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Digital Fluency: Why Gamers Might Make Better Communicators

Suciana Wijirahayu*
Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. DR HAMKA
Jakarta, Indonesia
sucianawijirahayu@uhamka.ac.id

Eko Digdoyo
Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. DR. HAMKA
Jakarta, Indonesia
ekodigdoyo@uhamka.ac.id

Retno Hendryanti
Universitas Telkom
Bandung, Indonesia
rehendry@telkomuniversity.ac.id

Asyam Ahmad Fathin
Akademi Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia
Semarang, Indonesia
asyamahmadfathin@gmail.com

Purpose
The study investigated how social media and online games influence student-lecturer interpersonal communication within a campus environment. The research also aimed to identify strategies to mitigate adverse outcomes, such as potential addiction to foster stronger academic relationships and English proficiency.

Method
This research employed a qualitative approach involving 70 Communication Science students in South Jakarta. Data were collected using a combination of semi-structured interviews and 20-item demographic questionnaires. The gathered data were then descriptively analyzed to understand the students' usage patterns and the subsequent impact on their academic communication and social interactions.

Results/findings
Online gaming, a high-stakes Digital Language Lab, enhances English speaking, phonetic correctness, and auditory-based vocabulary, the study found. Instead of rote study, multiplayer gaming requires real-time English application as a strategic tool. Social media boosts collaborative pedagogy, data reveals. These digital platforms allow direct, low-stakes communication with peers and lecturers, reducing the affective filter—the psychological barrier of anxiety—that hinders second-language acquisition in formal contexts.

Conclusion
These findings highlighted the dual nature of digital tools, emphasizing their potential as educational aids despite the challenges of overuse. It is recommended that educators and policymakers develop balanced strategies and informed policies that maximize these linguistic and social benefits while mitigating potential drawbacks to ensure a healthy academic environment.

Keywords
Communication science, meta-gaming; digital adaptation; Perceived Communicative Competence (PCC); student-lecturer interaction

*) Corresponding Author

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Abstrak

Tujuan
Meluasnya integrasi media sosial dan game online telah mengubah pengalaman akademik secara mendasar. Studi ini meneliti pengaruh media sosial dan game online terhadap komunikasi interpersonal mahasiswa-dosen, serta mengidentifikasi strategi mitigasi dampak negatif dan pemanfaatan sisi positifnya untuk hubungan akademik dan kemahiran bahasa Inggris.

Metode
Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif yang melibatkan 70 mahasiswa Ilmu Komunikasi di Jakarta Selatan. Pengumpulan data dilakukan menggunakan kombinasi wawancara semi-terstruktur dan kuesioner demografis yang terdiri dari 20 butir pertanyaan. Data yang terkumpul kemudian dianalisis secara deskriptif untuk memahami pola penggunaan mahasiswa serta dampaknya terhadap komunikasi akademik dan interaksi sosial mereka

Hasil/temuan
Temuan menunjukkan bahwa game online meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara, pelafalan (pronunciation), dan penguasaan kosakata berbasis pendengaran dalam bahasa Inggris melalui lingkungan yang imersif dan interaktif. Lebih lanjut, media sosial terbukti meningkatkan interaksi dengan teman sebaya dan dosen dengan memfasilitasi pembelajaran kolaboratif serta keterlibatan langsung, yang secara efektif meningkatkan kepercayaan diri mahasiswa dalam komunikasi interpersonal menggunakan bahasa Inggris.

Kesimpulan
Temuan-temuan ini menyoroti perangkat digital yang memiliki peran ganda dalam pendidikan. Diperlukan strategi kebijakan yang seimbang untuk memaksimalkan manfaat linguistik dan sosial sembari memitigasi risiko penggunaan berlebihan demi terciptanya lingkungan akademik yang sehat

Kata kunci
Ilmu komunikasi, meta-gaming, adaptasi digital, kompetensi komunikatif yang dirasakan (PCC), komunikasi interpersonal mahasiswa-dosen .

الملخص

الهدف
أحدث التكامل الواسع النطاق لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي والألعاب الإلكترونية تحولًا جذريًا في التجربة الأكاديمية. تتناول هذه الدراسة تأثير وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي والألعاب الإلكترونية على التواصل بين الطلاب والمحاضرين، وتحدد استراتيجيات للتخفيف من الآثار السلبية والاستفادة من جوانبها الإيجابية في العلاقات الأكاديمية وإتقان اللغة الإنجليزية

الطريقة
استخدمت هذه الدراسة منهجًا نوعيًا شمل 70 طالبًا من طلاب دراسات الاتصال في جنوب جاكرتا. جُمعت البيانات باستخدام مزيج من المقابلات شبه المنظمة واستبيان ديموغرافي مكون من 20 بندًا. ثم حُللت البيانات المجمعة تحليلًا وصفيًا لفهم أنماط استخدام الطلاب وتأثيرها على تواصلهم الأكاديمي وتفاعلاتهم الاجتماعية.

النتائج
تشير النتائج إلى أن الألعاب الإلكترونية تُحسّن مهارات التحدث والنطق واكتساب المفردات في اللغة الإنجليزية من خلال بيئة تفاعلية غامرة. علاوة على ذلك، أظهرت الدراسة أن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تُعزز التفاعلات مع الزملاء والمحاضرين من خلال تسهيل التعلم التعاوني والمشاركة المباشرة، مما يزيد بشكل فعال من ثقة الطلاب في التواصل الشخصي باللغة الإنجليزية
الكلمات الرئيسية

الخلاصة
تُبرز هذه النتائج الدور المزدوج الذي تؤديه الأدوات الرقمية في التعليم. لذا، ثمة حاجة إلى استراتيجية سياسية متوازنة لتعظيم الفوائد اللغوية والاجتماعية مع الحد من مخاطر الإفراط في استخدامها، بما يضمن بيئة أكاديمية سليمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية
واحدة؛ الكلمة الأساسية الثانية؛ الكلمة الرئيسية ثلاثة؛ الكلمة الرئيسية أربعة؛ الكلمة الرئيسية خمسة

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has restructured the architecture of human interaction, evolving from a mere utility into the primary ecosystem where students live, learn, and communicate. For the contemporary undergraduate, digital immersion is inextricably linked to academic identity; social media and online gaming are no longer peripheral activities but are deeply woven into the fabric of their daily communicative experience (Wijirahayu et al., 2025). However, a critical scholarship gap remains in understanding the logical continuity between a student's informal digital play and their emerging professional discourse. While prior research has often analyzed technology in isolation or within rigid formal systems (Amin, 2024), there is an urgent need to investigate how these pervasive digital habits reshape interpersonal hierarchies, specifically the delicate student-lecturer dynamic.

This study transcends the traditional, decade-long debate regarding the dual nature of technology—the binary tension between its role as a collaborative asset (Ansari & Khan, 2020) and a cyber-loafing distraction (Yılmaz & Yurdugül, 2018). Instead, the focus shifts toward adaptation over addiction. Current scholarship identifies platforms like YouTube and online gaming lobbies as informal laboratories for language acquisition, where English functions as a dynamic *Lingua Franca* (Wijirahayu et al., 2024). While game-based strategies are known to catalyze productive skills (Asih & Halisiana, 2022), the qualitative transference of these skills into formal academic settings—where nuanced interpersonal communication is the benchmark for success—remains significantly underexplored.

Communication Science students represent the optimal demographic to bridge this gap. Unlike the general student population, these individuals possess an inherent, academically trained awareness of media dynamics and interpersonal signaling. This specialized training affords them a unique level of reflexive agency, allowing them to critically evaluate how digital platforms influence their own communicative competence and social confidence. By focusing on this specific cohort, the research investigates the mechanism by which the informal English of gaming lobbies is recalibrated into the formal register required for successful university-level discourse.

To explore the intersection of digital immersion and academic performance, this research addresses several pivotal questions. How do Communication Science students perceive the role of immersive online gaming in shaping their productive English speaking and auditory processing skills? To what extent do social media platforms recalibrate the ability to interact with peers and lecturers within formal English learning contexts? What are the students' perceptions regarding how these integrated digital ecosystems influence their Perceived Communicative Competence (PCC) and confidence in real-world interpersonal communication?

By pivoting the analytical lens from addiction to strategic adaptation, this study offers a unique contribution to the field. It extends beyond the mechanics of general language acquisition to the functional application of English in high-stakes social interactions. Furthermore, by explicitly exploring how digital platforms influence the often-overlooked student-lecturer hierarchy, this research provides a holistic understanding of the modern academic ecosystem. Through this qualitative depth, the study captures the subjective experiences and meta-gaming strategies of students, offering a nuanced understanding of the motivations behind digital engagement in higher education.

METHOD

The study was conducted at a private university in South Jakarta, involving a cohort of 70 undergraduate students majoring in Communication Science. Participants were selected via purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) active daily engagement with both online gaming and social media, (2) current enrollment in English language courses, and (3) a minimum of two years of undergraduate study in Communication Science. This spe-

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cific demographic was selected not for their tech-savviness, but for their academic reflexivity. As students of communication theory, these participants possess the foundational vocabulary to critically analyze their own interpersonal signaling and code-switching behaviors—a meta-awareness essential for high-quality qualitative data that general student populations may lack.

A two-tiered approach was utilized to achieve methodological triangulation, balancing self-reported habits with deep-dive narratives. First, it is the baseline assessment & self-Perception. A 12-item demographic and usage questionnaire gathered data on platform preference, frequency, and Perceived Communicative Competence (PCC). While recognizing that self-reported proficiency is subjective, this phase served to categorize participants' own confidence levels before the interview stage. Second, it is semi-structured interviews. The core data were derived from in-depth, semi-structured interviews. These sessions followed a standardized protocol focusing on four domains: (a) digital usage patterns, (b) the transition of gaming-specific vocabulary into academic speaking/listening, (c) the evolution of peer and lecturer interactions via social platforms, and (d) the impact of digital play on professional confidence.

To mitigate researcher bias and ensure a systematic interpretation of the data, the interview transcripts were analyzed using the thematic analysis framework. The process involved open coding of transcripts to identify recurring semantic units. Aggregating codes into broader candidate themes related to linguistic adaptation and hierarchy navigation. Reviewing themes against the entire dataset to ensure they represent the students' lived experiences. Reviewing themes against the entire dataset to ensure they represent the students' lived experiences. This systematic coding strategy allowed the researchers to move beyond simple usage statistics, uncovering the specific strategies students employ to bridge the gap between informal digital play and formal academic discourse.

RESULT/FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the nuanced perceptions of Communication Science students regarding the influence of online games and social media on their interpersonal communication skills and English language proficiency. The data collected from 70 respondents yields a rich tapestry of insights, revealing a complex ecosystem where digital leisure and academic necessity intersect. An analysis of the findings derived from the 12-item demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

The analysis moves beyond simple descriptive statistics to explore the lived experiences of students in the digital age. It challenges the binary narrative that views digital tools solely as distractions, proposing instead a framework of Digital Fluency, where students actively repurpose entertainment platforms—specifically Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas (MOBAs) and social networking sites—as informal learning environments. The findings are organized into five major thematic sections: Demographic Profile and Digital Habits; The Impact of Online Games on English Proficiency; The Transformation of Student-Lecturer Communication; The Dual Nature of Digital Immersion; and a General Discussion and Synthesis.

Demographic Profile and Digital Habits: The Rise of the Gamer-Student

To understand the qualitative perceptions of communication, it is first necessary to establish the quantitative reality of the students' digital lives. The landscape of online game users is remarkably diverse, extending far beyond the traditional stereotype of a solitary, isolated player. Today's online gaming communities comprise individuals from various age groups, geographical locations, and socio-economic backgrounds. For Communication Science students in South Jakarta, gaming is not a fringe activity but a central pillar of their social and recreational lives.

Demographic Profile and Digital Habits

The landscape of online game users is diverse, extending far beyond the traditional ste-

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reotype of a solitary player. Today's gaming communities comprise individuals from various backgrounds driven by complex motivations including social connection, competition, and problem-solving. The study confirmed the widespread integration of gaming into student life. As illustrated in the pie chart below, a substantial 77.8% of respondents indicated that they actively play online games. This dominant majority suggests that online gaming is a significant activity to consider when examining communication behaviors.

The Prevalence of Gaming

The widespread integration of online games into students' daily routines as illustrated in Figure 1, a substantial 77.8% of the surveyed respondents indicated that they actively play online games. This statistic is critical; it demonstrates that nearly four out of every five students in the cohort engage with these digital environments.

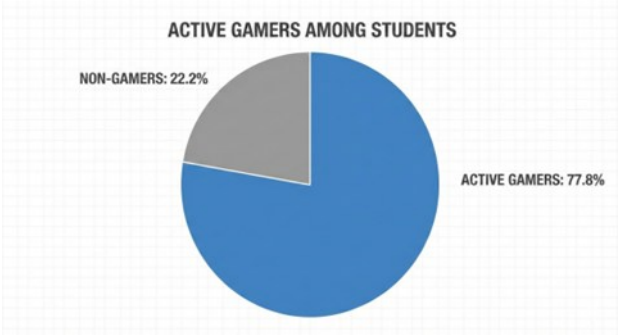

Figure 1. Active gamers among students

This dominance (77.8% vs. 22.2% non-gamers) suggests that online gaming has shifted from a subculture to a mainstream cultural practice among university students in this study. When educators discuss communication behaviors, they must acknowledge that for most students, a significant portion of their daily communication occurs within virtual environments. These users are driven by a complex array of motivations that go beyond mere entertainment, including seeking social connection, engaging in competitive challenges, fostering teamwork, and developing problem-solving skills. The high prevalence suggests that the cognitive and linguistic habits formed in these games inevitably bleed into academic and professional life.

The Impact of Online Games on English Literacy

One of the findings of this study is the potent role of online gaming in English Language Learning (ELL). The data provides compelling evidence that online games serve as immersive, informal learning environments that significantly impact reading, vocabulary, and speaking skills. This supports the concept of incidental learning—learning that occurs as a byproduct of another activity—where the primary goal is winning the game, but the secondary outcome is language acquisition.

The study found compelling evidence that online games serve as immersive, informal learning environments, significantly impacting reading, vocabulary, and speaking skills. The composite bar chart below illustrates how gaming contributes to English literacy. A substantial 41.8% of respondents agreed that understanding game rules directly increased their reading comprehension. Furthermore**,** 46% reported actively searching for vocabulary, and 44% acknowledged learning language from listening to in-game audio. These findings highlight the role of gaming as an active language-learning tool.

Reading Comprehension and Focus

Online games, beyond entertainment, offer indirect but powerful benefits for reading comprehension. Many popular games require active reading to understand objectives, narratives, dialogues, mechanics, and menus. Unlike a textbook, where a student might skim

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text passively, a game forces the player to understand the text to progress (Jabbari & Peterson, 2023).

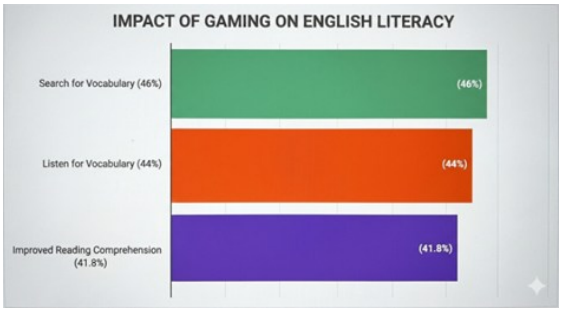

Figure 2. Impact of gaming on English Literacy

A substantial 41.8% of respondents agreed that understanding game rules directly increased their reading comprehension and focus on in-game text. The finding underscores a vital relationship between motivation and literacy. In an educational game or a complex RPG (Role-Playing Game), the text contains the keys to the kingdom—instructions on how to defeat a boss or solve a puzzle. The necessity of comprehending intricate rule sets fosters deeper engagement with written material.

This constant, motivating exposure to in-game text encourages extensive and critical reading. Students engage in what is known as narrow reading—reading multiple texts on the same topic (game lore, item descriptions, patch notes)—which is known to be highly effective for vocabulary acquisition. Educational games further leverage gamified elements to make comprehending written information more engaging, but even commercial entertainment games inadvertently enhance contextual inference skills (Aprilia & Nasekhah, 2023). The data suggests that the cognitive load required to process game text trains students to scan for keywords and infer meaning from context, a skill highly valuable in academic research.

Game Preferences and Communicative Demands

The data regarding game preferences (Figure 3) reveals a sophisticated digital landscape. The students are not engaging in simple, passive clicking games; they are immersed in complex, communicatively demanding genres (Lo, 2024). The most popular titles identified in this study included: MOBAs (Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas): Mobile Legends, Dota 2, Clash Royale. Shooters: PUBG Mobile, Call of Duty Mobile, Valorant. Sports Simulations: eFootball 2023, NBA 2k, FIFA 22. Social Deduction: Among Us. Simulation/Sandbox: The Sims, Growtopia.

Table 1. Video Game Genres and title selected by the scholars in this study

Genre	Game Titles	Developer	Platforms
MOBAs	Mobile Legends: Bang Bang	Moonton	Mobile
	Dota 2	Valve	PC
	Clash Royale	Supercell	Mobile
Shooters	PUBG Mobile	LighSpeed & Quantum/Krafton	Mobile
	Call of Duty: Mobile	TiMi Studio Group (Tencent)	Mobile
	Valorant	Riot Games	PC, Console (PS5, Xbox)
Sports Simulations	eFootball 2023	Konami	PC, Console, Mobile
	NBA 2K	Visual Concepts	PC, Console, Mobile
	FIFA 22	EA Sports	PC, Console, Mobile
Social Deduction	Among Us	Innersloth	PC, Console, Mobile

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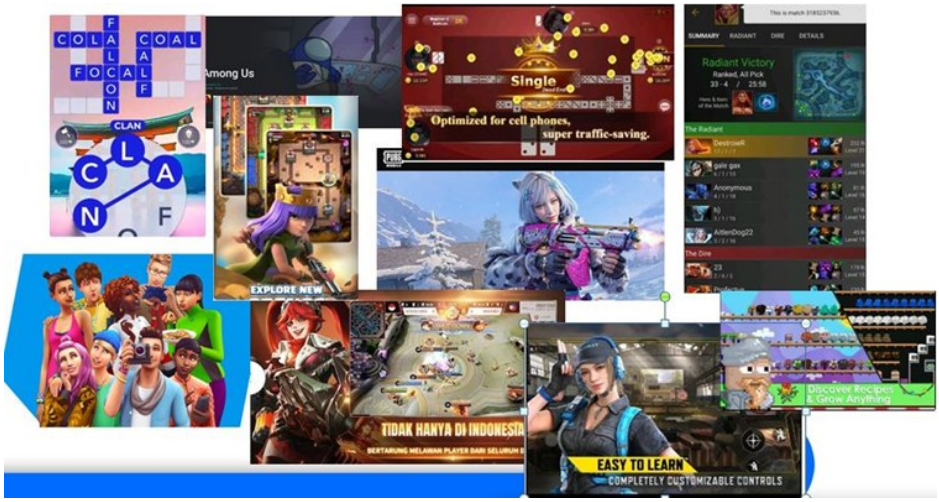

Figure 3. Online Game Selections of Respondents

This broad spectrum of genres suggests participants are exposed to varied communicative demands. For instance, MOBAs like Mobile Legends require rapid-fire strategic communication, often causing the use of English commands (Push, Retreat, Gank) to coordinate team movements. Social Deduction games like Among Us are purely communicative, requiring players to use persuasion, deception, and argumentation to survive—skills that are directly transferable to communication science. Shooters require spatial awareness and immediate reporting of enemy positions.

The diversity shown in Figure 3 shows that students are not just playing; they are operating in complex semiotic domains where success is predicated on the ability to send and receive information efficiently. This aligns with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, suggesting that students select these specific games not just for fun, but to satisfy social and cognitive needs, including the need for affiliation and competition.

Vocabulary Mastery: The Role of Necessity

Vocabulary acquisition is often cited as the most tedious part of language learning. However, online games transform this drudgery into discovery. Figure 2 illustrates that a notable 46% of participants reported actively searching for English words encountered within games to improve their gameplay.

This behavior—stopping a game or using a second screen to look up a word—is a high-agency learning strategy. It shows that nearly half of the students are self-regulating learners (Li, 2021). The motivation here is Pragmatic Necessity. If a student does not know what the word Invincible or Sanctuary means in a game like *Mobile Legends*, they may use an item incorrectly and lose the match. This immediate feedback loop (knowing the word = winning; not knowing = losing) creates a powerful memory anchor.

This supports the Depth of Processing hypothesis; because the students are manipulating the word and using it to solve a problem, they retain it longer than if they had merely memorized it for a quiz. This continuous, low-stakes application of new words fosters significant incidental vocabulary acquisition (Patra & Mahadewi, 2022). Students acquire a specific lexicon—often related to strategy, management, and conflict—that enriches their overall English proficiency.

Auditory Vocabulary Expansion

Beyond textual immersion, online games offer a powerful auditory pathway for expanding vocabulary. Many modern online games feature comprehensive audio tutorials, in-game character dialogues, or voice-overs that explain mechanics and lore. For EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students in Jakarta, this provides invaluable exposure to spoken English in a functional context.

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Figure 2 highlights that 44% of respondents specifically acknowledged expanding their vocabulary through listening to rules and instructions within online games. Players are compelled to process new words and phrases presented auditorily, often reinforced by visual demonstrations (Erya & Taloko, 2023). This dual coding (audio + visual) helps cement the meaning of words. For example, hearing a character shout Retreat! while seeing a visual indicator to move back creates an immediate synaptic link between the sound and the action. This active listening is driven by the immediate need for comprehension to succeed. The data suggests that gaming serves as a form of Listening Lab, providing diverse inputs—different accents, speeds, and registers of speech—that prepare students for the variability of real-world English communication.

Pronunciation and Speaking Skills

Perhaps the most surprising and significant finding lies in the domain of oral proficiency. Traditionally, gaming is viewed as a silent or text-based activity. However, the rise of Voice over IP (VoIP) in games has revolutionized this. A percentage of 50% of respondents directly attributed improvements in their pronunciation to listening to in-game sounds. This mimicry is a natural part of language learning. Students hear high-quality voice acting (often by native speakers) or communicate with international teammates via voice chat. To be understood in the heat of battle, they must mimic the stress and intonation patterns of intelligible English (Öztürk-Taş et al., 2025). This suggests that games provide a safe space for phonological rehearsal, where students can practice sounds without the scrutiny of a classroom teacher. Further underscoring this, 48% of participants agreed that the very act of playing games contributed to the development of their speaking skills. Multiplayer games rely on real-time voice chat, compelling players to articulate clearly and consciously.

This finding aligns with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. In a classroom, anxiety (the affective filter) is often high, blocking language production. In a game, the focus is on the *task*, not the language. The adrenaline and focus on the objective lower the affective filter, allowing students to produce English more freely. The iterative nature of gameplay provides constant feedback; miscommunications directly impact game success, motivating players to refine their speech. This finding supports recent research by Asih & Halisiana (2022) and Primasari et al. (2024), confirming that the high-stakes, low-anxiety environment of gaming is a fertile ground for developing oral fluency and confidence.

The Transformation of Student-Lecturer Communication

Gaming is the engine of linguistic competence, while social media serves as the primary infrastructure for interpersonal connection within the university. The study confirms that social media has altered the landscape of academic interaction, shifting from rigid, vertical hierarchies to more fluid, networked relationships. The study confirms that social media has altered the landscape of academic interaction, shifting from rigid hierarchies to more fluid, networked relationships. The stacked bar chart below visualizes the overwhelming positive consensus regarding social media's impact on academic communication. All respondents agreed social media influences communication, with a high agreement rate of 91% that it enhances learning and discussion. Furthermore, 86% agreed that it impacts inclusive and diverse communication.

The synergy between online gaming and social media creates a multifaceted 'digital third space.' While gaming provides the raw, high-stakes linguistic practice through incidental learning, social media offers the platform for professional curation and networking. Together, they form a continuous feedback loop where Communication Science students do not just 'consume' content, but actively negotiate their professional identities through English. This combined influence suggests that 'Digital Fluency' is not the mastery of a single platform, but the ability to seamlessly bridge the gap between the informal camaraderie of a gaming lobby and the formal expectations of academic discourse.

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The Pervasive Influence of Social Media

The impact of social media on academic life has evolved beyond mere utility into a cemented reality. In a finding rare for social science research, 100% of respondents agreed social media influences communication between students and lecturers, with a striking 77.1% expressing strong agreement. This unanimity underscores a significant paradigm shift. Social media is no longer a supplementary tool; it is the primary environment in which education occurs. In this space, the traditional academic hierarchy is recalibrated. Much like a Guild Leader in a complex online game, the lecturer is perceived not as a distant authority, but as a high-level mentor accessible for real-time strategy and guidance. Effective interpersonal communication—crucial for mentorship—now relies on this digital mediation to bypass the gatekeeping of formal office hours.

This shift allows for a continuity of contact previously impossible in traditional pedagogy (Wijirahayu et al., 2025). By utilizing platforms that mirror their gaming communication habits (such as instant messaging and community threads), students can seek clarification and receive feedback in an Asynchronous Loop. For the lecturer, these platforms provide a HUD (Heads-Up Display) of student needs, allowing for personalized support that feels immediate and relevant. The data suggests that the Digital Campus now functions as a psychological Safe Zone or Spawn Point. For many students, the Affective Filter (anxiety) of a physical classroom is high. Social media provides a lower-stakes environment where they can ping a lecturer for help without the social pressure of a face-to-face confrontation. In this sense, the digital experience is as critical as the physical campus in shaping the modern student's communicative confidence.

Mixed Perceptions and Boundary Issues

While the majority view of social media's impact is positive, 86% of respondents explicitly disagreed that social media always has a positive effect. This minority view is statistically significant as it signals Technostress or negative externalities.

These negative perceptions likely stem from the blurring of professional and personal boundaries. The Always-On culture creates an expectation of availability. Students may feel anxiety if a lecturer does not reply instantly, or conversely. Furthermore, the informal nature of social media can lead to misunderstandings regarding tone and respect (Wijirahayu et al.,2023).

The Erosion of Formality

Almost all participants agreed social media affects the *style* of communication. This implies a linguistic shift toward text speak. The habits formed on these platforms—brevity, use of abbreviations (IDK, TBH), lack of capitalization, and reliance on emojis—can clash with academic expectations. While some researchers argue this is a sign of linguistic evolution, in an academic context, it presents a challenge of code-switching. Students must learn to compartmentalize their linguistic habits, using informal registers for WhatsApp and formal registers for essays. The data suggests social media makes this distinction harder to maintain, as the casual style becomes the default mode of communication (Bobkina & Romero,2022).

Enhanced Learning, Efficiency, and Responsiveness

The utility of this digital transformation is perceived overwhelmingly positively regarding academic logistics and pedagogy. A high agreement rate of 91% suggests a widespread belief that these platforms enhance learning and foster dynamic discussion. Social media dismantles traditional communication barriers (Ansari & Khan, 2020). Platforms like WhatsApp groups or dedicated Discord servers create communities of inquiry where peer-to-peer learning thrives. Students can share resources, debate concepts, and clarify doubts in real-time, often without the direct intervention of the lecturer. This fosters a more collaborative, constructivist learning environment.

Furthermore most respondents in this study agreed that social media speeds up re-

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sponse times and improves communication efficiency. The preference for social media's rapid response times is deeply rooted in the synchronous communication habits developed through online gaming. In a competitive gaming environment, information is mission-critical and instantaneous; players rely on immediate haptic and auditory pings to coordinate complex strategies. This translates into a Push Notification culture in the academic sphere, where students view the temporal lag of traditional email as a form of communication latency that hinders progress.

This expectation of real-time feedback is a primary driver of Teacher Immediacy—the perceived psychological closeness and accessibility of an instructor (Kougioumtzidou et al., 2023). For a generation accustomed to the instant coordination of a Discord server or a gaming lobby, a responsive lecturer on social media mirrors the role of a Guild Leader or Team Captain—someone who is digitally present and actively facilitating the quest of learning. While this immediacy significantly boosts student satisfaction and engagement, it also highlights the challenge of Metacognitive Switching. Students must learn that while a gaming lobby demands responsiveness, the professional academic hierarchy requires a disciplined balance between this digital immediacy and the boundaries of traditional scholarly discourse.

The Dual Nature: Challenges and Negative Impacts

While the benefits of digital integration are transformative, the study reveals a profound Dual Nature to this immersion. The same tools that facilitate rapid connectivity simultaneously foster cognitive fragmentation and the erosion of professional boundaries. It is imperative to analyze these friction points to provide a balanced perspective on digital fluency. As illustrated in the data, a striking 94% of respondents acknowledged that excessive social media engagement leads to a deficit in sustained attention and a marked reduction in focus during direct interactions with lecturers.

This always-on culture, driven by the same instant-response mechanisms valued in gaming and social feeds, appears to cultivate a shortened attention span that is antithetical to the deep work required in higher education. This creates a significant paradox: while students possess a heightened capacity for rapid-fire, synchronous coordination (the gamer advantage), they simultaneously struggle with the linear, prolonged engagement necessary for critical thinking during face-to-face academic exchanges. This tension underscores the urgent need for metacognitive switching, allowing students to consciously transition from the distracted digital mode to the focused academic register.

The Crisis of Attention

The study's most significant challenge is the overwhelming consensus (94%) that excessive digital immersion correlates with a deficit in sustained attention and reduced focus during direct pedagogical interactions. This points to the phenomenon of Continuous Partial Attention, where the cognitive load is perpetually fractured by the always-on nature of digital platforms. Students acknowledged that the instantaneous ping of a notification—a stimulus they are conditioned to prioritize in gaming environments—often overrides the complex cognitive demands of a traditional lecture.

This habituation to rapid-fire stimuli facilitates Cyber-loafing—the use of digital tools for non-academic purposes during instructional time—which acts as a primary barrier to Deep Work (Newport, 2016). The paradox revealed here is that while Communication Science students are evolving into highly efficient multitaskers capable of rapid information processing, they may concurrently lose the capacity for the sustained, singular focus required for complex academic analysis. This finding aligns with the research of Twum et al. (2021) and Yılmaz & Yurdugül (2018), which identifies Cyber-loafing not merely as a distraction, but as a systemic correlate of reduced academic performance in an increasingly fragmented digital landscape.

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Trust, Confidence, and Inclusivity

Beyond efficiency, social media acts as a powerful catalyst for flattening traditional academic hierarchies and democratizing classroom participation. As illustrated in the data, 86% of respondents agreed that these platforms significantly foster more inclusive and diverse communication. In a traditional, high-stakes lecture environment, introverted students or those with lower confidence in their spoken English often remain marginalized (Wibowo, 2021).

The asynchronous nature of social media—allowing for deliberate composition, grammar checking, and reflective posting—effectively removes the performance anxiety of immediate public speaking. This creates a low-stakes digital sandbox where a wider range of voices can contribute to academic discourse, accommodating varied learning styles that are often overlooked in synchronous, face-to-face settings.

Furthermore, a substantial 81.4% of participants identified social media as a primary driver for building interpersonal trust and collective confidence. This phenomenon is driven by Social Grooming—the exchange of memes, personal updates, and casual banter that mirrors the pre-game rapport found in online gaming communities. This informal interaction builds a social capital that traditional academic structures rarely facilitate. When students feel a personal connection to their peers and lecturers, they are more willing to take intellectual risks. This peer-driven dynamic, supported by findings from Flemming et al. (2021), suggests that social media does not just connect users; it cultivates a profound sense of academic belonging, transforming the classroom from a rigid hierarchy into a collaborative, high-trust community.

The Meta Gaming Approach to Education

The transition toward video-centric learning (Zoom, Google Meet, and YouTube) is not merely a post-pandemic shift but an extension of the Meta-Gaming culture prevalent among Communication Science students. In the gaming world, players rarely rely on static manuals; instead, they engage in autonomous research—watching high-level streamers, analyzing Let's Play videos, and participating in live Discord strategy sessions to master complex mechanics.

For a gamer, a Zoom or Google Meet session mirrors the Synchronous Coordination of a gaming lobby. The preference for Chat-based Questions over verbal interruption reflects the Text-Ping communication style used in competitive play, where rapid, non-intrusive text updates allow for coordination without breaking the flow of the mission. This digital-first participation reduces the affective filter, allowing students to apply the same confidence they feel in a gaming squad to their academic interactions.

The near-universal reliance on YouTube (94%) reflects a shift from passive consumption to Active Meta-Learning. Just as a player uses YouTube to understand a game's meta (the most effective tactics available), these students use the platform to deconstruct English proficiency and Communication Theory. Unlike a linear textbook, YouTube offers a multimodal, interest-driven experience. Whether they are watching a gaming stream in English or a technical review, the language is learned as a utility to unlock deeper knowledge.

Finally, the view of YouTube as a Global Learning Community reflects the Guild or Clan structure of online gaming. This is Connectivism in its purest form: learning by connecting to specialized nodes of information across a global network (Wijirahayu et al., 2024). By engaging in comment sections and international community posts, students are essentially participating in a Global Co-op Mission. They are not just learning English; they are practicing Global Englishes within a worldwide network of peers, moving beyond the classroom to become active citizens of a digital, English-speaking world.

Integration of Pedagogical Approaches and Student Agency

The enthusiasm and high engagement rates reported by the students underscore the importance of incorporating student voices into educational strategy. As highlighted by

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Özgüleş et al. (2021), understanding student perceptions is crucial for evaluating pedagogical effectiveness. The findings here suggest that students do not view gaming and social media merely as distractions, but as vital third spaces for learning and socialization.

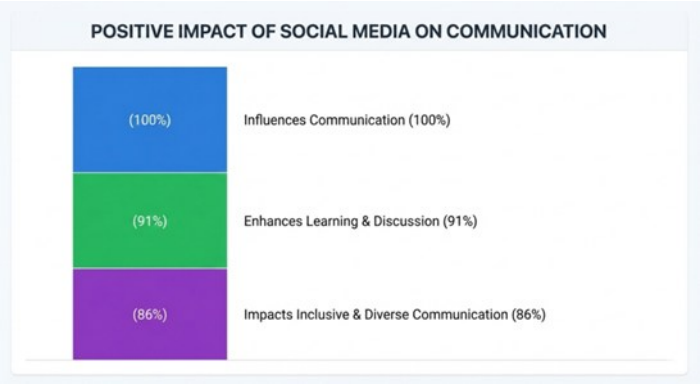

Figure 4. Positive impact of social media on communication

The study supports the findings of Sugahara & Cilloni (2021), who found that game-based learning positively influences student engagement. The fact that nearly half of the students are voluntarily learning English vocabulary to succeed in games suggests a massive, untapped reservoir of intrinsic motivation. Educators have the opportunity to leverage this by integrating Games into the curriculum—using the mechanics of games (progress bars, badges, leaderboards) or the content of games (analyzing narratives, using gaming jargon) to make learning more relevant.

Theoretical Implications: The Digital Zone of Proximal Development

Theologically, the findings align with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Online games and social media communities act as More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs). In a game, a student is often paired with players of slightly higher skill or language ability. To survive, they must interact within their ZPD, stretching their linguistic capabilities. Similarly, Teo et al. (2022) found that teacher immediacy in technology-enhanced classrooms boosted engagement. This study confirms that social media is the primary vehicle for this immediacy, reducing the psychological distance between learner and instructor.

The Need for Digital Fluency

Ultimately, the Communication Science students perceive these platforms as dual-natured. On one hand, they offer accessible, motivating, and low-pressure avenues for practicing English as a Lingua Franca—enhancing speaking, vocabulary, and confidence (Wijirahayu & Roza, 2022). The Gamer is not a passive consumer but an active problem-solver and language learner. The Social Media User is not an isolated individual but a node in a vibrant, global learning network.

On the other hand, the effective integration of these tools necessitates mindful use. The challenge lies in mitigating the cyber loafing and attention deficits identified by the 94% of respondents. The path forward is not prohibition—which is impossible given the 100% usage rates—but regulation and literacy.

This leads to the concept of Digital Fluency. True digital fluency is not just knowing how to use the tools, but knowing when and how to use them effectively. It involves the metacognitive ability to switch between the casual register of social media and the formal register of academia (Park, 2017). It involves the discipline to use Focus Modes to combat attention fragmentation.

The findings of this study suggest that Higher Education institutions must move beyond simply providing access to technology. They must now focus on teaching the management of technology (Chen, 2023). By establishing clear digital etiquette charters, inte-

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grating gamified learning to harness intrinsic motivation, and openly discussing the pitfalls of addiction and distraction, educators can help students navigate this complex ecosystem. In doing so, they can ensure that the Gamer and the Scholar are not conflicting identities, but complementary facets of the modern, communicative learner.

Integration of Pedagogical Approaches The enthusiasm reported by Communication Science students regarding digital tools underscores the importance of incorporating student voices into educational strategy. As highlighted by Özgüleş et al. (2021), understanding student perceptions is crucial for evaluating pedagogical effectiveness. The findings here suggest that students do not view gaming and social media as distractions, but as vital third spaces for learning.

Game-Based Learning Potential The study supports Sugahara & Cilloni (2021), who found that game-based learning positively influences student engagement. The fact that nearly half of the students are voluntarily learning English vocabulary to succeed in games suggests that educators can leverage this intrinsic motivation. By integrating gamified elements or acknowledging the gamer lexicon in class, lecturers can build stronger rapport and relevance.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that for Communication Science students, the digital landscape is not merely a supplement to academic life but a foundational environment for linguistic and social evolution. By analyzing the intersection of online gaming and social media, the research reveals a profound shift in how students acquire English and navigate institutional hierarchies. While the sample size of 70 students offers a localized snapshot, the qualitative depth of the data provides a compelling look at Incidental Learning and Digital Fluency. With 77.8% of participants active in gaming—and half identifying these spaces as primary language labs—it is evident that the high-stakes, synchronous demands of a gaming lobby serve as a powerful catalyst for Perceived Communicative Competence (PCC).

However, this immersion presents a Cognitive Paradox. The same Always-On culture that fosters Teacher Immediacy and democratizes the classroom through Social Grooming also facilitates Cognitive Fragmentation. The overwhelming 94% consensus regarding reduced attention spans suggests that while students are mastering Rapid-Fire Processing, they are simultaneously struggling with the Linear Engagement required for Deep Work. This tension between the speed of a digital ping and the depth of academic analysis is the defining challenge of modern Communication Science.

Educators should move beyond simple game mechanics and instead leverage the Meta-Gaming habits of students—their natural inclination for autonomous research, tactical coordination, and connectivist learning—to bridge the gap between informal play and professional discourse. To mitigate the Always-On strain, universities must implement protocols that define the boundaries of digital interaction. These Charters protect the focus of both students and faculty while maintaining the democratized, inclusive benefits of social media. The ultimate goal of the modern curriculum should be to train students in the conscious ability to transition between the utilitarian register of a gaming lobby and the nuanced, formal register of scholarly inquiry. The successful Communication Science student is no longer defined by a singular mode of focus, but by their Digital Agility. By reframing the narrative from distraction to adaptation, this study asserts that the future of the field lies in mastering this hybrid identity—utilizing the global connectivity of the digital world while reclaiming the cognitive discipline necessary for academic excellence.

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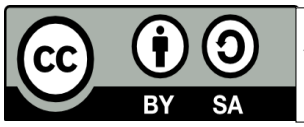

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