



NAVIGATING PRIVACY BOUNDARIES BY INTERNATIONAL ONLINE GAMING PLAYERS

Sofiari Ananda ^{1*}, Nur Fitriyani Saputri ²

^{1,2} Communication Sciences Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

Corresponding author: sofiariananda@usu.ac.id

Article Info

How to cite:

Ananda, S., Saputri, F. N. (2025). NAVIGATING PRIVACY BOUNDARIES BY INTERNATIONAL ONLINE GAMING PLAYERS. *Opini: Journal of Communication and Social Science*, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 101-107, 2025.



This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license

ABSTRACT

This study explores how international online gaming players negotiate privacy boundaries and construct digital intimacy across cultural contexts. Employing participant observation and autoethnography, the research examines disclosure practices and communication patterns among players from Indonesia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Findings reveal that players manage privacy through layered self-disclosure, selective use of game affordances such as guild systems and chat channels, and strategic migration to external platforms like Discord and WhatsApp. The study extends Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory by integrating an intercultural dimension showing how cultural values shape the permeability of privacy boundaries and the negotiation of digital intimacy. The novelty lies in applying CPM theory to global gaming contexts, highlighting how online relationships are simultaneously facilitated and constrained by technology, culture, and trust dynamics.

Keywords: online gaming, privacy boundaries, digital intimacy, self-disclosure, intercultural communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of online gaming has transformed how individuals interact, build relationships, and share personal information in digital spaces. Multiplayer online games not only serve as entertainment platforms but also as social environments where players from diverse cultural backgrounds form bonds that often extend beyond the game itself. Existing studies have examined digital intimacy and self-disclosure among gamers from Western contexts, emphasizing the role of anonymity and technological affordances in shaping online relationships. However, little is known about how such intimacy and privacy negotiations occur in non-Western settings, particularly in Indonesia, where cultural values, collectivist orientations, and communication norms significantly influence online behavior.

However, previous studies rarely explore intercultural intimacy in online gaming through the lens of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory, leaving a gap in understanding how cultural differences shape privacy boundaries and self-disclosure online.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how online gaming players from Indonesia, the United States, and the United Kingdom negotiate privacy boundaries and build digital intimacy using the CPM framework.

Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory, developed by Petronio (2002), offers a lens for understanding how individuals regulate the flow of private information. It emphasizes that privacy management is a dynamic process shaped by ownership, control, and the permeability of information boundaries. In online gaming, these boundaries become more complex as players navigate between public and private identities within semi-anonymous spaces. While prior studies have applied CPM to contexts such as social media (Child & Starcher, 2016) and online dating (McEwan et al., 2018), few have explored its relevance to gaming communities that transcend national and cultural borders. By applying CPM in this setting, this research not only extends the theory's scope but also contributes to understanding how cultural differences influence digital intimacy and privacy negotiation.

Indonesia's gaming community provides a unique context for this exploration. As one of the largest gaming markets in Southeast Asia, Indonesia exhibits rapid digital adoption alongside strong collectivist and relational communication norms (Nugroho, 2021). These cultural characteristics shape how players form trust, disclose personal information, and maintain boundaries in online spaces. Examining these dynamics contributes both to the theoretical development of CPM and to practical insights into intercultural communication in digital environments. In summary, this study explores how online gamers from Indonesia, the United States, and the United Kingdom negotiate privacy and intimacy through the Communication Privacy Management framework. By focusing on intercultural interactions, it aims to reveal how cultural values and technological affordances jointly shape self-disclosure, trust, and relationship-building in global online gaming communities.

2. RESEARCH METHODE

This study employs a qualitative approach using autoethnography and participant observation to explore how online gaming players negotiate privacy boundaries and develop intimacy across cultures. The unit of analysis is the interactional communication practices among players within online gaming environments, focusing on self-disclosure, boundary negotiation, and relationship maintenance.

Data were collected over a six-month period (January–June 2024) through active participation in multiplayer online games, including Genshin Impact, Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, and Valorant. The researcher engaged in gameplay, joined guilds and team channels, and participated in both in-game and external communication platforms such as Discord and WhatsApp. Field notes, chat transcripts, and reflective memos were compiled throughout the observation period.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed. All participants were informed of the study's purpose, and consent was obtained verbally prior to data inclusion. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used and identifiable data were omitted.

Data analysis followed the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), conducted through three systematic stages:

- 1) Coding: Relevant excerpts from field notes and transcripts were assigned initial codes representing concepts such as trust, disclosure, or cultural difference.
- 2) Theme Development: Codes were grouped into broader categories to identify recurring patterns related to communication privacy and intimacy across cultural groups.
- 3) Interpretation: Themes were interpreted in relation to Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory, connecting empirical patterns with theoretical constructs such as privacy boundaries, ownership, and permeability.

To enhance credibility, the researcher conducted member checking by discussing preliminary interpretations with several participants and triangulated findings across multiple data sources (chat logs, observation notes, and autoethnographic reflections).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identifies four interrelated themes that describe how players negotiate privacy and intimacy across online gaming platforms: ownership of personal information, control of disclosure, rule coordination, and boundary turbulence. These themes reflect how cultural values shape communication practices and expand the understanding of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory in a global digital context.

Privacy Ownership: Establishing Personal Boundaries in Online Spaces

Players perceive their digital identities and personal stories as their private "territories." They consciously decide which aspects of their real-life identities such as nationality, religion, or gender they reveal in-game. Indonesian players, for instance, tend to withhold sensitive information and rely on humor or indirect speech to maintain harmony, reflecting collectivist communication norms. In contrast, Western players are generally more open, viewing disclosure as a way to build authenticity.

This pattern illustrates Petronio's (2002) notion of privacy ownership, where individuals feel they possess the right to control their private information. It also resonates with Baruh and Cemalcilar's (2018) findings that cultural context affects privacy expectations and the perceived risks of disclosure. In online gaming, ownership of information is shaped not only by personal boundaries but also by platform structures avatars, guild systems, and chat channels that blur public and private spheres.

Privacy Control: Regulating Self-Disclosure through Technological Affordances

Privacy control manifests through the use of in-game features and external communication tools. Players selectively migrate from open channels to private chats

or external platforms such as Discord or WhatsApp to deepen trust-based interactions. This selective migration exemplifies privacy control, the ability to regulate how and to whom personal information is shared.

Indonesian players often test trust gradually before moving conversations outside the game environment, a practice influenced by high-context cultural norms. Hsu et al. (2019) found similar patterns in East Asian online communities, where relationship building precedes disclosure. In this study, cultural context and platform affordances intertwine: technological control mechanisms (muting, blocking, or private chats) reinforce the social norms that guide disclosure behavior.

Rule Coordination: Negotiating Shared Boundaries within Gaming Communities

As relationships develop, players co-create informal privacy rules governing acceptable topics, frequency of contact, and emotional tone. Within guilds, these rules emerge organically through interaction and are reinforced by group norms. Indonesian players, for instance, avoid discussions of religion or politics to maintain group harmony, while Western players are more comfortable engaging in debate.

This process reflects rule coordination, where privacy boundaries are jointly managed among co-owners of shared information (Petronio, 2002). Cross-cultural coordination can lead to misunderstandings when implicit rules differ. For example, joking about sensitive issues may be interpreted as offensive in collectivist contexts but as friendly in individualist ones. Consistent with Baruh and Cemalcilar (2018), such rule negotiation highlights how culture mediates perceptions of privacy, redefining what constitutes “appropriate” disclosure in intercultural settings.

Boundary Turbulence: Managing Conflict and Miscommunication

Despite established rules, conflicts occasionally arise when expectations about privacy are violated a phenomenon CPM defines as boundary turbulence. Instances include the unintentional sharing of private conversations or the exposure of sensitive information to unintended audiences. Players often respond by adjusting their boundaries either reducing disclosure or moving to smaller, more trusted groups.

This turbulence reveals both the fragility and adaptability of privacy management in digital environments. While Petronio (2002) conceptualized boundary turbulence primarily within face-to-face settings, this study demonstrates how such disruptions occur in transnational online spaces mediated by technology and culture. Similar to Hsu et al. (2019), who observed relational strain following boundary violations in virtual communities, these findings suggest that cultural empathy and technological awareness are essential for restoring trust and re-establishing boundaries.

Cultural Expansion of the CPM Framework

The intercultural context of this study broadens CPM theory beyond its predominantly Western applications. Indonesian players’ collectivist orientation emphasizes group harmony, indirect disclosure, and relational maintenance, whereas Western players exhibit more individualistic disclosure styles emphasizing autonomy and authenticity. These contrasts extend CPM by illustrating that privacy management is culturally contingent and technologically mediated.

By situating privacy boundary negotiation within a global gaming environment, this research shows that CPM’s core components ownership, control, coordination, and turbulence operate differently across cultural systems. Cultural norms not only

influence how boundaries are drawn but also how they are repaired after turbulence occurs. Thus, CPM evolves from a communication theory of private information to a framework for understanding global digital intimacy, where privacy is co-constructed across borders, technologies, and cultural expectations.

Thematic Synthesis

Overall, the themes highlight that privacy negotiation in online gaming is layered, culturally situated, and technologically mediated. While games offer opportunities for intimacy, these relationships are unstable and deeply dependent on both trust and cultural understanding.

Informant	Theme	Key Finding	Example Quote
Darkness1 2 (27, USA)	Cautious Disclosure	Shares personal info gradually; avoids giving address/phone; prefers keeping game persona separate.	"I wouldn't really give people my Discord unless I knew them for a decent amount of time... I probably wouldn't give out my phone number, I think that's a different territory."
Keefus (26, UK)	Openness & Trust	More open and trusting, willing to share name, location, even gifts after only weeks of interaction.	"I'm a pretty trusting person so not long, a couple of weeks maybe... My name, near the area of where I live, some life stories... stuff like that."
Yui (24, USA)	Social Impressions & Boundaries	Decides interaction based on how others treat a person; uses gender/age/country info to set conversational boundaries.	"Knowing gender helps me address them, later comes age... it also helps me adapt within conversations."
Mashwell (20s, Indonesia)	Selective Sharing & Mutual Trust	Shares only minimal info (gender, approximate age, occupation); exchanges gifts only after years of knowing, with	"Well, paket nggak saya kasih alamat balik... nama juga bukan nama lengkap. But because I've known them for years, it's okay."

limited personal
details.

4. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how intercultural communication unfolds within online gaming environments through the lens of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory. Theoretically, it extends CPM beyond its traditional interpersonal and Western contexts by demonstrating that privacy ownership, control, rule coordination, and boundary turbulence are shaped by cultural norms and technological affordances. The integration of intercultural dynamics into CPM reveals that privacy boundaries are not fixed but fluid, adapting to differing expectations of trust, hierarchy, and collectivism.

Methodologically, the use of autoethnography combined with participant observation provides a nuanced, insider perspective on digital intimacy and privacy negotiation. This approach captures both lived experiences and interactional subtleties often overlooked in survey-based studies, demonstrating how qualitative inquiry can enrich theory-building in digital communication research.

Practically, the findings offer insights for educators, digital platform designers, and community managers seeking to foster safer and more inclusive online spaces. Encouraging awareness of cultural diversity and implementing clearer privacy controls can minimize boundary turbulence and promote respectful interactions among users from varied cultural backgrounds.

Future research should expand this investigation by including larger, more diverse participant samples and comparative analyses across different digital platforms beyond gaming. Longitudinal studies could also explore how privacy boundaries evolve over time and how emerging technologies such as virtual reality or AI-mediated communication reshape the dynamics of intimacy and disclosure in global digital contexts.

References

- Andhika, R., & Syahputra, I. (2019). Interaksi dan identitas pemain Mobile Legends: Studi etnografi virtual. *Koneksi*, 3(1), 125–137.
<https://doi.org/10.24912/kn.v3i1.5689>
- Baruh, L., & Cemalcilar, Z. (2018). Privacy concerns in digital environments: A review of research and a framework for future studies. *New Media & Society*, 20(3), 108–125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816654464>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Chen, V. H. H., & Duh, H. B. L. (2020). Online gaming and social interaction: Mediated communication in virtual worlds. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 113, 106456. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106456>

- Cole, H., & Griffiths, M. D. (2018). Social interactions in massively multiplayer online role- playing gamers. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 11(6), 575–583. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2007.9988>
- Fox, J., & Tang, W. Y. (2017). Women's experiences with general and sexual harassment in online video games: Rumination, organizational responsiveness, withdrawal, and coping strategies. *New Media & Society*, 19(8), 1290–1307. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816635778>
- Hofstede, G. (2018). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hsu, C. L., Chang, K. C., & Huang, H. C. (2019). Understanding online game communities: A social capital perspective. *Information & Management*, 56(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2018.03.006>
- Kowert, R., Breuer, J., & Quandt, T. (2020). Women are from FarmVille, men are from ViceCity: The cycle of exclusion and sexism in video game content and culture. *Journal of Communication*, 70(3), 363–386. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqaa007>
- Lestari, P., & Wulandari, S. (2022). Identitas digital dan negosiasi privasi di media sosial: Perspektif mahasiswa komunikasi. *Jurnal ASPIKOM*, 7(2), 215–229. <https://doi.org/10.24329/aspikom.v7i2.1234>
- Lomanowska, A. M., & Guitton, M. J. (2018). Online intimacy and well-being in the digital age. *Internet Interventions*, 13, 24–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.invent.2018.05.002>
- Markham, A. (2018). Afterword: Ethics as methods: Doing ethics in the era of big data research. *Social Media + Society*, 4(3), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118784502>
- Petronio, S. (2018). *Communication Privacy Management Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pink, S., Horst, H., Postill, J., Hjorth, L., Lewis, T., & Tacchi, J. (2019). *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage.
- Pratama, Y. (2020). Game online dan konstruksi identitas remaja: Perspektif komunikasi interpersonal. *Jurnal Komunikasi*, 12(1), 45–59. <https://doi.org/10.25008/jk.v12i1.789>
- Suryani, N. (2020). Etnografi digital dalam penelitian komunikasi: Studi pada komunitas gamer Indonesia. *Jurnal Komunikasi Indonesia*, 9(1), 67–81. <https://doi.org/10.7454/jki.v9i1.1123>
- Syahputra, I. (2021). Privasi, identitas, dan media digital: Perspektif generasi muda Indonesia. *Jurnal Komunikasi Indonesia*, 10(2), 155–170. <https://doi.org/10.7454/jki.v10i2.1254>
- Wohn, D. Y. (2019). Video game communities as sites of social capital. *Information, Communication & Society*, 22(2), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1349827>