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# The Influence of Digital Media on Interpersonal Communication among University Students

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### ABSTRACT

Digital media has significantly transformed interpersonal communication, particularly among university and diploma students. This review study investigates the influence of digital media on students' communication behaviors, interpersonal relationships, and overall social dynamics through a systematic analysis of Scopus-indexed literature. Using a scoping review methodology, the study aims to identify research trends, challenges, and opportunities concerning how digital media, including social media platforms, shapes interpersonal communication. Findings indicate that while digital platforms offer increased connectivity, they also contribute to the decline in face-to-face interactions. High dependence on digital communication can lead to weaker interpersonal bonds, social isolation, and feelings of loneliness despite constant online presence. Media Richness Theory supports this by emphasizing the lack of immediate feedback and contextual cues in digital interactions, which are vital for effective communication. Furthermore, students are increasingly using informal communication styles influenced by digital platforms, which may affect their communication competence in academic or professional settings. The study also highlights the contrasting roles of active versus passive social media users. Active engagement fosters interpersonal interactions, while passive usage correlates with higher levels of social anxiety. This aligns with Communitarian Theory, which underscores the importance of shared values and community engagement in enhancing social well-being. Despite the drawbacks, digital media also presents opportunities. When used mindfully, it can foster self-awareness and meaningful connections. The review suggests that students need to balance online and offline interactions to maintain healthy communication patterns. Over-reliance on digital platforms for both academic and social purposes can negatively impact academic performance and traditional interpersonal skills. In conclusion, the study calls for the promotion of digital literacy and self-regulation among students to maximize the benefits of digital media while mitigating its adverse effects on interpersonal communication.

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## 1. Introduction

The extensive growth of digital media in daily life has eventually introduced new scopes to interpersonal communication. University students in the present are native to digital media as most students are familiar with digital media in both personal and academic contexts. Platforms such as social media, messaging apps, and video calls are examples of tools which have become essential for academic, social, and professional interactions. Nonetheless, the impact of digital media and the depth of interpersonal communication among this group remains a topic of scholarly debate. Many previous studies explored the impact of digital media on university students' communication but there remains a lack of comprehensive analysis on how digital media influences interpersonal communication across different dimensions such as communication behavior and styles, psychological and social implications, and challenges in interpersonal communication. There is lack of in-depth research on the shaping of interpersonal communication behaviors using digital media such as adaptability, responsiveness, and conversational depth. The nonverbal clues, tone, and context in digital settings remains unexplored.

On the other hand, there is insufficient synthesis on how psychology affects students in forming interpersonal relationships as existing studies are only highlighting the positive and negative psychological effects of digital communication. Besides that, previous studies also focused on the advantages and disadvantages of digital communication. Thus, few studies highlight the challenges students face in maintaining meaningful interpersonal communication. Hence, this review aims to associate findings from Scopus-indexed studies to give a thorough understanding of this trend.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Communication Behaviour and Styles*

All online applications such as Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp, WeChat, and other communication channels are categorized as social media [1]. Most demographic groups on social media are university students. Digital media is used for diverse purposes such as for communication and connectivity with family and peers. The frequent use of social media may provide a shift in communication patterns. Students are increasingly depending on digital platforms for interaction, leading to shorter, asynchronous, and informal communication styles. Features like emojis, memes, and GIFs are used to express emotions and reinforce messages. Studies highlight how these tools enhance clarity and emotional resonance but may reduce linguistic depth in conversations [2]. According to Manurung *et al.*, (2024) [3], social media users use informal language, playful tone, incorporate memes and audio suit their demographic. The findings also showed that social media users express themselves and maintain social relevance through social media apps such as TikTok. Meanwhile, social media platforms are based on specific norms. For instance, Instagram adopts visual storytelling, while WhatsApp is used for direct and personal communications [4]. The language used on social media is also known as narcissistic language, which refers to the way words, images, and posts are used to create attention on the users [5]. For instance, university students often use words and images that can gain admiration from others.

Narcissistic language on social media refers to the way some people use words, images, and posts to focus attention on themselves. It is a form of communication where individuals emphasize their achievements, appearance, or lifestyle to gain admiration and validation from others. The style of communication differs from virtual style. Students use exaggerated captions to promote self and frequently use "I" or "Me" which shows self-centered communication. [5] claimed that online communication style varies with the degree of narcissism. Another communication behavior is the

absence of physical cues in digital communication often results in misinterpretations, particularly in conflict scenarios. However, video-based platforms like Zoom and Snapchat have mitigated this limitation to some extent [6].

## *2.2 Psychological and Social Implications*

Social media allows social values and immersion of community. Moreover, it fosters values such as respect for diversity and active involvement in civil matters. In a study on the impact of using Facebook and Instagram in promoting Citizenship values among Arab students at Jordanian universities indicated that social media promotes social ideals and enhances citizenship among Arab students at Jordanian colleges [7]. Hence, this finding shows that social media highly influences the level of participation and community involvement among students. Nonetheless, students use social media either passively or actively. The passive use of social media initially creates social anxiety among students, while active use can reduce it. Students who actively use social media often post content, comment, or like others' posts. In contrast, students who are passive merely browse or consume content without any interactions [8]. Hence, it is considered a matter of choice among students. In a study by Weeks and Cody [9], the finding revealed that students who use social media more actively display higher level of mindfulness compared to those who use passively. According to Weeks and Cody [9] concluded that mindfulness or being conscious of the surroundings and self could alleviate the negative effects of social comparisons. Thus, this highlights that an active engagement promotes self-awareness and conscious interaction with others and environment. This can enhance interpersonal communication which emphasizes the vitality of mindful interaction in digital platforms for healthier social relationships.

## *2.3 Challenges in Interpersonal Communication*

Students who are highly engaged in social media interactions are likely to experience challenges in face-to-face interactions. This can lead to physical distance even when students are in a similar context. A previous study found out that social media platforms promote social interaction among university students, but it creates a physical distance among them in a face-to-face meeting or an event [10]. Similarly, Bo and Xiao [11] claimed that college students frequently engage in interpersonal communication through social media platforms and thus, the campus interpersonal relations appeared to be a crisis due to the change of this communication mode. Apart from these views, few previous studies claimed that students demonstrate diverse perspectives on the impact of social media on their interpersonal relationships, with some viewing it as advantageous and others considering it harmful. A study on social media usage for academic purposes among medical students highlighted that students gain benefit from social media and are aware of its positive and negative influence on interpersonal communication [12]. Likewise, another study on the impact of social networking sites on study habits and interpersonal relationships at the tertiary level found that the frequent use of social networking platforms had a negative influence on their study habits and interpersonal interactions [13].

## **3. Methodology**

This study analyzed literature related to the influence of digital media or social media on interpersonal communication or social interactions among university students through a systematic

search and selection process. The coping review is a suitable method to quickly identify research trends and results related to the research topic.

### *3.1 Search Strategy*

The search included keywords such as “digital media”, “interpersonal communication”, “social media effects”, and “communication behavior of university students”. A comprehensive search was conducted in Scopus. Articles published between 2019 to 2024 were considered, focusing on empirical studies, theoretical analysis and meta-analyses.

### *3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

The inclusion criteria are relevance, and studies addressing university students. This include the section of empirical and theoretical studies that are directly related to the research topic. The existing studies focused on university students and their interpersonal communication behaviours in digital contexts. Moreover, empirical studies, theoretical analyses, and meta-analyses focusing on digital media influence on social interactions and communication styles are included. Also, studies written in English and published in peer-reviewed journals or conference proceedings.

The exclusion criteria are studies focusing exclusively on the technical aspects of digital media rather than its influence on communication. Also, non-peer-reviewed articles, opinion pieces, and editorials. Furthermore, studies centered on younger students (K-12) or non-university populations are also excluded.

### *3.3 Selection Process*

The study selection followed a systematic process where first it started with database search and initial screening. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, and duplicate records were removed. Next, the full-text review where the remaining articles were assessed based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies that did not focus on university students or lacked discussion on interpersonal communication were excluded. To systematically analyze the influence of digital media on interpersonal communication among university students, the literature was classified into three primary aspects of interpersonal communication: communication behavior and styles, emotional and social effects, and the impact on relationship dynamics. The journals on examining how digital media affects students' communication styles, adaptability, and conversational depth are selected. Furthermore, journals analyzing the emotional and social effects of digital media on interpersonal relationships are also chosen. Finally, articles on identifying barriers such as reduced nonverbal cues, miscommunication, and dependency on digital interactions are selected.

This approach ensured a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted effects of digital media, aligning with the study's objectives. By categorizing the literature into these three aspects of interpersonal communication, this review effectively synthesized diverse perspectives on how digital media influences university students' social interactions. To ensure a balanced perspective, the review considers both the benefits (e.g., enhanced social connectedness, accessibility, and self-expression) and challenges (e.g., reduced nonverbal cues, miscommunication, and social anxieties) of digital media. The findings are categorized into communication behavior and styles, psychological and social effects, and the challenges in interpersonal communication, providing a holistic understanding of how digital media shapes university students' interpersonal interactions.

## 4. Findings and Results

**Table 1**

Illustrates the findings of the review

Aspects	Findings	Supporting References
<i>Communication Behaviour and Styles</i>	• Social media controls communication habits.	[14]
	• Informal communication reduces linguistic depth.	[15]
	• Distinct norms are used for interpersonal interactions on digital platform.	[16]
	• Students use self-centered communication.	
	• Lack in physical cues in digital communication, but video-based platforms suggest solutions.	
<i>Psychological and Social Implications</i>	• Social media encourages civic engagement	[17]
	• Passive users experience higher social anxiety.	[18]
	• Active users foster mindfulness, enhancing interpersonal communication.	
<i>Challenges in Interpersonal Communication</i>	• Frequent use of social media increases physical distance.	[19]
	• Decline in traditional interpersonal interaction among students.	[20]
	• Diverse view on social media as beneficial and detrimental to interpersonal skills.	
	• High -dependent on social media inhibits academic and social interaction.	[21]

The findings demonstrated in Table 1 show a high reliance on digital communication can weaken interpersonal connections among students. Students may experience a sense of loneliness or isolation despite being highly connected online. By promoting self-awareness and a conscious connection with one's environment, active social media use has the potential to enhance interpersonal communication.

## 5. Conclusion

Social media redesigns communication habits, as evident in students' reliance on informal communication styles. Ishii *et al.*, (2019) [22] highlighted the Media Richness Theory developed by Daft *et al.*, (1986) [23] which claimed that digital platforms often lack immediate feedback, physical cues, and rich contextual information found in face-to-face communication. Besides that, active users of social media strengthen interpersonal interactions while passive users correlate with higher social anxiety [24]. This is aligned with Communitarian Theory, which emphasizes the role of shared values in fostering collective well-being. Finally, online interactions can both enhance and hinder relationships. Students found the benefits of connectivity against the costs of reduced traditional interactions. Hence, the over-reliance on social media for academic and social purposes also supports findings from. In conclusion, students need to have self-control in social media usage as over consumption of it can have an impact on academic performance and interpersonal relations. The effective use of social media needs guidance and thus, educators and policymakers are required to develop approaches to monitor students to balance their social media use. This helps students to engage in more face-to-face interactions while minimizing distractions and social anxiety.

## 6. Implications

Educators can address the potential drawbacks for students to engage in fragmented conversations by incorporating training on digital literacy and communication skills. This can help students to balance digital and face-to-face communication. Policymakers could use the insights from this study to create guidelines or regulations that promote healthy and responsible social media use, particularly in educational settings. This study opens the door for further research into how different types of social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) impact communication in varied contexts. Researchers could also investigate the long-term effects of social media on communication patterns, particularly in the post-graduate or professional stages of life, shedding light on the long-term effects of digital media on workplace interactions, relationship-building, and social adaptability. Exploring cross-cultural perspectives on digital media's role in shaping communication behaviors could also offer deeper insights into global trends and variations.

Further studies could also analyze how AI-driven communication tools, such as chatbots and virtual assistants, impact interpersonal interactions and whether they contribute to or hinder authentic communication. Moreover, cross-cultural research could examine how digital media shapes communication behaviors in different cultural contexts, providing insights into global variations in social interactions. Future studies could also investigate the role of digital media in shaping students' emotional intelligence and empathy levels, assessing whether digital communication enhances or diminishes these skills over time. By expanding research in these areas, scholars can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how digital media influences human interaction in an evolving technological landscape.

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