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Digital Aggression or Social Frustration? A Türkiye-Centred Socio-Relational Document Analysis of Online Gaming, School Climate, and Student Violence

Ethem Gürhan[1*]
[1]Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi, Türkiye
* **Email**: 18830203301@ogr.erbakan.edu.tr

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Abstract

Online gaming is often associated with student violence, but such claims rarely consider the social conditions in which aggression emerges. This study explores how gaming, social frustration, school climate, and peer and family relationships intersect in evidence concerning Türkiye. Using qualitative socio-relational document analysis, 25 of 34 candidate records were retained: eight Türkiye-specific records, one mixed-country synthesis with substantial Türkiye evidence, and 16 international or comparative records. Comparative coding, constant comparison, and negative-case analysis highlighted three patterns. Aggression was discussed alongside negative emotions, unmet social needs, weak social intelligence, and limited support rather than gaming exposure alone. School climate mattered through belonging, self-control, peer networks, and bystander responses. Gaming also served different functions: it could deepen frustration, offer coping, or foster competence and connection, depending on the circumstances and whether engagement was ordinary or problematic. These findings inform a Socio-Relational Digital Aggression Model that links digital experiences with students' relational environments. The model identifies plausible pathways for further study rather than establishing causal relationships for Türkiye. Prevention should therefore distinguish forms of gaming while strengthening school connectedness, family support, media literacy, and positive peer relationships.
Keywords: digital aggression; online gaming; school climate; social frustration; Türkiye

Abstrak

Permainan daring kerap dikaitkan dengan kekerasan siswa, tetapi anggapan tersebut sering mengabaikan kondisi sosial tempat perilaku agresif muncul. Penelitian ini menelaah keterkaitan permainan daring, frustrasi sosial, iklim sekolah, serta hubungan dengan teman sebaya dan keluarga berdasarkan bukti yang relevan dengan Türkiye. Melalui analisis dokumen kualitatif berpendekatan sosio-relasional, penelitian ini menggunakan 25 dari 34 dokumen kandidat: delapan dokumen khusus Türkiye, satu sintesis lintas negara dengan bukti penting dari Türkiye, dan 16 dokumen internasional atau komparatif. Pengodean komparatif, perbandingan konstan, dan penelaahan temuan yang bertentangan mengungkap tiga pola. Agresi berkaitan dengan emosi negatif, kebutuhan sosial yang tidak terpenuhi, rendahnya kecerdasan sosial, dan keterbatasan dukungan, bukan semata-mata paparan permainan. Iklim sekolah berperan melalui rasa memiliki, pengendalian diri, jaringan pertemanan, dan respons pengamat. Permainan daring pun memiliki fungsi yang berbeda: dapat memperkuat frustrasi, menjadi sarana menghadapi tekanan, atau mendukung kompetensi dan keterhubungan sosial, bergantung pada situasi serta apakah keterlibatan dalam permainan bersifat wajar atau bermasalah. Temuan ini menjadi dasar pengembangan Socio-Relational Digital Aggression Model yang menghubungkan pengalaman digital dengan lingkungan relasional siswa. Model tersebut menunjukkan kemungkinan jalur hubungan untuk diteliti lebih lanjut, bukan membuktikan hubungan sebab-akibat di Türkiye. Pencegahan kekerasan perlu membedakan bentuk keterlibatan dalam permainan sekaligus memperkuat keterhubungan dengan sekolah, dukungan keluarga, literasi media, dan hubungan teman sebaya yang positif.
Kata kunci: agresi digital; permainan daring; iklim sekolah; frustrasi sosial; Türkiye

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I. INTRODUCTION

Online gaming is now embedded in adolescent social life, but its relationship with student violence is still frequently framed through a compressed causal question: do games make young people aggressive? The question is rhetorically powerful because it offers a visible technological cause for a difficult social problem. Analytically, however, it combines exposures that are not equivalent violent content, time spent playing, intensive engagement, problematic use, and Internet gaming disorder and it treats aggression, bullying, cyberbullying, physical fighting, and broader violence risk as interchangeable outcomes. Research on cyberbullying, school-age bullying, and adolescent violence shows why these distinctions matter: each outcome involves different relationships, settings, and pathways of escalation (Mroczkowski et al., 2021; Park et al., 2021; Santric-Milicevic et al., 2022). A credible explanation must therefore specify what kind of gaming is being studied, which form of aggression is at issue, and where the relevant social interaction occurs.

Evidence concerning violent content does not support an uncomplicated direct-effect account. A preregistered study that paired 1,004 British adolescents with 1,004 caregivers found no association between violent-game engagement and caregiver-rated aggressive behavior (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2019). A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies similarly found no substantive long-term relationship between aggressive game play and later youth aggression (Drummond et al., 2020). Positive findings do exist, but they often depend on mediators or moderators rather than a uniform content effect. For example, moral disengagement and family environment altered the association in a moderated mediation model (Shao & Wang, 2019). Taken together, this literature does not make digital environments irrelevant. It indicates that content exposure alone is too coarse an explanation for differences in aggressive behavior.

The evidence changes when the exposure is problematic or disordered gaming. Meta-analytic studies report positive associations between Internet gaming disorder, digital-game addiction, aggression, and anger, but also substantial heterogeneity across regions, age groups, gender distributions, measures, and publication periods (Li et al., 2023; Nagar et al., 2025). This is not the same claim as saying that violent games cause violence. Measures of problematic gaming already incorporate loss of control, conflict, impairment, or displacement, which places emotional regulation and social functioning inside the construct. Treating ordinary play, violent-content exposure, and disordered engagement as one variable obscures the conditions under which gaming becomes consequential and helps explain why apparently contradictory results coexist.

This article uses social frustration as an interpretive category for experiences of unmet need, blocked belonging, weak recognition, exclusion, and strained family or peer relationships. The term overlaps with established ideas such as psychological need frustration, social exclusion, and strain, but it is used here more broadly to describe how these experiences accumulate within a student's relational ecology rather than as a diagnosis or a single latent construct. The point is not to rename existing variables, but to ask what function gaming serves when recognition, support, or belonging are uneven. Longitudinal evidence links negative emotion, lower social intelligence, aggression, and pathological gaming in a reciprocal sequence rather than a one-way media effect (Lee et al., 2024). Reviews of gaming problems during the COVID-19 period likewise locate risk within loneliness, peer disconnection, harsh parenting, and weak supervision, while appropriate support can be protective (Han et al., 2022). From this perspective, gaming may remain recreational, provide competence and relatedness, compensate for offline strain, or become entangled with dysregulation and aggressive interaction.

School climate extends this argument from individual adjustment to institutional relationships. Studies connect aggression and bullying with belonging, non-inclusive group

norms, moral disengagement, empathy, self-control, peer affiliation, and bystander participation (Bardach et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021; Montero-Carretero et al., 2021; Waasdorp et al., 2022). Peer victimization is also associated with problematic online game use through deviant peer affiliation and reduced school connectedness (Li et al., 2022). Yet school climate is not uniformly protective. Longitudinal network evidence shows that dense friendship networks can weaken or even reverse the expected association between positive climate and lower violence (Pinchak, 2024). Climate is therefore better understood as relational infrastructure: it organizes who belongs, which behaviors are rewarded, how bystanders respond, and whether cohesion transmits prosocial or exclusionary norms.

Türkiye provides a revealing context because its literature has expanded rapidly but remains conceptually fragmented. A systematic review of 69 Turkish studies found a field dominated by quantitative and cross-sectional designs, with considerable variation in samples and terminology (Boz & Dinç, 2023). More recent studies associate digital-game addiction or smartphone addiction with aggression, bullying, or cyberbullying, while also identifying social skills, psychological needs, perceived support, media literacy, and parent–adolescent relationship quality as relevant conditions (Aslan et al., 2022; Gürkan et al., 2022; Karakul & Bozkul, 2024; Köse et al., 2024; Ulaş & Incekara, 2026; Yıldırım & Zeren, 2021). These studies make a relational account locally plausible, but their mostly local and cross-sectional samples cannot establish a national causal effect. The international literature can identify mechanisms for testing in Türkiye; it cannot substitute its coefficients or prevalence estimates for Turkish evidence.

Beyond its value as a national case, Türkiye is also a well-established Muslim-majority social context. The nationally representative Religious Life in Türkiye Survey, jointly conducted by the Presidency of Religious Affairs and the Turkish Statistical Institute with 21,632 adults, found that 99.2% of respondents identified with Islam (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 2014). More recent cross-national survey evidence similarly indicated that 95% of Turkish adults currently identify as Muslim (Lesage et al., 2025). These figures establish a demographic and socio-religious setting, but they do not imply uniform religious practice or personal religiosity. Their relevance here is relational and institutional: adolescent socialization extends across schools, families, peer cultures, digital platforms, and community settings, where belonging, adult guidance, moral expectations, and social support are negotiated.

The central gap is therefore not the absence of studies on gaming or aggression. It is the absence of an integrative account that distinguishes gaming forms and violence outcomes while connecting individual emotion, family relationships, peer networks, school climate, community environments, and sociocultural context. Existing reviews summarize gaming-addiction research, meta-analyses estimate pooled associations, and school-climate studies explain bullying processes; these strands rarely test whether they form a coherent multilevel pathway or translate their mechanisms into community-based prevention. They also give limited analytical weight to null, protective, or reversed cases, even though such cases define the boundary of any causal claim. The novel contribution of the present analysis is to synthesize these literatures at the level of relational mechanisms and derive a context-sensitive prevention agenda for Türkiye without forcing them into a single estimate of a gaming effect or treating religion as an unmeasured causal variable.

Accordingly, this study asks four questions: How are online gaming, aggression, peer dynamics, and school climate connected in the available literature? Which psychosocial mechanisms position gaming as an amplifier, a coping context, or a potentially protective space? How do individual, relational, institutional, and sociocultural levels converge or diverge? What community-based prevention implications follow for Muslim-majority Türkiye? A qualitative socio-relational document analysis is used to answer these questions. Its main contribution is a Socio-Relational Digital Aggression Model that treats digital aggression and social frustration as connected rather than competing explanations, while

preserving construct distinctions and the limits of the available evidence. The model also provides an evidence-bounded basis for school-family-community coordination without presenting community or religious institutions as tested causal factors.

II. METHOD

This study used qualitative socio-relational document analysis to examine how online gaming, aggression, peer relations, family processes, and school climate are connected in research relevant to adolescent violence. The design was interpretive rather than aggregative: it sought to identify relational mechanisms, boundary conditions, and contradictory cases rather than calculate a pooled causal effect. One scholarly or institutional document constituted the primary unit of analysis, while a discrete evidence proposition constituted the unit of extraction and coding. The retained corpus was Türkiye-centred rather than Türkiye-exclusive: eight records were Türkiye-specific, one multinational synthesis contained prominent Türkiye evidence, and sixteen were international or comparative. The first two categories formed the nine records with direct or prominent Türkiye relevance. International evidence was used to identify mechanisms, comparisons, and boundary conditions, not to transfer prevalence estimates, coefficients, or causal claims to Türkiye. The transfer logic is therefore mechanistic rather than statistical: processes such as belonging, parental support, peer organization, and school connectedness can inform locally testable propositions without assuming that effect sizes, prevalence estimates, or causal relations travel unchanged across settings.

Türkiye's Muslim-majority demographic context was established through two contextual sources: the national Religious Life in Türkiye Survey, jointly implemented by the Presidency of Religious Affairs and the Turkish Statistical Institute, and a recent Pew Research Center survey (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 2014; Lesage et al., 2025). These sources were used only to describe the national setting; they were not included in the 34 candidate records or the 25 retained documents and did not enter extraction, coding, appraisal, or thematic synthesis. Religiosity, Islamic practice, and participation in faith-based institutions were not treated as exposures, mediators, moderators, or outcomes because they were not consistently measured in the retained corpus.

The analysis addressed four questions: how the documents conceptualized relationships among gaming, aggression, peer dynamics, and school climate; which psychosocial mechanisms positioned gaming as an amplifier, coping context, or potentially protective space; how individual, relational, institutional, and sociocultural levels converged or diverged; and which multilevel prevention implications followed from convergent, divergent, and negative-case evidence. This framing required gaming exposure, gaming intensity, problematic use, and gaming disorder to remain analytically distinct, just as cyberbullying, bullying, general aggression, and physical violence were treated as related but non-equivalent outcomes.

Corpus construction combined an initial seed set drawn from manuscript references and body citations with targeted supplementary scholarly searches completed on 7 August 2026. The search strategy was purposive and theory-informed rather than exhaustive: its purpose was to secure conceptual coverage across direct-effect evidence, Türkiye-specific studies, school and peer mechanisms, family processes, and negative or protective cases. The supplementary searches covered four concept clusters: violent-game exposure and longitudinal or registered aggression evidence; Türkiye-based gaming addiction, aggression, bullying, and cyberbullying; school climate, belonging, peers, networks, and violence; and gaming disorder in relation to loneliness, family relationships, peer stress, or school connectedness. The working period was 2016–2026, although an older source could be retained when theoretically indispensable. English- and Turkish-language documents were eligible.

Once the corpus had been fixed, a separate indexing check was conducted to document the bibliographic visibility of the retained evidence. The publication sources were verified against publisher indexing pages and bibliographic services, with attention to Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed/MEDLINE, and TR Dizin where relevant. Of the 25 retained records, 20 appeared in Scopus-covered sources, 19 in Web of Science-covered sources, 18 in PubMed/MEDLINE-covered sources, and five in TR Dizin-covered sources; these categories overlap. The check was performed after corpus selection and did not add records or alter eligibility decisions. It therefore provides an audit of source visibility rather than a claim that the corpus was retrieved through those databases. For the IJERPH articles published in 2021–2022, Web of Science coverage was recorded for the publication years concerned because the journal's indexing status later changed. Record-level verification is provided in Supplementary Dataset S1.

A record was retained when it was a peer-reviewed empirical study, systematic review, credible scholarly chapter, or authoritative report; addressed at least two core concepts or one explicit relational pathway; concerned adolescents or schools, or offered a defensible theoretical mechanism; and provided sufficient bibliographic and methodological information for audit. Records were excluded when they were non-verifiable, duplicated, opinion-only, only mentioned gaming or violence without an analysable relational mechanism, involved a population with no defensible transfer to adolescents, or lacked sufficient methodological clarity after reasonable retrieval attempts. Excluded records were removed from extraction, coding, and appraisal, but remained in the candidate corpus and exclusion log.

Table 1. Corpus profile and appraisal indicators

Indicator	n	Analytic role
Candidate documents screened	34	Initial auditable corpus
Documents retained	25	Primary analytic corpus
Documents excluded after risk screening	9	Removed from synthesis; reasons retained
Core empirical studies	11	Direct quantitative or qualitative evidence
Higher-level syntheses	7	Review-level or meta-analytic evidence
Contextual-mechanism sources	7	Theory and relational mechanism development
Türkiye-specific/prominent records	9	8 Türkiye-specific + 1 mixed-country synthesis
High-quality appraisals	13	Greater evidential weight in claim calibration
Negative/protective coding rows	9	Counter-evidence and boundary conditions
International/comparative records	16	Mechanisms, comparisons, and boundary evidence

Each search string, date, language, year range, retrieval count, screening outcome, and note was recorded in a search log. The completed searches were used to broaden the seed corpus until additional searching no longer altered the three higher-order themes or the structure of the proposed model. This point of corpus closure was treated as theoretical saturation for an interpretive document synthesis, not as proof of exhaustive database coverage. Accordingly, the study does not claim PRISMA-style completeness or represent the 25 retained documents as the full universe of relevant publications.

Verification status was recorded at full-article, abstract/results, institutional-metadata, or manuscript-metadata level. Evidence units were paraphrased unless a page or section location had been verified, and no synthesized statement was presented as a direct quotation. Claims dependent on an unresolved or corrupted citation were removed or replaced with a verifiable source. Variation in verification depth was therefore treated as an evidential boundary rather than silently collapsed into a single level of certainty.

For each retained document, extraction recorded bibliographic identity, country and setting, geographic corpus class, document type, study design, population and sample, the form and function of digital engagement, aggression or violence outcomes, family and peer processes, school-climate constructs, effect direction, methodological limitations, Türkiye

relevance, transfer boundary, and citation-readiness. Each document then received one coding row that identified its primary relational mechanism, ecological level, evidential role, negative or protective contribution, and candidate theme. Coding was guided by an eighteen-code codebook with operational definitions, inclusion and exclusion rules, ecological levels, and default thematic destinations.

Table 2. Socio-relational coding domains

Domain	Included codes	Guiding analytic question
Individual regulation	C01–C03: social skills, emotional dysregulation, aggression as mediator	How do affect regulation and social competence shape the gaming–aggression pathway?
Relational coping and family	C05, C12: compensation, parental mediation	When does gaming answer unmet needs, weak support, or family strain?
Peer and group organization	C07–C09: conflict, power, norms, exclusion	How do peer positions and group expectations legitimize or inhibit aggression?
School and protective ecology	C10, C16: school climate, multilevel protection	How do safety, belonging, support, and institutional responses organize violence participation?
Digital function and risk	C04, C06, C11, C13, C14, C17	Does gaming operate as exposure, problematic use, status system, coping space, or positive need satisfaction?
Sociocultural and cumulative risk	C15, C18: wider norms and multilevel convergence	Which cultural and ecological conditions alter the meaning or strength of the observed relationship?

An eight-item appraisal considered clarity of aim, appropriateness of design, transparency of sample or source, credibility of the data source, transparency of analysis, support for the reported findings, acknowledgment of limitations, and relevance to the analytic framework. Thirteen retained documents were judged high quality and twelve moderate quality. These judgments calibrated the confidence attached to claims; they were not converted into a statistical weight or used to erase contradictory findings. Registered, longitudinal, meta-analytic, and large multilevel evidence received particular attention when evaluating direct-effect or temporal claims, while local cross-sectional studies were used more cautiously to establish contextual plausibility.

Synthesis proceeded through constant comparison across extraction and coding rows. Evidence propositions were first grouped by mechanism and ecological level. Convergent propositions were then consolidated, while null, protective, or contradictory cases were deliberately retained. This process produced three higher-order themes, a twelve-claim evidence matrix, and a six-component integrative model. The themes were accepted only when they could accommodate both supportive and boundary evidence and when their transfer to Türkiye could be stated without converting international findings into local causal or prevalence claims.

The workflow preserved an audit trail from candidate record to inclusion decision, extraction, coding, appraisal, theme, and manuscript claim. Coding was conducted within a single-analyst interpretive workflow rather than an inter-coder reliability design. Analytic consistency was strengthened by revisiting coding decisions during theme development and checking them against the extraction and claim-evidence matrices, while null, protective, and contradictory cases were retained rather than reconciled away. This choice is consistent with the study's interpretive aim, although an independent second coding perspective might reasonably produce different thematic boundaries.

For transparency, the search log, corpus screening record, extraction matrix, codebook, exclusion log, claim-evidence matrix, quality appraisal, and integrative-model specification are provided in Supplementary Dataset S1.

Community-development implications were formulated only after thematic synthesis. They were treated as context-sensitive applications of the identified relational mechanisms rather than as additional empirical findings. This preserved a clear distinction between evidence about school, family, peer, and digital processes and prospective recommendations for coordination with wider community institutions.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Profile and analytic orientation

Risk screening produced an analytic corpus of 25 documents from 34 candidates. Eleven were classified as core empirical studies, seven as higher-level syntheses, and seven as contextual-mechanism sources. Geographically, eight records were Türkiye-specific, one multinational synthesis included prominent Türkiye evidence, and sixteen were international or comparative. The nine excluded candidates were removed because of population mismatch, unverifiable bibliographic identity, insufficient methodological clarity, construct mismatch, or an indirect relationship to the target phenomenon. Their exclusion was recorded rather than erased, preserving the audit trail.

Table 3 identifies the country or evidence context, corpus function, and analytic role of all 25 retained records. The author-year labels remain synchronized with the complete reference-list entries.

Table 3. Geographic composition, corpus function, and analytic role

NO	Source	Country/context	Corpus function and analytic role
1	Aslan et al. (2022)	Türkiye	Türkiye empirical core; social-competence pathway
2	Bardach et al. (2020)	Austria; 788 adolescents	Comparative peer/school mechanism; belonging and non-inclusive group norms
3	Gürkan et al. (2022)	Edirne, Türkiye	Türkiye empirical core; digital aggression and protective media literacy
4	Park et al. (2021)	East Asia; systematic review	International synthesis; macro-sociocultural cyberbullying context
5	Pina et al. (2021)	Spain; 96 primary/secondary students	Comparative qualitative mechanism; violence meaning and normalization
6	Santric-Milicevic et al. (2022)	Serbia	Comparative contextual evidence; behavioural-ecology profile
7	Sevinçli & Eğer Aydoğmuş (2022)	Türkiye; theory-based review	Türkiye contextual mechanism; protective gaming affordances and negative case
8	Shao & Wang (2019)	China; 648 middle-school students	Comparative empirical mechanism; conditional gaming-aggression pathway
9	Yıldırım & Zeren (2021)	Türkiye	Türkiye empirical core; social-support and coping pathway
10	Mroczkowski et al. (2021)	International clinical literature	International synthesis; multifactor violence-risk framework
11	Przybylski & Weinstein (2019)	United Kingdom	International boundary evidence; direct-effect falsification and negative case
12	Drummond et al. (2020)	International	International synthesis; longitudinal negative-case evidence
13	Li et al. (2023)	International	International synthesis; heterogeneous gaming-aggression association
14	Lee et al. (2024)	South Korea	Comparative longitudinal mechanism; socio-emotional pathway
15	Li et al. (2022)	China	Comparative empirical mechanism; peer-school-gaming pathway

16	Li et al. (2021)	China	Comparative empirical mechanism; school-family protective pathway
17	Montero-Carretero et al. (2021)	Spain	Comparative school-climate mechanism; empathy and moral disengagement
18	Waasdorp et al. (2022)	United States	Comparative large-scale climate evidence; bystander roles
19	Pinchak (2024)	United States	Comparative boundary evidence; friendship-network condition
20	Nagar et al. (2025)	Eight countries; Türkiye prominent	Mixed-country synthesis with Türkiye evidence; recent pooled association
21	Han et al. (2022)	International	International synthesis; family and peer frustration mechanism
22	Boz & Dinç (2023)	Türkiye	Türkiye evidence synthesis; national evidence map and gaps
23	Ulaş & Incekara (2026)	Istanbul, Türkiye	Türkiye empirical core; contemporary family-cyberbullying model
24	Karakul & Bozkul (2024)	Southern Türkiye	Türkiye empirical core; gaming-bullying association
25	Köse et al. (2024)	Batman, Türkiye	Türkiye empirical core; gaming-aggression association

The included literature did not yield a single linear sequence from game exposure to student violence. Three distinctions repeatedly altered the interpretation. First, violent-game content, ordinary gaming engagement, and problematic or disordered gaming were not interchangeable constructs. Second, aggression appeared variously as an antecedent, mediator, correlate, and outcome. Third, school climate operated through peer networks, belonging, self-control, and bystander roles rather than as a uniform school-level attribute. These distinctions formed the basis of the three themes reported below.

2. Aggression as a mediated psychosocial process

The first theme relocates aggression from the end of a direct media-effects chain to the middle of a psychosocial process. Across the corpus, problematic gaming was more intelligible when it was considered alongside negative emotion, weak social intelligence, unmet psychological needs, limited social support, peer stress, and family strain. This pattern does not deny an association between gaming problems and aggression. It changes the question from whether games are aggressive to the conditions under which digital engagement becomes bound up with dysregulation and conflict.

The strongest temporal evidence came from a three-year study of 968 adolescent gamers. Negative emotions were associated with lower social intelligence and higher aggression, while social intelligence was inversely related to both aggression and pathological gaming; aggression, in turn, predicted pathological gaming (Lee et al., 2024). This ordering is important because it makes aggression part of the pathway into problematic gaming rather than merely its presumed consequence. Turkish studies of social skills, psychological needs, and perceived support point in a compatible direction, although most remain correlational (Aslan et al., 2022; Yıldırım & Zeren, 2021).

The Türkiye evidence becomes more specific in the moderated mediation model reported by Ulaş and Incekara (2026). Among 601 high-school students in Istanbul, gaming addiction predicted cyberbullying ($\beta = .18$), cyberbullying mediated the relationship with Machiavellian tendencies, and the indirect effect was .15 with a 95% confidence interval from .05 to .25. Parent-adolescent relationship quality moderated the gaming-addiction-to-cyberbullying path ($\beta = .20$). The statistical direction should not be treated as causal because the study was cross-sectional, but the model

demonstrates that family relationships change how problematic gaming is associated with online aggression.

A systematic review of children and adolescents during the COVID-19 period further located gaming problems within relational stress. Peer disconnection, loneliness, lack of supervision, and harsh parenting repeatedly accompanied increased gaming problems, whereas appropriate supervision was protective (Han et al., 2022). Read together, these documents support a social-frustration interpretation: gaming may become a compensatory arena when recognition, relatedness, control, or support are weak. Aggression can then operate as a form of dysregulated coping or as an interactional practice carried into digital relationships.

The theme therefore supports a mediated proposition rather than a direct-effect proposition. Relational strain does not make aggression inevitable, and gaming is not consistently harmful. However, the conjunction of negative affect, weak social competence, low support, and problematic gaming creates a more plausible pathway to cyber-aggression than exposure to violent content alone.

3. Student violence as a relational and institutional process

The second theme treats student violence as a product of relationships, group positions, and institutional organization. Bullying and aggression were repeatedly linked with belonging, non-inclusive norms, peer victimization, moral disengagement, school connectedness, self-control, friendship-network density, and bystander participation. School climate mattered, but not as a single score operating identically across schools. It worked through the social arrangements that made defending, assisting, exclusion, or silence more likely.

The clearest bridge between peer experience, school connection, and gaming came from a study of 698 Chinese adolescents. Peer victimization was associated with problematic online game use through deviant peer affiliation and reduced school connectedness (Li et al., 2022). This model places gaming downstream from strained peer relations and weak school attachment. A separate study of 1,030 pupils found that positive school climate was associated with lower aggression through self-control, with the parent-child relationship moderating the first part of this pathway (Li et al., 2021). Together, the studies show how family and school relationships can operate simultaneously rather than as competing explanations.

The institutional mechanism was also visible in bystander behavior. In a sample of 64,670 middle- and high-school students, more supportive and safer climates were associated with more defending and fewer passive or assisting responses to bullying (Waasdorp et al., 2022). Studies of belonging, social achievement goals, and non-inclusive group norms likewise suggest that peer-group expectations shape who is permitted to aggress, who becomes a target, and how violence is interpreted by observers (Bardach et al., 2020). Qualitative evidence on identity-based school violence adds an important warning: aggression may be normalized, justified, or treated as relationally useful, especially when directed toward marginalized students (Pina et al., 2021).

The corpus nevertheless contains a consequential negative case. Pinchak (2024), using longitudinal data from 11,771 adolescents, found that the expected inverse association between positive school climate and violence depended on friendship-network density. The protective relationship was clearer in schools with less dense friendship networks; dense networks could attenuate or reverse it. This does not make

school climate irrelevant. It indicates that cohesion can transmit supportive norms or reinforce problematic group expectations, depending on the organization of the network.

For Türkiye, this theme exposes a substantive gap. The local literature contains relevant studies of cyberbullying, media literacy, social skills, gaming addiction, and family relationships, but few studies jointly model school climate, peer-network structure, gaming, and student violence. International findings can therefore guide mechanism-building, but they should not be used as Turkish prevalence estimates. The most defensible local research agenda is to test whether school connectedness, peer norms, bystander roles, and family relationships condition the gaming-aggression association in Turkish secondary schools.

4. Gaming as a context-dependent amplifier, coping space, or protective resource

The third theme rests on a distinction that is often blurred in public discussion: violent content is not the same as problematic gaming. A registered study using nationally representative data from 1,004 British adolescents and the same number of caregivers found no association between violent-game engagement and caregiver-rated aggression (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2019). A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies similarly concluded that aggressive game content did not have a substantive long-term association with youth aggression (Drummond et al., 2020). These findings provide high-quality counter-evidence to deterministic content-effect claims.

Evidence concerning gaming disorder is different. A meta-analysis of 24 papers and 30 samples found an overall positive association between Internet gaming disorder and aggression, but also documented substantial variation across regions, ages, gender distributions, measures, and publication years (Li et al., 2023). A more recent synthesis of ten studies involving 11,259 participants reported a pooled correlation of .531 between digital-game addiction and aggression, alongside very high heterogeneity (Nagar et al., 2025). The association is therefore meaningful at the level of problematic use, but its magnitude and interpretation remain context dependent.

The Turkish evidence reflects the same caution. Karakul and Bozkul (2024) reported only a weak positive relationship between digital-game addiction and bullying tendency among 381 secondary-school students. Köse et al. (2024) found a positive association with aggression among 300 school-age children, while Gürkan et al. (2022) showed that cyberbullying was weakly related to smartphone addiction ($r = .288$) and inversely related to media literacy ($r = -.201$) among 431 high-school students. These studies do not support a uniform or large causal effect. They indicate that digital risk is entangled with literacy, self-regulation, family relationships, and the social uses of technology.

The negative cases also matter. A self-determination perspective suggests that games can support autonomy, competence, and relatedness under appropriate conditions (Sevinçli & Eğer Aydoğmuş, 2022). Gaming can consequently be a coping space without becoming disordered, or a social environment that offers mastery and belonging. The relevant analytic question is not whether gaming is good or bad in itself, but what function it serves, how intensively it is used, and which offline and online relationships organize the experience.

Gaming is therefore best described as a conditional amplifier. Where relational strain, dysregulation, deviant peer affiliation, and weak support are present,

problematic gaming may intensify or extend aggression into digital interaction. Where support, literacy, self-control, and need satisfaction are present, gaming may remain recreational or serve a constructive psychosocial function.

5. Integrative interpretation: a socio-relational digital aggression model

The three themes can be integrated into a proposed Socio-Relational Digital Aggression Model. The model is interpretive rather than statistically tested; its purpose is to organize the convergent and contradictory pathways in the corpus without upgrading association to causation.

a. Relational antecedents. Peer victimization, low belonging, weak family relationships, loneliness, unmet needs, and school or academic frustration create the conditions under which gaming may become compensatory or conflict-laden.
b. Function of digital engagement. Ordinary play, violent-content exposure, problematic use, coping, status seeking, and need satisfaction must be distinguished because they do not carry the same behavioral implications.
c. Interactional mechanisms. Aggression, cyberbullying, deviant peer affiliation, moral disengagement, weak self-control, and bystander positioning connect digital experience with school and peer relationships.
d. Violence-related outcomes. Bullying perpetration, cyber-aggression, passive or assisting participation, and broader violence risk are related but distinct outcomes.
e. Relational moderators. Parent-adolescent relationship quality, school connectedness, friendship-network density, media literacy, empathy, and self-control can buffer, redirect, or intensify the pathway.
f. Negative and protective cases. Null violent-content effects, positive need satisfaction, supportive climates, and defending behavior limit deterministic interpretations and strengthen the credibility of the synthesis.

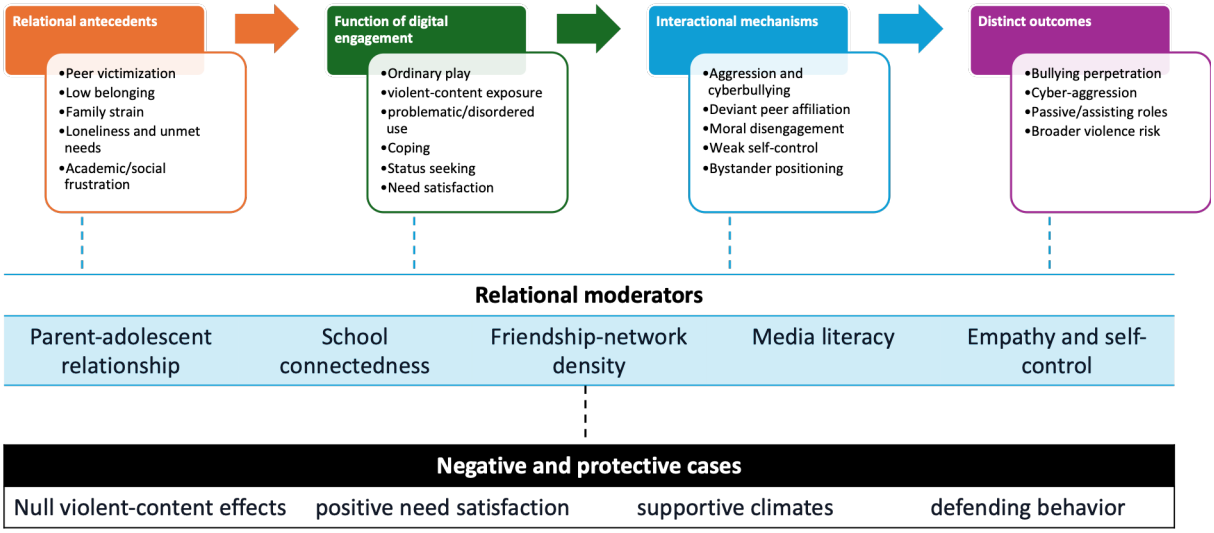


Figure 1. Socio-Relational Digital Aggression Model

This model resolves the apparent opposition in the study title. Digital aggression and social frustration are not mutually exclusive explanations. Social frustration describes the relational conditions that make particular forms of digital

engagement more likely to become aggressive, compulsive, or socially consequential. Digital environments then provide a setting in which existing strain can be expressed, amplified, redirected, or sometimes relieved.

6. From direct content effects to conditional pathways

The synthesis helps resolve a recurrent source of disagreement in the gaming literature. Null or near-null findings for violent-game content and positive associations between problematic gaming and aggression do not necessarily contradict each other, because they concern different exposures and different behavioral processes. The registered report by Przybylski and Weinstein (2019) and the longitudinal meta-analysis by Drummond et al. (2020) weaken the claim that violent content, by itself, produces a substantive rise in adolescent aggression. By contrast, the meta-analytic associations reported by Li et al. (2023) and Nagar et al. (2025) concern problematic or disordered engagement, where intensity, impairment, emotional dysregulation, and social context are already part of the construct. Treating the two literatures as interchangeable inflates apparent inconsistency and encourages causal claims that the measures do not support.

The more coherent interpretation is conditional. Gaming becomes relevant to aggression when it is embedded in negative affect, weak social intelligence, peer stress, low support, or strained family relationships. Lee et al. (2024) is especially important because aggression entered the longitudinal pathway toward pathological gaming rather than appearing only as a downstream consequence. Ulaş and Incekara (2026) likewise showed that the association between gaming addiction and cyberbullying changed with parent–adolescent relationship quality. Social frustration is therefore not an alternative explanation that removes the digital environment from view. It identifies the relational conditions under which digital practices acquire aggressive, compulsive, or compensatory functions.

7. School climate as relational infrastructure

The findings also suggest that school climate should not be interpreted as a general atmosphere positioned outside the behavior under study. It is better understood as relational infrastructure: the patterned organization of safety, belonging, peer expectations, adult response, self-control, and bystander participation. This explains why supportive climates were related to more defending and less passive or assisting behavior in the large study by Waasdorp et al. (2022), and why school connectedness and self-control appeared as mediating mechanisms in studies by Li et al. (2021, 2022). Climate matters because it changes what students expect from one another and what forms of participation become socially available.

Pinchak (2024) network finding prevents this argument from becoming simplistic. Dense friendship networks did not guarantee protection; under some conditions, they weakened or reversed the expected relationship between positive climate and violence. Cohesion can circulate prosocial norms, but it can also strengthen exclusionary expectations or conceal aggression within tightly organized groups. Interventions based only on a school-wide climate score may consequently miss the peer structures through which aggression is normalized, witnessed, resisted, or

rewarded. A socio-relational approach requires attention to network position, bystander roles, and the unequal distribution of belonging.

8. Reading the Türkiye evidence without overclaiming

The Türkiye studies make the proposed mechanism locally plausible, but they do not yet establish a national causal pattern. Local evidence links gaming addiction or smartphone addiction with aggression, bullying, or cyberbullying, while also identifying family relationship quality, media literacy, social skills, psychological needs, and perceived support as relevant conditions. The reported effects range from weak correlations to moderated pathways, and most studies rely on local cross-sectional samples. Their contribution lies less in estimating the size of a national gaming effect than in showing that digital risk is intertwined with family, school, and psychosocial processes in Turkish adolescents.

International evidence can therefore be used as a set of sensitizing mechanisms rather than as a substitute for Turkish data. Peer victimization, school connectedness, bystander behavior, and friendship-network density provide specific hypotheses for local testing. The next empirical step is not simply to repeat another bivariate correlation between gaming addiction and aggression. It is to examine whether the association changes across schools and peer networks, whether family relationships and media literacy buffer the pathway, and whether gaming serves different functions for students experiencing belonging, exclusion, or academic and social frustration.

Table 4. Cross-theme discussion matrix

Theme	Convergent evidence	Boundary evidence	Interpretive implication
Mediated psychosocial process	Negative emotion, weak social intelligence, unmet needs, low support, peer stress, and family strain accompany problematic gaming and aggression.	Direction varies; much Türkiye evidence is cross-sectional, and gaming may follow rather than cause aggression.	Treat aggression as part of a reciprocal or mediated relational pathway, not as an automatic content effect.
Relational and institutional violence	Belonging, norms, victimization, school connectedness, self-control, and bystander roles organize violence participation.	Dense networks can weaken or reverse the expected protection of positive climate.	Assess school climate through peer structures and participation roles, not only through an aggregate score.
Context-dependent gaming	Problematic gaming is positively associated with aggression, while media literacy, support, and need satisfaction can be protective.	Registered and longitudinal evidence finds weak or null direct effects of violent content; pooled estimates are highly heterogeneous.	Distinguish ordinary play, content exposure, intensive use, and disorder before interpreting risk or designing intervention.

Note. The matrix summarizes the interpretive balance between supporting patterns and evidence that limits deterministic or causal conclusions.

9. Theoretical contribution

The corpus supports three conclusions. First, direct violent-content explanations are too narrow: the strongest registered and longitudinal evidence does not show a substantive direct association with adolescent aggression. Second, problematic gaming is related to aggression, but the relationship is heterogeneous and should be interpreted through social, emotional, family, and school conditions. Third, school climate is not merely a protective background characteristic; it organizes peer

networks, bystander roles, belonging, and behavioral norms, and its effect can vary with friendship-network structure.

The main contribution is therefore a change in explanatory level. Rather than asking whether games cause student violence, the socio-relational approach asks how gaming functions within a wider ecology of frustration, support, peer organization, school connection, and digital competence. This formulation accommodates positive, null, and harmful outcomes within one framework and is better aligned with the mixed evidence found in Türkiye and internationally.

More specifically, the proposed model contributes three distinctions. It separates violent-content exposure from problematic or disordered use; it allows aggression to operate as antecedent, mediator, interactional practice, or outcome; and it specifies the mechanisms through which institutional settings matter. These distinctions make it possible to place direct, null, harmful, and protective findings within one explanatory structure without forcing them into a single linear media-effects account. The model remains a document-analysis product rather than a validated causal model, but it offers a clearer basis for selecting variables, temporal order, and levels of analysis in subsequent research.

10. Implications for prevention and educational practice

Several practical implications follow from the socio-relational account. Student assessment should differentiate ordinary recreation, violent-content exposure, intensive play, and clinically or functionally problematic use, because time spent gaming is insufficient as a risk indicator without evidence of impairment, coping function, conflict, or displacement. School responses should also treat peer organization as an intervention target by mapping bystander roles, exclusionary norms, and friendship structures alongside general climate perceptions. In this respect, defender mobilization and safe reporting are likely to be more informative than climate slogans alone.

Prevention should further strengthen relational support rather than rely primarily on restriction. Family guidance can combine proportionate supervision with communication, recognition, and support, since restriction that overlooks loneliness, conflict, or unmet needs may leave the compensatory function of gaming unchanged. Critical media literacy should therefore be developed together with self-control, empathy, conflict resolution, and digital citizenship as connected protective capacities. This integrated approach addresses both online practices and the relational conditions in which aggression becomes meaningful.

11. Limitations and research agenda

This study has several limitations. First, it uses a curated, purposive corpus rather than exhaustive indexed-database coverage, so it should not be read as a systematic review of every publication relevant to gaming and adolescent aggression. The post-hoc indexing audit shows that much of the retained corpus appears in internationally visible sources, but bibliographic visibility is not the same as search provenance and does not substitute for an exhaustive database strategy. Second, retained sources were available at different verification depths. The analysis therefore avoids unverified direct quotations and treats fine-grained comparisons of coefficients cautiously. Third, coding was conducted within a single-analyst interpretive workflow; although the audit trail makes the reasoning traceable, independent coding could yield alternative categorizations or thematic boundaries.

The available evidence also sets clear interpretive boundaries. Most Türkiye studies are cross-sectional and local, which means that their associations should not be rewritten as causal or nationally representative findings. Sixteen retained records were international or comparative and one was a mixed-country synthesis; differences in educational systems, peer cultures, family relations, digital practices, and measurement limit direct transfer to Türkiye. These sources are useful for identifying mechanisms, comparisons, and boundary conditions, but they cannot substantiate Turkish prevalence estimates, effect sizes, or national causal claims. Violent-game exposure, gaming intensity, gaming addiction, Internet gaming disorder, smartphone addiction, cyberbullying, bullying, and physical violence must also remain analytically distinct. Finally, the proposed integrative model is an output of document analysis and requires empirical testing before it can be treated as a validated causal model.

Future research can extend this synthesis in two directions. A formal systematic review could test the breadth of the present corpus through exhaustive indexed-database searching and independent screening. More importantly, empirical work should move toward longitudinal and multilevel designs in Turkish secondary schools, ideally combining student surveys with peer-network data and qualitative accounts of what gaming does for students in different relational circumstances. Measures should distinguish content, intensity, impairment, and social purpose, while models should test family relationships, school connectedness, media literacy, self-control, and friendship structure as moderators or mediators rather than treating them as background controls.

IV. CONCLUSION

The evidence does not require a choice between digital aggression and social frustration. Direct violent-content explanations are too narrow, while associations involving problematic gaming become more intelligible when emotional regulation, family relationships, peer organization, school connectedness, and media literacy are brought into the analysis. Gaming can amplify strain, provide compensatory coping, or support competence and belonging; which function dominates depends on the relational ecology surrounding the student. For Türkiye, the strongest contribution of the present corpus is therefore a testable socio-relational account, not a national causal estimate. Its central proposition is that digital environments do not act independently of school and social life: they are settings through which existing frustrations, supports, identities, and group norms can be expressed, intensified, redirected, or relieved. Because the corpus is Türkiye-centred rather than Türkiye-exclusive, its international evidence should be read as comparative support for mechanisms and boundary conditions, not as a replacement for nationally representative Turkish data. Viewed through the community-development concerns of a Muslim-majority society, the practical implication is a coordinated prevention ecology rather than a religious explanation of violence. Schools can strengthen connectedness and bystander responsibility; families can provide communication, recognition, and proportionate supervision; and youth and community organizations can extend safe belonging, digital literacy, referral pathways, and non-stigmatizing support. Religious and community institutions may participate where locally appropriate, but the present corpus does not estimate their independent effects. Their contribution should be

examined through field-based and participatory research involving adolescents, families, educators, counselors, and community practitioners. This preserves the evidential boundaries of the synthesis while translating the model into an agenda for community empowerment and socio-religious transformation.

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The author used ChatGPT to assist with language editing, structural refinement, organization of the extraction and coding materials, and preparation of the editable conceptual figure. All AI-assisted outputs were reviewed and revised by the author. The author remains fully responsible for source verification, analytical decisions, interpretation, originality, accuracy, and the integrity of the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest
The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data Availability
All data supporting the findings of this study were derived from publicly accessible scholarly and institutional documents cited in the article. The retained corpus, inclusion and exclusion records, extraction matrix, codebook, appraisal results, claim–evidence matrix, and model components are provided in the Supplementary Materials and Supplementary Data S1. No confidential or participant-level data were collected.

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