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ONLINE COMMUNICATION AS PARTICIPATORY CULTURE: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AT VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY – HO CHI MINH CITY

*(Komunikasi dalam Talian sebagai Budaya Partisipatori:
Kajian Kes terhadap Pelajar Universiti
di Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City)*

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital media has reshaped fundamentally contemporary communication practices, particularly among university students. Drawing on Henry Jenkins' theory of convergence culture, this study conceptualises online communication as a form of participatory cultural practice among students at Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City. Using a cross-sectional survey of 538 students across seven member universities, the study examines patterns of media convergence, content creation, online community participation, and collective knowledge-sharing. The findings indicate that students actively engage in multi-platform communication and content production, reflecting a convergence-driven media environment. Online communities function as key sites of participatory culture, facilitating collective meaning-making, peer-based support, and informal learning, while also generating normative pressures and ambivalent experiences. By framing online communication as participatory culture rather than passive media use, this study extends Jenkins' theoretical framework to a non-Western higher education context and contributes to cultural studies on youth digital practices in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Online communication, participatory culture, media convergence, collective intelligence, Vietnam National University.

ABSTRAK

Perkembangan pesat media digital telah mengubah secara fundamental amalan komunikasi kontemporari, khususnya dalam kalangan pelajar universiti. Berpandukan teori budaya konvergensi oleh Henry Jenkins, kajian ini mengkonseptualisasikan komunikasi dalam talian sebagai satu bentuk amalan budaya partisipatori dalam kalangan pelajar di Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City. Dengan menggunakan tinjauan keratan rentas melibatkan 538 orang pelajar daripada tujuh universiti anggota, kajian ini meneliti pola konvergensi media, penghasilan kandungan, penyertaan dalam komuniti dalam talian, serta perkongsian pengetahuan kolektif. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar terlibat secara aktif dalam komunikasi pelbagai platform dan penghasilan kandungan, sekali gus mencerminkan persekitaran media yang didorong oleh konvergensi. Komuniti dalam talian berfungsi sebagai ruang utama budaya partisipatori yang memudahkan pembentukan makna secara kolektif, sokongan berasaskan rakan sebaya, dan pembelajaran tidak formal, namun pada masa yang sama turut menghasilkan tekanan normatif dan pengalaman yang bersifat ambivalen. Dengan menanggapi komunikasi dalam talian sebagai budaya partisipatori dan bukannya penggunaan media secara pasif, kajian ini memperluas kerangka teori Jenkins dalam konteks pendidikan tinggi bukan Barat serta menyumbang kepada kajian budaya berkaitan amalan digital belia di Asia Tenggara.

Kata kunci: *Komunikasi dalam talian, budaya partisipatori, konvergensi media, kecerdasan kolektif, Vietnam National University.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the Internet and digital media platforms over recent decades has profoundly transformed how individuals communicate, engage in social interaction, and participate in community life. In digital environments, communication is no longer constrained by spatial or temporal boundaries; instead, it unfolds within highly connective spaces where interactions are archived, reproduced, and disseminated at scale (Castells, 2010). International scholarship suggests that online communication is not merely an extension of traditional communication. Rather, it represents a distinct mode of interaction shaped by platform architectures, algorithmic systems, and online community norms (van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018). Within such environments, norms concerning politeness, communicative responsibility, social presence, and privacy are being redefined, leading to profound changes in how individuals present themselves and maintain social relationships. Consequently, online communication should be approached as a cultural practice closely tied to processes of meaning-making, value negotiation, and the reconfiguration of social relations.

Studies on youth in Southeast Asia show that digital spaces have become arenas in which young social actors negotiate social norms, assert generational identities, and restructure power relations in everyday life (Lim, 2020; Nissen, 2022). These transformations are particularly pronounced among university students – a social group situated at a critical transitional stage between education and professional life, and simultaneously a key driving force in society's digital transformation. Within the context of higher education, changes in online communication culture not only affect interpersonal relationships among students but also shape academic environments, teacher–student interactions, and students' capacity to participate in academic and social forums. Differences in digital communication mindset and practices across generations have also exerted cultural tensions, underscoring the need for in-depth studies that can account for these transformations from a cultural studies perspective (Turkle, 2015).

In Vietnam, although there have been initial studies on the Internet, social media, and the youth, there remains a notable lack of research examining university students' online communication culture as a socio-cultural phenomenon embedded within specific institutional contexts, historical conditions, and local cultural characteristics (Krisnuwardhana, M. E., & Arimi, S., 2025). This gap highlights the necessity of investigating Vietnamese university students' online communication culture to elucidate their role as active cultural agents in the construction of norms, meanings, and communicative forms within contemporary digital society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online communication culture amongst the youth has assumed a tremendous proportion of scholastic interest at a global level, hence a ubiquity of inquiry in the context of global digital transformation. Such a tendency is mainly due to the shift of social interactions from physical spaces to online environments for altering the means of communication and interactive norms of people. In this regard, constructing meaning and organizing social relations have invited significant attention from academia over the world. In increasingly prevalent contemporary scholarly approaches, the Internet is no longer viewed merely as a communication tool; rather, it is conceptualized as a distinctive socio-cultural environment in which communicative norms, modes of expression, and social relationships are restructured (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Kaul, 2012).

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the development of the Internet and social media has contributed to the formation of online communities, enabling individuals to connect and interact beyond spatial and temporal boundaries (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). Within these communities, technology does not merely mediate communication but actively shapes how young people perceive social presence, communicative responsibility, and their own positionality in online interactions. As a result, online communication has increasingly been approached as a cultural practice closely intertwined with technical conditions, platform architectures, and specific socio-cultural contexts. However, most studies adopting this perspective remain at the level of describing changes in communication practices, without sufficiently analysing the active participatory role of young people in constructing and negotiating communicative norms.

Another important line of research focuses on the growing role of youth in content creation and circulation on digital media platforms. Research shows that young people are increasingly engaged in producing, sharing, and reconfiguring content, thereby contributing to the shaping of contemporary cultural trends (Radwan, 2022; Esteban & Rubio, 2024). The rise of image- and video-oriented platforms has accelerated a shift from text-based communication to visually driven and highly symbolic forms of expression (Truong Nguyen Khanh Dan et al., 2025). Within this context, communicative practices such as "seen but not replied," reacting with icons, or minimal responses have gradually been accepted by young people as common communicative norms, reflecting an emphasis on brevity, convenience, and expressive efficiency (Baym, 2015; Herring, 2007). From a cultural studies perspective, these practices should not be understood as isolated communicative behaviours, but rather as outcomes of collective processes of meaning-making and norm negotiation within digital media environments.

Nevertheless, research on online communicative norms has largely approached these phenomena from behavioural or media ethics perspectives, emphasizing risks such as generational conflict, declining politeness, or diminished communicative responsibility (Prensky, 2001; Helsper & Eynon, 2010). While such approaches help illuminate cultural tensions emerging in digital society, they do not fully explain the mechanisms of participatory culture through which young people actively form, sustain, and adjust new communicative norms. Challenges such as cyberbullying, misinformation dissemination, or privacy

violations are often framed within risk management paradigms, rather than being examined as integral components of participatory practices shaped by expressive power and platform structures (Song, 2017; Zou et al., 2024).

Alongside studies on norms and risks, the concept of digital identity has been widely employed to analyse how young people present themselves in online environments. Existing research suggests that online communication is closely linked to strategic self-presentation processes, whereby individuals actively manage the impressions they convey through choices of platforms, content, and expressive forms (Huang et al., 2021; Holmberg et al., 2018). Self-presentation on image-oriented platforms such as Instagram or TikTok has contributed to the emergence of a communication culture that prioritizes form and symbolic expression, while also influencing the development of personal and generational identities (Allen, 2019). However, most studies on digital identity remain focused at the individual level, without situating identity formation within participatory cultural contexts where identities are co-constructed through interaction, feedback, and recognition from online communities.

A synthesis of these research trajectories reveals a significant theoretical gap. Although youth online communication has been examined from multiple perspectives, there remains a lack of studies that conceptualize online communication as a participatory cultural practice in which young people are not merely recipients of technological influence but active co-creators of meanings, norms, and communicative forms. This gap is particularly evident in the Vietnamese context, where in-depth studies of university students' online communication culture - as a distinct social group embedded within higher education institutions and shaped by local cultural characteristics - remain limited. Addressing this gap, the present study proposes to employ Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture as a central analytical framework to examine how students at Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City participate in the formation and transformation of online communication culture. This approach shifts the analytical focus from assessing the impacts of social media toward exploring everyday communicative practices, thereby highlighting students' roles as active cultural agents within contemporary digital society.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

The rise of digital media has profoundly transformed the contemporary communication landscape, particularly for young people – a social group that is simultaneously the recipient of media influences and an active agent in the construction of new communicative forms, norms, and cultural meanings. Analysing these transformations requires a theoretical framework capable of capturing the complexity of technological convergence, the active role of audiences, and the reconfiguration of cultural practices within digital environments. In this context, Henry Jenkins' theory of convergence culture provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for examining the transformation of youth communication culture in the digital age (Jenkins, 2006). The theory centres on the interrelationship among three key concepts: media convergence as a structural context, participatory culture as a mechanism of cultural operation, and collective intelligence as a mode through which participation is manifested in digital media environments. In this regard, convergence is conceived as a cultural shift in the behaviours and expectations of media audience rather than a mere flow of content across multiple media platforms or the intersection of technologies and media industries (Jenkins, 2006).

Within the context of media convergence, users – particularly young people – frequently move across different platforms, connect diverse media forms, and construct meaning through everyday communicative

practices. This approach enables an analysis of how Vietnamese university students navigate the digital media ecosystem while simultaneously expressing their identities, values, and viewpoints across different online communicative spaces.

One of Jenkins' core contributions lies in his emphasis that media convergence is not simply a technological change, but a cultural transformation that reshapes how audiences interact with media and with one another. Accordingly, the concept of participatory culture describes a context in which the boundary between media producers and consumers becomes increasingly blurred (Jenkins, 2006). Within participatory culture, audiences are no longer passive recipients but active participants engaged in creating, sharing, commenting on, and reconfiguring content, while simultaneously constructing communicative norms and meanings through online interaction (Jenkins, 2006). This perspective is particularly well suited to the study of Vietnamese university students' online communication culture. Rather than viewing students as subjects merely affected by social media, participatory culture theory conceptualizes them as active cultural agents who contribute to the formation of communicative norms, expressive forms, and social relationships within digital environments. Practices such as content creation and sharing, participation in online communities, and the use of symbols, images, and minimal responses in everyday communication can thus be understood as forms of cultural participation through which students negotiate meaning, express identity, and sustain social cohesion.

In addition to participatory culture, the role of collective intelligence in digital media contexts is also emphasized. Collective intelligence refers to the capacity of online communities to knowledge pool, experience, and distributed resources to develop shared understanding, solve problems, and generate new forms of knowledge. Jenkins (2006) argues that in complex media environments, no single individual possesses all the necessary knowledge; rather, knowledge is produced through cooperation and sharing within social networks. Social media platforms and online communities therefore become crucial spaces for the operation of collective intelligence, particularly in students' learning activities, information exchange, and problem-solving processes.

From this perspective, Jenkins' theory enables the integration of technological, cultural, and identity dimensions in the study of youth communication culture. Online communication culture is not merely the outcome of platform design or individual behaviour, but the product of participatory practices in which students interact with technology and communities while continuously negotiating communicative norms and values. This approach is especially relevant in the Vietnamese context, where students are simultaneously influenced by global media flows and actively adapt and transform them in accordance with local cultural and social conditions.

Based on Jenkins' participatory culture framework, this study applies an analytical model focused on several key dimensions to guide data collection and analysis. First, participatory culture is examined through students' levels and forms of engagement in online communities, content creation and sharing activities, and patterns of everyday communicative interaction on social media. Second, collective intelligence is analysed through the ways students share knowledge, support one another in learning, and develop shared understanding within online spaces. In addition, the study examines the integration and multi-platform use of media devices in students' online communicative practices as an expression of convergence culture. The combination of these dimensions allows the study to elucidate how convergence culture and participatory culture are actualized in the everyday communication practices of students at Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City.

Research Methodology

Guided by Henry Jenkins' theory of convergence culture, this study adopts a qualitative-oriented research design to interpret online communication as a set of participatory cultural practices among students of Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM). A cross-sectional survey is conducted to capture students' self-reported communicative practices, patterns of participation, and engagement across digital platforms within VNU-HCM's member universities, including University of Social Sciences and Humanities (HCMUSSH), University of Science (HCMUS), University of Technology (HCMUT), International University (HCMIU), University of Information Technology (UIT), University of Economics and Law (UEL), and University of Health Science (VNUHCM-UHS). An Giang University and VNU-HCM's satellite campus at Ben Tre Province are not statistically eligible for they situate in other provinces apart from Ho Chi Minh City, which scarcely relates to the research's scope. In this regard, the population of the research is the total number of students in the said 7 member universities in 2024: N=86.504 (Table 1).

Table 1

Number of Students Enrolling in Formal Training Program at VNU-HCM by Annum

Institution	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
University of Technology (HCMUT)	20,955	23,957	23,987	23,715	23,696	116,310
University of Science (HCMUS)	13,792	15,270	17,062	15,911	15,883	77,918
University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH)	10,942	11,753	13,291	14,839	16,543	67,368
International University (HCMIU)	5,656	6,323	7,566	8,259	8,510	36,314
University of Information Technology (UIT)	5,988	7,038	8,123	8,757	9,235	39,141
University of Economics and Law (UEL)	7,619	8,674	9,936	10,097	10,927	47,253
An Giang University	7,413	9,262	9,308	10,347	10,998	47,328
University of Health Sciences	1,043	1,137	1,248	1,711	1,710	6,849
VNU-HCM Branch Campus in Ben Tre Province	19	49	80	93	108	349
VNU-HCM (Total)	73,427	83,463	90,601	93,729	97,610	438,830

Source. VNU-HCM.

Applying the formula of Yamane (1967), the sample size is calculated with the margin of error at 5%, hence the confidence level at 95%. In this regard, the minimum sample size provided by the formula $n = N / [1 + N \times (e^2)]$ is estimated at 398. To ensure the expected confidence level, 538 responses were collected via random sampling, whose criteria include respondents' age group (18 or above), status of enrolment (currently studying at one of the surveyed universities), and their consent of the survey.

The survey link is distributed via online platforms, including students' email, social media, and internal communication channels provided by the studied universities and faculties. The questionnaire consists of four sections designed in line with Jenkins' theoretical framework: demography; Internet use for communicative purposes (media convergence); content creation and community engagement

(participatory culture); and the evaluation of online communication and shared knowledge practices (collective intelligence), comprising a total of 22 questions. After gathering and refining data, statistical analysis is conducted via Excel.

The research is also in alignment with research ethical proceedings regulated by USSH, VNU-HCM. All participation is voluntary and anonymous, recognising participants not merely as respondents but as active social actors whose communicative practices constitute the core analytical material of the study; all data are used exclusively for academic purposes. Participants have the right to refuse or withdraw from the survey at their will at any time without any cost.

FINDINGS

Media Convergence

The survey data collected from 538 university students reveals distinct and in-depth manifestations of each theoretical pillar in the current landscape of digital communication. Regarding Internet usage time, students at VNU-HCM reported an average of approximately 7.17 hours per day, with a median value of 6 hours/day and a mode of 5 hours/day (Table 2). Furthermore, 97% agreed with the view that online communication – via Internet-connected devices for activities such as chatting, calling, browsing social media, studying, and content creation – has become a dominant mode of interaction in their daily lives. This suggests that the Internet has emerged not merely as a technological medium but as a primary participatory communication space in which students routinely negotiate interaction, meaning, and social presence in everyday life.

Table 2

Summary Statistics of Respondents' Daily Internet Use (hours per day)

Description	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max	Median	Mode
Daily hours spent on the Internet	538	7.17	3.148	2	24	6	5

Source. Authors' team.

Survey results showed that 76.2% of students used smartphones as their main device for online communication, while personal computers accounted for 23%, and other devices represented a marginal proportion (Table 3). This illustrates technological convergence as a cultural condition, in which multiple media platforms are integrated into students' everyday communicative practices rather than functioning as isolated technical tools.

Table 3

Distribution of Preferred Devices for Internet Use

Device	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Ranking
Cellphones	410	76.2	1
Laptops/desktops	124	23.0	2
Tablets	4	0.7	3
Total	538	100%	

Source. Authors' team.

Notably, 97.4% of respondents reported that they frequently used multiple devices simultaneously, with the most common combination being smartphones (64.1%) and personal computers (81.8%) (Table 4 and Table 5). This is strong evidence of a multi-platform media environment, in which data continuously flows without being restricted to any specific device.

Table 4

Concurrent Use of Multiple Devices for Internet Communication

Statement	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I use multiple devices concurrently (cellphone(s), laptop(s), tablet(s), etc.) to communicate on the Internet.	524	97.4	14	2.6
Total	N=538		100%	

Source. Authors' team.

Table 5

Devices for Concurrent Online Communication

Device	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
Laptops/Desktops	440	81.8	1
Cellphones	345	64.1	2
Tablets	133	24.7	3
Wearables	131	24.3	4
Gaming consoles	22	4.1	5

Source. Authors' team.

Multitasking capacity in communication was also notably high among students, with an average multitasking score of 5.38 out of 10, and 25% of respondents scoring 7 or higher (Table 6). This reflects a key skill of convergence - the ability to simultaneously process information from multiple sources - an essential aspect of contemporary communication environments.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of Multitasking during Online Communication

Description	Mean	Std. Dev
Degree of multitasking while communicating on the Internet (texting, consuming media content, working, etc.)	5.38	2.117

Source. Authors' team.

Participatory Culture

The majority of surveyed students (92.8%) engaged in content creation or production on online platforms (Table 7). Facebook, Zalo, YouTube, Google Workspace and TikTok were identified as the most used platforms, serving diverse purposes including social connection, content sharing, learning, entertainment, and even business.

Table 7

Participation in Content Creation on Social Media Platforms

Statement	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I have participated in creating content on social mediated platforms	499	92.8	39	7.2
Total	N=538		100%	

Source. Authors' team.

Importantly, almost all of these students (99.3%) participated in online communities such as fanpages, forums, social media groups, or fandoms (Table 8). The level of engagement in these communities is relatively high: the modal interaction scores range from 5 to 8, with some students scoring as high as 9 to 10. These findings indicate that students are not merely passive content consumers; rather, they actively create, share, and discuss content, thereby participating in the ongoing construction and negotiation of communicative norms within digital environments.

Table 8

Participation in Online Communities as a Form of Digital Engagement

Statement	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I have participated in online communities (groups, forums, fandoms, fanpages, etc.)	534	99.3	4	0.7
Total	N=538		100%	

Source. Authors' team.

In addition, 81.8% of students confirmed having participated in online collaborative projects such as video production, blogging, or online group learning activities (Table 9). This highlights their dual role as “prosumers” (producers and consumers), a central concept in Jenkins’ notion of participatory culture. Participation thus goes beyond entertainment and social connection, extending into meaningful contributions to shared digital spaces, where individuals actively shape and co-construct the digital media environment. The average self-reported contribution scored to online communities is 5.7 out of 10, with the mode at 5.

Table 9

Prevalence of Participation in Online Collaborative Projects

Statement	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I have participated in online collaborated projects (group projects, video production, blogging, social activities, etc.)	440	81.8	98	18.2
Total	N=538		100%	

Source. Authors' team.

The results revealed a strong orientation toward participatory content creation among students, with written posts (86.6%), images (83.5%), and videos (77.3%) being the most common formats (Table 10). This pattern reflects a convergence-driven participatory culture in which students actively appropriate accessible media forms to express ideas, share experiences, and engage with online audiences. The relatively limited use of memes and podcasts suggests that participation is shaped not only by creativity but also by platform affordances, skills, and perceived communicative effectiveness, aligning with Jenkins' view of participation as culturally and technologically conditioned.

Table 10

Media Format Choices among Social Media Content Creators

No.	Media format	I tend to choose		I do not tend to choose		Ranking
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
1	Post (written content)	466	86.6	72	13.4	1
2	Photo	449	83.5	89	16.5	2
3	Video	416	77.3	122	22.7	3
4	Meme	64	11.9	474	88.1	5
5	Podcast	137	25.5	401	74.5	4

Source. Authors' team.

Table 11

Perceived Feelings during Participation in Online Communities

No.	Feelings	Agree		Disagree		Ranking
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
1	Supported	396	73.6	142	26.4	4
2	Heard/empathized	386	71.7	152	28.3	3
3	Judged/criticized	290	53.9	248	46.1	2
4	Nothing	205	38.1	333	61.9	1

Source. Authors' team.

The findings suggest that online communities function as key sites of participatory culture among students. A majority answered feeling supported (73.6%) and heard (71.7%), indicating that communication in these spaces enables collective meaning-making and peer-based knowledge exchange, consistent with Jenkins' notion of collective intelligence. At the same time, the proportion of students who felt judged or criticized (53.9%) highlights the ambivalent nature of participation, where empowerment and normative pressure coexist within digitally mediated communication practices (Table 11).

Collective Intelligence

The element of collective intelligence is clear in this study, as 53.5% of respondents frequently sought academic support or life advice from online communities (Table 12). These communities function as distributed knowledge networks where students can learn, ask questions, and receive assistance from peers and other users. Additionally, the impact of these online interactions on individual cognition was notable, with an average score of 5.7 out of 10, indicating that a significant proportion of students perceive online engagements as influential in shaping their thoughts, decision-making, and perspectives.

Table 12

Seeking Informational and Emotional Support via Online Communities

Statement	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
When I encounter difficulties in learning and daily matters, I seek advice and consultation from online communities.	288	53.5	250	46.5
Total	N=538		100%	

Source. Authors' team.

Table 13

Knowledge Acquisition through Online Communication

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
By communicating on the Internet, I tend to gain new knowledge of various fields (e.g.: scholastic, aptitude-related, hobby-related, etc.)	6.54	2.183

Furthermore, the average score of 6.54 for acquiring new knowledge (academic, skills-based, or hobby-related) through online communication reinforces the notion that the Internet serves not only as an information channel but also as an effective space for informal learning (Table 13). This represents a distinctive form of collective intelligence, in which knowledge and understanding emerge through distributed interaction, reciprocal feedback, and shared meaning-making rather than from any single individual.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study not only reaffirm but also extend Henry Jenkins' framework of convergence culture by empirically demonstrating how its three pillars – media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence – are enacted as everyday communicative practices among Vietnam National University students. These pillars are not abstract theoretical constructs but lived realities that shape how young people engage with digital media in everyday contexts.

The data underscore the profound integration of technology into students' communicative behaviours, reflecting the logic of technological convergence. The dominance of smartphones and the simultaneous use of multiple digital devices exemplify not merely technological ubiquity, but a convergent cultural logic in which communication practices flow fluidly across platforms as part of students' everyday meaning-making. This aligns with Jenkins' assertion that media convergence is both a top-down corporate process and a bottom-up consumer-driven phenomenon. Vietnamese students, like their global peers, demonstrate agency in how they appropriate and combine digital tools to meet diverse communicative needs. However, this convergence is not without tensions; multitasking and continuous connectivity may lead to cognitive overload, blurred boundaries between study and leisure, and issues of digital well-being – raising important questions for future research on media literacy and digital health.

In terms of participatory culture, the study illustrates that students are not merely passive recipients of online content but active contributors and co-creators. Their involvement in online communities, collaborative projects, and user-generated content production signals a shift in how knowledge, creativity, identity, and communicative norms are collectively negotiated within digital spaces. This participatory ethos also suggests that young people are developing new forms of civic engagement and digital citizenship, which resonate with recent scholarship emphasizing the political and pedagogical dimensions of participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2006). In the Vietnamese context, such participation occurs within specific socio-cultural frameworks where collectivist values, peer validation, and online anonymity may shape how students interact and express themselves online.

The third pillar, collective intelligence, is evident in students' reliance on online communities for problem-solving, emotional support, and knowledge acquisition. This practice reflects a reconfiguration of authority and expertise, wherein distributed peer-to-peer networks challenge traditional hierarchies of information and redistribute discursive power within youth communication cultures. The findings support the idea that collective intelligence can democratize access to knowledge, especially for populations with limited institutional resources. However, this also necessitates critical awareness of misinformation, echo chambers, and the varying credibility of online sources - factors that are particularly salient in educational and policy discussions on youth media engagement.

These insights carry several implications. For educators, there is a pressing need to integrate critical digital literacy into curricula, not merely as a technical skill set but as a means of fostering reflective, ethical, and participatory engagement with media. For policymakers, understanding how youth construct meaning and community in digital environments can inform more inclusive and responsive strategies for education, public health, and civic participation. Additionally, digital platforms and technology developers should consider how their designs can better support meaningful interaction, equitable participation, and mental well-being among young users. These implications further underscore the need to conceptualize youth online communication not as a deficit to be corrected, but as a participatory cultural system to be understood.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the online communication culture of students at Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City through the theoretical lens of Henry Jenkins' convergence culture, focusing on the interrelated dimensions of media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence. By integrating empirical survey data with cultural analysis, the study offers insight into how youth communication practices are shaped and transformed within contemporary digital environments.

The findings indicate that online communication among Vietnamese university students constitutes a culturally embedded practice rather than a purely technological or individual phenomenon. Students' intensive use of multiple devices and platforms reflects not only technological convergence but also a cultural logic in which communication flows seamlessly across media spaces as part of everyday meaning-making. While this convergence enables flexibility and connectivity, it also introduces challenges related to cognitive overload, blurred boundaries between academic and personal life, and digital well-being.

Concerning the second pillar, the study articulates the role of participatory culture in students' online communication. Students are not passive consumers of digital media but active participants who create, share, and negotiate content, meanings, and communicative norms within online communities (Muhammad Alee Abdullah Song, 2025). These participatory practices illustrate a shift toward

communication as a process of collective meaning-making, shaped by peer interaction, platform affordances, and socio-cultural context. In Vietnam, such participation is embedded within local cultural conditions, including collectivist orientations and the importance of social recognition, thereby extending Jenkins' framework beyond its original Western settings.

The dimension of collective intelligence further reveals how students rely on distributed online networks for learning, problem-solving, and emotional support. Knowledge and authority emerge through interaction and shared experience rather than centralized sources, highlighting both the empowering potential and the risks of misinformation within participatory environments.

Despite limitations related to self-reported data and cross-sectional design, this study contributes to communication and cultural studies by conceptualizing youth online communication as a participatory cultural system. It underscores the need for future research employing qualitative and longitudinal approaches, as well as for educational strategies that foster critical, ethical, and reflective participation in digital communication.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare no potential conflict of interest concerning the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting this study are not publicly available due to confidentiality agreements and participant privacy but may be provided by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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