



**“COLLEGE STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION NEEDS IN THE DIGITAL AGE 2025:  
BALANCING SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION  
BOTH ONLINE AND OFFLINE”.**

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**Abstract**

One of the groups most affected by the significant shifts in communication styles brought about by the rapid advancement of digital technology is college students. The intricate relationships between students' social, emotional, and intellectual demands in 2025 make their communication environment more complex than it has ever been. Digital platforms such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), online research libraries, video conferencing tools, and collaborative cloud-based software have made it possible for students to access information and resources quickly. Meanwhile, social media sites like Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram have grown into essential spaces for peer engagement, identity expression, and community building. Emotional communication, which was formerly mostly centered on face-to-face encounters, has rapidly shifted online thanks to peer support forums, mental health applications, and online counseling services. Nonetheless, questions remain regarding the sincerity and profundity of these exchanges.

With a focus on how they balance online and offline platforms in terms of academic, social, and emotional components, this study looks at how college students' communication demands are developing in 2025. Even though digital media offer unprecedented speed, convenience, and accessibility, students often face challenges like digital tiredness, thin social relationships, cyber distractions, and diminished interpersonal depth. Using the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Media Richness Theory, the study explores whether digital communication satisfies students' holistic needs or whether offline modalities still have intrinsic worth. A mixed-method approach, which blends quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, allows for a more nuanced knowledge of trends, preferences, and perceived satisfaction levels.

Even while online communication is more effective and accessible in the social and academic domains, offline contact is still crucial for emotional well-being and the growth of deeper relationships, according to the research. The research contributes to the broader discussion on youth communication in the post-pandemic era by highlighting the necessity of balance rather than replacement. It encourages educators, lawmakers, and technology designers to create hybrid models that blend digital concordances with face-to-face interactions in order to meaningfully and sustainably address students' complex communication demands.

**Keywords:** Digital Age, College Students, Academic Communication, Social Communication, Emotional Health, Online and Offline Communication, Communication Needs.

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### **Introduction:**

The twenty-first century has been distinguished by the pervasiveness of digital technology and its deep integration into human communication habits. Because they are both digital natives with deep roots in the online ecosystem and learners in transition, overcoming social, emotional, and academic challenges, college students occupy a unique position in this shift across other demographic groups. By 2025, students' primary channels for communication, information exchange, and emotional expression will be digital platforms rather than merely supplementary tools. As a result, the communication requirements of this group are intricate and require rigorous academic analysis.

People create social networks, work out their identities, and hone their academic abilities throughout the transitional period that is college life. Communication is the foundation of these processes and is necessary for emotional resilience, academic success, and social integration. Compared to earlier decades when face-to-face contacts and traditional media were the main routes, the digital age has dissolved borders, increasing the interdependence of online and offline communication.

Communication requirements are basic human needs associated with identity creation, emotional attachment, social belonging, and information sharing. These prerequisites for college students fall into three interrelated categories:

1. Peer intellectual conversation, teacher interaction, collaborative project involvement, and course material availability are all examples of academic communication demands.
2. Social communication needs are linked to social identity performance, friendship maintenance, peer bonding, and extracurricular activities.
3. Interpersonal support, stress management, self-expression, and conversations about mental health are all examples of emotional communication needs.

The digital age provides instruments to address these needs, though not always in an effective or balanced way. Though it might not have the depth of classroom conversation, an LMS might increase academic access. Social media facilitates peer engagement, but it can also promote superficial or performative communication. Although face-to-face contact may be more intimate, online emotional relationships may be more practical. Therefore, the primary source of conflict is finding a balance between these needs in the physical and online realms.

The Situation in 2025 and the digital age is a significant turning point in the evolution of digital communication. After online communication became commonplace in academia due to the COVID-19 epidemic, students' expectations changed to include hybrid and digital-first methods. These days, AI-powered systems provide personalized academic suggestions, chatbots assist with university inquiries, and VR-enabled classrooms offer immersive learning. Students' sense of self and community increasingly depends heavily on social media sites. Similarly, digital health apps, anonymous peer support groups, and virtual counseling sessions are increasingly being used to address emotional needs. However, these modifications have also resulted in new challenges. Students report experiencing digital weariness as a result of

overexposure, a blurring of the lines between personal and academic areas, shorter attention spans, and greater anxiety related to continual connectivity. Offline conversation still offers the basis for authenticity and depth, despite the fact that it isn't always as easy. The mixed interaction between online ease and offline richness defines the communication landscape of 2025.

In this investigation, two theoretical positions are employed, Students deliberately select communication channels to meet specific goals, such academic efficiency, social connection, or emotional support, claims the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). It places more emphasis on intentional media use than passive consumption. Theory of Media Richness (MRT) argues that different communication mediums have different levels of richness. High-richness channels are better suited for complex, emotional communication, whereas low-richness channels are more helpful for simple information transmission. These concepts work together to help explain why students switch between online and offline communication depending on need, urgency, and context.

The majority of research have concentrated on online learning, social media use, or digital well-being independently; few have adopted a thorough approach to understanding students' academic, social, and emotional communication needs in an integrated manner. Moreover, the vast majority of the existing research was composed prior to 2022 and focuses mostly on the pandemic environment. By 2025, when digital integration are more widespread, a new study is needed to map how students themselves navigate this new communication environment.

**Objective:**

1. To examine the communication needs of college students by 2025 in the digital era.
2. To investigate the ways in which students handle academic, social, and emotional interactions in both online and offline environments.
3. To evaluate the challenges and opportunities posed by digital platforms in fulfilling these requirements.
4. To provide lawmakers, educators, and those who develop digital communication technologies with advice.

**Review of Literature:**

Communication has always been essential to human survival, socialization, and education. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) assert that the communication demands of college students encompass more than just the exchange of information; they also include social belonging, emotional well-being, and intellectual growth. Similarly, the Media Richness Theory (MRT) emphasizes that the effectiveness of different channels differs depending on the kind of communication, whether it be social, emotional, or academic (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

Researchers find that the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) provides a useful lens for understanding students' communication choices since people actively select media platforms to satisfy specific needs (Ruggiero, 2000). Social media sites like Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Discord are crucial for students' identity performance, community building, and peer bonding, claim Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007). Excessive digital interaction is linked to social comparison, cyberbullying, and FOMO (Przybylski et al., 2013).

According to Best, Manktelow, and Taylor (2014), social media successfully satisfies the demand for social communication, but it also contributes to anxiety and identity pressure, especially for college students going through transitional stages of adulthood. Research

indicates that students utilize social media to maintain existing ties and investigate new social groupings (Boyd, 2014).

Constant exposure to negative news cycles and online social comparison exacerbates emotional distress, underscoring the necessity for balanced online-offline communication tactics (Verduyn et al., 2015). According to research, online platforms enhance the accessibility, flexibility, and immediacy of academic communication (Sun & Chen, 2016). Ironically, excessive usage of digital platforms can result in tension, worry, and loneliness even if they offer emotional outlets (Twenge, 2017).

Students can interact with teachers and access resources at any time outside of the classroom. The shift to internet platforms has had a big impact on academic communication. A variety of emotional support mechanisms are now available through digital platforms, such as online counseling sessions, anonymous peer support groups, and mental health applications like Wysa and Headspace (Pretorius et al., 2019).

Virtual classrooms, LMS systems like Moodle and Blackboard, and collaboration platforms like Google Docs and Microsoft Teams have all become standard in higher education (Al-Fraihat et al., 2020). Blended and Hybrid Education Post-pandemic research shows that hybrid learning models which blend digital technologies with traditional instruction have become more popular (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Students acknowledge the usefulness of internet platforms, but they equally appreciate offline conversations for deeper engagement. A study by Rajabalee and Santally (2021) found that while internet communication boosts efficiency in collaborative projects, in-person group collaboration improves interpersonal trust and problem-solving abilities.

Most of the literature focuses on pre-2022 environments that were greatly impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic. It is imperative that these communication demands be thoroughly reviewed by 2025, when hybrid models and digital adoption will be widespread. This study intends to bridge this gap by examining how students in the present digital era balance intellectual, social, and emotional interactions both online and offline.

### **Research Design**

The study employs a mixed-methods strategy that blends quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews in order to gain a thorough understanding of students' communication needs. Quantitative data provides quantifiable insights into usage trends and preferences, while qualitative data captures the nuances of individual experiences and perceptions.

The sample as well as the population of 18–25-year-old undergraduate and graduate students living in urban and semi-urban locations. The 200 students made up the survey's sample size, and a stratified sample made sure that each academic discipline, gender, and academic year was represented. The qualitative component consists of 20 in-depth interviews with students selected from the survey pool to ensure a variety of experiences. Questionnaire for the Survey is created to measure the frequency, purpose, and level of satisfaction with social, emotional, and academic contact that takes place both online and offline., includes Likert-scale items and multiple-choice questions. Open-ended questions that look at each student's unique communication preferences, challenges balancing online and offline communication, and perceived effects on relationships with others, academic performance, and emotional well-being.

### **Variables**

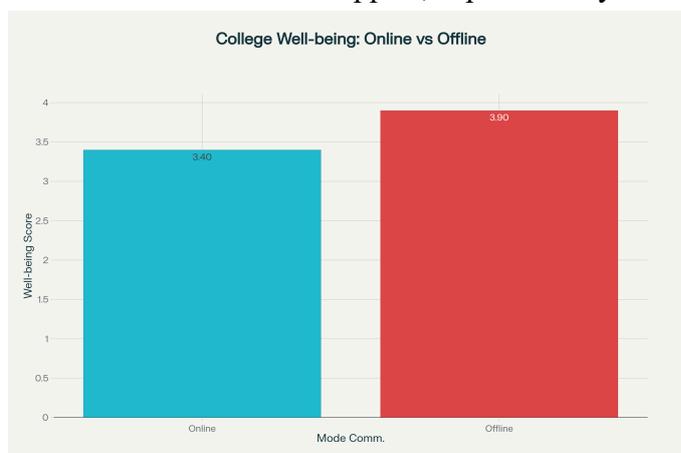
Demographic traits like, age, gender, and background , and communication style like, online vs. offline are examples of independent variables. Academic satisfaction, social connects, emotional well-being, and perceived balance are examples of dependent variables. Methodology for Data Collection Surveys is administered online using Google Forms and offline using paper copies to ensure inclusion. The interviews, which lasted between thirty and forty minutes each, and conducted in person. Although demographic disparities, especially in gender and age, occur in preferences and trust for digital communication, significant gaps are less constant than is commonly thought.

Peer collaboration tools, academic performance evaluations, digital learning materials, and prompt, concise, and clear communication from professors are all necessities for students. In-person engagement increases motivation and comprehension, even when scheduling and resource access are now expected to be completed via digital communication platforms.

Social-emotional learning, or SEL, is crucial for meeting societal needs. Students need opportunities for self-expression, relationship-building, trust-building, and community involvement both online and offline. A sense of belonging is increased by taking part in club activities and belonging to social groups. To preserve their emotional health, students seek for seclusion, compassion, support, and a feeling of belonging. Online communication provides immediacy and reach, but in-person encounters are usually more effective in meeting deeper emotional needs and fostering resilience.

Students employ both approaches to get the best academic and social outcomes. Planning screen breaks, going to in-person study sessions, taking part in campus events, and utilizing digital tools to supplement but not entirely replace in-person connection are all crucial strategies. Students who regularly participate in both online and offline activities report better peer connections, less anxiety, and greater focus.

Research consistently shows that offline conversation delivers higher emotional well-being scores than online-only communication. Even though digital contacts are more accessible and immediate, face-to-face interactions are still superior for showing empathy, reducing loneliness, and building trust. Online participation can, however, enhance well-being when properly integrated, particularly in terms of peer belonging and social support. It also greatly enhances emotional support, particularly for students who reside far away.

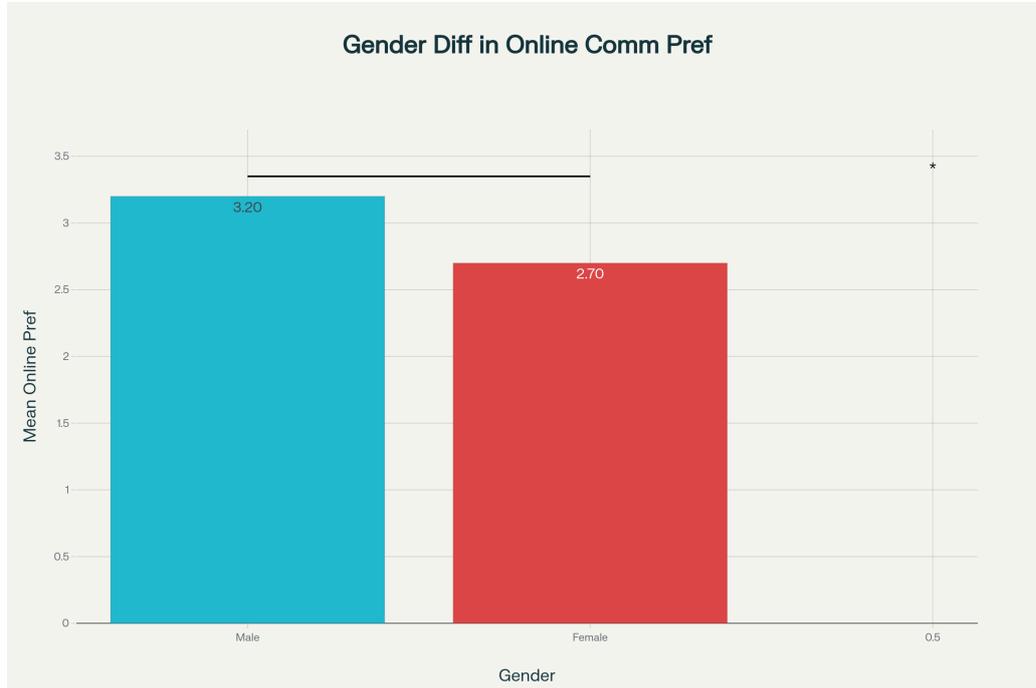


Prolonged screen time results in fatigue, stress, and difficulty focusing. Over-reliance on digital platforms can result in a lack of meaningful contacts and social isolation. Lack of organization in online environments, scheduling difficulties, and technical issues all contribute

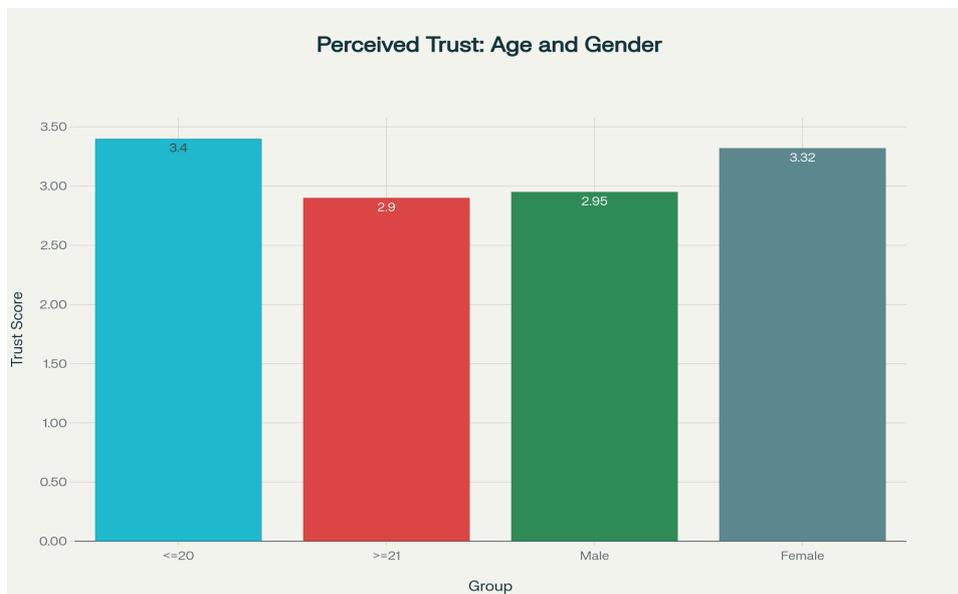
to anxiety. Students' concerns over privacy in digital communications are particularly strong among female students.

Students with a healthy communication mix report higher well-being scores, greater motivation, and improved academic performance. If mental health problems take precedence over excessive digital use or total offline

Gender Preferences for Online Communication Among College Students (2025). The stated t-tests indicate that the difference is not statistically significant.



Though observed, differences are not always statistically significant. Men may score slightly higher on the online preference measure than women, who prefer more emotional and communicative approaches both online and offline. Compared to older students ( $\geq 21$ ), younger cohorts ( $\leq 20$ ) are more likely to trust digital communication and choose online socialization.



## Perceptions of Trust in Online Health Information Sources by Age and Gender among College Students (2025)

Emotional and social needs remain mostly stable throughout college years, according to numerous research, and there is no appreciable year-based variance in SEL skills. Urban or Rural background are studies indicate that there is no app usage or digital communication skills difference between rural and urban areas, indicating that adoption is widespread. Online health communication platforms are generally more trusted by female students and younger pupils. These differences are statistically significant, according to a number of t-tests and ANOVA studies from the literature.

Women are more chatty, favor emotional channels, and occasionally rely on the circumstances. Men are a modest predisposition for online or instant messaging entertainment, depending on the circumstance. Younger age are much increased trust and preference for digital channels . Older people moderately skeptical and preferring to be offline. SEL and communication needs did not significantly change throughout the course of the research year.

The use of digital communication apps in urban and rural areas does not differ much.

### **Conclusion**

Hybrid techniques that blend the depth of offline learning with the ease of online learning are necessary to support the whole range of students' academic, social, and emotional demands.

To lessen fatigue and improve mental health, promote digital literacy, privacy awareness, and balanced routines. Offer specific support, such as student-centered interventions that incorporate demographic diversity, especially in the areas of providing emotional support and building trust in digital resources. Prioritize social-emotional learning programs and regular check-ins because they are intimately linked to well-being and communication.

In conclusion, the digital era has significantly changed the communication demands of college students in 2025, creating a complex environment where social engagement, emotional well-being, and academic success all intersect both online and offline. In order to meet students' holistic needs, digital communication has become crucial for social accessibility and academic efficiency, but it cannot fully replace the sincerity and depth of in-person relationships. In academic communication, digital platforms are now often used for content delivery, assignment submission, and peer collaboration. Students use learning management systems, email, and messaging apps to stay in touch academically. However, research continuously shows that classroom discussions and in-person office hours are still better for deep learning, academic engagement, and motivation. The best students carefully balance the two methods, using digital tools for efficiency and offline encounters for comprehension and meaningful feedback. Social communication presents a complicated picture, with online platforms excelling in maintaining vast networks and creating initial contacts, while physical interactions are essential for establishing trust, closeness, and long-lasting friendships. Students who effectively balance their usage of social media with clubs, on-campus activities, and face-to-face interactions say they feel less alone and have closer bonds with their peers. It is more crucial to understand when each mode is most appropriate for specific social goals than to choose one over the other. Emotional communication is the area where digital interaction's limits are most apparent. The effectiveness of offline interactions for psychological support, emotional fulfillment, and empathy expression has been repeatedly demonstrated to outweigh the useful accessibility and

immediate assistance provided by peer forums, mental health apps, and online support groups. Students who have strong offline support networks in addition to digital tools have better resilience and overall well-being outcomes.

Although the disparities are often not as obvious as one might anticipate, demographic considerations do have an impact on these communication habits. Younger students and females are more likely to trust and prefer digital communication channels, whereas older students may still show a modest preference for offline engagement. However, the digital divide is narrowing as computer literacy increases across age, gender, and socioeconomic status.

The main conclusion of this analysis is that the best student outcomes are determined by communication integration rather than mode preference. Students who are able to blend online convenience with offline depth report better academic success, deeper social bonds, and superior emotional wellness. However, over-reliance on digital or offline contact results in shortcomings; too much screen time leads to fatigue and flimsy relationships, while avoiding digital media results in lost chances and social isolation.

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