



Communication Styles and Interpersonal Communications Of Mobile Legends Bang-Bang (MLBB) Players

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the Mobile Legends Bang-Bang (MLBB) players' dominant communication styles and how their participation in this online game contributed to their interpersonal communications. The researchers utilized a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire based on Bourne's (1995) Communication Styles and an open-ended questionnaire that elicited qualitative responses from the 30 respondents for the players' interpersonal communications within family interactions. Data reveal that MLBB players often utilize the Aggressive Communication Style, given the nature of the game that involves competitiveness and quick decision making in order to win. In addition, Passive-Aggressive and Assertive Communication came close as other dominant styles since players could also be subtle in their aggression and at the same time positively straightforward in their communication to support or lead team members in defeating the game opponents. Data also show as revealed by the players' siblings that the Interpersonal Communications of the MLBB players might have been strengthened in terms of displaying assertiveness, clarity and directness in communicating their thoughts and feelings to the family members. On the other hand MLBB engagements might also have weakened interpersonal communications as some of these players demonstrate aggressiveness which could include the use of harsh words in interacting with their siblings on certain occasions.

Keywords: Flashflood-resilient, frequency ratio, GIDAs, GIS, susceptibility

INTRODUCTION

Online Games are now popular not only to the youth but also among adults. According to a survey conducted in 2022, gamers aged 18 to 34 make up 36%, while gamers aged 65 and beyond make up 6% (Clement, 2022). Over 43 million players take part in the Philippine esports sector, which has been growing yearly by 12.9% since 2017 (YCP Solidiance, 2021). These esports are played through consoles which work with television, laptops or computers, and augmented reality (AR) allowing players to interact through digital elements and mobile applications. Video games are often viewed as a source of relaxation during leisure time and information (Kolek et al., 2022). According to Stockdale and Coyne (2018), most video game players view playing video games as a fun way to unwind, interact with others, and hang out with their friends.

One of the very popular online games launched in Kuala Lumpur in 2016 is the Mobile Legends Bang-Bang (MLBB) created by Shanghai Moonton Technology. MLBB is a worldwide multiplayer online battle arena also known as Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) wherein players use heroes as characters and team up with other random players online. The online game ranks number one based on the Top 15 Popular Mobile Games in the Philippines during 2021; having 1 billion game downloads, 100 million registered users, and 25 million monthly active users in the Philippines (Mobile Legends Bang-Bang: Building the Filipino Esports Community, n.d.). Since its release, Racoma (2021) stated that the game has grown in popularity worldwide, most notably in Southeast Asia and

was announced as a medal game in the inaugural esports tournament of the 2019 Southeast Asian Games or SEA Games. Given that the game is easy to access and is available for free download on both iOS and Android, there are several issues observed in players with prolonged exposure to the game. One concern that may have implications on communication is that online game addicts fail to consider their relationships to the people around them since they are deeply hooked and concentrated in playing (Kristanty and Sunarya, 2019) hence replacing social interaction with the players' family and loved ones (Chai et al., 2011). MLBB players communications with their families can be a commendable context in investigating communication styles and interpersonal communications as it is within the family setting where members of this basic unit are given opportunities to interact with each other before they relate with the members of larger communities. Also, looking into family communications can possibly help strengthen family relationships which may lead to better interpersonal communications of family members when placed in other larger settings.

Specifically, online game players' communication styles and interpersonal communications have not been widely explored in researches. Most of the related studies that talk about the interrelationship of video games and communication have been centered on how video games can help improve the communication skills, specifically

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in acquiring English as a Second Language (Graham & Hardaker, 2017, p.797) of gamers. Thus, this study intends to investigate the communication styles of MLBB players as observed by their siblings and how these communication styles contribute to their interpersonal communications as manifested in their interactions within the family setting. It is important that the observations of the players' siblings are considered instead of the players themselves in order to have less biased descriptions of these communication styles and interpersonal communications that are exhibited.

Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework Pradhitya (2021) as cited by Firmannandya et al. (2021) affirms that since programmers release these online games without fee leads people to have an easy access to these games, causing them to become addicted and treating cyberspace as their reality. In a study conducted by Odour et al. (2016) as cited by Firmannandya et al. (2021) in the North American Region, the researchers acknowledged that excessive smartphone use in the family members can lead to conflicts in family communication patterns. However, Costa dan Veloso (2016) as cited by Firmannandya et al. (2021), refutes the findings of the previous studies, asserting that there is an increase in social interaction in the family environment as a result of online game usage.

There are also claims that the participation of the players on different online video games can influence strategic minds and communication behavior. According to Neofitou (2014), digital game worlds provide language learning environments via collaborative and entertaining communications through text-based chats which may also assist them in knowing how such communications may or may not affect their worlds outside of the games (Bawa, 2018).

Communication Styles by Bourne, J. E. (1995)

Communication style refers to a form of verbal or nonverbal cues such gestures, use of time, space and distance (Abdullah et. al., 2018). Identifying personal communication style is necessary to effectively communicate and understand what the sender or receiver is trying to convey. According to Abidin and Mohamed (2021), communication style is a method that negotiates situations involving others. Negotiation is based on the scenarios involving others such as using words gently but still being firm and willing to consider other opinions before making any decision. Bourne (1995) recognized five (5) types of communication styles: Submissive, Aggressive, Passive-Aggressive, Manipulative, and Assertive, which are explored in the present study.

Submissive. This communication style refers to individuals exhibiting behaviors that focus on pleasing other people to avoid conflict. According to Bourne (1995), in this type of communication, the person does not express true feelings and wants. Submissive communicators treat the needs and rights of others as more important than their own and seek to play a minimal part during meetings or discussions (Yardley, 2017). Examples include "You're on your own now. It's up to you." In addition, according to Lane (2016), they are characterized as having lives directed by others and suppressing feelings of anger that can erupt

at unexpected times and over insignificant events.

Aggressive. This style refers to individuals who are typically insensitive to others' rights and feelings and will attempt to obtain what they want through coercion (Bourne, 1995). In addition, aggressiveness succeeds by sheer force, creating enemies, and conflict along the way which often puts others on the defensive, leading them to withdraw or fight back rather than cooperate. Aggressive communicators behave as if their needs are the most important and their opinions are more important than everyone else (Yardley, 2017). These communicators are antagonists who most likely express a strong feeling of anger who challenge others hence get counter aggression. Aggressive communicators will cause some ill-feelings and resentment from others (Bocar, 2017). Examples include statements like "You're stupid if you think this will work!" and other statements that tend to be frank and less respectful. In addition, as expressed by Agarwal (2019), "Aggressive communicators are perceived to be poor listeners often expressing their feelings and opinions in a way that violates the rights of others, manifesting competition, criticism, interruptions, and impatience for others' perspectives" (p.5). This description is in line with the assertion of Filipeanu and Cananau (2015), that aggressive communicators impose their opinion on others, unwilling to give up their ideas for the team.

On the other hand, Passive-Aggressive according to Bourne (1995), is a style that instead of openly confronting an issue, the communicators express aggressive feelings covertly through passive resistance and seldom get what they want because they never get it across. This is the type of communication wherein individuals appear to be passive on the surface, but act out their anger indirectly or covertly (Yardley, 2017). Examples include statements like "No problem. You always seem to know everything." These communicators exhibit sarcasm and an ironic persona. With this, it can lead to a toxic and hostile work environment as evidenced through high attrition, unrealized productivity, feelings of frustration, fear, disappointment, among other adverse responses from the receiver (Brown et al., 2018).

Manipulative. According to Bourne (1995), manipulative communicators attempt to make people guilty and play the role of victim. In addition, manipulation only works as long as the target fails to recognize what is happening. These individuals exhibit shrewd and calculating behavior to achieve the outcomes they need. Their spoken words hide an underlying message, of which the other person may be totally unaware of (Yardley, 2017). Examples include statements like "This is not what I said." which may refer to the person attempting to gaslight. Manipulative communication is characterized by the preference for a backstage role, by the tendency to wait until the opportune moment comes, and the tendency to look for any hidden intentions behind others' statements (Urea, 2014).

Assertive. According to Bourne (1995), being assertive means respecting yourself and other people. It is the ability to clearly express one's thoughts and feelings through open, honest and direct communication. Yardley (2017) defined that communications are neither aggressive

nor passive, enabling them to have the confidence to communicate without resorting to games or manipulation. With this, assertiveness is considered as defending one's rights done through expression of opinions, emotions, and faiths directly, honestly and appropriately (Sherman, 2015 as cited by Abidin and Mohamed, 2021). Examples include statements like "We should choose the best option but if you have other ideas in mind, feel free to share them to the big group."

Arif and Aditya (2022) discovered adverse effects of MLBB towards the communication styles of the players as they found that players have frequent exchange of harsh words, and hate speech often surfaces when they spend long hours in the game. This influence of the player's change of behavior was found in a study by Quwaider et al. (2019, p. 581, para. 5) wherein online games were proven to have impact on player's personality, emotions, and the ways players think and respond to various situations.

In another study conducted by Mawalia (2020), the researcher discovered that Mobile Legends created a tendency for players to be passive in socializing with others in the real world. Additionally, Mawalia (2020) stated that players of Mobile Legends are becoming more indifferent to the real world around them by being preoccupied in playing and communicating with virtual friends over interacting with people who are physically present. However, Lande et al. (2019) came to the opposite conclusion in their study titled "The effect of mobile gaming in the quality of family communication" wherein the researchers found that there is a positive correlation between how frequently an MLBB player played a mobile game to family communication. The findings of the previous studies have different claims and these conclusions may or may not be true to the respondents of the present study.

Interpersonal Communications

Chen et al. (2018) defines interpersonal relations as the degree of a person's connectedness to people around them. Lin et al. (2017) stated that interpersonal relationships are classified into two categories: those that take place in offline situations and those that take place in the online platform. According to Lin et al. (2017), online gamers can create a virtual environment and detach from the real environment. Moreover, the researcher claims that introverts or people who are not comfortable communicating with others tend to seek emotional support in the virtual environment, thus resulting in distance and barriers in interpersonal relationships. With this detachment from the real world, it may result in depression, anxiety, and loneliness, as Wang et al. (2019) found, there was a positive correlation of these variables to mobile gaming. Hence, interpersonal communication plays a vital role in shaping family resilience and strengthening the functioning of families facing increasingly severe challenges (Thariq, 2018). Olipas and Leona (2020) explored how playing mobile games affects a person's relationships with others. Dumrique et al. (2018) as cited by Olipas and Leona (2020) claimed that playing mobile games improves social conduct in individuals and may even be linked to adolescents' good academic performance. However, Ali (2018) as cited by Olipas and Leona (2020) declared

that the negative impact of mobile gaming in creating a good relationship with others is that a player possesses aggressive behavior, which causes an individual to be a loner and develop incorrect values; unhealthy lifestyle, and poor academic achievement.

The opportunity for online engagement increases possible exposure to potentially risky behaviors for teens, which may have significant negative consequences (Hair et al., 2009). With this, understanding one's communication style and the communication styles of others can help the individual recognize situations in which the preferred type is not working and adapt to improve communication (Rustici, 2019) or maintain the communication style. In this connection, the present study will investigate the MLBB players' communication styles and how these styles contribute to their family interpersonal communications.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Quantitative and qualitative were the approaches used for the data gathering. The communication styles of the MLBB players were identified through a questionnaire with Likert scale and open-ended questions were asked to elicit descriptions of the players' interpersonal communications.

Research Participants

To avoid potentially biased responses of the MLBB players themselves, the siblings of these participants were chosen as the respondents of the study. The thirty (30) research respondents were selected through purposive-convenience sampling. The respondents of this study were determined through a researcher-made criteria which includes the following: (1) both the MLBB player and the sibling-respondents should be 18 years old and above upon answering the survey; (2) the MLBB sibling should have played the mobile game for two (2) years or more, regardless if they are an active or an inactive player at present; and (3) should not be part of the vulnerable group (e.g., senior citizens, pregnant women, PWD, mentally challenged, etc.). Individuals who willingly agreed to participate in the study were assigned a respondent code to maintain anonymity.

Research Procedures

Gathering of Data. Prior to data gathering, the researchers complied with all the protocols mandated by the Research Ethics committee.

The consent letter stated in clear terms that: (1) the respondents are participating voluntarily, (2) that their personal information will not be shared for any purpose other than this study, and that they have been made aware of their right to withdraw any time without any penalty, (3) that their names will not be asked, (4) and that the survey should be appropriately disposed of once the research is complete.

The online survey questionnaire took the

respondents at least 30-40 minutes to complete. The collected data were treated with utmost confidentiality and were automatically transferred and organized in a coding sheet using Google Sheets securely stored in a Google Drive.

Treatment of Data

For the first research objective, the responses were tallied in a coding sheet and were analyzed and interpreted using the Communication Style framework of Bourne. For the second, the answers which were mostly in narrative forms on how the MLBB players communication styles affect their interpersonal communications within family communications were transcribed and coded into themes. The narratives provided by the respondents were transferred to a coding sheet and analyzed using Glaser and Straus' (1967) Grounded Theory approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data gathered are presented in a tabular form that consists of numerical values and the common themes from the respondents' narratives are discussed in this section.

Results suggest that MLBB players often use Aggressive Communication Style when engaged in this game. The result somewhat confirms findings of a series of experiments, wherein researchers found video game violence elevating aggressive behavior and that more competitive games produced more significant levels of aggressive behavior than less competitive games (Adachi, 2011). In the case of MLBB's nature, participants are encouraged to be highly competitive in the game.

With this, it is evident that the players' communication style is primarily aggressive when engaged in the mobile game given that MLBB is an online battle arena where one aims to destroy the opponent and consecutively wins to rank up. Further, when a player experiences losing the battle, it increases one's urge to use hate speech to beat the opponent during the next game. Also, since the game requires quick and decisive action, players become naturally aggressive in their interactions with other players. This aggressiveness is then being carried over in their interactions with the siblings.

Passive-aggressive communication style on the one hand came close to Aggressive style as some respondents observed that their siblings also have the tendencies

to be passive at times but act out anger in subtle and indirect ways. This style is manifested in their sarcastic communications on certain situations. Indirect aggression could happen during the game for several reasons such as frustration, influence of toxic gaming culture, and may also be due to anonymity among gamers. This communication style may also be carried over by players even when not playing.

While the players' siblings declared that Aggressive and Passive-Aggressive communication styles are the dominant types displayed, it is noteworthy that the Assertive communication, a style known to be more positive is almost as evident as the other two types of communication. MLBB players exhibit this communication style as they support their teammates in the game, leading to mutual success. When players actively assist and empower their teammates, it enhances the performance of the entire team. By enabling their allies to perform at their best, supportive players contribute to overall team success, which benefits everyone involved. Furthermore, in Mobile Legends, different heroes have specific roles, such as tanks, supports, marksmen, mages, and assassins. Supportive behavior is essential because support heroes are designed to assist their teammates, provide healing, crowd control, vision, and utility.

Also, among teammates, it is vital to build a healthy and supportive gaming group through courteous and constructive interactions hence resulting in the use of Assertive communication style. Being assertive communicators may have positive implications on family dynamics and relationships as these MLBB players are able to express themselves confidently within family communications.

Some players however have resorted to Manipulative communication style especially when losing in the game. Albeit in MLBB, manipulation, blaming and the likes are not usually considered productive or conducive to a fulfilling gaming experience since these produce a toxic environment and may result in a negative impact on the overall game atmosphere, inevitably a manipulative style of communication can still occur.

The Submissive communication style occurred the least as this type may not be the most suitable when engaging in MLBB especially in dealing with opponents. However, depending on some unknown factors, these gamers on few occasions may still display a yielding attitude. Also, in dealing with team members, the

Table 1.0 Dominant Communication Styles based on Bourne's (1995) Communication Styles Sibling-respondents (n=30)

Communication Styles	Mean	Percentage
Aggressive Communication Style	3.11	62.33
Assertive Communication Style	3.05	61.11
Manipulative Communication Style	2.50	50.11
Submissive Communication Style	2.32	46.44
Passive - Aggressive Communication Style	3.09	61.89

Note: 1.00 - 1.79 = Strongly Disagree; 1.80 - 2.59 = Disagree; 2.60 - 3.39 = Neutral; 3.40 - 4.19 = Agree; 4.20 - 5.00 = Strongly Agree

Submissive communication style is expected on some instances.

Interpersonal Communications

Seemingly, MLBB engagements have either weakened or strengthened the interpersonal communications of the gamers. As far as weakening interpersonal communication is concerned, the nature of the game which requires aggression might have affected the players' communications outside of the gaming context. Included are excerpts from the respondents' narratives.

MLBB Weakening Interpersonal Communications

SR-002: "... the way my siblings communicate is aggressive ... MLBB does affect my siblings' communication."

SR-003: "You can't really have a conversation with him when he's playing MLBB since he doesn't like to be interrupted, therefore I guess that lowers his interpersonal communication skills."

SR-004: "Whenever they lose a rank game, they become very truculent they shout and curse..."

SR-006: "My brother's communication style to the family is poor. He is often misunderstood and is usually offensive. In my opinion, MLBB negatively impacts his communication style."

SR-007: "... she would raise her voice or scream at me when she's trying to prove a point."

SR-009: "... whenever I ask them a question while they are playing, they respond aggressively."

SR-021: "... just like saying bad words, and aggressively talking, and manipulative sometimes."

SR-025: "... he tends to be harsh especially when the game is going bad."

SR-030: "... whenever we would ask for him when he is in-game, he would get angry and would not want to be bothered. Also, after a loss, my sibling would be grumpy as well."

Habibillah (2022) purported that MLBB players often use offensive language to attract attention, insult their enemies or teammates, and provoke their opponents to create an exciting match. The act of MLBB players being aggressive in communication, including shouting and cursing, shares a common theme of aggression. MLBB players display aggression in their communication in competitive games to make their opponent uneasy and not confident to play Ringo (2021). The excerpts reveal that manifestations of hostility in communication are observable among these players even when not participating in MLBB.

Interestingly, some respondents also believe that playing MLBB have strengthened the interpersonal communications of their siblings.

MLBB Strengthening Interpersonal Communications

SR-001: "after playing so much together, we actually know how to communicate non-verbal, you know, you get used to his habits and without even verbal communication"

"It actually strengthens our communication... we found our common ground as siblings..."

SR-004: "in my brothers' case it strengthened their communication skills; They now talk a lot..."

"...both my brothers are introverted and had a hard time talking and making friends, but as they started playing MLBB they learned how to mingle with people..."

SR-005: "... it somehow enhances his leadership skills as he sometimes leads the team and directs his teammates on what to do during the game."

SR-008: "... it developed his communication skills."

SR-018: "He is more expressive and straightforward about anything he is trying to convey."

SR-026: "... He's more confident in dealing with others, especially to people with different personalities."

SR-029: "... she has improved her communication skills."

MLBB for some gamers became a tool that made them expressive and confident speakers as claimed by the siblings. The reason for this outcome is probably because MLBB as mentioned earlier is a game that encourages coordination and support among same team members which most frequently requires affirmative forms of communications.

Furthermore, some respondents indicated that their siblings have honed leadership skills and that playing MLBB allowed the gamers to form new friendships. These constructive interpersonal relations may be due to the shared goals of the players which is to win, make commands, and submit to the one who is in control which develops their leadership skills, communication skills, and leading them to create friendships. This finding confirms the assertion of Mawalia (2020) that virtual communications and interactions allow friendship in cyberspace to form a community. The players' exposure to the communication dynamics of MLBB can therefore potentially make MLBB players convey thoughts and emotions with their family members more openly hence possibly creating positive bonds and relationships with their respective families.

Based on the respondents' narratives, it is interesting to note that MLBB can both strengthen and weaken the interpersonal communication skills of gamers. On the other hand, it is essential to acknowledge that while MLBB gaming can positively affect or support interpersonal communications, the potential weakening of the players' interpersonal communications should be given more attention as the later can be disadvantageous to the gamers' ability to interact with others outside of the game more affirmatively.

CONCLUSION

MLBB players use the Aggressive Communication Style considering the nature of the game. MLBB players tend to communicate aggressively by shouting, cursing, and being sarcastic while playing the game. This type of communication can still be demonstrated even when players are not playing hence weakening interpersonal communications. On the other hand, MLBB can also help one to express and communicate freely by leading the team in the game in an assertive manner. As a result, players tend to have better communication skills as they become more expressive, vocal, and straightforward.

Despite the potential for MLBB to cause aggressiveness in communication styles of its players, the data highlights that the game can improve players' interpersonal communication skills. This improvement was demonstrated by the fact that players could express themselves better, more clearly, make new friends through the game, and even develop leadership skills through leading the team. Respondents even reported instances wherein their formerly introverted siblings learned to open up more and socialize as potentially and positively affected by MLBB gaming.

Nevertheless, researches still suggest guidance for young people especially the very young players who have yet to develop further their cognitive, social, and emotional quotients so that they can maximize the positive outcomes of MLBB engagements and minimize the harmful effects of their participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the knowledge that MLBB may cause aggressiveness in players' interpersonal communication skills, the researchers emphasize the importance of responsible gaming to prevent the possibility of conflicts within the household due to players' tendency to use harsh words while immersed in the game, and promote in-person bonding and connection with family members instead of solely focusing on the virtual reality of the game. The researches stress the value of courteous and constructive offline interactions which should not be affected negatively by online gaming. With this, future researchers may also consider expanding the number of respondents and reaching out to professional Esports players to further understand the world of online gaming and its positive and negative effects on the general well-being of the gamers.

Future researchers may also use alternative methods in collecting data such as Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Face-to-face in-depth interviews to elaborate respondents' answers to the questions asked in the questionnaire. Moreover, different communication contexts in relation to online gaming may also be considered. Conducting comparative analysis of the communication styles and interpersonal communication of MLBB players during the years before they were introduced to this online game and after they started playing the game can also be an alternative method.

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