



Analysis of Communication Ethics Violations in Digital Public Sphere Interactions: A Case Study of the Mobile Legends: Bang Bang Lobby Chat

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Abstract

The rapid growth of online gaming has transformed the Lobby Chat feature into a digital public sphere where users communicate, exchange information, and establish social relationships. Nevertheless, the openness of this communication space has also facilitated various forms of communication ethics violations. This study aims to analyze communication ethics violations within the Lobby Chat feature of Mobile Legends: Bang Bang from the perspective of the digital public sphere. A qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design was employed. Data were collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal recurring violations of communication ethics, including careless message delivery, conflict-provoking content, inadequate privacy awareness, impolite language, and inappropriate responses to negative interactions. These practices are driven by limited digital literacy, weak emotional self-regulation, competitive gaming culture, and insufficient platform moderation. The study extends the application of the digital public sphere framework to online gaming by demonstrating that communication ethics are shaped through the interaction of individual behavior, institutional support, and platform governance. Strengthening digital literacy, character education, and adaptive moderation mechanisms is essential to fostering a safer, more inclusive, and ethically responsible digital communication environment.

Keywords: Communication Ethics, Digital Literacy, Digital Public Sphere, Lobby Chat, Mobile Legends: Bang Bang.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of information and communication technologies has fundamentally reshaped patterns of social interaction by transforming conventional face-to-face communication into digitally mediated exchanges that transcend spatial and temporal boundaries, thereby creating an increasingly interconnected communication ecosystem. This transformation has fostered the emergence of the digital public sphere as a discursive arena in which individuals express opinions, negotiate identities, exchange information, and construct social relationships through diverse internet-based platforms (Wahyudi et al., 2024). Habermas's conception of the public sphere has consequently evolved beyond its original physical context into a digital environment that enables public deliberation, participation, and opinion formation within virtual communities (Habermas, 1991). The expansion of digital public spaces indicates that the quality of online interaction is determined not only by technological accessibility but also by the ethical standards governing communication among users. Digital communication has therefore become more than a medium for information exchange, functioning instead as a mechanism through which social norms, collective values, and patterns of interaction are continuously negotiated and reproduced. These developments position communication ethics as a critical issue because the sustainability of digital public spaces ultimately depends on users' capacity to engage in respectful, rational, and inclusive communication (Angga et al., 2023).

The development of the digital public sphere is no longer confined to social networking platforms, discussion forums, or instant messaging applications, but has increasingly expanded into online gaming environments that provide real-time communication features and facilitate continuous interaction among players. *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* represents one of the most prominent multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) games where lobby chat and in-game chat functions enable

players to communicate before, during, and after gameplay, thereby fostering complex virtual social interactions (Wijaya & Paramita, 2019). These communication features demonstrate that online games have evolved into virtual social spaces where players establish communities characterized by spontaneous, highly competitive, and context-dependent communication practices (Putra, 2023). Unlike interactions on conventional social media platforms, communication within competitive online games is often shaped by time pressure, strategic decision-making, and emotional intensity, all of which influence the way players express themselves toward others. Such characteristics make online gaming environments particularly relevant for examining how ethical norms are practiced, negotiated, and violated within digitally mediated interactions. This perspective suggests that online games should no longer be understood merely as entertainment platforms but as digital public spheres that reflect broader patterns of communication and social behavior in contemporary society.

Previous studies consistently demonstrate that communication within online gaming environments is frequently characterized by toxic behaviors, including verbal abuse, flaming, insults, provocation, hate speech, and other forms of impolite language that negatively affect both gaming experiences and interpersonal relationships among players (Fauzan et al., 2021). Recent research further reveals that communication practices within MOBA communities exhibit recurring patterns of verbal impoliteness driven by competitive pressure, user anonymity, and limited social accountability, resulting in the normalization of communication ethics violations within gaming culture (Sembiring et al., 2025). Studies focusing on female gamers likewise indicate that discriminatory communication and gender-based harassment remain persistent forms of unethical interaction in competitive online games (Maharani et al., 2024). Despite these important contributions, existing scholarship has predominantly emphasized the identification of toxic behavior or its psychological consequences without sufficiently conceptualizing online game chat as a digital public sphere where communication norms and democratic participation are continuously constructed and contested. The current body of literature also tends to regard in-game chat as a supplementary gameplay feature rather than as a meaningful social space that deserves independent scholarly attention from the perspective of communication ethics. As a result, the relationship between the characteristics of the digital public sphere, player interaction, and communication ethics violations remains insufficiently explored, leaving significant conceptual and empirical gaps that warrant further investigation.

The limited attention devoted to communication ethics within online gaming environments has become increasingly problematic because communication violations in digital public spaces generate consequences that extend beyond individual gaming experiences and influence broader patterns of digital interaction. Empirical studies have shown that verbal abuse has become a recurring sociolinguistic phenomenon among *Mobile Legends* players, reflecting the normalization of aggressive language as a communicative strategy rather than an isolated behavioral deviation (Almajid, 2019). Similar tendencies are evident in recent investigations demonstrating that hate speech and toxic communication within MOBA games emerge through repetitive interactional practices that gradually shape collective communication norms within virtual gaming communities (Meric, 2026). Such conditions indicate that communication ethics violations should not merely be interpreted as emotional reactions during gameplay but as manifestations of broader social processes occurring within contemporary digital public spheres. The persistence of these practices raises concerns regarding the declining quality of digital communication, particularly among young users who engage intensively with interactive online platforms. This situation also highlights the necessity of examining online game communication through an interdisciplinary perspective that integrates digital communication ethics, public sphere theory, and virtual interaction studies to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Practical responses implemented by digital platform providers demonstrate that communication ethics violations have become a pressing concern requiring systematic intervention rather than isolated moderation efforts. The removal of the Global Chat feature in *Clash of Clans* and the deactivation of the All Chat feature in *League of Legends* illustrate how game developers have attempted to reduce toxic communication by restructuring interaction mechanisms within their platforms (Clash of Clans Wiki, 2019). At the regulatory level, Indonesia has reinforced legal protection against digital communication misconduct through Law Number 1 of 2024 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions, although its implementation continues to face challenges related to enforcement and the dynamic nature of online communication practices (Republik Indonesia, 2024). Recent legal analyses

similarly emphasize that cyber regulations alone cannot effectively address communication ethics violations without being accompanied by stronger digital literacy and ethical awareness among platform users (Aprilianti, 2024). Existing research has also highlighted the importance of strengthening digital communication competencies to encourage responsible participation within digital environments, particularly among younger generations who dominate online interactions (Simbolon et al., 2024). Despite these initiatives, the effectiveness of institutional policies and regulatory frameworks remains insufficiently understood when examined within the specific communicative context of multiplayer online games, leaving substantial opportunities for empirical investigation.

This study is positioned to address these conceptual and empirical gaps by examining the *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* lobby chat as a digital public sphere in which communication ethics are continuously negotiated through everyday player interactions. Rather than treating toxic communication solely as an individual behavioral problem, this research conceptualizes communication ethics violations as products of interactional dynamics that emerge within a virtual public sphere characterized by openness, anonymity, competition, and instantaneous communication. The research adopts a qualitative case study approach to identify patterns of communication ethics violations, interpret their meanings within the context of digital public sphere theory, and explain how these interactions reflect broader transformations in digital communication culture. The findings are expected to enrich theoretical discussions concerning the application of Habermas's public sphere theory within interactive gaming environments while extending contemporary scholarship on digital communication ethics beyond the dominant focus on social media platforms. From a methodological perspective, the study demonstrates the relevance of qualitative communication analysis for understanding naturally occurring interactions in virtual gaming spaces, thereby offering a richer analytical framework for future digital communication research. Ultimately, this research contributes to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of online games as significant social communication arenas where ethical values, public participation, and digital citizenship are continuously constructed, contested, and transformed.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to analyze communication ethics violations occurring in the *Lobby Chat* feature of *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* as a form of interaction within the digital public sphere. A qualitative design was adopted because it enables an in-depth exploration of social phenomena by examining participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations within their natural communication settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted in Tanjungpinang City, Indonesia, where the unit of analysis consisted of communication interactions taking place in the *Lobby Chat* feature of the game. Participants included local government representatives, communication scholars, and active *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* players who possessed relevant knowledge and experience regarding digital communication practices. Informants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the collected data were directly aligned with the research objectives and capable of providing rich and meaningful insights. Data were collected through non-participant observation of *Lobby Chat* interactions, semi-structured interviews, and documentation in the form of chat screenshots and supporting records. This combination of data collection techniques enabled the study to capture communication practices from multiple perspectives while providing comprehensive empirical evidence of communication ethics violations.

The researcher served as the primary research instrument and was supported by semi-structured interview guidelines, observation protocols, and documentation sheets to ensure consistency throughout the data collection process. The credibility of the findings was enhanced through source triangulation and methodological triangulation by comparing information obtained from different categories of participants and multiple data collection techniques (Moleong, 2021). The collected data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). The analytical process was conducted iteratively to identify recurring patterns, classify forms of communication ethics violations, and interpret their meanings within the framework of the digital public sphere. Throughout the analysis, interpretations were continuously refined by comparing observational findings with interview results and documentary evidence to ensure analytical consistency. Ethical

considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from all interview participants, maintaining the confidentiality of participant identities through pseudonyms, and securely managing all research documentation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). All research procedures were conducted exclusively for academic purposes while respecting participants' privacy and adhering to established ethical standards for qualitative social research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Communication Ethics Violations in Message Production within the *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* Lobby Chat

The findings indicate that the *Lobby Chat* feature in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* has evolved beyond its original function as a medium for recruiting teammates and exchanging game-related information, instead operating as a dynamic digital public sphere where users continuously negotiate social relationships through spontaneous communication. Observational data revealed that interactions within this virtual space were characterized by a high volume of unmoderated conversations involving players from diverse backgrounds, creating an open communication environment with minimal interpersonal accountability. Such openness facilitated not only information exchange but also the reproduction of communication practices that frequently departed from accepted ethical standards, particularly when anonymity reduced users' awareness of the social consequences of their expressions. Interviews with players consistently suggested that the absence of direct social sanctions encouraged impulsive communication, especially during emotionally charged discussions or competitive interactions. From the perspective of the public sphere, these findings illustrate that unrestricted accessibility alone is insufficient to produce deliberative communication because meaningful public interaction also requires ethical responsibility among participants (Habermas, 1991). The observed communication patterns therefore demonstrate that the *Lobby Chat* functions simultaneously as a participatory digital space and as an environment in which communication ethics are continuously challenged through everyday interaction.

Field observations further identified several recurring forms of communication ethics violations, including verbal abuse, hate speech, religious insults, sexually explicit expressions, repeated promotional messages, and offensive language directed toward unknown users without any prior interaction. Participants acknowledged that many of these expressions had gradually become normalized within the gaming community and were frequently perceived as part of ordinary online gaming culture rather than as unethical behavior requiring correction. Several interviewees also explained that players often produced offensive messages without considering their broader social implications because the interaction was viewed as temporary, anonymous, and disconnected from real-life relationships. Such communicative behavior reflects the erosion of prudence in digital interaction, where immediate emotional expression frequently overrides reflection before message production, a condition that has been widely recognized as one of the principal challenges of digital communication ethics (Burlian, 2022). Similar tendencies have previously been identified in *Mobile Legends*, where verbal aggression increasingly functions as a routine communicative practice rather than an exceptional form of misconduct (Almajid, 2019). Representative documentation illustrating these communication patterns is presented in Figure 1.

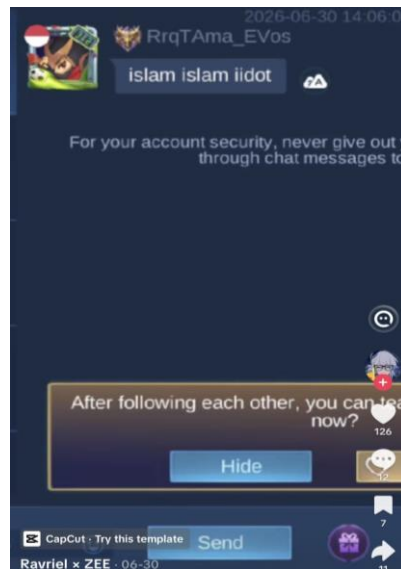


Figure 1. Religious Insults and Offensive Expressions Identified in the Mobile Legends: Bang Bang Lobby Chat

Source: TikTok video by @rezusxys (Uploaded June 30, 2026; Accessed July 14, 2026).

The documentation presented in Figure 1 demonstrates that communication ethics violations extended beyond ordinary insults and included expressions targeting religious identity through degrading and provocative language posted openly in the *Lobby Chat*. Such messages remained publicly visible to all users accessing the chat room, indicating that the communication environment enabled offensive content to circulate rapidly without immediate moderation or community intervention. This finding suggests that ethical violations in digital public spaces should not merely be interpreted as individual emotional reactions but as socially reproduced communication practices that gradually shape collective interaction norms within gaming communities. Previous research similarly reports that toxic communication in online games develops through repetitive interaction patterns in which hostility becomes embedded in everyday communication between players (Fauzan et al., 2021). Comparable patterns have also been documented in MOBA communities, where repeated verbal impoliteness contributes to the normalization of aggressive discourse and weakens the quality of digital communication (Sembiring et al., 2025). The convergence between observational findings and participants' experiences indicates that communication ethics violations in the *Lobby Chat* are sustained not only by individual behavior but also by interactional cultures that continuously reproduce offensive communication as an accepted social practice.

Table 1. Classification of Communication Ethics Violations Identified in the Mobile Legends: Bang Bang Lobby Chat

Type Of Violation	Empirical Evidence	Communication Ethics Indicator	Potential Impact
Verbal Abuse	Insults and offensive expressions	Prudence in message delivery	Psychological discomfort
Religious Hate Speech	Offensive statements targeting religious identity	Avoidance of conflict	Social hostility
Sexual Expressions	Vulgar and sexually explicit messages	Respect for others	Unsafe communication environment
Spam Promotion	Repeated account-selling advertisements	Responsible communication	Disruption of communication functions
Provocative Messages	Deliberate attempts to trigger arguments	Conflict avoidance	Escalation of interpersonal conflict

The communication practices identified during the observation also revealed that the *Lobby Chat* was frequently occupied by repetitive promotional messages offering game accounts, boosting services, and unofficial transactions, many of which appeared continuously within short time intervals and disrupted the primary communicative purpose of the platform. Interview participants consistently described these messages as intrusive because they displaced meaningful conversations related to team formation and gameplay while simultaneously creating uncertainty regarding the credibility of the information being circulated. Several participants further acknowledged that certain promotional messages encouraged users to continue conversations through external applications, increasing the possibility of fraudulent activities and other forms of digital exploitation. These findings indicate that communication ethics violations are not limited to offensive language but also encompass communication practices that manipulate users' trust for commercial or deceptive purposes. Similar concerns regarding virtual communication in *Mobile Legends* have been reported in previous studies, which observed that communication features increasingly accommodate interactions unrelated to collaborative gameplay and frequently expose users to disruptive content (Putra, 2023). Representative evidence of these communication patterns is presented in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Promotional Spam and Potential Fraud Messages Identified in the *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* Lobby Chat

Source: YouTube video by Angga Mzr Best (Uploaded July 9, 2025; Accessed December 2025)

The documentation presented in Figure 2 demonstrates that repeated promotional messages were distributed openly within the *Lobby Chat*, allowing every user entering the communication channel to become a potential target of unsolicited advertising or fraudulent offers. Participants explained that these messages frequently invited users to purchase game accounts or continue conversations through private communication channels, practices that reduced confidence in the reliability of interactions occurring within the platform. From the perspective of communication ethics, these findings indicate that the openness of digital public spaces can be exploited for purposes that contradict the collective interests of users when adequate moderation mechanisms are absent. Previous studies similarly argue that online gaming environments increasingly experience the convergence of toxic communication, spam, and commercial exploitation, producing communication ecosystems that are vulnerable to manipulation and conflict (Meric, 2026). Comparable platform governance challenges have motivated several online game developers to modify or remove public communication features after recognizing that unrestricted chat functions had become increasingly associated with spam, harassment, and abusive behavior rather than constructive interaction (Clash of Clans Wiki, 2019). The observed communication patterns therefore demonstrate that maintaining an open digital public sphere requires not only user participation but also effective institutional mechanisms capable of preserving communication quality and protecting participants from unethical practices.

The empirical findings also reveal that communication ethics within the *Lobby Chat* cannot be strengthened solely through platform moderation because participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of digital literacy, ethical awareness, and communication education in shaping responsible online behavior. Interviews with government representatives indicated that various digital literacy

initiatives had been implemented to promote safe and responsible digital communication, although these programs have generally focused on social media and have not yet specifically addressed communication practices occurring within online gaming environments. Educational efforts nevertheless provide an important foundation for improving users' capacity to evaluate digital content critically, regulate emotional responses, and recognize communication practices that may harm others or violate accepted ethical norms (Simbolon et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the argument that communication ethics violations identified in the *Lobby Chat* emerge through the interaction of individual behavior, platform design, and broader digital communication culture rather than through isolated personal misconduct alone. From the perspective of the digital public sphere, communication spaces can only support meaningful participation when openness is accompanied by ethical responsibility, mutual respect, and mechanisms capable of discouraging behaviors that undermine collective communication values (Angga et al., 2023). The evidence presented in this study therefore indicates that improving communication quality within *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* requires the integration of digital literacy initiatives, community-based ethical awareness, and more adaptive moderation strategies capable of responding to the evolving dynamics of communication in interactive gaming environments.

Privacy, Respect, and Digital Citizenship in the *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* Digital Public Sphere

The analysis further revealed that communication ethics violations within the *Lobby Chat* were not limited to offensive language but also involved practices that potentially compromised users' privacy and personal security. Observational data showed that some players openly shared personal contact information, including WhatsApp numbers, Instagram accounts, and invitations to continue conversations through external platforms despite interacting with individuals they had never previously encountered. Interview participants acknowledged that such exchanges were often intended to facilitate team formation or establish gaming relationships, yet they simultaneously created opportunities for identity misuse, fraudulent activities, and other forms of cyber exploitation. These findings suggest that the openness of communication within digital public spaces may unintentionally encourage users to disregard personal information boundaries in pursuit of immediate social interaction. Previous studies similarly emphasize that virtual communication in *Mobile Legends* frequently extends beyond gameplay and gradually develops into broader interpersonal interactions that require stronger awareness of digital privacy and communication ethics (Hakim & Nada, 2026). The findings indicate that protecting personal information should be understood as an essential component of ethical communication because the sustainability of digital public spaces depends not only on freedom of participation but also on users' capacity to recognize and manage potential risks associated with online interaction.

Participants from government institutions consistently viewed personal data protection as one of the fundamental elements of digital literacy that requires greater public attention, particularly among younger users who engage intensively with interactive online platforms. Although most government literacy initiatives have traditionally focused on social networking services, informants acknowledged that similar educational approaches are equally relevant for communication environments embedded within online games. Several participants explained that many players continue to underestimate the risks associated with sharing personal information because online gaming communities are commonly perceived as informal social spaces rather than environments where digital security should be carefully maintained. This perception contributes to the normalization of behaviors that potentially expose users to phishing attempts, identity theft, unsolicited contact, or financial fraud originating from interactions established through the *Lobby Chat*. Contemporary digital communication studies similarly argue that strengthening digital literacy is essential for improving users' awareness of privacy protection and responsible online participation across diverse digital platforms (Simbolon et al., 2024). The empirical evidence therefore demonstrates that communication ethics within online games should encompass not only linguistic behavior but also responsible management of personal information during virtual interaction. Respecting privacy consequently becomes a prerequisite for maintaining trust among participants within increasingly interconnected digital communities.

Table 2. Patterns of Privacy and Respect-Related Communication Ethics Violations Identified in the *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* Lobby Chat

Communication Pattern	Empirical Evidence	Ethical Concern	Potential Consequence
Sharing WhatsApp numbers	Observation and screenshots	Privacy protection	Identity misuse
Requesting social media accounts	Interview findings	Boundary violation	Unwanted contact
Inviting users to external platforms	Documentation	Digital security	Fraud risk
Verbal harassment	Observation	Respect and dignity	Psychological discomfort
Gender-targeted comments	Interview findings	Equality in communication	Discrimination

The documentary evidence further demonstrated that local government institutions have initiated various digital literacy and public education programs intended to strengthen responsible digital behavior, although these initiatives have not specifically targeted communication practices within online gaming environments. Programs organized by the Department of Communication and Informatics emphasized information security and responsible digital participation, while educational institutions incorporated anti-bullying and character education into school activities to encourage respectful interaction among young people. Likewise, public awareness campaigns conducted by the Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Community Empowerment Office highlighted the importance of protecting children and adolescents from risks associated with digital environments, including cyberbullying and inappropriate online communication. Although these initiatives operate outside the context of *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*, they illustrate that communication ethics is increasingly recognized as a multidimensional issue requiring collaboration among educational institutions, government agencies, families, and digital platform providers. Such institutional efforts are consistent with broader discussions on strengthening democratic participation within digital public spaces through the development of ethical digital citizenship rather than relying solely on technological regulation (Wahyudi et al., 2024). The findings therefore indicate that preventive educational strategies remain highly relevant for improving communication quality within interactive gaming communities where formal supervision is relatively limited.

Interview data also revealed that many participants perceived respectful communication as an individual responsibility that should remain applicable regardless of whether interaction occurs in physical or virtual environments. Academic informants argued that anonymity should not be interpreted as a justification for abandoning social norms because ethical communication continues to function as the primary mechanism for sustaining constructive dialogue in digital public spaces. Several players nevertheless admitted that repeated exposure to offensive language had gradually reduced their sensitivity toward impolite expressions, leading many users to regard insults and ridicule as ordinary components of online gaming culture. This normalization process demonstrates that communication ethics violations are reproduced through repeated social interaction rather than emerging solely from isolated personal behavior. Previous studies similarly report that communication directed toward female players frequently contains discriminatory language and verbal harassment, indicating that unequal communication experiences remain a persistent characteristic of competitive gaming environments (Maharani et al., 2024). The present findings therefore reinforce the argument that cultivating respectful communication requires transforming collective interaction norms instead of focusing exclusively on sanctioning individual offenders.

The relationship between privacy protection and respectful communication reflects a broader concept of digital citizenship in which users are expected to balance freedom of expression with responsibility toward the rights, dignity, and security of others participating in the same communication environment. The empirical evidence suggests that ethical communication within the *Lobby Chat* cannot be reduced to compliance with platform rules because it also depends upon users' capacity to exercise self-restraint, recognize communication risks, and appreciate diversity within virtual

communities. Public sphere theory likewise emphasizes that open participation only becomes socially meaningful when communicative practices are guided by mutual recognition and rational engagement rather than hostility or exclusion (Habermas, 1991). These findings indicate that strengthening communication ethics requires continuous interaction between individual awareness, educational interventions, and institutional support capable of fostering healthier patterns of digital participation. Such an approach expands the understanding of digital citizenship by positioning privacy protection and respectful communication as interconnected ethical principles rather than separate behavioral obligations (Angga et al., 2023). The evidence generated in this study consequently demonstrates that sustaining an inclusive digital public sphere within *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* depends not only on technological features but also on the collective commitment of users and institutions to uphold ethical communication as a shared social responsibility.

Ethical Responses, Platform Responsibility, and the Sustainability of the Digital Public Sphere

The findings demonstrate that communication ethics violations within the *Lobby Chat* are sustained not only by the production of offensive messages but also by the ways users respond to those messages during subsequent interactions. Observational data showed that many players reacted to insults, provocation, or abusive language by producing equally aggressive responses, creating prolonged exchanges that gradually escalated interpersonal conflicts. Interview participants explained that retaliatory communication was often perceived as an acceptable strategy for defending personal dignity, despite acknowledging that such responses frequently intensified hostility rather than resolving disagreement. This pattern illustrates that emotional reciprocity has become a dominant communication norm within competitive gaming environments, where rapid interaction frequently limits opportunities for reflective decision-making before responding to provocative content. Similar communication dynamics have been identified in previous studies, which describe toxic interaction in *Mobile Legends* as a cyclical process in which hostile messages encourage equally hostile responses and reinforce aggressive communication cultures (Fauzan et al., 2021). The evidence indicates that communication ethics within digital public spaces should therefore be evaluated not only through message production but also through users' capacity to regulate emotional reactions when confronted with unethical behavior.

Interview findings further revealed substantial differences in the strategies adopted by players when encountering inappropriate communication. Experienced players generally preferred ignoring offensive messages, blocking disruptive accounts, or utilizing the reporting feature instead of participating in prolonged verbal confrontation, whereas less experienced users more frequently admitted responding emotionally to provocative comments. These contrasting behaviors suggest that digital communication competence influences users' ability to evaluate conflict situations and select responses that minimize further escalation. Academic informants similarly argued that ethical communication requires emotional self-regulation because responsible participation in digital public spaces depends upon thoughtful responses rather than immediate emotional reactions. Such interpretations correspond with broader discussions of communication ethics, which emphasize that responsible digital participation involves conscious reflection before responding to messages capable of generating broader social consequences (Burlian, 2022). The empirical findings therefore indicate that communication ethics should be understood as an interactive process in which every response contributes either to sustaining or reducing the quality of public communication.

Table 3. Response Strategies Adopted by Players toward Communication Ethics Violations

Response Strategy	Evidence from Interviews	Potential Communication Outcome
Responding with insults	Frequently reported	Conflict escalation
Ignoring offensive messages	Common among experienced players	Conflict de-escalation
Blocking disruptive users	Frequently recommended	Reduced repeated exposure
Reporting accounts	Occasionally practiced	Platform moderation support
Leaving the conversation	Frequently observed	Personal protection from toxic interaction

The response strategies summarized in Table 3 demonstrate that users possess multiple alternatives when confronting unethical communication, although the effectiveness of each strategy depends upon both individual awareness and the moderation mechanisms provided by the platform. Participants consistently regarded the reporting and blocking features as constructive responses because these mechanisms reduced direct confrontation while allowing platform administrators to identify repeated violations. Nevertheless, several interviewees questioned the consistency of enforcement against offending accounts, explaining that repeated encounters with the same disruptive users weakened confidence in existing moderation systems. These perceptions indicate that communication ethics cannot rely exclusively on individual responsibility because sustainable digital interaction also requires institutional structures capable of discouraging repeated misconduct. Previous research similarly emphasizes that communication within online games increasingly depends upon the interaction between user behavior and platform governance, making moderation policies an essential component of healthy virtual communication environments (Hakim & Nada, 2026). The findings therefore suggest that ethical participation in digital public spaces emerges through the complementary relationship between responsible user behavior and responsive platform management.

The findings also indicate that platform governance plays a decisive role in shaping communication norms because the openness of digital public spaces must be accompanied by moderation mechanisms capable of discouraging repeated ethical violations. Academic informants argued that unrestricted communication features may unintentionally facilitate the normalization of hate speech, harassment, and disruptive behavior when enforcement mechanisms fail to respond consistently to user misconduct. Similar concerns have prompted several game developers to redesign communication systems by limiting public interaction features in response to persistent toxic behavior. The removal of the Global Chat feature in *Clash of Clans* and the temporary deactivation of the All Chat feature in *League of Legends* illustrate that platform providers increasingly recognize moderation as a strategic instrument for maintaining healthier communication environments rather than merely restricting user expression (Clash of Clans Wiki, 2019; Sanmufa, 2021). These policy changes demonstrate that preserving communication quality requires balancing openness with accountability so that digital public spaces continue to facilitate meaningful interaction without becoming dominated by abusive discourse. The present findings similarly suggest that the sustainability of the *Lobby Chat* depends on adaptive moderation strategies capable of addressing evolving communication patterns while maintaining opportunities for constructive social participation.

The empirical evidence further highlights that institutional support should extend beyond platform governance to include regulatory frameworks and digital literacy initiatives capable of strengthening ethical awareness among users. Government informants emphasized that communication violations occurring within online games should be regarded as part of the broader digital communication ecosystem because their social consequences are comparable to those emerging from social networking platforms. Indonesia's legal framework, particularly Law Number 1 of 2024 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions, provides an important normative basis for addressing various forms of unlawful digital communication, including hate speech and other harmful online behavior (Republik Indonesia, 2024). Contemporary legal scholarship nevertheless argues that regulatory provisions alone cannot eliminate unethical communication unless they are accompanied by continuous public education and effective implementation across diverse digital environments (Aprilianti, 2024). These findings indicate that legal regulation, digital literacy, educational institutions, and platform governance should be understood as complementary mechanisms rather than independent solutions to communication ethics violations. Strengthening cooperation among these stakeholders is therefore essential for cultivating communication practices that remain consistent with democratic values and respectful public participation in digital spaces.

The findings collectively demonstrate that the *Lobby Chat* in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* functions as a digital public sphere in which communication ethics are continuously negotiated through interactions among users, platform governance, and broader social institutions. Communication ethics violations identified in this study extend beyond isolated incidents of verbal abuse because they represent recurring interactional patterns that influence the quality of participation, inclusiveness, and trust within virtual communities. By interpreting these findings through the perspectives of the public sphere and communication ethics, the study illustrates that ethical digital communication depends upon

the interaction of individual responsibility, institutional support, technological moderation, and digital literacy rather than any single factor operating independently. This perspective contributes to expanding scholarly discussions on digital public spheres by demonstrating that online gaming environments deserve analytical attention comparable to that devoted to social media and other digital communication platforms. The study also provides practical implications for policymakers, educators, and game developers seeking to strengthen ethical communication through integrated educational, regulatory, and technological interventions that respond to the distinctive characteristics of interactive gaming communities. Collectively, these findings reinforce the position that sustaining healthy digital public spheres requires continuous collaboration among users, institutions, and platform providers to ensure that freedom of communication develops alongside ethical responsibility and mutual respect.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the *Lobby Chat* feature in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* has developed beyond its intended function as a communication tool for gameplay coordination and now operates as a digital public sphere where various forms of social interaction occur. The findings reveal that communication ethics violations are manifested through verbal abuse, hate speech, spam, fraudulent promotional content, privacy-related risks, impolite language, and emotionally driven responses that collectively reduce the quality of interaction among users. These communication practices indicate that the openness and accessibility of digital public spaces do not automatically foster rational, respectful, or inclusive communication, as envisioned in the concept of the public sphere. The analysis further shows that communication ethics violations are influenced not only by individual behavior but also by anonymity, competitive gaming environments, limited digital literacy, and the absence of consistently effective moderation mechanisms. The study also finds that users who possess stronger digital literacy and greater awareness of communication ethics tend to adopt more constructive responses, such as ignoring, blocking, or reporting inappropriate behavior instead of escalating conflicts. These findings confirm that ethical communication within online gaming environments should be understood as a multidimensional issue involving individual responsibility, platform governance, educational initiatives, and institutional support. Consequently, *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* represents an important empirical context for examining how communication ethics are continuously negotiated and challenged within contemporary digital public spheres.

This study contributes theoretically by extending Habermas's concept of the digital public sphere to the context of online gaming, demonstrating that virtual game communication constitutes a meaningful social arena where ethical values, participation, and public interaction are continuously constructed through everyday communication practices. The study also enriches communication ethics scholarship by integrating principles of ethical digital communication with empirical evidence obtained from naturally occurring interactions within a multiplayer online game environment. From a methodological perspective, the application of a qualitative descriptive case study combining observation, interviews, and documentation provides a comprehensive understanding of communication ethics violations that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement alone. The findings offer practical implications for game developers by emphasizing the importance of adaptive moderation systems, reporting mechanisms, and community guidelines capable of promoting healthier communication environments. Educational institutions and government agencies may also utilize these findings to strengthen digital literacy programs that address communication ethics within online gaming communities in addition to social media platforms. Future research is encouraged to investigate communication ethics across different online games, cultural contexts, and demographic groups while incorporating comparative or mixed-method approaches to produce broader empirical evidence. Such efforts will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of ethical communication in digital public spheres and support the development of more inclusive, respectful, and sustainable online interaction environments.

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