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Middle school students' verbal aggression and exposure to gaming content creators on social media

Fahira Nurul Islami^{*)}, Nur Fadhilah Umar, Zulfikri Zulfikri, Nurfaidah Ardis
Makassar State University, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The rise of social media has contributed to the emergence of gaming content creators who frequently use aggressive language such as profanity, taunts, insults, and derogatory nicknames as a means of venting emotions while playing. This pattern of communication has the potential to influence how students use language in their daily interactions. This study aims to describe students' verbal aggression resulting from exposure to gaming content on social media. A qualitative approach was used, specifically a single-case study. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation conducted over a two-month period with a 14-year-old male student, identified by the initials IZY at SMPN 3 Sungguminasa. The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis. The results of the study indicate that the intensity of viewing gaming content makes the subject more likely to recognize, remember, and imitate coarse language. These effects are evident in behaviors such as using coarse language, mocking peers, giving negative nicknames, and the emergence of social conflicts at school. This study concludes that exposure to gaming content is closely related to students' tendency toward verbal aggression; therefore, strengthening digital literacy and fostering positive communication habits are essential.



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Corresponding Author:

Fahira Nurul Islami,
Makassar State University
Email: nurulislami2004@gmail.com

Introduction

The development of digital technology has made social media an integral part of adolescents' daily lives, turning them into active users on various platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, as these platforms are easily accessible and serve as a means of entertainment, communication, and information seeking. According to , during adolescence, the intensity of social media use tends to be high due to the need to interact, follow trends, and seek out figures considered attractive to emulate. A similar point is also explained by Olejarnik & Romano (2023) , stating that social media is most heavily consumed by adolescents due to their high curiosity and desire to follow trends on social media, which results in the majority of social media users being adolescents. This situation means that social media has a significant influence on students' mindsets, habits, and communication styles (Rifqi et al., 2024). Meanwhile, gaming content creators display a harsh, emotional communication style and use profanity while playing. Expressions such as cursing, taunting, insults, or sarcasm are often considered part of the entertainment and spontaneous expression during gameplay (Soma et al., 2025).

Verbal aggression in school settings is still quite common. It can take the form of teasing peers, calling them derogatory nicknames, insulting them, using coarse language, or provoking arguments through speech (Xiaobei

Sun, 2024). This behavior is often dismissed as harmless banter, yet it can lead to conflicts, reduce the comfort of the learning environment, and disrupt social relationships among students. If it occurs repeatedly, verbal aggression has the potential to escalate into other, more serious forms of violence (Buamona et al., 2025). If viewers normalize the aggressive communication styles they see on social media, it will have a negative impact on both the individual and their social environment, as these communication styles will be emulated and applied in their daily lives (Nabila, 2025).

According to the Association for Education and Communication Technology (AECT), media refers to the forms and channels used to convey messages and information; as it has evolved through the internet, this has given rise to digital media as a new space that allows individuals to interact extensively and without limits through a combination of text, audio, visuals, and video. In this context, YouTube has become a highly dominant social media platform; according to the Digital 2021 report, approximately 94% of people aged 13–64 accessed YouTube in the past month, while among teenagers aged 13–17, YouTube use has even become part of their daily routine. This high intensity of use not only makes YouTube a source of entertainment and information but also influences adolescents' language style, as they tend to mimic the communication patterns and verbal expressions of the content creators they consume (Sari et al., 2022).

One of the dominant types of content consumed is gaming content, which in practice often explicitly features forms of verbal aggression, such as curses (e.g., “bego,” “anj*ng”), insults, derogatory terms (such as “tolol,” “idiot”), verbal threats (“I’ll slash you,” “I’ll slap you”), and the use of profanity as an expression of emotion while playing (Kordyaka et al., 2022). These forms of verbal aggression do not merely emerge as spontaneous emotional outbursts but also serve as part of content creators' distinctive communication styles to attract attention and boost audience engagement, thereby increasing the likelihood of imitation by adolescents who are repeatedly exposed to such content (Wahdiyati & Dwi Putra, 2022).

Based on preliminary observations and information from school officials, the use of coarse language and mutual taunting is still prevalent among middle school students. In some cases, students show a tendency to mimic popular terms from digital media, including the gaming content they consume. This situation indicates that the digital space has the potential to be a factor influencing the formation of students' communication patterns, although it has not yet been a primary focus in addressing behavioral issues at school.

A number of previous studies have extensively examined the relationship between digital media, online games, and adolescent aggressive behavior. However, most earlier studies have focused on the intensity of personal gaming, the impact of game addiction, or the general influence of social media use without examining the specific types of content viewed. Studies that specifically highlight exposure to content from gaming creators as a “role model” for students' verbal communication behavior remain relatively limited. In fact, adolescents do not merely play games; they spend hours watching the interactions of creators who often normalize profanity as a form of entertainment. Unlike previous studies, this research focuses on the process of imitating aggressive language from digital screens into the social reality of school through an in-depth single-case study approach.

Therefore, this study aims to provide an in-depth description of the forms of student verbal aggression that arise as a result of exposure to gaming content creators on social media, as well as to analyze its impact on students' social interactions within the school environment. Through a qualitative approach, this phenomenon can be analyzed contextually based on the subjects' real-life experiences in the field. The results of this study are expected to provide practical contributions to schools particularly guidance and counseling teachers—in developing appropriate intervention programs, designing strategies to prevent verbal aggression, and improving students' digital literacy to foster a more positive communication climate at school.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to explore the relationship between exposure to gaming content creators and verbal aggression among students. The research subject was a 14-year-old male middle school student selected based on the intensity of his gaming content consumption. Data for this study were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, involving three supporting informants: a guidance and counseling teacher, the subject's friend, and the homeroom teacher to ensure data triangulation. All data were analyzed qualitatively through the steps of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Sugiono, 2022, p. 6).

Data analysis in this study, as described by Miles and Huberman in (Sugiono, 2022), consists of data collection, the process of gathering data through observation, interviews, and documentation, data reduction, sorting and summarizing important data while discarding irrelevant information, data display, systematically presenting data using matrices and descriptive narratives to make patterns easily understandable as well as conclusion drawing/verification, which involves drawing preliminary conclusions that are then tested for

validity through triangulation and member checks with teachers, students, and relevant parties to produce a credible report.

Results and Discussion

Based on the results of interviews and field observations, it was found that IZY frequently accesses gaming content on social media. IZY can spend more than an hour watching live streams and consistently watches an average of five videos per day. This allows IZY to internalize and remember the profanity heard and seen in the gaming content consumed on social media. The details of the interview and observation results are presented in the following table

Table 1. Interview Results

Behavioral Aspect	Interview Results
Subjects Behavioral Conditions in the School Environment	The subject tends to be talkative, has difficulty staying calm, and often causes disturbances in the classroom. The homeroom teacher also explained that the subject is a student with disciplinary issues, such as acting arrogantly, not listening to teachers, frequently skipping class, and rarely completing assignments.
Forms of verbal aggression exhibited by the subject	The subject recalls and uses various aggressive terms acquired from gaming content creators, such as “dog,” “fucek,” “stupid team,” “idiot,” “whore,” and “tolo”. This verbal aggression manifests as using coarse language, mocking peers, using parents names as the subject of ridicule, and hurling insults both when angry and during casual daily conversations. Close friends and the homeroom teacher also stated that the subject frequently used profanity when interacting with classmates. This finding is supported by documentation of a behavioral contract the subject signed in 7th grade of junior high school for mocking classmates by using their parents’ names and occupations as the subject of ridicule.
Causes of Verbal Aggression	The subject’s verbal aggression tends to surface while playing video games, when feeling annoyed or angry, or during interactions with friends. The guidance counselor explained that verbal aggression in students is generally influenced by their social environment particularly peer groups that engage in mutual imitation as well as exposure to social media and digital content featuring aggressive language, leading students to mimic these communication patterns in their daily interactions.
Intensity of Exposure to Gaming Content	The subject has a fairly high level of exposure to gaming content, spending more than one hour watching live streams and viewing an average of about five gaming videos per day. This exposure has made the subject quite familiar with the communication styles and verbal expressions used by gaming content creators.
Perceptions of the use of verbal aggression in gaming content	The subject recognizes that these words are rude when directed at others, but considers them entertaining or funny, especially when content creators display angry expressions.
The Impact of Verbal Aggression on Social Interaction	The subject’s use of profanity has triggered conflicts among students that nearly escalated into fights on school grounds, even while classes were in session. This behavior has also affected the subject’s communication patterns with peers, as taunts and profanity have become more frequent in daily interactions.

Based on Table 1 the interview results indicate that the subject exhibits verbal aggression in the form of using harsh language, taunting, and using parents’ names as the subject of ridicule in daily interactions. This behavior occurs when the subject is angry, playing video games, or communicating with peers. The high intensity of exposure to content from gaming creators has made the subject quite familiar with the use of aggressive language, which is then imitated and used in daily life. In addition to influencing the subject’s communication patterns, this verbal aggression also impacts social interactions in the school environment, even triggering conflicts among students.

Table 2. Observation Results

Behavioral Aspect	Observation Results
The subjects behavior during the learning process	The subject exhibits a high level of activity (overactive), characterized by frequently changing seats and engaging in actions that disrupt the concentration and learning activities of classmates.
Verbal interactions with peers	The subject uses inappropriate terms (such as “jawir,” “sunna,” “dog,” “jancok”) in everyday conversation
Causes of verbal aggression	Verbal aggression emerges spontaneously under two conditions: during casual interactions and when the subject feels annoyed.

Based on Table 2 the observation results show that IZY’s verbal aggression has developed into an automatic communication pattern, both in casual situations and when the subject feels annoyed. Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation conducted, it was found that the subject’s verbal aggression is linked to high exposure to content from gaming creators on social media. The research findings indicate that the subject engages in various forms of verbal aggression, such as using coarse language, mocking friends, using parents’ names as insults, and hurling expletives when angry or while joking with peers. Based on the interview results, the subject uses various aggressive terms derived from gaming content creators, such as “dog,” “fucek,” “stupid team,” “idiot,” “whore,” and “tolo.” In addition, the observations also showed that the subject used inappropriate terms such as “jawir,” “sunna,” “dog,” and “jancok” in everyday conversations at school.

These findings suggest that verbal aggression among the subjects does not only arise in conflict situations but has evolved into a part of their daily communication patterns. The spontaneous use of coarse language—whether in jest or when feeling annoyed suggests that this behavior has undergone a process of normalization in social interactions. This situation indicates that aggressive language is no longer perceived as deviant behavior but rather as a form of communication considered normal within the subjects’ social circles. These findings align with the views of (2024) , who explain that verbal aggression among adolescents often arises when individuals are angry, annoyed, or joking with peers. Syahira Hayu Ananta et al (2025) also explain that verbal aggression among adolescents often manifests as taunts, insults, and the use of coarse language in peer group communication. Furthermore, Buamona et al. (2025) and Fahmi et al. (2025) state that the social environment and digital media play a role in shaping adolescents’ habits of using aggressive language. Thus, the findings of this study indicate that verbal aggression among the subjects is not only triggered by emotional situations but has become a communication habit reinforced by both the social environment and digital media.

Based on the interview results, it was found that the subjects had a fairly high frequency of gaming content consumption, namely more than one hour of live streaming and an average of five gaming videos per day. This high level of exposure has made the subjects quite familiar with the coarse communication style used by gaming content creators. The subjects were even able to recall various aggressive terms frequently used by gaming creators while playing. This indicates a process of imitation of verbal behavior repeatedly consumed through digital media.

This phenomenon aligns with the social learning theory proposed by Bandura & Walters (1977) , which explains that individuals can learn behavior through the process of observing social models in their environment. In social learning theory, individuals tend to imitate behaviors they frequently observe and find appealing or entertaining. This process involves attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation in imitating the model’s behavior. This is consistent with the research , which explains that the coarse language used by gaming content creators is often perceived as funny and appealing, leading adolescents to unconsciously imitate such language in their daily lives. Adolescents’ communication styles and behaviors can be influenced by trends and what they see on social media (Giannakopoulos & Prassou, 2025).

In addition, the interview results show that the subjects are aware that these words are considered rude when directed at others, but they still view the use of such language as funny and entertaining, especially when used by gaming content creators to express anger during gameplay. This situation indicates a process of normalization regarding the use of verbal aggression in digital media. Robbani, M. U. et al. (2023) which explains that the coarse language used by gaming content creators is often perceived as funny and appealing, leading adolescents to unconsciously mimic such language in their daily lives. This behavior stems from what we frequently hear and see; unconsciously, we normalize it and turn it into a habit that is applied in daily life (Selyutin, 2019).

In addition to being influenced by exposure to digital media, the subjects verbal aggression is also influenced by their emotional state and social environment. Based on the results of interviews and observations, rude language tends to occur more frequently when the subjects are playing video games, feeling annoyed or angry, or during casual interactions with peers. The guidance counselor also explained that students’ verbal aggression is generally influenced by their peer group and the tendency to imitate one another. These findings indicate that

verbal aggression is not only influenced by social media but is also reinforced by a social environment that condones the use of coarse language in everyday communication.

This aligns with the study, which shows that verbal aggression among adolescents who play online games is related to emotional regulation skills. Adolescent aggressive behavior can be influenced by the online games they frequently play (Yulianingrum et al., 2024). Furthermore, Putra & Hartono (2024) suggest that verbal aggression among adolescents while playing online games is linked to low self-control when facing emotional situations. Adolescents addicted to online games tend to have greater difficulty controlling themselves because they are accustomed to venting their emotions while gaming (Aulia et al., 2022). A study by, suggests that nearly all adolescents addicted to gaming exhibit communication styles that tend to be toxic; this is due to habits they develop while playing games. Ode et al. (2025) also explain that toxic communication in online games is often influenced by competitive situations and players' emotional reactions during gameplay.

Meanwhile, the impact of verbal aggression on students' communication behavior and social interactions indicates that the subjects verbal aggressive behavior affects communication patterns and social interactions within the school environment. Based on the observation results, the subjects use of coarse language has developed into an automatic communication pattern that emerges both in casual situations and when they feel annoyed. The repeated use of profanity has caused the subject's communication with peers to tend toward the use of taunts and curses as a form of daily interaction. The homeroom teacher also explained that the subject's use of profanity had once triggered conflicts among students, nearly leading to a fight during class. Furthermore, behavioral contract records indicate that the subject has had disciplinary violations since the seventh grade of junior high school for mocking peers by using their parents' names and occupations as the basis for ridicule. These findings suggest that the subject's verbal aggression has persisted for a considerable period and has impacted social relationships with peers within the school environment.

These research findings align with the views of (2021) who explain that aggressive behavior can affect students' personal and social aspects. Similarly, Tikhomirov & Akhrenova(2019) suggest that verbal aggression can affect the quality of students social relationships and lead to interpersonal conflicts in daily interactions. Furthermore, Habibah & Marsinun(2023) explain that verbal aggression is typically influenced by a person's lack of self-control. Low self-control can increase the tendency toward verbal aggression in adolescents, especially when individuals are in emotional situations or social environments that support such behavior (Chaq, 2019).

Thus, the research findings indicate that exposure to content from gaming creators that contains toxic language is potentially linked to the development of verbal aggression in students through the processes of modeling and social imitation. The high frequency of viewing such content makes students increasingly familiar with the use of coarse language, which they then come to view as normal and incorporate into their daily communication. This behavior ultimately influences students communication patterns and has the potential to cause conflicts in social interactions within the school environment.

Conclusions

Overall, this study has achieved its research objective, which was to describe student verbal aggression behaviors related to exposure to gaming content creators on social media. Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, it was found that the subjects exhibited verbal aggression behaviors in the form of using profanity, taunts, negative nicknames, and curses in their daily interactions. This behavior emerged when the subjects were angry, playing games, or joking with peers. The high frequency of watching content from gaming creators was associated with the subjects' increasing familiarity with various forms of aggressive language, which they subsequently reused in daily communication through the processes of modeling and social imitation. The research findings also indicate that the subjects view the use of coarse language in gaming content as something funny and entertaining, leading to the normalization of such language use. In addition to exposure to content from gaming creators, the subjects' verbal aggression is also influenced by their emotional state and social circles, where the use of coarse language is commonplace in daily interactions. These factors impact the subjects communication patterns in the school environment and trigger interpersonal conflicts with their peers. The findings of this study have practical implications: schools particularly guidance and counseling teachers need to develop guidance services focused on improving digital literacy, ethical communication on social media, and students emotional regulation. Additionally, parents are encouraged to provide closer supervision of their children's social media use and the types of digital content they consume, so that students can select and filter content that serves as a positive example in their daily lives. This study concludes that, in the case examined, exposure to content from gaming creators who use aggressive language is associated with a tendency toward verbal aggression through the processes of modeling and social imitation. However, this study has limitations

because it employed a single-case study approach involving only one subject therefore, the findings are not intended to be generalized to the entire student population. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more subjects from various educational levels or to use quantitative or mixed-methods approaches so that the relationship between exposure to content from gaming creators and verbal aggression can be examined more comprehensively.

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