Supplementary material 1. Peer-review process.

LETTER OF REVIEWERS

Reviewer A:
Recommendation: Revisions Required

Relevance: Moderated

Novelty: Moderated

Presentation and writing: Moderated

Comments for authors:

INTRODUCTION

1. The references are formatted according to the Vancouver style, but the journal requires APA citation. Please revise accordingly.

2. The introduction refers to motivation and community support; however, from a mental health perspective it would be important to include, even briefly, the double-edged nature of this issue. Challenging games can be associated both with adaptive coping (e.g., persistence) and with frustration, avoidance/escape, or problematic use. This would provide a more rigorous basis for the "therapeutic/educational" implications suggested at the end.

3. Conceptual adjustment (SDT vs. clinical constructs). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are linked to "resilience" and "emotional well-being." I suggest explicitly clarifying the theoretical bridge: is resilience understood as a narrative interpretation by the user, as emotional regulation, as self-efficacy, or as another construct? If it is not measured, it should be presented as an emergent theme in players' discourse rather than as an inferred psychological variable.

4. The authors need to specify the research gap more precisely. The statement that "few analyses explore how players experience these dynamics in online communities" is plausible, but it would be useful to clarify whether the gap concerns a lack of qualitative studies, studies focusing on high-difficulty games, or studies specifically examining Reddit.

METHOD

5. I recommend reorganizing the Methods section following the COREQ subheadings for qualitative research. Additionally, I recommend including a COREQ checklist as supplementary material.

6. The method describes selection based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, but key elements for replicability are missing, such as the temporal window (dates), the search strategy (terms used, threads, top posts vs. new posts), the number of threads reviewed to obtain the 82 comments, and whether thematic saturation was considered.

7. The analysis focuses on "comments," but in digital mental health research the conversational context is important (i.e., what the comment is responding to, the tone of the thread, whether social support is being received or offered). I recommend clarifying whether comments were extracted together with minimal context (e.g., the original post) and how this context was handled in the analysis.

8. Braun and Clarke and "initial codes" are mentioned, but important details are missing, including the number of coders, coder training, procedures for resolving discrepancies, the use of a reflexive log

(researcher positionality), and whether any form of audit or triangulation was conducted.

9. It is stated that identifiable information was removed. However, several excerpts refer to intense experiences (e.g., depression, relationship breakup, "bad point in my life"). From a digital mental health ethics perspective, I suggest adding information on the risk of reidentification through verbatim quotations; specifying the criteria used to avoid amplifying sensitive content; and clarifying whether particularly identifiable quotations were paraphrased or shortened.

RESULTS

10. The analysis is organized around the three SDT pillars, which provides clarity but may introduce confirmatory bias. I suggest explicitly reporting whether negative cases emerged (e.g., frustration, toxicity, isolation, compulsive use, hopelessness) and how they were handled analytically. If none emerged, it should be acknowledged that the inclusion criteria may have favored "inspirational" testimonies.

11. The table summarizes comments and their "Relationship with SDT," but it would be useful to indicate the criteria for assignment (e.g., whether a single comment could be assigned to more than one pillar).

DISCUSSION

12. The discussion proposes educational and therapeutic applications. I recommend reframing these as "potential hypotheses for application" and adding cautionary notes. For example, challenging games are not universally beneficial; in populations with depression or anxiety there may be risks of frustration, avoidance, or displacement of daily routines; and in individuals vulnerable to problematic gaming, caution is required. This would improve the clinical responsibility of the manuscript.

13. In the limitations section, I recommend expanding the discussion to include specific biases such as self-selection bias (users who choose to post), desirability or performativity bias (heroic narratives), and cultural or linguistic bias (predominantly English-speaking subreddits).

Interacciones seeks greater transparency in the review process and to provide credit to reviewers. If the editors decide to accept the manuscript, would you like your name to appear as a reviewer of the article?
No

Váscones-Román , F., Quiroz Marcelo, D., Común-Gutierrez, D., Sanchez Torres, D., Vera-Arias, F. (2026). Self-determination theory applied to Dark Souls: fostering motivation in video game communities. *Interacciones, 12*, e479. https://doi.org/10.24016/2026.v12.479

RESPONSE LETTER

INTRODUCTION

1. The references are formatted according to the Vancouver style, but the journal requires APA citation. Please revise accordingly.

The 14 references were corrected according to APA style using Zotero and are indicated in the text using chang control. Other modifications include spaces and periods to organize the citations. French indentation was applied to the bibliography.

2. The introduction refers to motivation and community support; however, from a mental health perspective it would be important to include, even briefly, the double-edged nature of this issue. Challenging games can be associated both with adaptive coping (e.g., persistence) and with frustration, avoidance/escape, or problematic use. This would provide a more rigorous basis for the "therapeutic/educational" implications suggested at the end.

Two new sentences were added to include this recommendation using change control and it can be seen in Introduction section, paragraph 1, page 2: However, video games can affect mental health in ambivalent ways. While challenging dynamics can promote persistence, they can also elicit negative emotional responses, such as frustration or avoidance. Recognizing this dual potential would provide a more balanced basis for therapeutic or educational implications

3. Conceptual adjustment (SDT vs. clinical constructs). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are linked to "resilience" and "emotional well-being." I suggest explicitly clarifying the theoretical bridge: is resilience understood as a narrative interpretation by the user, as emotional regulation, as self-efficacy, or as another construct? If it is not measured, it should be presented as an emergent theme in players' discourse rather than as an inferred psychological variable.

Three new sentences were added to include this recommendation using change control and it can be seen in Introduction section, paragraph 5, page3: Although the satisfaction of these needs is often associated with resilience and emotional well-being, this study does not measure this outcome with psychological or clinical constructs. Instead, they are analyzed as narrative interpretations articulated by players in virtual spaces for open discourse. As such, these emerging themes reflect how players interpret concepts rather than infer psychological processes.

4. The authors need to specify the research gap more precisely. The statement that "few analyses explore how players experience these dynamics in online communities" is plausible, but it would be useful to clarify whether the gap concerns a lack of qualitative studies, studies focusing on high-difficulty games, or studies specifically examining Reddit.

A sentence was modified in order to include this recommendation using change control and it can be seen in Introduction, paragraph 5, page 3: "Although SDT has been widely applied to video game studies, few analyses explore how players experience these dynamics in online communities, particularly in games that emphasize challenge and autonomy, such as Dark Souls" was changed to "Although SDT has been widely applied to video game studies, including analyses of need satisfaction in online multiplayer communities, there remains a gap when talk single-player games with high-difficulty and dark narratives, such as Dark Souls, within community forums for sharing experiences, such as Reddit."

METHOD

5. I recommend reorganizing the Methods section following the COREQ subheadings for qualitative research. Additionally, I recommend including a COREQ checklist as supplementary material.

COREQ couldn't be applicated because this study not use interview or focus group as methodology. However, the authors reorganized the Methods section following The Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) that is more flexible to accommodate to our approach. The following subheadings were added: qualitative approach and research paradigm, researcher characteristics and reflexivity, context, sampling strategy, ethical issues pertaining to human subjects, data collection methods, data units of study, data processing, data analysis and techniques to enhance trustworthiness. In some cases, paragraphs were move in order to present in previous subheadings and text was added in case of not been mentioned before.

6. The method describes selection based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, but key elements for replicability are missing, such as the temporal window (dates), the search strategy (terms used, threads, top posts vs. new posts), the number of threads reviewed to obtain the 82 comments, and whether thematic saturation was considered.

Two new sentences were added to include this recommendation using change control and it can be seen in Methodology section, paragraph 4, page 4: Data collection was conducted between early 2024 and December 2024. A total of 108 threads were obtained. Then, in the same paragraph was added: Thematic saturation was not considered to understand all the thematic patterns in our sample in order to meet the objectives proposed.

7. The analysis focuses on "comments," but in digital mental health research the conversational context is important (i.e., what the comment is responding to, the tone of the thread, whether social support is being received or offered). I recommend clarifying whether comments were extracted together with minimal context (e.g., the original post) and how this context was handled in the analysis.

Two new sentences were added to include this recommendation using change control and it can be seen in Methodology section, paragraph 4, page 4: Because conversational context can shape meaning in digital mental health and social support research, comments were extracted together with minimal context to preserve interpretability (i.e., the original post title and/or the immediate parent post when necessary). Context was used to interpret the function and tone of the comment (e.g., offering support vs. seeking support), without shifting the unit of analysis away from the comment text.

8. Braun and Clarke and "initial codes" are mentioned, but important details are missing, including the number of coders, coder training, procedures for resolving discrepancies, the use of a reflexive log (researcher positionality), and whether any form of audit or triangulation was conducted.

Two new sentences were added to include this recommendation using change control and it can be seen in Methodology section, paragraph 6, page 5: Thematic analysis followed the stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which include familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. The coding process was conducted independently by two authors (FFVR and DAQM), both trained in qualitative analysis. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus.

9. It is stated that identifiable information was removed. However, several excerpts refer to intense experiences (e.g., depression, relationship breakup, "bad point in my life"). From a digital mental health ethics perspective, I suggest adding information on the risk of reidentification through verbatim quotations; specifying the criteria used to avoid amplifying sensitive content; and clarifying whether particularly identifiable quotations were paraphrased or shortened.

Two new sentences were added to include this recommendation using change control and it can be seen in Methodology section, paragraph 5, page 5: Nevertheless, the study acknowledges the potential risk of participant re-identification through verbatim quotations, even when data are publicly available. To mitigate this risk, all direct identifiers were removed, and sensitive or potentially harmful content was avoided. Nevertheless, the study acknowledges the potential risk of participant re-identification through verbatim quotations, even when data are publicly available. To mitigate this risk, all direct

identifiers were removed, and sensitive or potentially harmful content was avoided.

RESULTS

10. The analysis is organized around the three SDT pillars, which provides clarity but may introduce confirmatory bias. I suggest explicitly reporting whether negative cases emerged (e.g., frustration, toxicity, isolation, compulsive use, hopelessness) and how they were handled analytically. If none emerged, it should be acknowledged that the inclusion criteria may have favored "inspirational" testimonies.

Two new sentences were added to include this recommendation using change control and it can be seen in Results section, paragraph 10, page 13: During coding, attention was also paid to potential negative experiences, such as, frustration, social toxicity or feelings of hopelessness. However, no sustained negative cases that contradicted the SDT framework emerged in the analysis, reflecting inclusion criteria that was focus on motivational experiences.

11. The table summarizes comments and their "Relationship with SDT," but it would be useful to indicate the criteria for assignment (e.g., whether a single comment could be assigned to more than one pillar).

Two new sentences were added to include this recommendation using change control and it can be seen in Results section, paragraph 11, page 13: Regarding the categorization in Table 1, the summary of the comments was assigned to SDT components based on their dominant thematic emphasis identified by consensus. Full comments could be analyses in more than one SDT pillar according to the complexity of the experience described by players.

DISCUSSION

12. The discussion proposes educational and therapeutic applications. I recommend reframing these as "potential hypotheses for application" and adding cautionary notes. For example, challenging games are not universally beneficial; in populations with depression or anxiety there may be risks of frustration, avoidance, or displacement of daily routines; and in individuals vulnerable to problematic gaming, caution is required. This would improve the clinical responsibility of the manuscript.

Two new sentences were added to include this recommendation using change control and it can be seen in Discussion section, paragraph 7, page 16: However, challenging video games could not be beneficial for any population. Specific context that control patients with depression or anxiety at risk of frustration, avoidance or displacement that affect functionality is important to enhance potential applications in daily routines.

13. In the limitations section, I recommend expanding the discussion to include specific biases such as self-selection bias (users who choose to post), desirability or performativity bias (heroic narratives), and cultural or linguistic bias (predominantly English-speaking subreddits).

Three new sentences and paragraphs modifications were included to follow recommendations, using change control it can be seen in Discussion section, paragraph 8, page 16: Certain methodological limitations were identified, such as the representativeness of the comments obtained from Reddit and the inherent subjectivity in interpreting them. Since the data comes from a specific platform, the sample may not capture the full diversity of players' experiences, particularly those who don't participate in online forums or who disengage from community discussion. Furthermore, qualitative analysis is subject to the researcher's interpretation, which can introduce biases despite efforts to ensure systematic coding. First, self-selection bias, as the dataset reflects the perspectives of users who may be overrepresented compared to other engaged or motivated players. Second, desirability bias may be present in inspirational terms that align with the community narrative. Finally, cultural and linguistic bias may be present, as the subreddits analyzed were predominantly English-speaking and may reflect different interpretations of challenges, achievements, and motivation.