional and informational support available in the social networks of expats in the home country is no longer present or relevant. Scholars have conceptualized this form of uncertainty as social uncertainty (Fahr et al., 2010). Social uncertainty is experienced when expats no longer obtain social support from previous networks and feel socially isolated and lonely in their host country (Fahr et al., 2010; Hattingh et al., 2013).

Different expats may encounter different levels of social uncertainty at different periods during expatriation. Fahr et al. (2010) notice that the highest degrees of social uncertainty often arise either immediately after the abroad transfer or after the 'honeymoon period' has ended and the period of 'culture shock' has set in. According to Lin, Woelfel and Light (1985), expats will take action to enhance their social support by maintaining pre-established ties with their network from home in order to deal with uncertainty and stress. Li and Rothstein (2009) support this argument by stating that emotional or affirmation support is accelerated by using the same language and having similar cultural perceptions.

Ong and Ward (2005) indicate that social networks of English-speaking expatriates in Singapore mainly consist of existing ties from previous networks from homelands. Additionally, participants in their study significantly confirmed that their home-country social connections "were much stronger, closer, and more familiar compared to local ties and that they served more personal needs such as the provision of spiritual, emotional, moral, and psychological support" (Ong & Ward, 2005, p. 639). The following paragraphs provide further information on the common practices of expats in general, and Asian expats specifically, when maintaining existing social connection from home countries.

To negotiate social uncertainty, expats often acquire social support by maintaining regular social connections with existing ties in their home country (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). The communicative affordances provided by social networking sites, virtual communities, and other communication platforms allow expats to maintain social connections with existing social ties in their home countries, and thus overcome social uncertainty (Hattingh et al., 2013). Many of the connection obstacles previously associated with geographical differences are now becoming easier, due to the current opportunities to stay connected with those in the home country (Hiller & Franz, 2004). In their study of expats living in Saudi Arabia, Hattingh et al. (2013) emphasize the invaluable role of social networking tools such as Facebook and Skype in keeping the expats connected with

people back home. Maintaining these social connections enables expats to reaffirm their sense of belonging with family and homeland network (Hattingh et al., 2013).

In regard to the Asian perspective, Lee, Kim, Lee and Kim (2012) highlight the use of Facebook to connected with their existing friends in their home countries by exchanged students. By providing the young expats with social support on various occasions, Facebook plays an essential role in strengthening social relationship over their period of living abroad. Facebook is a fundamental platform that connects the participants with social support while living abroad. Therefore, the majority of participants claimed to use social media platforms such as Facebook as a resource for social support. Pang (2018) emphasizes the importance of WeChat as a main social networking site in fostering and maintaining social capital and social connection between Chinese expats and their family in an intercultural setting. Another study that supports the same findings is a qualitative study by Yan and Berliner (2013). These researchers assert the role of social networking sites and examine how young Chinese expatriates use these tools to maintain connections with their primary social support source, which is their existing network from home. It can be seen that expatriates mostly use social networking sites to maintain social connections with those back home. Existing studies further emphasize the need of young Asian expats living abroad to maintain shared-language and shared-cultural relationships.

The existing literature has explored the use of social media platforms to keep expats in touch with existing networks in their home country. As mentioned earlier, social media platforms provide expats with opportunities to keep in touch with others' daily lives in their homelands. However, they may not be able to expand the topic of conversation. Since there is no mutual activity, it is most likely that people will only talk about what they and the others have been doing recently (Lee et al., 2012). This thesis suggests that the multiplayer online game is a common platform where expats and their existing connections can be mutually involved in an activity that might foster robust conversation. No known research has focused on such use of online video games by expats and young Asian expats specifically. In an effort to fill in this literature gap, this study attempts to identify and understand the ways that young Asian expats use an online video game, *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017), to maintain existing social connections from home countries, and the reasons behind this.

## **2.2. Online video games and social connections**

While the above overviews have shown how expats maintain existing social connections from home countries in general, this section presents background literature regarding the relation between online video games and social connection, which provides a theoretical framework to study expats' online video game usage and motivation. First, the paper provides a definition of

multiplayer online video games (MOGs) and the conceptualization of their social environment. Thereafter, the paper accesses existing studies on the relation between video games and social connection.

### **The social environment of Multiplayer Online Games**

Multiplayer Online Games are games in which multiple players can play in the same online game environment simultaneously (Jia et al., 2015). These games allow players to communicate, interact, and socialize with each other while gaming. Players in multiplayer online games often control in-game avatars, individually or team wise.

In multiplayer online games, social relationships develop and can be used to improve gaming features such as match recommendations and game population maintenance (Jia et al., 2015). Social dynamics play a key role in the attractiveness of multiplayer online games (Skoric & Kwan, 2011). An essential element of the gaming experience entails strategic movement across common space while battling for shared resources and achievements against others. As a result, multiplayer online games expand the typical social context of game play by involving online identity development, forming community and guild, where efforts are needed to handle possible disputes. Multiplayer online games enable players from around the world to play together simultaneously.

Indeed, multiplayer online games' consequent level of diversity in perspectives, circumstances, and expectations contributes to a highly dynamic social context. Therefore, multiplayer online games can also be considered as social networks in which players socialize with each other during game play (Jia et al., 2015). Scholars classify online social networks into two types: socializing-driven and target-driven networks. Socializing-driven networks such as Facebook or Instagram allow users to socially interact with social ties online. On the other hand, multiplayer online games are target-driven network in a way that their players mainly join and interact for the particular purpose of gaming (Jia et al., 2015). Other common target-driven networks are YouTube or Zoom, in which users interact by, co-commenting on the same video, or co-participating in the same online event simultaneously (Jia et al., 2015). Similar to many other social networking sites, users in multiplayer online games may develop various social interactions, relationships and connections. Therefore, results from existing research form a crucial point for this study to focus on the social environment of multiplayer online games, specifically *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017). Furthermore, based on the previous discussion, the study aims to explore how this social environment provides opportunities for the specific group of young Asian expats to maintain long-distant social connections.

### **Perceived social capital in online video games**

In developing a suitable approach to assess expat sources of social support, this current thesis suggests evaluating the concept of social capital as recommended by Putnam (1995) and

Castiglione, van Deth and Wolleb (2008). Although there may be conceptual vagueness around social capital, researchers have agreed to divide the concept of social capital into two dimensions: bonding social capital and bridging social capital.

The first encompasses strongly tied groups, which do yield emotional support and substantial support (Steinkuehler & Williams 2006; Williams et al. 2006). Regarding the second dimension, bridging social capital occurs in loose relationships among heterogeneous groups who differ in terms of demographics or other key aspects of social backgrounds. Williams (2006b) concludes from existing research of bridging social capital as typically general informational supports and new resources instead of yielding emotion support (Steinfeld, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). This current thesis is only interested in the concept of bonding social capital as the subject focuses on the connection between expats and their pre-existing friends in real life.

An extensive body of research has paid close attention to the acquisition of social capital in online gaming (Utz, 2000; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; Williams et al., 2006; Cole & Griffiths, 2007). Some game designers have openly talked about the purpose of making games that promote and reward socialization (Koster, 2004). Findings from Skorik and Kwan (2011) suggest that multiplayer online game playing is directly associated with online bonding social capital. The researchers identify the positive role of multiplayer online games in providing virtual spaces for informal socialization at a collective level to young citizens in Singapore, which enhance their social capital. Their study further emphasizes the uniqueness of multiple online games in associating with social experiences, while no other game genres were significant predictors of this social aspect. Similarly, Yee (2003) points out the beneficial role of high-stress gaming environments in multiplayer online games in establishing relationship, which, in return, can generate bonding social capital. Additionally, Ducheneaut et al. (2007) notice that online multiplayer games provide a “wind down” period of socialization which allows players to build relationships rather than focus on in-game matters, thus generating bonding social capital (p.163).

According to Lin (2011), the acquisition of social capital can be influenced by various factors, namely “commitment, reciprocity, shared codes and language, shared narratives, centrality, and network ties” (p.105). These factors are also found in online video games (Hsiao & Chiou 2012; Trepte, Reinecke, & Juechems 2012; Zhong 2001). In the context of online gaming, existing studies have indicated that bonding social capital is found primarily between players who had offline relationships and physical proximity (Zhong 2011; Skorik & Kwan 2011; Trepte et al. 2012). However, the above-mentioned study argues that online video games are a target-driven network that users join for the purpose of gaming (Jia et al., 2015). Yet, earlier study by Huynh, Lim and Skorik (2010) finds that multiplayer online games have grown into platforms for players perform social interaction, find romantic partners and sometimes even maintain real-life relationships online

(Huynh, Lim, & Skoric, 2010). Only a few studies have examined social support generated by social connections among MOGs' players. By conducting 48 guided interviews with MOG's players, Williams, Ducheneaut, Xiong, Yee, and Nickell (2006) acknowledge that players exchanged social support with other friends in the game. In a quantitative study by Longman, O'Connor and Obst (2009) about World of Warcraft players, participants unanimously reported to obtain social support from their relationships with other players. While it is common to give advice and assist with challenging tasks during game play, asking for advice about offline problems and pursuing emotional support is also prevailing, they found, validating earlier quantitative research (Longman et al., 2009).

### **Uses and Gratifications in online video games**

The negative social impacts of playing video games are well documented (Kneer, Rieger, Ivory, & Ferguson, 2014), including antisocial tendencies (Anderson & Bushman, 2001), negative emotions such as stress and stress-induced anger (Buckley & Anderson, 2006) related to perceived required social participation in gameplay (Hsu & Lu 2004), or loneliness (Stepanikova, Nie, & He 2010). However, some emerging studies applying the uses and gratifications approach have shown pro-social benefits that individuals gain from their gaming behaviours (Wu, Wang, & Tsai 2010). The uses and gratifications approach is especially useful to study the underlying motivation and behavioural patterns of online video players as confirmed by Lee et al. (2009) and Williams et al. (2008). In general, the uses and gratifications approach proposes the idea that people deliberately select media based on the degree to which it fulfils their needs and that social and psychological differences between users influences levels of fulfilment and therefore, leads to different levels of motivation in their pursuit (Baran & Davis, 2006; Pornsakulvanich, Haridakis, & Rubin 2008; Rubin, 2009). Research by Sherry et al. (2006) indicates different uses and gratifications of the same media among gamers from different social backgrounds. Probing further, Williams et al. (2008) regard gamers as active recipients who have full autonomy to take actions and make choices throughout while playing games. Gamers are purposely committed to games and expect certain types of gratifications from playing (Sherry, 2001; Lee et al., 2009). The uses and gratifications approach is suitable to gain insight into the influence of gaming experiences and behaviours, the role of players' decisions and actions (Williams et al., 2008). Therefore, this dissertation employs the uses and gratifications approach to explore motives and perceived benefits of the specific demographic group, young Asian expats, in multiplayer online games.

Previous uses and gratifications studies have discovered multiples motives or gratifications for video game play, including entertainment, accomplishment, social activity, immersion, and escape (Griffiths & Hunt; 1995; Griffiths et al. 2004; Gee, 2005; Hartmann & Klimmt, 2006; Yee 2006a, 2006b; Cole & Griffiths, 2007; Hussain & Griffiths, 2009; Kim & Kim, 2010; Hellstrom et al.,

2012). Chief among these findings is social connections, which is the one element that distinguishes and separates online multiplayer games from the rest of the field. A quantitative study by Cole and Griffiths (2007) indicates a strong link between gaming motives and social connections within and outside multiplayer online games. This research confirms the idea that multiplayer online games are highly socially engaging environments that offer the opportunity to build long-term friendships. Another significant but rarely studied aspect is the context of multiplayer online game play. In the aforementioned study by Cole and Griffiths (2007), 80.8 per cent of participants claimed that they enjoyed playing the same game with real-life friends and family members. Studies by Yee (2007) and Utz (2000) have similar findings, with 80 per cent of male players and 77 per cent of female players playing MOGs with people they already know in real life, by which the authors highlight the positive impact of multiplayer online games have a positive impact on social connectedness. A study by Ryan, Rigby and Przybylski (2006) emphasizes that the main goal of playing online video games, even violent games, is enjoyment. The authors further indicate that the perceived formation and maintenance of real-life connections can enhance the intrinsic rewards for video game players by means of gaming interaction. Probing further, empirical research about perceived gaming emotion of emerging adults has indicated higher levels of positive emotions in cooperative games than in individual games (Lavega, Alonso, Etxebeste, Lagardera, & March, 2014). This finding concurs with what Lazzaro (2004) describes as People Fun in the Four Fun Keys Model. In this research, Lazzaro (2004) explicitly focuses on the role of emotions in games and how specific emotions can be achieved. The last element of the Four Fun Keys Model by Lazzaro (2004) is People Fun, which indicates the enjoyment that comes from social interaction during game play. Lazzaro (2004) supposes amusement can also be created when people play. The intensity of this emotion outdoes other negative emotions, which can be created by failed missions, misfortunes, etc. As Lazzaro (2004) argues, negative events can produce laughter as a social interaction within the group of players. Similarly, Dormann and Neuvians (2012) suggest a gratification pattern of humour can be found in quest design, avatar death or through popular culture. In addition to this, other researchers have started to explore the potential for video games to be a source of nostalgia for players. Makai (2018) considers video games as objects that evoke fond memories of the past by means of game designs. On the other hand, Elson, Breuer, Ivory, and Quandt (2014) claim that nostalgia during game play is generated in a social context when players recall gaming memories with real-life friends. A quantitative research from Wulf, Breuer, Bowman, and Velez (2017) confirm nostalgic feelings can be triggered by social gaming memories when the player feels a sense of relatedness with others.

There is also evidence that many people frequently play online games with pre-existing offline friends (Domahidi, Festl, & Quandt, 2014; Shen & Williams, 2010). Previously, Ramirez and

Zhang (2007) reveal a situation when players play online game with their real-life friends. This scenario can be termed “modality switching”. Modality switching has been proven to strengthen established connections by providing additional scenarios in which players can actively engage (Cole & Griffiths, 2007; Domahidi et al., 2014). It is evident that many people practice “modality switching” to enhance pre-existing relationships (Durkin & Barber, 2002; Kowert, Domahidi, & Quandt, 2014). Similar research by Eklund (2015) asserts that gaming motives associated with social activity are related to increased gaming with friends, but not gaming with strangers. Gaming as a fun and relaxing hobby are often reported as activities with strangers. The researcher further proposes that gamers do not connect gaming with strangers as a social activity as they do for with gaming with real-life friends. A few studies have highlighted the social aspects of gaming with real-life friends and family by regarding online video game play as emotional regulation (Hussain & Griffiths, 2009; Gaetan, Bréjard, & Bonnet, 2016; Hemenover & Bowman, 2018) and escapism from the unpleasant offline social environment (King & Delfabbro, 2014). In this respect, De la Hera (2018) also points out the persuasive roles of digital games in supporting patients who are suffering from or have experienced the same difficulties. It is hard for patients to form new relationships with other patients or make conversations on issues that could be sensitive to talk about with people they do not know well. In addition, both Fogg (2003) and De La Hera (2018) have agreed on the fundamental role of digital games as a social actor for persuasion in the process of seeking social support. The context of gaming may drastically modify the social dynamics and gaming motives. The previously discussed literature suggests the idea that when multiplayer online game play becomes a mutual activity with one’s existing social ties, it integrates with existing spaces of social connections, and therefore complicates the gratification and behaviour patterns.

The existing literature identifies a positive correlation between video gaming and forming/maintaining social connections, and especially strengthening existing friendships. This literature provides an interesting theoretical framework used in this thesis to further explore the relationship between multiplayer online games and social connection.



### **3. Methodology**

This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of the methodology applied to research the ways young Asian expats use the multiplayer online game *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) to maintain social connections with those back home. Considering the qualitative nature of this research, the findings from the analysis cannot be generalized or replicated. Nonetheless, a thorough and systematic justification of the choices made and the steps taken during the research is addressed in order to explain the interpretations and to provide reassurance of the study's credibility (Brennen, 2012). Therefore, the following sections will inform about the research design, the sample and data collection, the operationalization of concepts, the analytic approach, and lastly about the credibility.

#### **3.1. Research design**

##### **Research approach**

This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of the methodology applied to research the way young Asian expats use the multiplayer online game *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) to maintain existing social connections with those back home. This research question is addressed by means of a qualitative research method, which utilized a hermeneutical phenomenology approach and a thematic analysis of in-depth interviews.

According to Brennen (2012), the qualitative research method is highly relevant for Media Studies because it aims to interpret social behaviours and the meaning-making process with what has been done or said. The argumentation is supported by Flick (2007), who claims that the qualitative research method utilizes material and interpretive techniques that reveal different layers of a phenomenon. In addition, qualitative research methods allow the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, and achieve the rich interpretation of people whose voices are unheard. Thus, a qualitative approach to gaming motivation and behaviour research has the potential to identify the factors that make multiplayer online games attractive to promote social connections among the specific group of young Asian expats.

The qualitative methodological approach chosen for this study is that of hermeneutical phenomenology. Phenomenological research is concerned with exploring and interpreting the meaning of a social phenomenon as perceived by a particular group of people (Groenewald, 2004; Creswell, 2007) with respect to “perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire and social activity linguistic activity, among others” (Lin, 2013, p.469). Additionally, hermeneutical phenomenology focuses exclusively on a phenomenon that is of importance to the researcher and

aspires to describe lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, it is necessary to note that the researcher of this current study took on the qualitative nature of reflexivity. I acknowledged the unseparated role from the analysis of the data and recognized myself as the interpretive tool (Rossman & Rallis 2012). By adapting a reflexive role, I enriched my understanding of what I had learned previously, and therefore I am able to accurately report participants' perspectives to the readers (Rossman & Rallis 2012). Furthermore, this approach allows a researcher to study the meaning-making process and perception of a small population over the same phenomena (Creswell, 2007). In this framework, this study sought to investigate how a group of young Asian expats use one specific online video game, *PUBG*, in relation to the purpose of connecting with and maintaining existing social relations with people in their home countries. Secondly, this topic is based on the personal concern of the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Specifically, I myself am a young expat from an Asian country, Vietnam, and I have also played this game for a while to keep in touch with my friends back home. Therefore, I am not only interested in this field as a researcher, but also as an expat who experiences this phenomenon herself. Alongside with this characteristic of phenomenological research, this study employed a thematic analysis to analyze in-depth interviews regarding the way studied participants experienced the phenomenon. Justification for the use of in-depth interviews will be presented in the sub-section on in-depth interviews. In addition, the subjective approach of hermeneutical phenomenology plays a vital role in choosing a suitable sampling technique, which will be elaborated upon later in section 3.2.

### **In-depth interviews**

In order to gain valuable insight from participants' personal perception and experience, the data collection method used in this study is individual in-depth interviews. This method places the emphasis on gathering information by asking people specific questions to get more detailed information about behaviours, attitudes and perceptions, and unfolding complex processes (Brennen, 2007). Unlike other methods involving questionnaires, interviews give the researcher the option to ask probing questions in order to find out potential similar or different patterns among the participants.

The format of the interviews was semi-structured in nature. By utilizing this format, the researcher can integrate a list of issues and topics that should be discussed with participants in a flexible way (Thomas, 2011). Thomas (2011) further highlights the ability to add follow-up questions and probes during semi-structured interviews. Babbie (2008) describes the qualitative interview as an "interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry including the topics to be covered, but not a set of questions that must be asked with particular words and in a particular order" (pp. 335-336). Therefore, semi-structured

interviews can include guided open-ended questions that allowed follow-up questions and probing based on the responses of interviewees. The list of questions was structured around a fixed order of overarching concepts and adhered to several starting and follow-up questions (see Interview Guide in Appendix I). More importantly, semi-structured interviews allow a researcher to observe participants' facial expressions and relevant gestures in a formal yet comfortable environment. With this method, interviewees are more likely to further clarify and openly share their subjective opinions (Brennen, 2012). The flexible nature of this method gives the possibility to explore both the personal and subjective context of each participant's perception and experience (Brennen, 2012). Thus, with this method, the full scope of certain previously unknown dimensions of how young Asian expats use online multiplayer games for social connections could be discovered. Details about the interview guide with questions in relation to the central topics and concepts are further elaborated upon in the operationalization section.

### **3.2. Sampling and data collection**

#### **Sampling technique**

Sampling was conducted through purposeful sampling. Participants acquired through the purposeful sampling technique are selected "because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). The purposeful sampling technique allows researchers to adjust an initial sample with recent findings from the field of research while also enabling new ideas from the data collection to be uncovered (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In order to find potential participants, snowball sampling was employed by asking interviewees to refer additional people that fit sampling criteria. This technique "is appropriate when the members of a special population are difficult to locate" (Babbie, 2008, p. 205). Due to the exploratory nature of this thesis and an large population of young Asian expats that is difficult to access under the current (coronavirus pandemic) situation at the time of writing, this snowball sampling technique was the most appropriate (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2014). Furthermore, it was observed that in order to access the respondents, a higher level of trust was required. Therefore, adopting snowball sampling through my own network, including the groups I am associated with, aided access.

Among the potential participants found through snowball sampling, purposive sampling was used to select the right candidates for this study. Many scholars take notice of the importance of diversity for data collection. In particular, Flick (2007) suggests that a diverse sample provides a more in-depth analysis of phenomena and helps to capture several dimensions. To achieve the maximum number of unique cases to expand the spectrum of distinction, Patton (2002) and Maxwell (2005) emphasize the importance of maximum variation and heterogeneity when selecting

participants. However, due to the particularities of the studied subject and the nature of snowball sampling, it is not possible to conduct a heterogeneous sampling technique. Young Asian expats, as discussed in the theoretical framework chapter, share specific attributes, behaviours, situations and so forth. Therefore, this study employed a homogeneous sampling technique to select participants. This technique allows a researcher to examine a phenomenon in detail in relation to specific characteristics of the particular group of interest (Flick, 2007). As a result, participants were chosen based on the light of these insights. A detailed indication of the sampling design is presented in the next sub-section.

### **Sampling criteria**

This study researches the ways young Asian expats use *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) to maintain social connections with people from their home countries. During the sampling process, the first priority was to define the group of 'young Asian expats'. This study was situated in the context Arnett's (2000) research, which points out the particular age range of young adults or emerging adults. Although a great deal of research has examined aspects of social connection in various age demographics, very few studies have investigated the social connection in emerging adults, a life stage when important developmental transitions are being made and identity continues to form. Arnett (2000) recommends that the period from 18 to 25 years be called "emerging adulthood" and describes it as a distinct developmental stage. Emerging adulthood is observed as having specific demographic attributes such as area of residence, subjective experiences, and life situations (Arnett, 2000). This developmental stage differs from adolescence in the sense that it illustrates an age period beyond 18 years in which individuals have typically left their childhood home and are facing new life situations. Emerging adults have often been used to capture this demographic, but generally this extends into one's thirties, where greater stability has generally been established. Additionally, Arnett points out that the term emerging adulthood emphasizes the flexibility of this transitional phase, and the fact that a majority of young adults consider themselves to be adults. The transitory nature of living arrangements is one aspect that differentiates emerging adulthood from other stages, as Arnett's (2000) study indicates the highest rate of residential changes of emerging adults among all age groups. Given the fluid nature of emerging adulthood as a developmental stage, it is important to analyze the circumstances when the young adults are more likely to become more stable and start to earn social achievement (Demir, 2010). In other words, when studying the category of young adults, it is necessary to include the group of emerging adults up until those in their thirties. This study is interested in young Asian adults who moved to foreign countries for study or occupational purposes and so encounter a huge transitory stage to a new living environment and are confronted with several life situations abroad. As a result, the dissertation selected young Asian expats who fall into the

categories of emerging adults (18-25 years old) and young adults (25-30). To sum up, the sampling criteria used to purposively select the participants in this study were the following:

- a) young Asian professionals who are living and working/studying outside of their home countries
- b) being either highly skilled migrants or have acquired/will acquired a diploma from an institution of higher education in their host country,
- c) aged between 18-30, and
- d) are active players of *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017)

I myself am an Asian expat who has been living in the Netherlands for the last four years. Additionally, I actively play *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) with others who share the same background and situation. As a result, some of the participants were found from my own personal networks. The sample was located through two channels. A function in *PUBG* to create a squad with strangers who speak the same first (Vietnamese) and second (Simplified Chinese) languages in the local area allowed me to form connections with other players who share the same background and live in the Netherlands. When approaching suitable participants, snowball sampling techniques were used to locate additional participants. Therefore, by asking these players who met the sampling criteria if they could introduce other potential participants for this dissertation, I was able to recruit enough interviewees. It is important to take into account my personal social network, which mainly consists of Chinese and Vietnamese expats. Therefore, the majority of participants in this study are from the mentioned ethnicities. As a result of the abovementioned sampling criteria, five participants selected for this study were Chinese, and the rest were from Vietnam. Participants were mainly students from higher education institutions, with the exception of two expats who were pursuing professional careers after their study abroad. Table 3.1 provides more complete information concerning the interviews and the respondents.

	Name	Age	Home country	Host country	Occupation	Date
1	Trung/Nguyen Quoc	22	Vietnam	Japan	Student	April 26, 2020
2	Linh/Dang Khanh	22	Vietnam	Japan	Student	April 26, 2020
3	Miao	24	China	Netherlands	Student	April 28, 2020
4	Cass	21	China	Netherlands	Student	April 28, 2020
5	Claire	25	China	Netherlands	Student	April 29, 2020
6	Linh/ Duong Dieu	23	Vietnam	Japan	Student	April 29, 2020
7	Nam Phương/Hồ	25	Vietnam	New Zealand	Student	May 1, 2020
8	Luca	25	China	The United	Professional	May 2, 2020

				Arab Emirates		
9	Ashley/Cao	25	Vietnam	New Zealand	Professional	May 2, 2020
10	Edith/Dong	27	China	Netherlands	Professional	May 5, 2020

Table 3.1. Overview of interviewees

### Data collection

In regard to data collection, the interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. Using this method of data collection, detailed and in-depth data relating to the subject of the analysis were obtained. In addition, by allowing the participants to speak in the language that they felt most comfortable in, they fully expressed their thoughts. The interviews thus became more vigorous and constructive, providing more valuable insights. Under the current situation, the coronavirus pandemic, and the nature of the sample, the interviews were solely via online platforms. To ensure no loss of data and to analyze all the conversations, each interview was digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim with full consent from the participants. All interviews were transcribed and translated in Atlas.ti and Otranscribe.com, followed by a reduction of irrelevant materials and breaking the data into groups of concepts, which will be discussed in the following sub-sections. Ethical concerns regarding recording, transcribing and translating interviews were highly respected.

### 3.3. Operationalization

The data collection and data analysis of this study are structured around the theoretical framework. As mentioned above, the overarching concept of social connection is conceptualized by three sub-concepts: emotional closeness, network size and social support. The assessment of these sub-concepts provides an answer to the question of how young Asian expats maintain existing social connections with people from their home countries by using the multiplayer online game PUBG (PUBG Corporation, 2017). The following sub-sections discuss the operationalization of each sub-concept, respectively, and indicate how these concepts were covered throughout the in-depth interviews.

*Emotional closeness* indicates the intensity of social ties (Marsden and Campbell, 1984), and captures how close an expat feels towards each partner in his or her network. Additionally, emotional closeness refers to the frequency that the expat contacts his or her social ties within a limited time frame (Wang, 2002). In order to assess emotional closeness, Taylor (2018) suggested to evaluate how expats identify their normal, core and significant relationships.

The concept of *network size* was assessed on two criteria: quantity and diversity. In this dissertation, relationship quantity refers to the number of social ties the expat reports in his/her personal network during the time living abroad. As mentioned, social ties can include host-country

nationals, other expats in the host country and existing ties with home-country nationals such as family, friends or colleagues. It is important to note that this thesis is only concerned with the pre-existing ties between expats and home country nationals. Moreover, the study aimed to assess relationship diversity which refers to the variety of relationship closeness in relation to the type of social ties, i.e., how many weak or strong connections expats establish with each type of social tie.

As aforementioned, the concept of *social support* can be assessed through how expats received three types of social support (emotional, informational and instrumental) through different sources of social ties.

The three mentioned sub-concepts are inter-connected, so they were incorporated together in the interview guide (see Appendix I). These concepts guided the interviews by determining the topics of conversation and helping to formulate the questions. Moreover, they justified and drove the construction of the topic list. In order to gain as many comprehensive insights as possible, the conversations were guided and followed seven sections. Firstly, demographic questions were asked to assure participants fitted the sampling criteria and further provide their social context related to the concept of social connection. This section provided the researcher with contextual and background information about the participants. The purpose of this section was to gain participants' personal experience and situation when living abroad. Participants were asked to describe the intensity of their social ties, in which they need to evaluate their normal, core and significant relationships. Following this, questions assessing the network size were asked. These questions provided information about each participant's relationship quantity and relationship diversity in relation to different types of social ties. This second section also concerned how participants maintain social connection with those social ties. The objectives of this section were to find similarities and differences between the way participants maintain social connections with different types of social relationship. The section revealed the communication tool and the level of emotional closeness in term of frequency of communication. In the third section, narrative questions assessed how and why the participants started playing *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017), therefore gaining detail knowledge about participants' motivation and purpose of playing this game. The remaining sections referred to participants' gaming experiences and behaviours. Researchers suggested that already existing relationships can be strengthened through gameplay (Durkin & Barber, 2002; Jansz & Martens, 2005; Griffiths et al., 2004; Schaap, 2002). Therefore, this section will try to explore these connections. The following topics were assessed: emotion, identities, communication and conversations. Through the discussion of broad ideas to more specific examinations, the interviews explored the topic from a broad to a more detailed perspective. Pilot interviews was conducted to avoid misunderstanding and incoherence by revealing some potential issues regarding the research of the

concepts. The interview guide was revised before being used during the interviews with the participants. The interviews were semi-structured by nature, so the information received was not homogeneous, since every participant had different perspectives and personal experiences. Also, probes were utilized to discover potential hidden data relevant to the given answers by the interviewees. The material gathered from the in-depth interviews was analyzed on the basis of a repetitive process. This will be further explained in the following section.

### **3.4. Data analysis**

Following the collection and transcription of data from the tenth semi-structured in-depth interviews, the data was analyzed by employing thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytical method used to examine data with regard to recognizable themes (Marks, 2004). Braun and Clarke (2012) state that thematic analysis is a highly useful and flexible research method which offers a comprehensive interpretation of data. This method is especially useful for understanding and clarifying the meanings of the common patterns from qualitative interviews. Marks (2004) also indicates two types of coding within thematic analysis: deductive coding and inductive coding. Deductive coding refers to the method that the researcher presents predetermined theoretical concepts and themes. Inductive coding, on the contrary, develops themes from the raw data collected. This current study employed deductive coding. The predefined themes were drawn from the topics previously discovered within the literature review. However, the analysis also combined with inductive coding. The combination of two coding types was utilized by semi-structured nature of the interview, which resulted in the identification of new themes in relation to participants' personal experience.

Thematic analysis was chosen for this study also based on its flexibility (Gibson & Brown, 2009). This form of analysis offered the suitable process to recognizing similarities and differences within the data set, while also associated the recognized elements and identified certain repetitive trends. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Theoretical Framework), and sub-section 3.3 (Operationalization), central concepts are interconnected according to the network of literature. As such, the analysis was guided to further explore this correlation.

In order to perform thematic analysis, the current dissertation followed the six-step guide as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researchers point out the importance of a gradual progress in the data analysing process. This consists of familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, checking for overlapping patterns, reviewing overarching themes, identifying the final themes, and establishing and reflecting on the overall analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The complete dataset was first read multiple times to get a sense of the contents before breaking the data into smaller fragments. Thereafter, each interview was broken down into smaller fragments



and carefully examined through open coding. During open coding, special attention has been paid to theoretical-related content, and repetitions in the dataset. However, as mentioned previously, the research adapted an open mind and reflexivity to ensure objective interpretation of the interviewees. During this phase, all tenth interviews were re-read multiple to ensure that all data relevant to the research question. Until no new codes emerged and the dataset reached saturation, the process moved on to the next phase. In the next step, the axial codes were recognised according to the dominance of certain codes compared to others. Initial codes found in the open coding phase were combined based on similarities and renamed if necessary. Furthermore, with every effort to gain valuable information, it was useful not only to look at overlapping topics but also contradictory data between the cases (Boeije, 2010). Therefore, redundant codes were removed, and the remaining codes were then combined into overarching, mutually exclusive sub-themes that each covered multiple codes and established interrelations among the data (Alhojailan, 2012). This resulted in a much shorter compilation of the best descriptive codes (Boeije, 2010) that represent the bulk of the data (Alhojailan, 2012). Finally, the axial codes were further conceptualized and then assembled into selective codes.

Throughout the six phases of the analysis, constant comparison was made to enable the observation of differences between cases. The analysis consisted of these hierarchical steps are illustrated using a coding tree. In regard to the coding tree, analytical induction was applied with the intention of connecting the results to a suitable theoretical framework. Moreover, proactive focus was given to theoretical sensitivity, in order to fill in the literature gap when relating the data to theoretical frameworks (Boeije, 2010). This resulted in finding explanations and an answer to the research question. The elaboration of these stages is discussed in Chapter 4 (Results).

### **3.5. Validity and reliability**

In the research field of games and their relation to social connections, the existing web of literature mainly consists of quantitative studies. However, this dissertation has tried to argue that the qualitative research method could provide a detailed understanding of the subject, as gamers might express themselves better in qualitative interview settings. Long and Johnson (2000) notice the importance in assessing reliability of its method, the truthfulness of its findings, and the integrity of assumptions made or conclusions reached. Findings that are unclear or irrelevant may result in wasted time and resources, whereas findings that are simply incorrect can result in failures. Typically, such evaluation has centred on evaluation of reliability and validity. In an attempt to prove this argumentation, validity and reliability issues of this particular qualitative study are hereby addressed.

#### **Validity and reliability**

The concepts of validity and reliability were evaluated in relation to the two qualitative research methods conducted throughout this research: in-depth interviews and thematic analysis. In relation to the qualitative in-depth interviews, pilot interviews were conducted with peer researchers. By conducting pilot interviews, I was successful in practicing peer debriefing. I discussed the method with classmates to prompt reflection and consideration of additional perspectives and explanations at various stages of the process of interviewing and data analysis. Furthermore, Hermanowicz (2002) asserts that practicing with pilot interviews could produce a more insightful result. As discussed, the interviews were held in the participants' preferred language. Therefore, some interviews were conducted in Mandarin or Vietnamese. In order to improve validity and ensure stability of translating interviews, I utilized respondent validation as suggested by Brink (1991). Participants were asked to confirm the transcribed and translated version of their interview to ensure the accuracy of findings.

Regarding the thematic analysis, pilot testing of the coding frame was repeatedly revised during the research process in order to be coherent and consistent. The reliability of this study was ensured by keeping the data collection process and data analysis as transparent and informative as possible throughout each research phase. Furthermore, by employing thematic analysis, data analysis and interpretation were reasonably systemized, this again increases the reliability of this study (Alhojailan, 2012). It guarantees that future research in this field would be able to utilize a similar method and the study is, therefore, reproducible (Stempler, 2001).

### **Self-reflexivity**

Another important part of qualitative research is self-reflexivity. As suggested by Brennen (2012), self-reflexivity refers to researchers' ability to think critically and objectively about their roles in the research process. This study employed a hermeneutical phenomenology approach, which could be influenced by the subjective perception of the researcher. Therefore, personal presumptions and self-interpretation were highly constrained throughout the participant selection process as well as when conducting the thematic analysis.

### **Ethical consideration**

Ethical considerations play a vital role in evaluating a research paper. As discussed, participants were informed about and gave consent to the research process. The recording, transcription and translation of interviews were conducted with the full consent of participants. To ensure a level of privacy, any confidential information that participants did not want to share was highly respected, so was not discussed during the interview. Further, participants have total control over what they want to share in the report of this study.

## 4. Results

After conducting and analyzing ten interviews, three major themes were identified in the data analysis: *Emotional Responses*, *Just A Game?* and *Uses and Gratifications*. The presentation of the results will follow the two sub-questions. The first two themes reveal how young Asian expats interpret their gaming experience in term of social connection. First, section 4.1 covers the theme of Emotional Responses, which conveys how participants perceived emotional support from existing ties from their home countries. Explanations regarding how participants are socially involved in the game and perceive social and cultural capital constitute the focus of the second section, 4.2. Just a Game? Finally, in section 4.3, the third theme of Uses and Gratification provides insights into how young Asian expats benefit from their gaming behaviours and experiences. Various uses and gratifications that the informants experienced were identified in relation to social connection. The exhaustive analysis of the data used to create these themes is retrieved in a coding tree (see Appendix I)

### 4.1. Emotional responses

The overarching theme of emotional responses that emerged from the qualitative data analysis supports some recent trends in the academic research concerning multiplayer online games. The most commonly mentioned themes expressed by the participants clustered together in three main sub-themes: **positive emotions**, **avoiding negative emotions** and **unhelpful emotions**. For each sub-theme, several emotional descriptors were mentioned, referencing how the participants discussed their emotional experiences and engagements in the game.

#### 4.1.1. Positive emotions

By far the largest sub-theme relates to the positive emotions that participants described when discussing the meaning of their gaming experiences. According to the interviews, all participants describe playing PUBG with existing ties from home countries as a positive emotional experience. Concretely, enjoyment, chill, and nostalgia were discussed as positive emotions linked to the shared playing experience. The reports of these findings will be interpreted and compared with additional studies on the topic.

#### Enjoyment

The centrality of the gaming experience with existing ties is mostly described as enjoyment or fun. The majority of respondents chose fun as the keyword while describing the emotion they feel while playing PUBG with friends in their home countries. As Claire (Chinese expat in the Netherlands, eight months living abroad) emphasized, "As long as I can play with my friends, the experiences are all enjoyable." Moreover, in some circumstances, *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017)

is not liked by all members, yet even those who do not like the game play it, since they enjoy spending time with friends. For instance, Miao (Chinese expat in the Netherlands, four years living abroad) revealed she barely played any game before and never enjoyed playing games, but she still downloaded and plays *PUBG* twice a month with her close friends, since they asked her to play with them. On the other hand, Trung (Vietnamese expat in Japan, four years living abroad), a hardcore *PUBG* fan, shared:

“During the couple of first weeks playing *PUBG* with my homies, it was all about goofing around with the stupid bugs in the game. You know, *PUBG* in the beginning has many bugs, but it’s not frustrating; actually we had so much fun playing together around those bugs”

Probing further, Trung explained why “goofing around” with the in-game bugs with his homies is what he found most enjoyable and memorable. He explained:

“Y, this guy, is something else [laughs]. There was one time, two other bros and I were knocked down by only one enemy while Y was just some distance away. So we had so much hope that Y could turn back to save us. And he did [laughs]. The moment he came back, us three couldn’t help but burst out laughing since he had no gun but insisted on going against the strong enemy. We just couldn’t understand his action [laughs].”

Although Trung and his 'homie' squad encountered an unpleasant situation, Trung still associated this moment with excitement and a sense of humour. Generally, the participants barely described any moment when game play is the source of their enjoyment in *PUBG*, but instead they referenced this feeling to the time they spent with friends. This finding shares a similarity with studies by Ryan et al. (2006) and Przybylski et al. (2009), which state that playing games with real-life relationships can contribute to positive emotions. This was confirmed by Luca (Chinese expat in the UAE, two years living abroad), who spoke about the unforgettable memories of fun gaming:

“I remember, once as four teammates together we drove one jeep and we fought another jeep behind us [...] then we died, we died together at one time. That's the funny moments. Because when we were shooting them, we thought that we could win. We found the smoke bomb in their car. But that is the reason that we all died. That was funny.”

It is clear to see Luca’s “funny moment” was generated even with negative events which cannot be experienced when playing alone. Similarly, Khanh Linh (Vietnamese expat in Japan, four years living abroad) loved it whenever she could watch her best friend’s goofy actions in *PUBG*. Linh burst out laughing when talking about many moments with her best friend, “You can’t believe how funny she is. Everything she does is just naturally funny. Just watch her playing makes my day”. These findings show another dimension to existing studies about humour patterns in online video games. As discussed, Dormann and Neuvians (2012) found humour patterns in quest design, avatar death or through popular culture. However, the retrieved data shows another dimension, in which

the informants found a sense of humour from their teammates. The interviewees expressed that they often have enormous fun watching their friends playing. Indeed, the emotion of enjoyment, which the participants also refer to as excitement and humour, reflects what Lazzaro (2004) describes as People Fun in the Four Fun Keys Model. Rather than describing the excitement in relation to game play, the informants mostly linked this emotion to the time they spend with friends. Truly, the experience of gaming with other people, especially real-life friends, creates enjoyment. Furthermore, this emotion was only found through PUBG since participants barely have any chance to acknowledge this side of their friends in serious or other contexts. Edith (a Chinese expat in the Netherlands, four years living abroad) said that otherwise she would never have known that a formal guy like Tony could be this funny in the game. This humour pattern sustains and enhances players' experience by providing a platform for people to engage with the goofy moments of friends regardless of physical activities and distance.

In his study of the Four Fun Key Model, Lazzaro (2004) states that People Fun is obtained when people which play a game together are present in the same spaces because then they have the opportunity to interact with each other outside beyond the game is already offering. However, results from this dissertation, which focuses on the long-distance connection between expats and their existing ties from their home countries, show similar patterns. Therefore, the explanation of this sub-theme adds another dimension to the Four Fun Key Model by Lazzaro (2004).

### **Chill**

According to the interpretation of data, there is some evidence related to another form of positive emotion that the majority of participants experience while playing PUBG with existing ties. This refers to a feeling of chilling out. As with much retrieved data from the analysis, there is a lack of indication for this emotion in the previous literature review, so it seems valuable to study this pattern in more detail. Even though *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) and other MMOGs are famous for their intense and fast-paced game play, many examples from the material support a completely opposite idea. The informants refer to playing PUBG as a relaxed and chilled activity, especially while playing with their close friends. In one of the interviews, the emotion was described as “just chill”. Cassie referenced her positive emotion to the fact that she knew her friend would not get angry about her poor skills:

“I was playing with a primary school friend. She and I have known each other for a really long time. So I was chill, I knew that she would not angry or pissed off by my [skill], as for her it's chill. And I know she played a lot with her partner too. So I sometimes just watch them play and I'm chill.”

Respondents unanimously referenced their experiences in this fast-paced game as chilling

out due to the fact that they can totally count on their friends and will not get blamed in unpleasant situations. Khanh Linh further told me: “my friend will give me all the good equipment without me asking for it. She gives me the feeling of comfort and assurance”. Trung shared the same sentiment as Linh in relation to his 'homie', Tai, who tries to accommodate Trung's needs. Trung explained: “Tai gives me whichever gun or ammo I need [...] Playing with him is just very chill”. Probing further, Trung explained this emotion in reference to the uniqueness of *PUBG*'s design:

“*PUBG* is quite different to other games that I also play with those boys. For instance, Phuoc and I also play LOL [League of Legends] together. But there are not many reasons to blame if you lose in that game. Most of the time it is because of your poor skills or you are being inattentive. Sometimes, Phuoc can get a bit angry, or even blame me. However, there are so many reasons to blame your failure on in *PUBG*, like you can just be unlucky. If we lose, we just go for the next round. Things happen really quickly, and there is nothing to get mad about. It's just very relaxing.”

By pointing out the distinctiveness of *PUBG*, the analysis of data suggests that the frivolous design of *PUBG* allows players to focus more on the social interaction among the team, therefore generating positive and relaxed emotions. It is noteworthy that the informants solidly agree that when they play with real-life friends, the result of the game is not as important as the memories they share. Indeed, these memories are built up upon the relaxed and comfortable emotions generated by a social activity instead of gaming for the sake of winning. This is especially appreciated by the participants, who miss having real-life activities with their long-distance ties. Examples illustrating the idea of recalling the feelings or memories with existing ties before living abroad will constitute the focal points of the next emotional response considered here.

### **Nostalgia**

Another powerful theme emerged from data analysis was that of nostalgia, which refers to participants' discussions around intersubjectivity with respect to the social context in which they interact with their existing ties during game play. Many examples from the material support the idea that nostalgia resides in the personal social events shared by participants. The following examples illustrate how young Asian expats interpreted “the most enjoyable moments while playing *PUBG* with friends back home”. Often, the informants referenced those moments that elicited a strong nostalgic feeling. Trung described the unforgettable memories with his long-distance friends with a great sentimental attachment:

“We were riding on a boat to cross the river, you know, that area has quite good scenery. And all of a sudden, I was able to recall the same situation when we were on a boat together before I went abroad. I really miss this brotherhood moment with them. I don't know when we can have it again.”

Phuong perhaps said it best:

“Khanh used to take me everywhere in Sai Gon. With her motorbike, we have been all over the place to get something to eat. Those memories came to my head when Khanh drove me on her motorbike in PUBG. She did not take me directly to any location but made it into a ride around the map [laughs]. It was really nostalgic.”

Claire experienced this emotion when eating at the same dining table [a feature in PUBG mobile anniversary mode] with her best friend KaiLun: “When we were together, we always hung around, ate hot-pot and gossiped about everything. It happened again when we used this feature in the game [laughs]. When we sat down at the table, we started gossiping [laugh].”

As seen from the mentioned quotes, the informants associated the feeling of nostalgia with social activities in the game, which stimulated fond memories between them and their friends. The aforementioned literature from Makai (2018) regards video games as a vehicle of nostalgia by evoking past gaming memories through game designs. However, the pattern of nostalgia in this study shows that recalled memories were not linked to any game-related objects or designs but to former social events, therefore offering another facet to existing research on nostalgia in the field of video games (Makai, 2018).

The emotional response of nostalgia has provided us with a more nuanced interpretation of young Asian expats’ intrinsic rewards during game play than has emerged from most other studies, illustrating the positive emotional responses not only as fun but also as chilled out and nostalgic. Long distance has limited mutually social activities between expats and existing ties back home. However, PUBG provides a platform for a social context that recall players’ personal experiences instead of using an aesthetic design that resembles the past.

#### **4.1.2. Reduced negative emotions**

Participants also referred to the reduction of negative feelings while interpreting their emotional gaming experiences with pre-existing relationships from their home countries. This sub-theme coincides with the research of Hattingh et al. (2013), stating that expats often negotiate social uncertainty through online environments. Furthermore, the interpretation also concurs with the research of Gaetan, Bréjard, and Bonnet (2016), Hemenover and Bowman (2018), and Hussain and Griffiths (2009), who report the use of video games for emotion regulation purposes. According to the analysis of the data, four intrinsic rewards relating to avoidance of negative emotions include reduced loneliness and stress relief.

##### **Reduced loneliness**

Reduction in loneliness was discussed throughout the sample. While arguing *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017), as well as other MMOGs, as a highly social environment like other social networking sites (SNSs), the data shows patterns when young Asian expats use *PUBG* as a vehicle to

cope with loneliness. When asked about when she plays *PUBG* with friends in China, Miao said that most of the time she prefers to invite her friends to play *PUBG* whenever it is rainy in the Netherlands. She further explained “[...] in the rainy days in the Netherlands when the weather is really bad. [...] I do think so to avoid the negative feeling of loneliness”. Trung was straightforward when he spoke about reasons why he was so into *PUBG*, explaining: “the game gives me the chance to talk with my homies whenever I feel homesick”. During the interview, Linh expressed she is quite an introverted person, which means she only has a small network in Japan. Linh emphasized the fact that her social ties in Japan are mainly secondary or weak ties. She cannot consider them as close relationships and share confidential things with them. She explained: “There are many things I cannot share in other languages but only in Vietnamese. I am afraid I would become depressed if I could not contact and play games with my close friends in Vietnam.”

It is apparent that many participants have suffered from loneliness when moving abroad. Some of them chose to play *PUBG* with friends in their home countries to reduce this feeling. This sub-category reflects the point of view of Hattingh et al. (2013), who argue that expats in general, and Asian expats in particular, often negotiate isolation and loneliness through online communication tools. Furthermore, interviewees reported dealing with loneliness by playing games with strong social ties, who share the same language and network as them. Thus, it is important to highlight that the informants receive support (i.e. emotional support) by means of bonding social capital. This pattern of acquiring social capital and social support by bonding with strong ties chimes with the research of Steinkuehler and Williams (2006) and Williams et al. (2006), indicating that bonding social capital yields emotional and substantial support (as cited in Lin, 2011).

### **Stress relief**

In addition to using *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) as a way to diminish loneliness, the participants also revealed that playing *PUBG* with friends from home helped them to relieve stress. Some of the informants agreed that playing this multiplayer online game with close friends is a form of catharsis for the accumulated stress from studying. Specifically, Trung told me there were many occasions when he got stressed by the tough assignments from university. When encountering such situations, Trung decided to play some *PUBG* matches with his best friends. Trung interpreted his experience:

“Of course they cannot solve my assignment, but what I need is to reduce stress while playing the game with them. As I said, I only play this game for fun so after some matches, I can refresh my brain and deal with the assignment.”

The game is not only used as a tool to reduce stress. Linh, who suffered from racial discrimination in her workplace, specified that playing *PUBG* with her best friends in Vietnam is an



ideal way to run away from this unpleasant situation. She confided that: “even though addressing the problem with them will not change my current situation, I just want to tackle the situation by distracting myself from this foreign environment”. Clearly, Linh actively seeks emotional support in terms of affirmation by escaping from bad situations through the game, where she can socially interact with her real-life friends. Escapism is widely discussed among existing studies as a way gamers choose to zone out from bad situations. This pattern overlaps with findings from research by King and Delfabbro (2014), which advocates online game play as a coping strategy to deal with offline social environments. However, the analysis of data indicates that not many participants choose to escape from a negative offline environment through the game. A considerable amount of participants stated that if they felt stressed, they would not choose to play a game with friends, but would instead try to deal with that negative emotion alone. Aside from Khanh Linh and Trung, no evidence from other participants supports the idea that they would use the game to escape from bad situations. Luca chooses to play alone whenever he does not feel well, as for him playing PUBG with strangers is a means to reduce stress or anger. Luca and Cassie both agree that playing PUBG with offline friends is a relaxed hobby, so they only play it with real-life friends when they are in a good mood.

#### **4.1.3. Unhelpful emotions**

The negative emotions putatively associated with playing online games have been elevated to a central focus in many studies (Buckley & Anderson, 2006). The notion that playing violent video games produces negative emotions and has a reinforcing effect has always been a conundrum for the research in the gaming field. However, the interpretation of data found that negative emotions such as boredom and anxiety were only noticeable for a small number of participants. Only two informants reported negative emotions in relation to their gaming experiences with existing ties. Cassie confided that due to her bad skills she often feels like she “drags her cousin down”. She further added:

“I am just afraid that I affect his rate. [...] I mean he may not blame me or something, but I will feel like that because like sometimes, [...] he was like, come here quickly, as soon as possible But I just move slowly. So at that time I felt nervous because I felt like I was doing bad things.”

Additionally, Luca spoke about the rare occasions when he felt bored in *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017): “[Min] doesn't like to talk, so when we play, I feel a little bored. I play with Min and Hao together. They are together when I play with them, and then I feel a little bored, but they really like to ask me to play together [laughs] [...] They just focus on the game; they don't want to talk about something else or about themselves, their lives. They just focus on the games. Nothing else.” As previously quoted, Luca associated the game with positive emotions when he can socially

interact with his real-life friends. However, when social interaction was not mutually generated within the squad as the teammates only focused on the game play, *PUBG* became a boring game for the informant.

In an effort to assess negative emotions during game play with real-life friends, the analysis of data found a consensus among the informants that “gaming with friends is just for fun”. The majority of interviewees denied having bad emotions while playing with real-life friends. Trung clarified:

“why would I feel angry or mad while playing with a friend. That is very unlikely to happen. After all the things we have been through together, I do not think I can get bad emotions regardless of how bad they play.”

This pattern, therefore, further enriches the argumentation that *PUBG* can reinforce the chilling out emotion. While the participants’ teammates provide them assurance and comfortable feelings, the informants themselves also construct this atmosphere.

In the light of the elaborated results, it is clear to me that young Asian expats obtained emotional support while playing games with existing ties from their home countries. The centrality of positive emotions and avoidance of negative emotions in this sample of players unifies the general research on usage of SNSs among expats and the contemporary theoretical framework of video game research. It becomes apparent that young Asian expats receive more positive intrinsic rewards through social involvements and the bonding social capital they perceive with existing ties. The next section will explore the specific ways that participants socially involve in *PUBG*.

## **4.2. Just a Game?**

Two main themes emerged from the material when looking at the way young Asian expats explain what the game meant to them by describing their involvement with it and evaluation of it. This refers to **involvement and immersion** and perceived **social and cultural capital**. It is evident that *PUBG* has grown to be more than just a game. It has taken on a meaning that stretches far beyond winning and losing. This constitution of dominant patterns is supported by the appearance of sub-categories developed from the retrieved data. These will be further explained below.

### **4.2.1. Involvement and immersion**

Social gaming is mostly found in massively multiplayer online games in which social play is not just a choice but a key element of the game (Griffiths et al., 2004). In a review by Cairns, Cox, Day, Martin & Perryman (2013), socially playing in multi-player game settings seems to increase the level of immersion. However, the results from data analysis do not entirely support the above-mentioned statement. Indeed, it seems that when young Asian expats are involved in social game play, the sense of immersion is often identified in terms of the self-presentation in role-playing and

fantasy. However, the participants do not interpret immersion in terms of absorption. As guided by Yee's (2009) and Jennett et al.'s (2008) research, sub-categories constitute immersion and involvement patterns include engrossing game play, fantasy and role-playing.

### **Engrossing game play**

First, the review of the findings indicates that playing *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) with existing ties from home countries allows young Asian expats to monitor and control game play better. Indeed, looking at the assessment of the time and moment of game play, the participants reported a low level of frequency and average amount of gaming session with real-life friends from their home countries. The consensus among the informants was that they often play *PUBG* with friends from their home country for an average of three to four times per week. Additionally, all ten participants expressed that they made great effort to adapt their gaming session with friends so that it would not adversely impact each other's daily lives. For instance, three Chinese participants (i.e. Edith, Cassie and Claire), who currently live in the Netherlands, choose to play *PUBG* with their friends back home in the evening time in China, when everyone is free for a game. Cassie further explained:

"I know that although it's in a special time, people are working during the morning or the afternoon. They need to finish their work first, and then play the game. So I guess it's not convenient to invite them to play the game in the morning. Most Chinese people play games at night. It also applies to other games like LoL, because night time is the best time for them to play."

Similarly, Trung and Linh, who live two hours ahead of Vietnamese time, always choose to stay up a bit late so they can spend one or two hours playing with friends in Vietnam before going to bed. Also due to the time difference, expats take an active role in adjusting the total time played so that it does not affect their friends. All the participants said that even though it is enticing to play with friends, they will stop after one or two hours, which can encompass two to three matches. Linh told me "We often play from 10pm, but after two hours at most, if we cannot get top 1, then we just leave it to another day." However, Linh also shared there was one special occasion when she completely lost track of time:

"That was on New Year's Eve, [...] we wanted to take top 1 together right on the first day so the whole year could be lucky. [...] So we played overnight from 10pm to 4pm. [...] I could not wait to hang up the phone call with my parents and go back to the game [laughs]. We totally forgot the fireworks. After several tries, we finally ate the chicken [slang for winning in *PUBG*], which engrossed us more. So we continued for like one or two more hours."

### **Fantasy**

Then, the sub-theme of involvement and immersion is supported by the subcategory

referring to how participants fantasize about social events while playing with their friends from their home country. Even though fantasy is widely discussed among research on immersive game play, there is no empirical evidence for fantasy in relation to social events since existing studies only concern character or heroic fantasy. A considerable amount of evidence from data findings constitutes another perspective to look at the pattern of fantasies.

Young Asian expats within the sample often recalled enjoyable moments while socially playing *PUBG* with an immersion in imaginary social events. Trung, who has been living abroad for four years, perhaps said it best:

“There was one time when we drove one car together even though it is not a good strategy, but we still decided to since it felt like we were in the same car in real life. At that moment, I just randomly talked about my future plans, like I’m going to open a store, then you will do this, you will do that...[laughs]...It’s just so random and nonsense but if we are driving together in real life, we would talk about similar topics. I just imagine doing this with my homies in real life, yet we are far apart now”.

Similarly, when Miao shared about the moment when she missed her best friend, Mary, she vivaciously expressed: “I feel relatable to her sometimes because she's working in my home city. And then I feel like I'm staying in my home city when playing with her.”

As demonstrated, the link between this sub-category and the social nature of how young Asian expats play *PUBG* with long-distance ties hinges on the idea that fantasy is not only performed in terms of character but also in terms of the social contexts and events. When playing in a social context, players, especially those who pursue the need to do things they cannot do in real life, become more immersed while also perceiving positive intrinsic rewards.

### **Role-playing**

Another aspect deriving from the data that supports the pattern of involvement and immersion is role-playing. Existing studies on role playing connect role-playing with the presentation of self in multiplayer online games. The presentation of self, whether as the existing self, or in an alternate version, are repeatedly being examined in relation to the online avatar. As guided by existing studies, this subcategory put its focus on the similar and different roles involved in social game play between young Asian expats and their existing ties from their home countries. Moreover, this subcategory adds to the literature by illustrating how participants represent their offline self in *PUBG*, which has not been examined in any previously published work.

The interpretation of materials indicates that the informants possess great control over self-presentation in *PUBG* (*PUBG Corporation, 2017*). As support, some evidence shows that the participants seek to present an alternative version of themselves by spending considerable time customizing their characters and acting upon that framework. Phuong spoke of role-playing as a

guy: “I want to try being a low-key excellent player, so I pick a male character with simple fashion, which allows me to hide easily since it’s not too obvious.”

Cassie has a different role-playing style that involves trying to create a self-presentation as similar to real life as possible. She explained: “you are playing the game for fun. [...] Also the reason, as I already told you, is that you need to bring energy or help a teammate. An avatar is for your teammate, not your enemy.”

Another relevant idea of the self is that of being interchangeable, depending on who they are playing with, which can be closely related to the factor of hierarchy and social interaction. Edith confided her tips of enjoyable game play is to “act more feminine in the game while playing with male friends” despite her real-life character being quite the opposite. She added: “I am so used to playing games alone. Until *PUBG*, I never knew that the power of acting soft, girly around others, especially my male friends, would get me much better results [laughs].” All of the participants revealed that they play a more active role while gaming with real-life friends than with strangers. Interestingly, eight out of ten interviewees unanimously disclosed that they would not talk on the in-game microphone if they played with strangers, which results in a passive role-playing. As Luca confirmed: “If I play with strangers, I usually follow where they jump, usually it’s G-harbor, it would be an intense fight that needs cooperation audio-wise but I don’t like to turn the microphone on in such cases.”

Additionally, some informants indicate that while playing with their friends in *PUBG*, they may possess a different role to that as a friend in real life. Claire, Luca and Linh referenced this interchangeable role-playing to in-game ability and skills. Revolving around this idea, the next sub-theme will focus on the way young Asian expats perceive social capital and develop hierarchy with their existing ties from their home countries.

#### **4.2.2. Social and cultural capital**

The assessment of young Asian expats’ evaluation of their social gaming experience with friends from home constitutes the focal point of this sub-section. All of the respondents reported that they have some form of online relationship with those friends from their home country. The following cases exhibit the way young Asian expats acquire social and cultural capital. Social capital will be explained in relation to bonding social capital since this thesis focuses on expats and their offline relationships from their home countries. Then, the sub-section continues with the way young Asians obtain cultural capital by the hierarchy they form with real-life friends in *PUBG*.

##### **Bonding**

First, results from data analysis indicate that young Asian expats referenced *PUBG* (*PUBG Corporation, 2017*) as a bridge to maintain connection with long-distance friends. The consensus

among the informants was that PUBG gives them more chance to contact with close friends now that they live abroad. Speaking of how she had become closer to a long-distance friend, Phuong shared: “We were very close before, but after five years abroad, we barely talked any more, just once every other month to see what was going on”. But after her friend asked to play PUBG together, Phuong immediately downloaded the game. She explained: “even in our first match, we talked so much more than these five years together”. Just like Phuong, Trung spoke of the bonding social capital in PUBG, specifically comparing the game with SNSs such as Facebook:

“As I grow older, I become less likely to post anything on Facebook. I also do not use it that much, only when I want to talk with my parents. But if I want to chat with my close friends, I won’t contact them frequently, cause what do we have to talk about [laughs]? I mean we are not lovers, ha ha, just boys and boys. [...] But playing PUBG with my homies is definitely a way to make us talk more. I mean I wouldn’t be able to chat with them for four hours on Facebook, but we can play PUBG and talk as much as we want during the game”. Sharing the same experience with Phuong and Trung, Cassie named PUBG as a seasoning to her relationship with people in China:

“It is definitely like a flavouring when you're cooking the dishes. Or seasoning. It's like flavouring because sometimes we are serious in real life and we cannot act out so much. Sometimes we are just stuck in our role. But when we are playing the game, we just release ourselves.”

Funnily enough, both Dieu Linh and Khanh Linh did not have good relationships with their sisters due to the differences in age and character. However, after they started playing *PUBG* with their younger sisters, the sisterhoods became much closer. Linh explained: “My sister is eight years younger than me [...] we barely ever talk even when I have video call with my parents and she’s just around. [...] But after playing *PUBG* together, we kind of know each other more, and she also knows how to express herself to me.”

Not only Dieu Linh and Khanh Linh, but also Cassie had more opportunities to know her cousin better after playing PUBG with him for a long period:

“It brings us closer because actually he is like 9 years older than me. And we sometimes don't have common topics to talk about. [...] And without the game, we don't get the opportunity to talk. If we talk, we're just talking in the family group. We seldom have a private conversation because that's not necessary. But when we're playing the game, he will mention his business and relationship with his wife, [...] his son or something. And I'll listen to that. Outside the game, he will not deliberately send those pictures to me or something.”

Similarly, Thuan echoed the possibility of bonding with her cousins by playing *PUBG* together. She confided that even though they are relatives, it does not mean they will deliberately communicate with each other. However, after Thuan found out that she could play *PUBG* with her

cousins, they actually started to talk more often. The analysis of data shows a consensus that *PUBG* is the only communication tool of some young Asian expats who play *PUBG* with their relatives. Last but not least is the evidence that Claire got to talk with her former colleague, who she does not know well. According to Claire, she can only connect with that co-worker when they are playing the game together.

It is apparent that young Asian expats use *PUBG* as a platform to maintain long-distance relationships, to improve weak relationships with those who they cannot get to see very often as well as reconnect with lost contacts. The social nature of the game promotes the development of social capital between expats and existing ties. The findings discussed are supportive of prior research about the association of MMO playing and online bonding social capital by Skoric and Kwan (2011).

### **Hierarchy**

Further, playing *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) with real-life friends eventually generated cultural capital as well. While investigating the interchangeable roles that young Asian expats play while gaming with friends, it provides evidence that an online hierarchy is developed in addition to their offline relationship.

As the group play together, it becomes evident who the strong and weak ones are. Trung spoke about cultural capital, specifically gaming status, within his group of 'homies'. "You know who's good and who's not. Phuoc is very good at this game, he always the leader of the team while Tai and me are more like supporters and follow him". Similarly, Luca showed his respect for QiQi's skill, as he said: "QiQi [...] is very good at this game. If you play with QiQi, you don't need to worry about anything. You just give your best to her".

Nowhere was cultural capital more evident in *PUBG* than at the moment the team choose the location to parachute. Luca spoke extensively about who can decide where to jump when playing with his friends, "I will always follow QiQi, where she goes, I will follow her". Nevertheless, Luca said that this hierarchy only exists in the game since their roles as friends are different to those in the game. Luca continued: "I think it is very difficult to describe our relationship, our behaviours. Sometimes I would be a leader, and sometimes I would accept other proposals – it depends on the condition". Claire shared the same sentiments as Luca; there are two different hierarchies existing between her and the close friend, Kailun. According to Claire, in *PUBG*, Kailun and her are at the same level – both of them follow and support the leader of the team, which is Luca. However, in real life, Kailun "always knows what he wants", thus acts as someone who can give advice and sometimes makes decisions. Miao echoed with the same experience: "As I said, the male friend, he's [shyer], he's quieter. And so in the real world I do feel like, yeah, I am more leading".

### 4.3. Uses and Gratifications

The remarkably active role that social themes played in player interpretations of their gaming experiences constitutes the third and final overarching themes of the data analysis. The following section explains the various uses and gratifications that young Asian expats enjoy through socially playing *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) with existing ties from their home countries. Various uses and gratifications that the informants experience were identified in relation to social connection and divided into two sub-themes: **Teamwork and Cooperation**, and **Social Gaming**. This constitution of dominant patterns is supported by the appearance of sub-categories developed from the retrieved data. These will be further explained below.

#### 4.3.1. Teamwork and cooperation

According to the interpretation of the data, all the participants at least partially associated their gaming experience with social terms, and these patterns clustered into two sub-categories, Coordinated group enjoyment and Altruistic game play. That teamwork and cooperation makes gaming more enjoyable was a point of view repeated throughout the interview process. Overall, this dominant pattern seems to concur, with previous study suggesting that the awareness of being socially connected to others contributes the enjoyment of gaming (Gajadhar et al., 2008a). There is also a lot of evidence of where altruistic actions were recognized as guided, as also identified by Riar, Morschheuser, Hamari and Zarnekow (2020).

##### **Coordinated group enjoyment**

The consensus among the informants was that, even though it can be fun from time to time to play as the lone wolf, especially while waiting for friends to become available to play with, playing alone is extremely difficult. Therefore, the informants aimed to avoid playing alone or playing with strangers by actively adjusting their schedules so that they can ensure the group moments. As discussed previously in the subcategory of Engrossing game play, the adjustment in schedule for group moments can be interpreted as a display of coordination. Furthermore, many examples support the idea that coordinated group enjoyment is only achieved while playing with real-life friends but not with strangers. Luca said he would try his best to ensure everyone in the team can enjoy the game:

“When I play with Claire or QiQi or somebody else from the college, I will play not as [aggressively], or jump somewhere that too many people jump. Because if you play with them, if someone dies and for the rest of the time, they are just watching, they cannot fully enjoy the match. So I would choose those places that can make sure all of us stay alive”.

Here, Luca suggested that group enjoyment is essential while playing with his real-life friends. He further added that, when playing alone or as a lone wolf with strangers, winning is the



motivation instead of enjoying the game. Explaining his statement, Luca said:

“Because if you play with strangers, you jump to some places nobody jumps. And then after you arrive at the location you just search a house one by one, for the result, and it is so boring. Nobody talks to you. If you jump to G-harbor [slang for one of the most dangerous locations on the map], it'll be more fun. One game, over, another one.”

Miao shared this sentiment with Luca, stating that: “When we are winning as a team, that's the moment that I enjoy the most”. Other participants also showed their determination to only enjoy *PUBG* with real-life friends by saying that they quit the game if their friends stop playing. In conjunction with this subcategory, it seems that young Asian expats cooperatively engaging in the game with existing ties from their home countries associate this with altruism. This pattern will be the focus of the following subcategory.

#### **Altruistic game play**

There are two main findings that constitute this subcategory. First, many informants experienced altruism while receiving in-game help from friends. There are many forms of help that players can receive from their teammates in *PUBG*, for instance, recovering after being knocked out by enemies or receiving equipment from teammates. Khanh Linh, Dieu Linh, Trung and Cassie reported to receive a lot of equipment and help from their real-life friends in *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017). Cassie said: “my cousin would carry me to win the game. He lets me take the good gun [...], tells me where to hide, etc. while he knocks the enemy down.” Khanh Linh experienced a very similar situation when only her friend, Thuy and her were left to fight with one enemy. While Linh could not figure where the last enemy was, Thuy gave Linh the best equipment and ran away from their spot to lure the enemy.

Further, altruistic game play was also encountered when the participants tried to create a platform to help their friends. Knowing his best friend, Y, had been quite isolated and lonely after moving abroad, Trung showed his empathy by asking his other two 'homies' to reform their legendary squad of four in *PUBG*. Trung explained: “I just wanted to bring him to the game and have some fun”. Findings from the retrieved interviews have provided support to the findings from Riar, Morschheuser, Hamari and Zarnekow's (2020) research, which indicates a positive correlation between cooperative game play and altruistic action.

#### **4.3.2. Social gaming**

A last major theme developed through the results of data analysis is the social gratifications that young Asian expats enjoy from playing *PUBG* with pre-existing friends from their home countries. These are the gratifications of shared identity, social investigation, social interaction and social connection. This constitution of dominant patterns is supported by the appearance of sub-

categories developed from the analysis of interviews. These will be further explained below.

### **Shared Identity**

While only focusing on the social environment of multiplayer online games such as PUBG, the investigation of retrieved material indicates similar concerns of being left out among young Asian expats after moving to a foreign country. While being physically far away from their pre-existing network and social connection in their home countries, expats encounter the fear of being left out. Linh spoke extensively about this concern, stating: “whenever my group of best friends gather in Vietnam, I feel a bit of self-pity and unhappiness since it looks like they are getting closer to each other and I am being left out. [...] Moreover, I do not have any shared interests with them, so it’s not easy to talk to them on a daily basis like when I was still in Vietnam”. Therefore, the moment Linh got invited by two of her best friends to play PUBG together, she realized that PUBG is a good opportunity to belong to the group again.

In another situation, Luca shared that due to some particular reasons, he could not use WeChat to call his friends in China. Fortunately, at the same moment, PUBG was being played by everyone in China that he knew. Therefore, Luca wanted to try the game to keep up with his friends and life in China. He accidentally found out that the voice connection through the game is really stable and clear. Consequently, PUBG became Luca's main vehicle to chat with his friends in China.

Due to the geographical limitations, young Asian expats expressed great concern about being left out and isolated from their pre-existing connections in their home countries. In order to cope with this fear, the informants chose to join the mutual activities with their friends back home, thus achieving a shared identity. These findings of shared identity concur with the review of Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) of the consideration that “all friends have SNS accounts” and users do not want to feel isolated. Therefore, this pattern supports the idea that PUBG has similar attributes to other social networking sites and decreases the likelihood of being left out.

### **Social investigation**

Social investigation is the second gratification that young Asian expats acknowledge, despite being salient to a small group. Social investigation is often discussed in research concerning the motivation to use SNSs such as Facebook, which characterized this pattern to see what friends do and how they make new friends.

The investigation of data provides another way to look at social investigation with a focus on the social environment of multiplayer online games. Some of the informants reported to often use the spectating function of PUBG to check out what is going on when their real-life friends are not playing with them. Cassie shared:

“I did that a lot. Yeah, [...] They always make the team and they always play together. So I choose to watch their games. And that's great fun. Because sometimes we are even talking on the

phone, the WeChat call, so I know what's happening in the game with their reaction. It's not a mute game, it is with their voice and even their arguing [laughs]”.

Other informants seem less likely to spectate their friends for social investigation. However, social investigation is also obtained when the participants use the game to discover unknown perspectives of their long-distance friends. For instance, Phuong said sometimes when she plays PUBG with a close friend, Khanh, together with Khanh’s own friends, she sees a different side of her friend after being far away for five years.

### **Social interaction**

The results from data analysis indicate the significant role of *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) as a blended platform that generates social interaction in the form of online conversation. Even those who play fast-paced games like *PUBG* can also enjoy the social aspect of online gaming. They enjoy working together in the game and using the communication features, including in-game voice chat. All the informants reported to always use the in-game voice chat channel whenever playing with existing ties from their home countries. Speaking of her gaming experience, Cassie emphasized the substantial role of communication while playing with friends: “sometimes we would just stay in the lobby and chat for a long time”. The participants were most likely to describe *PUBG* with terms such as “another place to talk”, “more chances to talk with friends” or “more about chatting than shooting”.

Furthermore, the participants solidly reported to initiate non-game related topics when they are not in an intense fight. Specifically, Trung told me that he often talked about those topics when his team is driving any vehicles. Likewise, Khanh Linh admitted to always chatting about everything but not about *PUBG* whenever the team is looting equipment. Linh explained: “in the mobile version of *PUBG*, you do not need to pick up supplies manually; the system will do it automatically, so it is a very relaxed and low-paced environment and my friends and I would naturally start chatting”. Throughout the interview with Luca, “talking” was the most identified term in relation to his gaming experience. He spoke extensively about in-game communication, as he referred to it as the most important element of the game. Additionally, Luca explained that sometimes he feels quite nervous about initiating a chat through SNSs since he is not sure if his friends are free or perhaps because there is no real purpose to the chat. However, once they are all available for a game, Luca thinks it is a suitable situation to start a chat. Similarly, as mentioned, Trung will not deliberately try to interact with his friends while they are not playing *PUBG* together since he does not want to ask “how are you doing?” on a daily basis.

Indeed, previous studies also suggest that in-game communication is often emotional and life-related while team coordination is often a requisite to complete more difficult missions (Pena & Hancock, 2006; Kowert & Oldmeadow, 2013). It is clear that *PUBG* might not become a mutual

topic to talk among friends, yet the uniqueness of this multiplayer online game lies in its relaxed moments during game play, which allow socialization. Young Asian expats regard this game as a blended platform that offers an optimum solution to increase social connection with their existing ties from their home countries.

### **Social connection**

The last subcategory of social gaming patterns is social connection. This subcategory corresponds to how young Asian expats perceive social connection during the social gaming in *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) with existing ties.

By means of physical input, modification of challenge, and real-time visual feedback, *PUBG* can provide instant and on-demand experiences for players. Specifically, all the participants identify maintaining relationships as the main motivation to play *PUBG*. As previously discussed, *PUBG* generates bonding social capital among the interviewees and their pre-existing ties from their home countries. Indeed, Trung likened *PUBG* to other multiplayer online games and came to the conclusion that the slow-paced period at the beginning of the game and while driving vehicles allows him to perceive more social capital. Trung and Khanh Linh further clarified that games such as League of Legends require players to pay full attention to the game process and strategy, providing no relaxed moments for chatting. However, as indicated, the participants found spaces in between battles during *PUBG* to build relationships with teammates. Ducheneaut et al. (2007) suggested labelling such “slow-paced” periods as “wind-down” periods of socialization during game play, which provide space to achieve pro-social goals rather than focusing on in-game, progress-related goals.

Not only does *PUBG* bring the expats closer to their friends regardless of geographical limitation, but it also allows the participants to interact and receive real-time support from friends in the gaming environment. Certainly, *PUBG* provides a comfortable environment to receive and exchange emotional support. All of the informants reported discussing non-game related topics: studying, love life, jobs or even future plans. For example, Claire shared that her best friend, Kailun, who always gives her advice in real life, also naturally discussed and gave advice about her future plan after graduation in the summer. Likewise, participants initiate gossip with their friends during game play; such topics do not appear frequently if they chat on SNSs. Cassie confided she is the one that always bring up gossip while playing *PUBG*: “Sometimes I'm gossiping like, are you still in contact with your [ex-boyfriend]? [...] Are you still playing together?” However, Cassie further emphasized that the possibility to bring up such a topic is almost zero if they are not playing *PUBG* together, “If it's a very urgent thing, we will talk about it anyway. But if it is just like gossip or something we will not talk about it, we just miss the opportunity.” Indeed, other participants agreed that unless it is about an urgent event, they will not open up if talking in a serious or normal

environment. As Luca concluded:

“You can imagine that if you are sitting in a cafe, but without coffee, it would feel very embarrassing. It would be a disaster. So *PUBG* is good for the conversation in my opinion. It feels like you are together at that moment and with a cup of coffee. So you can really talk freely.”

The young Asian expats from this study solidly associated *PUBG* with terms such as “a bridge for our friendships”, and just like “seasoning”, or as “a tool to connect with my friends”. Previous studies complement that idea, indicating social connection can be built upon social capital and social support (Ducheneaut et al., 2017). Consequently, the reinforcement of social connection generated by in-game support (emotionally and instrumentally), in-game social and cultural capital and in-game social interaction also supports the dominant theme of social gratification.

## 5. Conclusions

The goal of this qualitative study was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ways that young Asian expatriates utilize the opportunities of the multiplayer online game *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) to maintain existing social connections from their homelands. This chapter provides concise answers to the research question. Thereafter, it discusses the implications of this thesis theoretically and societally. The thesis is then concluded with a reflection on its limitations and suggestions for future research.

### 5.1. Main findings

The scale of multiplayer online game users is gradually expanding. The addiction of the multiplayer online game *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) is soaring worldwide and it has a large user base, with Asian players accounting for the largest portion. Social connection generated by group confrontation and collaborative mobile games cannot be ignored. The previous literature reviewed involved further investigation into the link between multiplayer online games as another form of online social networking platform and the reinforcement of social connection (Shen & Williams, 2010; Snodgrass, Lacy, Dengah, & Fagan, 2011). This present study focused on the particular group of young Asian expats, who reported levels of reliance on social networking platforms to acquire social connections from pre-existing ties from their home countries (Segumpan & Saludadez, 2017; Pang, 2018).

In light of previous insights, this research suggests three main findings: emotional responses during game play with existing ties from home countries; the perceived social and cultural capital via unique patterns of gaming behaviours; and observed uses and gratifications including teamwork, cooperation and social gaming. The qualitative findings of this research provide a detailed picture of young Asian expats' gaming experience in their own words. Three major themes emerged strongly from the analysis of ten in-depth interviews. Specifically, the two themes of *Emotional Responses* and *Just a Game?* reveal young Asian expats' gaming experience in relation to social connection. First, an overwhelming majority of participants describe game play with existing ties as a positive emotional experience that provides them with emotional support during unpleasant situations in the offline environment. The findings suggest that young Asian expats rarely describe shared games with friends from home as stressful, anger-inducing, or boring. Instead, the participants indicated playing *PUBG* with existing ties as a positive emotional experience or as a way to avoid negative emotions. Young Asian expats in this study referenced the source of their enjoyment to real-life friends or family members and the social interaction between them instead of the game play itself. Interestingly, the informants indicated a significant level of chilling out emotion during this shooting game due to the fact that they could rely on their real-life

friends in the team. In addition, the participants also referred to this supposedly fast-paced game as happening at a fairly low pace with plenty of wind-down periods of socialization, which contributes to the perceived chilling out emotion. Besides, young Asian expats acknowledged that game play with existing ties reinforces the nostalgic feeling with similar social events in the past. Furthermore, the studied subject confirmed their intention to use this game as a tool to reduce negative emotions while living away from their homeland. The literature review suggests that online video games are highly immersive and captivating (Jennett et al., 2008; Yee, 2009; Cairns et al., 2013). However, the theme *Just a Game?* suggests that young Asian expats possess a strong sense of autonomy over total time played in order to acquire more social capital. On the other hand, patterns from this theme also provide evidence of cultural capital acquiring through immersive gaming behaviours in terms of fantasy and role-playing. The findings suggest that young Asian expats performed and observed interchangeable roles in online hierarchy in addition to their offline relationships. Finally, the theme *Uses and Gratifications* reveals the pro-social benefits that young Asian expats obtain from their gaming behaviours. The analyzed pro-social benefits patterns include coordinated group enjoyment, altruistic game play, shared identity, social investigation, social interaction and the interconnected concept of social connection. Group enjoyment and cooperation are central elements that facilitate social gratification from playing *PUBG* with existing ties from homelands. To achieve the shared identity with friends back home and avoid being left out, young Asian expats consider playing the most common game *PUBG* together is the most effective way. Interestingly, the substantial role of immediate feedback and in-game voice chat provide young Asian expats more opportunities to engage in social connection with their long-distance ties. The combined assessment of these three themes was fundamental to answer the research question.

The study of the preceding chapters was fundamental to the research. The introductory chapter actively provided the social context of globalization and the rising number of young Asian expats, the consequent emergence of maintaining social connection via social networking platforms, and the significant popularity of *PUBG*, its social environment and relation to social connection. Furthermore, the chapter justified the academic and societal importance of the study. The theoretical framework chapter displayed the potential and served to create a framework for this dissertation. It specifically indicated a thorough overview the concepts and theories regarding expatriates, young Asian expatriates and their current practices to maintain social connections. Moreover, the chapter provided a detailed overview of existing studies on multiplayer online games and their links to the study subject. In regard to the choice of the methodological approach, the research method played a significant role in the analysis progress and the findings of extensive insights. The use of the hermeneutical phenomenology approach and in-depth interviews provided the possibility to thoroughly encompass the complete breadth of the topic. The in-depth interviews

provided deep understanding of young Asian expats' gaming experience and behaviours from their own perceptions. The findings suggest that game experience sometimes does not reflect on the apparent game play but dramatically influenced by social factors. Such social factors cannot be assessed through content analysis or other quantitative approach as argued by Ferguson (2011). Therefore, it is important to note that research into the personal gaming experience in relation to social factors such as this current dissertation especially benefits from the qualitative approach of in-depth interviews and hermeneutical phenomenology approach. Besides, the operationalization of social connection from the theoretical lenses of expatriate research helped to explore the social aspects during the interviews with this particular group of young Asian expats.

## **5.2. Theoretical implications**

Reflecting upon a review of the literature, the research findings are supportive of certain theoretical discussions but also provide a different viewpoint to some others. It is important to note that there have been no existing studies on the same subject in the field of online video games and gaming communication. First, the findings correlate with the work of Ryan et al. (2006) and Przybylski et al. (2009a) claiming that play with existing ties can generate positive emotional rewards. In regard to regulating negative emotions, findings indicate a similarity with Li and Rothstein's (2009) work supporting the argument that affirmation support is received when the support seeker and the support provider share the same language and similar cultural perception. Furthermore, the participants also reported only receiving emotional support from real-life friends during game play. These results reinforce the idea that expats often receive emotional support through bonding social capital (Steinkuehler & Williams 2006; Williams et al. 2006) with strong ties (Lin, 1983), thus further complimenting Skoric and Kwan's (2011) studies on MMO playing and online bonding social capital.

In addition, the informants reported a strong reliance on the social networking platform of PUBG to stay connected, especially in the situation when other online networking sites are not available. However, it does not result in engrossing game play as discussed in the research by Cairns et al. (2013). Findings indicate a high level of control over total time played, and by actively adjusting time played, the informants aim to receive more intrinsic rewards and pro-social benefits. In addition, it is demonstrated that young Asian expats perform different patterns of fantasy and role-playing, thus perceive different sorts of cultural capital during game play with existing ties from their home countries. Therefore, the research significantly contributes to the academic debates as it complements the previous research of Jennett et al. (2008) and Yee (2009) about involvement and immersion and its influence on players and their gaming behaviours. Moreover, the research helps to add depth and breadth to existing empirical research of uses and gratifications of video



game play (Griffiths et al., 2004; Gee, 2005; Hussain & Griffiths, 2009; Yee, 2006a; Yee, 2006b; Wu, Wang, & Tsai, 2010) by investigating the new pattern of cooperated group enjoyment, altruistic game play, shared identity, and social connection.

In addition, the theoretical implications of the data analysis addressed some unanticipated observations, providing new patterns for the field of research. The results indicate a brand-new pattern in research on humour in video game play. Dormann and Neuvian (2012) claim sense of humour is obtained in quest design or avatar death, and Lazzaro's (2004) research states the source of this emotion is from the social interaction that players initiate while playing together in the same room. However, the findings from this current study suggest that humour is obtained when players watch their teammate playing regardless of the geographical distance. Furthermore, never has any research on gaming experience, especially a fast-paced shooting game such as *PUBG*, discovered the emotion of chilling out. Yet, the analysis indicated the uniqueness of *PUBG* in its frivolous mechanism of providing spaces for players to focus more on the social interaction with others. In addition, the funny rewards as well as the metaphor of unlucky death allow players to spend more time creating memories with friends.

Another interesting observation is that of nostalgia. This emotion is especially relevant as the study subject focuses on the group of young Asian expats who yearn for past memories and social connection with existing ties back home. The analysis showed that nostalgic feelings are generated when the young expats encounter situations recalling former social events with the same partners. As briefly discussed above, cultural capital is perceived as young Asian expats observing the interchangeable role-playing during game play with existing ties back home. Last but not least, the pattern of social connection is maintained not only by staying connected with existing ties but also by receiving emotional and instrumental support during game play and social and cultural capital gained from playing *PUBG* with existing ties from players' home countries.

### **5.3. Societal implications**

The key strength of this study lies in its qualitative approach. As discussed, the majority of existing research on video game play adopts a quantitative approach or that of content analysis. The current dissertation makes several noteworthy contributions to the current research field by comprehending the gaming experience of the niche group of young Asian expats. Indeed, the study is a first in the research field by connecting the pro-social benefit of multiplayer online games with the communication pattern of the unique population (i.e. young Asian expats). The pro-social benefits that young Asian expats perceive through gaming with existing ties is evidence to reduce the existing stereotypes about gaming. The research has pointed out the uniqueness of the multiplayer online game *PUBG* in facilitating social connection in comparison to common social

networking sites and other multiplayer online games. Therefore, the present study provides useful insights for game creators to develop an ever-broadening, pro-social space for relationship development and personal gratification. In addition, as the study employed a general lens to assess the theoretical concept of social connection, its findings can be expanded to relevant fields besides multiplayer online games.

#### **5.4. Limitations**

The major limitations of this study lie in the small scale of the research. Given the small sample size of only ten participants, this study does not claim to hold a representative sample of young Asian expat PUBG players. Furthermore, social capital and the uses and gratifications of online multiplayer games are suggested to exist according to gaming demographics across genres, but they did not surface in this research. Due to its small scale, the current research did not manage to cover for possible differences in experience between genders as due to the snowball sampling technique. Thus, the selection of the sample of participants was not random or representative. Although this thesis is empirical, it builds on previous, well-established studies and the interpretation is grounded in a solid understanding of multiplayer online game research. All steps in data process and analysis are transparent and carefully justified in order not to influence the credibility of the study.

#### **5.5. Future research**

First, as the research field and subject are relatively recent, further research would help to contribute to fill in the gap in academic literature. A bigger sample with diversity in gender would help to enhance the representativeness of the results. In addition, due to the sampling technique, the researched sample was limited to Chinese and Vietnamese expats. It would be beneficial to extend this type of methodology to account for possible differences in participants' cultural background. Bigger samples, including a broader range of respondents in terms of demographics and gender, would enhance follow-up research, as Funk, Chan, Brouwer and Curtiss (2006) suggest different groups perceive different uses and gratifications. Furthermore, as shown in Yee's (2005) and Ryan et al.'s (2006) research, it would be informative to evaluate players' experience during and right after game play as experiences vary over time. Besides, the ethnography approach is also recommended to explore some facets of the game experience that may not be accurately recognized or described by players through in-depth interview such as this. Moreover, some insights from participants indicate a comparison to other game titles such as League of Legends or Dota and other social networking sites. Therefore, it would be interesting to employ the current methodology in other games and social networking sites. By comparing user experiences through

different platforms, future research can further investigate different gaming design elements that may either foster or limit social connection. This would complete the current research with additional insights and provide comparisons among genres and platforms.

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## Appendix I

The code tree below presents the three main themes, the selective codes, axial codes and a collection of sample quotes (open codes) retrieved from the thematic analysis performed in this study.

### Theme 1: Emotional Responses

Themes	Selective codes	Axial codes	Sample quotes
<b>Emotional responses</b>	<u>Positive emotions</u>	Enjoyment	I had so much fun playing with them. Whenever I looked at Linh playing, I burst out laughing. She acts like a comedian.
		Chill	when I'm playing with primary friends because she and I know each other who for a really long time. So I was chill, I know that she will not angry or be angry or pissed off by my skills.
		Nostalgia	I just suddenly remembered the same situation when we were on the boat together in the game.
	<u>Reduced negative emotions</u>	Reduced loneliness	Gives me the chance to talk with my friends whenever I feel homesick
		Stress relief	Playing PUBG with my friends is something I do as a form of catharsis for the built-up stress from schoolwork. It's pretty relaxing.
	<u>Unhelpful emotions</u>	Anxiety and Boring	Since I play very bad, I feel like I'm dragging my friends down. Min] doesn't like to talk, so when we play, I feel a little bored

### Theme 2: Just a game?

Themes	Selective codes	Axial codes	Sample quotes
<b>Just a game?</b>	<u>Involvement and immersion</u>	Role playing	My cousin plays a character that truly portray himself in real life
		Engrossing game	We just keep playing together until we

		play	won the game without realizing we already played for 6 hours. We even missed the NYE firework
		Fantasy	While driving the car together, I imagine I would do this with my friends in real life as well even though we are far apart now
	<u>Social and cultural capital</u>	Bonding	I didn't talk with him for so long until we play PUBG together
		Hierarchy	Phuoc plays very well, he always the leader of the team while me and Y are more like supporters and followers

Theme 3: Uses and gratifications

Themes	Selective codes	Axial codes	Sample quotes
<b>Uses and Gratifications</b>	<u>Teamwork and cooperation</u>	Coordinated group enjoyment	As long as I can play with my friends, the experiences are all enjoyable. When we are winning as a team, that's the moment that I enjoy the most.
		Altruistic game play	Y has moved away lately, Y feel so bad so my friends and I just want to bring him to the game and have some fun
	<u>Social gaming</u>	Shared identity	Everybody around me plays this game, so I wanted to give it a try
		Social investigation	I want to know what they are playing. I do spectate them a lot, I just want to know who they play with while not playing with me.
		Social interaction	I always play with a same group of my real-life friends. Sometimes we would just stay in the lobby and chat for a long time.
		Social connection	So PUBG is good for the conversation

			in my opinion's. It feels like you are together at that moment and with a cup of coffee. So you can really talk freely
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## Appendix II

This appendix presents the interview guide that was used to guide the tenth semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted through the research process of this thesis.

### Interview Guide:

#### Demographics:

Before we dive into the questions about games, I'd like to ask you a few basic questions:

1. May I have your name and age and your current occupation?
2. Where are you from? And where are you currently living?
3. How long have you been living abroad?

#### Emotional closeness and network size

4. During the time living abroad, who are the people from your home country who you keep in contact with? (group A)
  - a. Could you maybe think of the main five reasons you keep in contact with people from your home country?
  - b. Did you ever experience difficulties to maintain the relationship with people from your home country? Could you try to think of three reasons why you think you experienced these difficulties?

#### Playing PUBG with friends or family from home country

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about playing PUBG:

5. Could you explain me why and how did you start playing PUBG?
6. Do you also play it with your friends or family from home country?

#### Topic: Purpose

9. Could you describe the first time you played with a friend or family member from your home country?
10. With who else from your home country do you play? (go one by one explaining the reasons)
  - a. When was it? Why did you start playing with them?
  - b. How did you start playing together?
11. Are there any other reasons why you're playing PUBG with your friends/family in [home country]?
12. Do you ever watch/spectate your friends or family from your home country PUBG when they are not playing with you?
  - a. When did you start doing it?
  - b. In which moments you do it?
13. How often do you play with friends or family from your home country?

- a. How long are usually these sessions?
- b. In which moments of the day you prefer to play with them and why?
- c. Could you choose three keywords to define the reasons when you do it?  
(elaborate on the reasons)

**Topic: Emotion**

14. If you would have to use one keyword to describe the emotions that you feel when you are playing with each of your friends or family members at home, what would these be?
  - a. (go one by one, when he or she says the name of the person and the emotion, ask the follow up question:
  - b. Do you remember a specific moment playing with that person in which you felt that emotion? What happened?)
15. Think about the most enjoyable moment while playing PUBG with your friends or family from home country, can you describe the experience? (follow-up questions to get the details)
16. Did you ever played PUBG with your friends or family from home country to avoid negative emotions/feelings?
  - a. Think about any time when you played PUBG to avoid negative emotions/feelings?
    - Who did you play with?
    - Did you feel better after the game?
    - How did playing with that person make you feel better?
17. Have you ever had an experience where you had negative emotions while playing PUBG with your friends or family from home country?
  - [if yes] what happened?
  - [if yes] who did you play with?

**Topic: Identities**

18. Now focus on your online avatar when you are playing PUBG? How you describe your avatar in terms of style, personality and playing style (strategy)?
19. Would you say you do have one single identity or playing style while you are playing PUBG or you have different playing styles depending on who you are playing with when you play PUBG?
  - a. If different: Could you describe your different playing styles and identities when you are playing with your people from your home country?
  - b. If you play with strangers, do you change your playing style? What do you think is different?

20. Now think about the identities of the people from your home country that you play with. Could you please choose two of them, the most important for you, and describe their online avatars and playing style?
- a. What do you like about their online avatars and playing style?
  - b. Are they similar or different from what you do know from them?
  - c. What is your role while playing with them?
    - i. Would you say that this role is similar or different from the role you have as a friend or family?
    - ii. Why do you think so?
    - iii. Could you maybe describe a moment in which you were playing together with a friend, and you felt that he/she was helping you in the game in a similar way he does in real life? How did you feel?

**Topic: Communication**

21. Could you describe how is your relationship with the people form your home country that you play with in PUBG?
- a. Do you also communicate with them outside of the game, or you only stay in contact via the game?
    - i. If only in the game (discuss this in relation to all the people they play with):
      1. Why do you think this happen? What does this make you feel?
      2. What do you like the most about your relationship with them via the game?
      3. Do you miss something about your relationship?
    - ii. In also outside the game (discuss this in relation to all the people they play with):
      1. Do you discuss about the game in other platforms?
      2. Which type of conversations do you have about the game in other platforms?
      3. What do you think it is the role of playing the game in your relationship at this moment?
22. How do you start a session with people from your home country in the game? Do you contact them outside the game before you all play together? If so, through which platform(s)? Why?
- a. Are there any difficulties/challenges that you have to face to be able to play together?

- b. How do you experience these difficulties?
  - c. Do these difficulties become a problem in maintaining your relationship with them?
23. When you are playing together with people from your home country, how do you communicate with them?
- a. Do you use the integrated communication feature to communicate with your teammates?
  - b. Do you use any other resources in the game to communicate with them?
  - c. Do you use any other tools outside the game to communicate with them?
  - d. Does the form of communication change depending on who you are playing with?
    - i. If yes: Could you provide an example?

**Topic: Conversations**

24. During the game, do you sometimes have conversations with people from your own country aside from PUBG-related topic?
- a. How are usually these conversations initiated?
  - b. Are you usually the one starting the conversation or is usually your teammate?
  - c. Which are the values of these conversations for you?
  - d. Please, try to think of three different topics that you have discussed while playing the game, that are not related to the game itself?
  - e. Did you ever stop playing the game to continue with one of these conversations?
  - f. Did any of these conversations became especially relevant for you?
  - g. Do you think that this conversation would have happened if you were not playing the game together?
  - h. Do these conversations continue outside the game sometimes?
25. Could you describe a nice conversation that you have with your friends while playing PUBG?
- a. May I ask what was this conversation about?
  - b. Why do you want to share those things with them during the game?
26. Do you talk about those topics with every of your friends or just some of them during game?
27. How do you think that has PUBG influenced your social connection with friends from home country? Can you elaborate further?
28. After you started playing PUBG, do you feel like you talk with your friends/family back

home more than before?

29. Would you consider quitting PUBG if your real-life friends or family stop playing the game?

Could you tell me the reason?

**Probes used during the interview:**

- Asking the interviewee to elaborate on given answer.
- Repeating interviewees' answer to verify comprehension and facilitate follow-up questions.
- Specifying specific (unclear) elements for further elaboration.
- Staying silent to indicate that more info is expected to be given.
- Asking more details and comparison when interviewees interpret gaming experiences with different partners.