Student Communication Experience Facing Digital Fatigue in the Era of Hyper-Connectivity

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Abstract

This study aims to understand how university students perceive the experience of digital fatigue and the communication strategies they employ to manage it within an era of hyper-connectivity. While digital platforms offer academic efficiency, they simultaneously create psychological pressure through information overload and demands for constant responsiveness. This research utilizes a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with students from various academic backgrounds. The analysis applies Stuart Hall's Reception Theory to examine how students interpret and negotiate digital messages and pressures. The findings reveal that students experience digital fatigue characterized by mental exhaustion, emotional burnout, and decreased academic motivation. However, students are not passive recipients; they actively implement diverse communication strategies, including digital detoxes, screen time limits, notification management, physical activity, and open interpersonal communication. This study demonstrates that students act as active agents capable of negotiating meaning and building resistance against hyper-connectivity demands. It contributes to digital communication studies by highlighting the role of individual interpretation and adaptive strategies in overcoming digital fatigue.

1. Introduction

The development of information and communication technology has brought society into the era of hyper-connectivity, a situation where individuals are constantly connected to digital devices without the boundaries of space and time. This condition changes interaction patterns, learning methods, and work dynamics, including within the context of students' academic lives. As part of the digital generation, students are the group that most intensively engages in online spaces for academic, social, and entertainment purposes. Continuous digital activities create a total integration between learning life and social networking, leading to a new phenomenon known as digital fatigue. This exhaustion does not only impact physical aspects due to excessive gadget use but also affects students' mental and emotional conditions. Hyper-connectivity causes the blurring of boundaries between studying, working, and resting, thereby triggering psychological pressure, burnout, interpersonal stress, and a decrease in academic motivation.

Initial findings from interviews with several students show that the phenomenon of digital fatigue is experienced consistently, albeit with different patterns between individuals. Andre (23 years old, Accounting major) noted digital device usage of up to 10–12 hours per day for academic, organizational, and additional work as a content manager. He explained that digital fatigue appears not only in physical form but primarily as mental burnout when facing a screen for long periods. WhatsApp group notifications are a significant source of pressure, as they create a feeling of having to be constantly alert and responsive even while resting. The coping strategies he employs include exercise, leisure walking, and sleeping as a form of detox from digital exposure.

A similar experience was shared by Laila Asizah (19 years old, Sharia Economics), who described digital fatigue as feeling "truly tired because of too much phone or laptop use," especially when academic activities take place entirely online via Zoom, Google Classroom, or WhatsApp Groups. Piling

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notifications, demands for quick responses, and simultaneous assignments worsen her psychological condition. To overcome this, Laila performs a digital detox, limits online time at night, and communicates her condition to friends as a form of interpersonal stress management. Meanwhile, Syarifa (20 years old, Communication Science) admitted to often experiencing digital fatigue when facing assignment deadlines and online meetings, forcing her to be more selective in replying to messages and engaging in outdoor activities to maintain self-balance. Dewi Geizya (20 years old, Informatics Engineering) also emphasized that digital multitasking—coding, attending online classes, and communicating across various platforms—is a source of continuous pressure that disrupts mental peace. She responds to this condition by limiting notifications, reducing screen time, and performing periodic digital detoxes.

These experiences show that students understand hyper-connectivity as a double-edged condition: providing convenience while simultaneously creating pressure. They are not passive users but active actors who adjust the rhythm of connectivity and build personal strategies to maintain psychological balance. This phenomenon aligns with findings (Ou et al., 2023) explaining that digital fatigue is a form of mental and emotional exhaustion due to excessive information exposure and a continuous flow of messages. Research (Noenoek & Handayani, 2024) also confirms that digital fatigue impacts the decline of concentration, academic achievement, and student mental health. The APJII (2024) report shows that the 18–24 age group, the majority of whom are students, are the largest users of digital media in Indonesia, indicating a close proximity between academic life and digital media. Meanwhile, (Maryana et al., 2025) revealed that the high intensity of social media use triggers anxiety when individuals are not connected and sparks phubbing behavior which has the potential to decrease the quality of interpersonal communication.

The phenomenon of digital fatigue is influenced not only by the duration of screen time but also by how students interpret and respond to media messages shaped by digital platform algorithms. A digital environment full of

notifications, fast-paced content, and algorithmic logic encourages the emergence of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), which makes it difficult for students to exercise self-control in media consumption. (Muzakki, 2021) noted that during online learning, students faced psycho-academic pressure in the form of digital burnout, socio-economic pressure, and declining academic resilience due to technological burdens. On the other hand, Stuart Hall's reception theory (1980) helps explain how students process and negotiate the digital messages they receive. Hall explains three decoding positions—dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional—which describe how audiences actively interpret messages. In the context of hyper-connectivity, students have the capacity to accept, negotiate, or even reject dominant messages that are pressuring or inconsistent with their personal experiences.

Contemporary research further strengthens the relevance of this concept. (Rachma et al., 2025) found that the intensity of social media use correlates positively with symptoms of depression and anxiety. Venus Wijaya (2025) identified information overload and FOMO as the main factors causing digital fatigue, while students who implemented a digital detox showed better psychological health. Research (Maryana et al., 2025) also emphasizes that excessive social media use can trigger phubbing behavior that damages interpersonal communication. Furthermore, (Nisa & Fitriani, 2024) offer the concept of digital minimalism as an approach to increase self-control and prevent digital addiction, indicating that adaptive communication strategies have become an essential need in the era of hyper-connectivity. And research from (Wahyuningsih et al., 2025) emphasizes changes in attitudes and actions through persuasive communication in specific social contexts, while this research focuses more on the subjective experiences of students in responding to digital communication pressures in daily life.

Digital fatigue is not merely the result of intensive technology use, but the result of complex interactions between media systems, algorithmic structures, social environments, and individual psychological dynamics. In the

context of Hall's reception theory, students as part of Generation Z live in a digital ecosystem controlled by algorithmic logic, yet they still possess the capacity to negotiate meaning and build resistance strategies against digital pressure. A research gap exists in the lack of phenomenological studies that deeply describe how Indonesian students interpret digital fatigue in their academic and social lives, and how communication strategies are used to manage that pressure. This study aims to explain how students interpret and recognize the experience of digital fatigue in academic and social activities in the era of hyper-connectivity, as well as to identify the communication strategies they use, both personal and interpersonal, to manage, reduce, or overcome the digital pressure they experience.

2. Method

This research employs a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences and subjective meanings university students attach to digital fatigue in an era of hyper-connectivity. By focusing on everyday communication experiences, the qualitative framework allows for a deep dive into the nuances of individual perceptions that quantitative measurements cannot capture. Phenomenologically, this study posits that social reality is not an objective, external entity but a construction of individual consciousness. Rooted in the philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl, the method emphasizes "intentionality"—the idea that consciousness is always directed toward an object. Through the concepts of noesis (the act of perceiving) and noema (the object as perceived), this research analyzes how digital fatigue is formed within the student's consciousness as a result of constant digital interaction and information overload.

The methodological framework is further enriched by the perspectives of Martin Heidegger and Alfred Schutz, shifting the focus toward the "lifeworld" (lebenswelt) and the social context of the experience. Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology suggests that student experiences cannot be isolated from their

academic environments, social relationships, and cultural backgrounds. Complementing this, Schutz's social phenomenology explains how students utilize their "stock of knowledge"—accumulated through daily digital habits—to interpret social situations and negotiate the pressures of hyper-connectivity. Consequently, digital fatigue is understood not merely as a physical byproduct of screen time, but as a complex psychological state shaped by the blurring lines between study, work, and rest, necessitating a study of how students actively interpret these pressures within their specific social reality.

Guided by a constructivist paradigm, the research subjects consist of 20 students from Universitas Trunojoyo Madura, aged 19–22, selected via purposive sampling. This group represents the "digital native" demographic—late adolescents to young adults who are most vulnerable to the cognitive and emotional exhaustion of "social media fatigue." The study recognizes these students as active agents rather than passive users; they are individuals who develop "communicative coping" strategies—such as digital detoxing, notification management, and selective channel usage—to maintain psychological equilibrium. By viewing these students as active interpreters of their digital environment, the research moves beyond objective metrics to capture the "essence" of how it feels to be constantly connected and the internal logic behind the strategies used to resist or manage that connection.

Data collection was executed through a rigorous process of semi-structured in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Initial screening was conducted via questionnaires to identify primary informants who had consistently experienced digital fatigue. Following the data analysis steps outlined by Creswell (2014), the research moved through stages of data organization, horizonalization (coding), thematic identification, and the final formulation of the "essence" of the experience. To ensure the scientific integrity of the findings, data validity was maintained through source and technical triangulation, member checking with informants, and systematic audit trails. This comprehensive approach ensures that

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the resulting insights into student digital fatigue are credible, dependable, and reflect the true subjective reality of the participants.

3. Result and Discussion

The results showed that all informants experienced digital fatigue with different intensities, but had similar experience patterns. Andre, an Accounting student, experiences digital exposure of up to 10-12 hours per day which causes mental boredom, especially when facing academic deadlines, and identifies WhatsApp notifications as the main factor of stress because it forces him to always be responsive even during breaks. This reinforces the idea that hyper-connectivity blurs the boundaries between personal and academic space, creating a continuous psychological burden. Laila, a Sharia Economics student, experienced similar dynamics when her homework and digital interaction increased simultaneously through platforms such as Google Classroom and WhatsApp groups, causing her to feel physical and mental exhaustion. Laila's coping strategy is in the form of digital detox and limiting the use of devices as a form of adaptation to digital pressure. Syarifa and Dewi also show a parallel pattern of digital fatigue, where Syarifa chooses to "off from social media" when the academic load increases, while Dewi who is involved in coding and online classes often experiences excessive multitasking, triggering boredom and loss of focus. Both informants managed these conditions through digital interaction selection, physical activity, and notification restrictions. Overall, students understand digital fatigue as a multidimensional condition that affects psychological well-being, concentration, motivation, and academic capacity, in line with research by Ou et al. (2023), Noenoek & Handayani (2024), and Rachma et al. (2025) which affirms the association of digital fatigue with information pressure, rapid response demands, and excessive content exposure.

Reception analysis using Stuart Hall's theory shows that students do not passively receive digital messages, but decode in various positions. In the dominant-hegemonic position, students accept the demands of quick response as part of a digital academic culture, as seen in Andre. The negotiated position is

shown by students who select certain messages so as not to be burdened, such as Syarifa which limits involvement in digital groups. Meanwhile, the oppositional position emerged through the digital detox strategy carried out by Laila and Dewi by limiting screen time or turning off notifications, actively rejecting the hegemony of non-stop digital connectivity. These findings reinforce Hall's (1980) notion that audiences are active agents in negotiating the meaning of media messages, not just passive objects, which is important in the context of hyper-connectivity to maintain students' psychological balance.

This study identified three main factors that trigger digital fatigue, namely notification overload, demands for social and academic responsiveness, and excessive multitasking. The effects of this condition include decreased concentration and focus, emotional exhaustion, reduced academic motivation, sleep disturbances, and guilt when not responding to messages. This finding is consistent with the concept of technostress (Tarafdar et al., 2011) which explains that the pressure from technology can become psychological stress if not managed properly. All informants also showed adaptive strategies in managing digital fatigue, such as limiting screen time, notification management, doing physical and recreational activities, and open communication with friends or academic groups about the need for rest. This strategy shows that students are not only aware of the impact of digital fatigue, but also actively build coping mechanisms to maintain psychological balance and academic performance. Thus, students' experiences related to digital fatigue reflect a multidimensional phenomenon that requires conscious management of technology exposure and daily digital interactions.

4. Conclusion

This research concludes that university students live in a state of hyper-connectivity where digital technology has become an inseparable component of both their academic and social spheres. The high intensity of digital device usage, coupled with the persistent social demand for immediate responsiveness and a non-stop flow of information, contributes significantly to the emergence of

digital fatigue. This phenomenon is interpreted by students not merely as physical strain resulting from prolonged screen time, but more profoundly as a state of mental and emotional exhaustion that undermines concentration, academic motivation, and overall psychological well-being. The findings reveal that students consciously recognize the onset of digital fatigue through indicators such as screen-induced burnout, the psychological pressure of notification overload, and the increasing difficulty of maintaining healthy rest boundaries.

Within the framework of Stuart Hall's Reception Theory, this study establishes that students function as active audiences who do not passively succumb to the dominant-hegemonic demands of constant digital connectivity. Instead, they engage in a sophisticated process of negotiating meaning and even manifesting resistance against digital hegemony through diverse adaptive communication strategies. These strategies—ranging from digital detoxes and screen time limits to notification management, physical activities, and transparent interpersonal communication—demonstrate a deliberate effort to reclaim the balance between digital engagement and physical reality. Ultimately, this research affirms that digital fatigue is a complex interplay between digital media systems, socio-academic expectations, and individual agency. It highlights that students are resilient actors capable of managing communication pressures, providing a vital foundation for developing academic policies and digital literacy programs that prioritize mental health and psychological equilibrium.

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