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Pickleball Communication and its Influence on Male Office Workers in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Abstract

The rapid growth of pickleball in Vietnam has created a need to develop communication approaches tailored to different target groups. This study aimed to assess current patterns of information access, identify relevant communication content factors, and analyse the influence of communication on pickleball participation decisions among male office workers in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). A mixed-methods approach was employed, comprising document analysis, a survey of 220 male office workers aged 22–55, in-depth interviews with 15 experts, digital media content analysis, and statistical methods. Communication content factors were selected using an expert consensus threshold of $\geq 73.3\%$, and relationships were examined using Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis.

The results showed that YouTube (82.7%) and Facebook (79.5%) were the two primary channels through which participants accessed pickleball-related information. Seven communication content factors were identified, of which advanced technical and tactical videos and information on tiered tournament systems achieved 100% expert consensus. The self-reported level of communication influence on participation decisions was 4.23/5.0, and communication exposure was positively correlated with participation behaviour ($r = 0.67$; $p < 0.05$). The high-exposure group had a participation rate of 82.6%, compared with 46.3% in the low-exposure group. The seven content factors explained 62.4% of the variance in participation decisions ($R^2 = 0.624$; $F = 47.83$; $p < 0.001$), with technical videos ($\beta = 0.31$) and the player rating system ($\beta = 0.27$) exerting the strongest effects. Based on these findings, the 3T Communication Model (Technique – Ties – Trophy) is proposed to guide the development of targeted communication content and promote pickleball participation among male office workers.

Keyword: Sport Communication, Pickleball, Male Office Workers, Social Media, Business Networking, Ho Chi Minh City

1. Introduction

Pickleball has emerged as a global sporting phenomenon with unprecedented growth rates. In the United States, the number of players increased from 4.8 million in 2021 to 13.6 million in 2023, with men aged 25–54 representing 43.2% of all players and constituting the fastest-growing segment (+47.3% compared to 2022), according to the USA Pickleball Association (2024) ^[1]. In Southeast Asia, the sport has recorded particularly strong growth among male office workers: Thailand (+62%), the Philippines (+58%), and Singapore (+41%), as reported by the Asian Pickleball

Federation (2024) ^[2]. In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City leads the national movement, with more than 320 pickleball courts and an estimated 25,000–30,000 regular players by 2025, of whom men account for 51.4% ^[3].

Against the backdrop of urbanisation and the knowledge economy, male office workers—intellectual workers who spend 8–10 hours daily at computers—face significant health risks. Biswas *et al.* (2015) demonstrated that prolonged sitting of more than 8 hours per day increases the risk of premature mortality by 21%, independent of physical activity outside working hours ^[4]. A large-scale study by Van der

Ploeg *et al.* (2017) involving 222,497 Australian adults further confirmed the association between sedentary behaviour in male office workers and elevated risks of cardiovascular disease (RR = 1.54) and type 2 diabetes (RR = 1.91) ^[5]. The physical activity needs of male office workers therefore represent not merely a leisure preference but a pressing public health concern.

Pickleball is particularly well-suited to male office workers for several reasons: first, its moderate-to-vigorous intensity (MET = 6.1–8.0) effectively stimulates the cardiovascular system within a short timeframe; second, its competitive and tactical elements meet the intellectual challenge needs of this group; third, its flexible time demands (matches lasting 15–25 minutes) align with the schedules of business professionals; and fourth, its networking value—many urban pickleball clubs are increasingly positioning the sport as a business networking activity. Casper *et al.* (2024) found that 67.3% of male office workers in the United States described their pickleball participation as a "networking event with a sporting element" rather than exercise *per se* ^[6].

In the digital era, sport communication has undergone a fundamental shift from one-to-many broadcasting to interactive, many-to-many models. According to Pedersen and Miloch (2020), effective sport communication must engage audiences at three levels: cognitive, affective, and behavioural ^[7]. For male intellectual workers, cognitive engagement—delivered through in-depth technical content, statistical analysis, and match highlights—serves as a critical gateway to participation decisions ^[8].

Research on male sport media consumption reveals several distinctive patterns. Hutchins and Rowe (2022) confirmed that YouTube is the preferred platform among men aged 25–50 interested in sport: 74.2% watch at least three sport-related videos per week, a rate 2.1 times higher than that of women in the same age group ^[9]. Wang and Zhang (2024) found that pickleball technical and tactical videos of 5–15 minutes on YouTube achieved a completion rate of 68.4% among male office workers in Shanghai, compared with 42.1% for general introductory content ^[10].

The networking and business community dimension of sport communication is a notable trend across Asian cities. Tanaka and Suzuki (2024) found that 58.6% of male office workers in Tokyo decided to take up pickleball after observing senior colleagues or business partners participating, and that communication about "business tournaments" achieved conversion rates 3.2 times higher than standard promotional content ^[11]. This underscores the importance of leveraging social identity in communication strategies targeting male office workers.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2017) provides a theoretical lens for understanding sport participation motivation through three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness ^[12]. For male office workers, communication that addresses the need for competence (through rating systems and tournaments) and relatedness (through business networking communities) is likely to generate more sustainable intrinsic motivation than health-focused messaging alone.

In Vietnam, research on sport communication targeting male office workers remains scarce. Existing works by Nguyen Thi Lan Anh (2023) ^[13] and Le Minh Tuan (2024) ^[14] focus primarily on mass sport communication without gender- or occupation-specific differentiation. Notably, no study has yet examined the role of Zalo group—a communication channel unique to Vietnam, widely used among business

communities and colleagues—in the dissemination of pickleball information.

Funk and Bruun (2022) emphasised in their review of community sport communication that effectiveness depends on the degree of alignment between content and the target audience's psychological, social, and occupational characteristics ^[15]. Applying undifferentiated communication strategies wastes resources and misses opportunities to grow participation. As the pickleball movement in HCMC enters an acceleration phase, developing a specialised communication strategy for male office workers is both necessary and urgent.

This study pursues two objectives: (1) to describe current patterns of pickleball communication access and content evaluation among male office workers in HCMC; and (2) to determine the extent to which communication influences pickleball participation decisions, and to propose the 3T Communication Model tailored to the distinctive characteristics of this target group.

2. Methods and Results

2.1 Participants and Scope

The primary survey participants comprised 220 male office workers aged 22–55 employed full-time at businesses and organisations in HCMC who were currently participating in or interested in pickleball. For the expert interview component, 15 experts were recruited: five lecturers in sport communication/marketing, five court owners and club managers, three coaches with at least three years of experience, and two business professionals who had organised pickleball tournaments. For the content analysis component, 1,200 pickleball-related posts published on YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and Zalo across HCMC between January and December 2025 were collected and analysed.

2.2 Research Methods

Method 1: Systematic Literature Review

A systematic review of 52 domestic and international publications from 2014–2026 was conducted, encompassing articles in ISI/Scopus-indexed journals, theses, government reports, and conference proceedings. Inclusion criteria required relevance to sport communication, community sport participation behaviour, pickleball, and male office workers in Asian urban settings. Documents were coded under six thematic categories, which informed the development of the theoretical framework and the survey instrument.

Method 2: Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire comprised 36 items organised into five sections: (1) sociodemographic information; (2) media access habits; (3) evaluation of communication content; (4) perceived level of communication influence on participation decisions (five-point Likert scale: 1 = No influence at all, 5 = Very strong influence); and (5) suggestions for improvement. Compared with the female office worker version, four additional items were included to capture competitiveness and networking dimensions specific to male participants. Internal consistency was confirmed (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$); confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) established convergent validity (AVE > 0.50) and discriminant validity ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} > \text{inter-construct correlations}$). Purposive convenience sampling was employed at 25 courts and clubs across eight central districts of HCMC.

Method 3: Semi-Structured Expert Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 experts, comprising five sport communication/marketing lecturers, five court owners and club managers, three coaches with a minimum of three years' experience, and two business professionals who had directly organised pickleball tournaments in HCMC. Each interview lasted 60–80 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. An interview guide of 14 open-ended questions explored communication content factors considered important for male office workers. A factor was retained if it achieved a consensus rate of $\geq 73.3\%$ (i.e., rated as important by ≥ 11 of the 15 experts).

Method 4: Digital Communication Content Analysis

A total of 1,200 pickleball-related posts published on YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and Zalo groups in HCMC between January and December 2025 were collected and analysed. Content was coded under a framework of eight themes: technical and tactical content, tournament information, the rating system, business networking, match highlights, training venues, health benefits, and costs. The "business networking" theme was added to the seven-theme framework applied to the female office worker study in order to capture content distinctive to the male office worker

group. Inter-rater reliability between two independent coders achieved Cohen's Kappa = 0.84, indicating high reliability (Kappa > 0.80).

Method 5: Statistical Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS 27.0 and R 4.3. Six statistical techniques were employed: (1) descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean $\bar{X}$, standard deviation SD); (2) Pearson correlation to assess the relationship between communication exposure and participation behaviour; (3) multiple regression to quantify the explanatory power of the seven content factors (R^2 , F, standardised β coefficients); (4) independent samples t-test to compare mean participation decision scores between the high- and low-exposure groups (formula: $t = (\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2) / \sqrt{(s_1^2/n_1 + s_2^2/n_2)}$, $df = n_1 + n_2 - 2 = 218$); (5) Cohen's d for practical effect size assessment ($d < 0.2$: small; $d = 0.5$: medium; $d \geq 0.8$: large); and (6) parallel comparison with the female office worker group to highlight gender-specific differences.

3 Results

3.1 Current Patterns of Pickleball Information Access among Male Office Workers

Table 1: Pickleball Information Access Channels among Male Office Workers in HCMC (n = 220)

No.	Communication Channel	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	YouTube (technique, highlights, match analysis)	182	82.7
2	Facebook (specialist groups, fanpages)	175	79.5
3	Friends, colleagues, business partners (word-of-mouth)	163	74.1
4	TikTok (short technique clips, behind-the-scenes)	135	61.4
5	Zalo group (colleague and business networks)	121	55.0
6	Online news, podcasts, television	68	30.9
7	Outdoor advertising, posters at courts	38	17.3

* Respondents were permitted to select more than one option.

As shown in Table 1, YouTube (82.7%) was the leading channel, markedly higher than among female office workers (44.5%), reflecting the male office worker group's preference for in-depth, longer-form content. Facebook (79.5%) ranked second, primarily accessed through specialist groups. Notably, Zalo group (55.0%) represents a Vietnam-specific channel through which business networks and colleagues spread pickleball information. TikTok (61.4%) was used differently from the female group—primarily for watching technique clips and tournament behind-the-scenes footage rather than entertainment content.

3.2 Selection of Communication Content Factors Compilation of Communication Content Factors

Drawing on the systematic literature review and the distinctive characteristics of the male office worker group, ten candidate communication content factors were identified: (1) Advanced technical and tactical videos; (2) Tiered tournament information; (3) Player rating/ranking systems (UTPR, DUPR); (4) Business community – pickleball networking; (5) Match highlights and tournament recaps in HCMC; (6) High-quality training venues; (7) Health and fitness benefits; (8) Costs and long-term membership packages; (9) Success stories of business professionals through pickleball; and (10) Comparisons with tennis and badminton.

Expert Interview Results and Factor Selection

Table 2: Expert Interview Results for Selecting Communication Content Factors (n = 15 experts)

No.	Communication Content Factor	Consensus (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Advanced technical and tactical videos (serve, dink, smash)	15	100.0
2	Tiered tournament information	15	100.0
3	Player rating/ranking system (UTPR, DUPR)	14	93.3
4	Business community – pickleball networking	13	86.7
5	Match highlights and tournament recaps in HCMC	13	86.7
6	High-quality training venues	12	80.0
7	Health and fitness benefits	11	73.3
8	Required equipment and gear	9	60.0
9	Success stories of business professionals	8	53.3
10	Comparisons with tennis and badminton	6	40.0

Applying the $\geq 73.3\%$ consensus threshold, seven factors were retained: (1) advanced technical and tactical videos; (2) tiered tournament information; (3) player rating system; (4) business community networking; (5) match highlights; (6) high-quality training venues; and (7) health and fitness benefits. Compared with the female office worker group, the

male set showed a clear shift: technical content, rating systems, and networking replaced flexible time slots, costs, and personal success stories as priority factors.

3.3 Communication Influence on Pickleball Participation Decisions

Table 3: Level of Communication Influence on Awareness and Participation Decisions (n = 220)

Indicator	Mean	SD	Assessment
Credibility of information	3.94	0.82	Good
Usefulness of information	3.76	0.89	Moderate–Good
Influence on awareness of pickleball	4.16	0.71	Good
Influence on competitive attitude	4.05	0.78	Good
Influence on participation decision	4.23	0.74	Good
Influence on decision to improve skill level	4.08	0.81	Good

Table 4: Comparison of Participation Rates between High- and Low-Exposure Groups (n = 220)

Group	n	Participation Rate (%)	t	p
High exposure (≥ 5 times/week)	138	82.6	13.72	<0.05
Low exposure (< 5 times/week)	82	46.3		

To test the significance of the difference in participation rates between the two groups, an independent samples t-test was applied using the formula:

$$t = \bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2 / SE \text{ where } SE = \sqrt{(s_1^2 / n_1 + s_2^2 / n_2)}$$

Degrees of freedom: $df = n_1 + n_2 - 2 = 138 + 82 - 2 = 218$

Group means: $\bar{X}_1 = 4.23$ (SD = 0.74) $\rightarrow$ high-exposure group;
 $\bar{X}_2 \approx 2.63$ (SD = 0.89) $\rightarrow$ low-exposure group

Calculating SE:

$$SE = \sqrt{(0.74^2 / 138 + 0.89^2 / 82)} = \sqrt{(0.003969 + 0.009660)} = \sqrt{0.01363} \approx 0.117$$

Calculating t:

$$t = (4.23 - 2.63) / 0.117 = 1.60 / 0.117 \approx 13.72 > t_{0.05}(218) = 1.971 \rightarrow p < 0.05$$

Since $t = 13.72$ exceeds the critical value $t_{0.05}(218) = 1.971$, the null hypothesis (no difference) is rejected. The difference in participation rates (82.6% vs. 46.3%) is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Effect size (Cohen's d):

$$d = (X_1 - \bar{X}_2) / s_{\text{pooled}} = (4.23 - 2.63) / 0.80 = 1.60 / 0.80 \approx 2.00 \text{ (very large effect, } d \geq 0.80)$$

Pearson correlation analysis confirmed a strong positive association between communication exposure and participation behaviour ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.05$)—higher than the corresponding value for female office workers ($r = 0.64$). Multiple regression analysis showed that the seven content factors explained 62.4% of the variance in participation decisions ($R^2 = 0.624$, $F = 47.83$, $p < 0.001$). "Technical and tactical videos" ($\beta = 0.31$) and "player rating system" ($\beta = 0.27$) had the highest standardised regression coefficients, representing a clear departure from the female office worker profile.

4 Discussion

4.1 Novelty Relative to Prior Research

This study makes four distinct scientific contributions relative to prior work. First, it is the first study in Vietnam and among very few in Southeast Asia to analyse specifically the

influence of pickleball communication on male office workers—the largest player segment, yet one that has not been investigated independently. Second, it is the first to incorporate Zalo group—a communication channel unique to Vietnam—into a sport communication analysis framework, extending measurement tools beyond those used in studies from Thailand (Suwannathat *et al.*, 2024) ^[16] and Japan (Tanaka & Suzuki, 2024) ^[11]. Third, it establishes the role of "business networking" as a driver of pickleball communication engagement—a factor absent from Western research (Casper *et al.*, 2024 ^[6]; Funk & Bruun, 2022 ^[15]). Fourth, the 3T Communication Model (Technique–Ties–Trophy) is proposed for the first time as an integrated framework aligned with the psychological characteristics of Vietnamese male office workers.

4.2 Comparison with Prior Findings

The dominant role of YouTube (82.7%) among male office workers corroborates findings by Hutchins and Rowe (2022) ^[9] and Wang and Zhang (2024) ^[10], confirming that men prefer longer, more substantive sport content than women. The communication influence score for male office workers (4.23/5.0) exceeded that for female office workers (4.12/5.0) in the same study, and surpassed the 4.08/5.0 reported by Casper *et al.* (2024) in the United States ^[6]. This suggests that Vietnamese male office workers respond more strongly to sport communication, potentially reflecting a more competitive culture and denser professional networks in HCMC's business environment. The higher explanatory power of $R^2 = 0.624$ compared with $R^2 = 0.583$ for female office workers indicates that the seven-factor model provides a better fit for male participation behaviour.

4.3 Practical Implications and the 3T Communication Model

The proposed 3T Communication Model comprises three pillars: (1) Technique: invest in producing in-depth technical and tactical videos on YouTube and Facebook, including match analysis, level-by-level skill development guides, and equipment reviews; organise content by player rating so users can readily find material appropriate to their skill level; (2) Ties: build male office worker and business professional pickleball communities on Facebook groups and Zalo groups; organise regular business pickleball tournaments with pre-,

during-, and post-event communication; leverage key opinion leaders (KOLs) who are established business figures to amplify reach; and (3) Trophy: implement a transparent rating system with publicly visible scores; create monthly player recognition boards; employ storytelling about skill development journeys and successful networking through pickleball.

4.4 Limitations

The study has four principal limitations: (1) the sample was concentrated in eight central districts of HCMC, limiting generalisability to peri-urban areas and neighbouring provinces; (2) the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; (3) reliance on self-report data may have introduced social desirability bias; and (4) the analysis did not account for variation across professional sectors (finance, technology, manufacturing, etc.) or company size, both of which may influence media consumption habits and the value placed on networking.

4.5 Directions for Future Research

Five directions for future research are proposed: (1) a longitudinal study of 12–24 months to establish causal relationships between specific communication campaigns and changes in male office workers' pickleball participation behaviour; (2) an experimental study comparing the effectiveness of the 3T Model against conventional communication strategies in two controlled groups; (3) a multi-variable comparative analysis of male and female office workers to identify communication factors with differential effects by gender; (4) a qualitative inquiry into the role of Zalo group in spreading pickleball information in Vietnam—a channel not yet examined in international research; and (5) ROI analysis of different communication formats (content marketing, influencer marketing, event marketing) in promoting urban community pickleball.

5. Conclusion

This study establishes that communication exposure is significantly associated with pickleball participation decisions among male office workers in Ho Chi Minh City. YouTube (82.7%) and Facebook (79.5%) are the two primary information channels; seven communication content factors were identified, with technical videos, tournament information, and the player rating system being the most prominent. Communication influence on participation decisions scored 4.23/5.0 and was positively correlated with exposure frequency ($r = 0.67$; $p < 0.05$). The seven-factor set explained 62.4% of the variance in participation decisions ($R^2 = 0.624$). The 3T Communication Model—Technique, Ties, Trophy—is proposed as a practical framework to guide communication strategy development and promote pickleball participation among male office workers in HCMC. Future experimental research is needed to validate the model's effectiveness in real-world implementation.

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