

Psychological Perspectives on Indonesian Netizens' Impoliteness in Digital Communication

Abdullah Rasyid^{1✉}, Achmad Khudori Soleh²

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia

Abstract:

Digital communication has intensified public interaction while also increasing the visibility of impolite exchanges in online environments. This study aims to examine the psychological factors underlying Indonesian netizens' impoliteness in digital communication. Using a qualitative descriptive-interpretive design, data were collected through digital observation, semi-structured interviews with 12 active social media users aged 19–35, and document analysis of public online interactions. The findings identified three main psychological dynamics. First, emotional impulsivity encouraged immediate verbal reactions when participants felt provoked or offended. Second, perceived anonymity reduced social accountability and weakened awareness of interpersonal consequences. Third, identity-based defensiveness intensified hostile responses when beliefs, values, or group affiliations were perceived as threatened. This study contributes to digital communication scholarship by positioning impoliteness as a psychologically mediated interaction rather than merely a problem of etiquette. The findings suggest that digital literacy initiatives should incorporate emotional regulation, reflective communication, and awareness of social consequences.

✉Corresponding Author: 2204012200022@student.uin-malang.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

Digital communication has become one of the most influential social environments in contemporary Indonesian society. Social media platforms, online discussion forums, and instant messaging applications now shape how citizens exchange opinions, construct identities, and negotiate social relationships. The importance of studying impoliteness in this environment lies in its direct impact on social cohesion, psychological well-being, and democratic interaction (Afriana et al., 2024; Fatmawati et al., 2024; Tahir, 2025). When online communication becomes increasingly hostile, public conversation may shift from constructive dialogue toward



symbolic aggression, humiliation, and emotional polarization. Reports of verbal attacks, ridicule, and hate-oriented exchanges in Indonesian digital spaces suggest that impolite communication is no longer incidental but increasingly normalized (Arafah et al., 2025; Khomairotusshiyama et al., 2025). This condition matters because repeated exposure to hostile interaction can intensify stress, reduce trust, and weaken interpersonal sensitivity. Therefore, understanding Indonesian netizens' impoliteness from a psychological perspective is socially urgent and academically significant.

The growing intensity of digital participation in Indonesia has been accompanied by the emergence of communication practices marked by sarcasm, insults, ridicule, mockery, and aggressive verbal reactions. Public controversies involving politics, religion, entertainment, and everyday social issues frequently trigger emotionally charged exchanges among users (de Vasconcellos et al., 2022; Kyrychok, 2021). In many cases, anonymity, rapid information circulation, and algorithm-driven visibility encourage impulsive reactions rather than reflective communication. Observations of comment sections on social media indicate that disagreement often escalates into personal attacks rather than reasoned argumentation. This phenomenon creates a problematic communicative climate because online hostility may normalize aggression, intensify group polarization, and reduce empathy toward others. For younger users in particular, repeated exposure to such interactions may shape emotional habits and social perception (Santuso et al., 2022; Yusuf et al., 2025). Consequently, Indonesian digital communication presents a concrete societal problem requiring systematic psychological investigation.

Previous studies have examined online communication from sociolinguistic, media, and cultural perspectives, but psychological explanations remain relatively limited. Shofi et al. (2025) and Ningrum et al. (2025) argued that emotional regulation strongly influences how individuals respond to conflict in online environments. Setiawati et al. (2025) and Zaini et al. (2025) found that anonymity and reduced social accountability often encourage more aggressive digital expression. (Afriana & Mubarak, 2024), through the concept of online disinhibition effect, explained how mediated interaction reduces restraint and increases impulsive expression. Tahir (2025) and Hina (2025) demonstrated that impoliteness functions not only as linguistic behavior but also as a socially interpreted act involving emotional consequences. Although these studies provide important foundations, most focus either on language patterns, technological environments, or general behavioral tendencies. They have not sufficiently explained how psychological processes among Indonesian netizens shape impolite communication in culturally specific digital contexts.

The novelty of this study lies in positioning digital impoliteness as a psychological phenomenon embedded in Indonesian socio-cultural interaction. Existing research often treats impoliteness as a linguistic deviation, platform effect, or communication ethics issue (Zahroh et al., 2025). However, online hostility also involves emotional arousal, cognitive appraisal, perceived social threat, identity defense, and group belonging. These internal psychological mechanisms remain underexplored in the Indonesian context, despite the country's highly active social media participation (Fatmawati et al., 2024). This research therefore advances the discussion by connecting

individual psychological processes with broader digital communication practices. It is important to address this issue because understanding why netizens become verbally aggressive can contribute to more effective digital literacy strategies, healthier public discourse, and more context-sensitive interventions for preventing the normalization of hostility in online communication.

Based on the preceding discussion, this study addresses a central research problem concerning how psychological factors shape impoliteness among Indonesian netizens in digital communication. More specifically, the study asks why individuals who may maintain politeness in face-to-face interactions become more confrontational, sarcastic, or verbally aggressive in online spaces. It also examines what psychological mechanisms such as emotional impulsivity, perceived anonymity, social identity affirmation, frustration, and reduced interpersonal accountability contribute to the emergence of impolite digital behavior. Another important question concerns how repeated exposure to hostile interaction influences communicative norms within online communities. These questions are important because they move beyond describing observable expressions of impoliteness and instead investigate the internal processes that generate and sustain such behavior in contemporary Indonesian digital environments.

This study argues that Indonesian netizens' impoliteness in digital communication is not merely a matter of weak etiquette or moral decline, but is closely related to psychological dynamics activated within mediated interaction. The provisional assumption is that emotional immediacy, perceived social distance, identity-based defensiveness, and the weakening of direct interpersonal consequences jointly create conditions that facilitate impolite expression. From this perspective, digital hostility emerges as a patterned psychological response shaped by technological affordances and socio-cultural context. The original contribution of this research lies in integrating psychological interpretation with digital communication analysis to explain why impoliteness becomes normalized in Indonesian online spaces. By doing so, the study seeks to enrich psychological scholarship while offering conceptual foundations for healthier, more reflective, and socially responsible digital interaction.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive-interpretive approach (Kassam et al., 2022). The design was selected because the objective of the study is not to measure the frequency of impolite expressions statistically, but to understand the meanings, psychological motivations, and contextual interpretations underlying Indonesian netizens' impoliteness in digital communication. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate for examining social phenomena that involve subjective experience, emotional processes, and situated interaction. In the context of digital communication, impoliteness is not merely observable through words or expressions, but also through how users interpret provocation, social identity, emotional triggers, and interactional consequences. A descriptive-interpretive design therefore allows the researcher to explore how online users construct meaning around impolite

communication and how psychological factors shape their communicative behavior within specific social contexts.

The research was conducted in Indonesian digital public spaces, particularly on social media platforms widely used by Indonesian netizens, including Instagram, X, and TikTok. These platforms were selected because they represent highly active spaces of public interaction where opinion exchange, debate, emotional expression, and spontaneous reactions occur intensively. They also provide a rich environment for observing forms of impoliteness such as sarcasm, ridicule, verbal aggression, and hostile comment exchanges. In addition to platform observation, the study involved 12 informants selected through purposive sampling. The informants consisted of active Indonesian social media users aged 19 to 35 years who regularly participate in online discussions, comment activities, or public digital interaction. Their backgrounds included university students, teachers, freelance workers, private-sector employees, and community-based digital content creators. The diversity of these backgrounds was intended to capture a broader range of psychological experiences and interpretations related to impolite communication in Indonesian digital environments.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: digital observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis (Kekeya, 2023). First, digital observation was conducted by examining public interactions on selected social media platforms, especially comment sections, discussion threads, and public responses related to social, cultural, and everyday issues. This observation focused on identifying recurring forms of impolite communication, emotional reactions, and interactional patterns. Second, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the 12 informants to explore their perceptions of online impoliteness, emotional experiences during digital interaction, reasons for responding aggressively, and interpretations of conflict situations in online environments. Interviews allowed participants to explain the psychological meanings behind their communicative behavior. Third, document analysis was used to examine screenshots, public posts, comment threads, and interaction archives relevant to the phenomenon under study. These multiple techniques enabled richer contextual understanding and strengthened the depth of qualitative interpretation.

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative model adapted from Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña on Soesana et al. (2023)'s research. The first stage was data condensation, in which raw field materials, interview transcripts, observation notes, and digital documents were organized and focused according to themes relevant to psychological factors underlying impoliteness. The second stage involved data reduction by selecting, coding, and categorizing data into meaningful analytical units such as emotional impulsivity, perceived anonymity, identity defense, frustration, and interpersonal distancing. The third stage was data display, where the condensed findings were organized in thematic matrices, interpretive descriptions, and conceptual relationships to facilitate analytical interpretation. The final stage was data verification, in which patterns, recurring meanings, and interpretive conclusions were continuously examined through comparison across different data sources. This process enabled the researcher to develop credible interpretations

regarding the psychological dynamics of Indonesian netizens' impoliteness in digital communication.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied several validity procedures (Fadli, 2021). First, source triangulation was conducted by comparing findings obtained from digital observation, interviews, and document analysis. Second, method triangulation was used to examine whether similar themes emerged across different forms of data collection. Third, member checking was carried out by confirming several interpretations with selected informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretation reflected participants' intended meanings. Fourth, peer debriefing was employed through discussion with academic colleagues familiar with qualitative research and digital communication studies in order to review analytical consistency and interpretive logic. Through these procedures, the study sought to strengthen credibility, dependability, and interpretive validity in understanding the psychological dimensions of impoliteness among Indonesian netizens.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

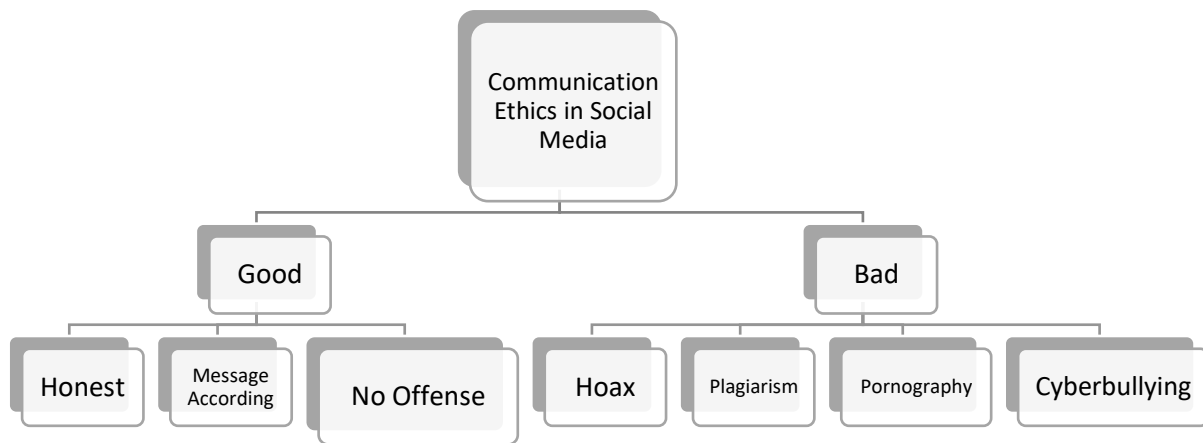
Result

The findings reveal that Indonesian netizens' impoliteness in digital communication is shaped by interconnected psychological dynamics. Based on digital observation, interviews, and document analysis, three main patterns emerged: emotional impulsivity, perceived anonymity with reduced social accountability, and identity-based defensive communication. These findings provide an empirical basis for understanding how psychological processes influence hostile interaction in online environments.

Emotional Impulsivity in Digital Interaction

Emotional impulsivity in this study refers to a psychological tendency in which individuals respond immediately to online stimuli without sufficient reflection, emotional regulation, or consideration of interpersonal consequences. In digital communication, emotional impulsivity appears when users quickly express anger, sarcasm, ridicule, or verbal attack after feeling provoked, offended, misunderstood, or emotionally disturbed by online content. In the field, this tendency emerged when netizens interpreted particular posts, comments, or opinions as emotionally provocative and responded spontaneously rather than reflectively.

Several informants explained that they often reacted immediately when encountering content perceived as offensive or provocative. One participant stated that emotionally charged posts often triggered irritation and created a strong urge to reply before thinking carefully. Another participant described how disagreement in online discussion sometimes produced instant emotional tension, especially when the issue touched personal values. In these situations, participants recognized that their comments were often written while emotions were still active rather than after calm reflection. This indicates that online impoliteness often emerges from immediate affective reaction rather than deliberate communicative intention.



Picture 1. Conceptual Framework: Communication Ethics in Digital Media

Communication ethics in social media refers to normative principles that regulate responsible interaction in digital environments. Ethical communication involves honesty, message relevance, and avoidance of expressions that may harm or offend others. In contrast, unethical communication includes the circulation of false information, plagiarism, pornography, and cyberbullying. These principles provide a conceptual basis for interpreting how Indonesian netizens negotiate acceptable and unacceptable communicative behavior in online spaces. Some participants also admitted that after emotions subsided, they sometimes regretted the language they had used. This suggests that emotional impulsivity reduces reflective judgment and narrows awareness of the broader social consequences of digital interaction.

Digital observation showed similar patterns across public comment sections. Responses frequently appeared within a short time after provocative posts were published, and comment threads often shifted rapidly from disagreement toward emotionally charged personal attacks. Restated simply, emotionally provocative content often produced immediate reactive language rather than thoughtful dialogue. The pattern indicates that emotional arousal functions as an important psychological trigger of impolite communication. In digital spaces characterized by speed, visibility, and immediate response mechanisms, impulsive emotion becomes highly influential in shaping communicative behavior.

Perceived Anonymity and Reduced Social Accountability

Perceived anonymity in this study refers to the psychological experience of social distance that reduces feelings of interpersonal responsibility during online interaction. Although users may communicate through identifiable accounts, digital environments often create a sense that communicative consequences are weaker than in face-to-face situations. In the field, reduced social accountability appeared when participants reported feeling less constrained, less cautious, and less emotionally aware of how their words might affect others.

One informant stated that speaking harshly online felt easier because direct emotional reactions from the other person were absent. The participant explained that in offline interaction, facial expressions, voice tone, and immediate social feedback

usually encouraged greater caution. In contrast, online communication created distance that reduced emotional sensitivity. Another participant similarly noted that writing comments through a screen made interaction feel less personal. As a result, strong words could be used more easily than in everyday face-to-face communication.

Another participant explained that digital interaction often created a feeling that comments disappeared quickly and therefore carried fewer interpersonal consequences. This perception sometimes reduced internal restraint. Participants acknowledged that they would probably not use the same expressions in direct interpersonal encounters. The absence of visible social feedback therefore influenced how language was produced, interpreted, and regulated during online exchanges.

Observation of public discussion threads supported these accounts. Comment sections frequently contained sharp criticism, ridicule, dismissive language, and hostile responses even in relatively minor disagreements. Restated more simply, the distance created by mediated interaction reduced awareness of interpersonal consequences. The data pattern shows that when social accountability becomes psychologically weaker, verbal aggression becomes more likely to appear. In this context, perceived anonymity functions not merely as technical invisibility but as reduced emotional responsibility toward others.

Social Identity and Defensive Communication

Social identity in this study refers to a person's psychological attachment to groups, beliefs, values, communities, or symbolic affiliations that shape emotional interpretation during digital interaction. Defensive communication occurs when disagreement is interpreted as a symbolic threat to one's identity, which then produces emotionally charged responses intended to protect status, belonging, or social position. In the field, this tendency appeared most clearly when online discussions involved political preference, religious values, fandom loyalty, or community affiliation. Participants did not merely respond to the informational content of messages; rather, they often interpreted comments as symbolic judgments directed toward groups they valued. In such situations, disagreement was experienced not simply as difference of opinion but as an emotionally meaningful challenge to collective identity, dignity, and social recognition within digitally mediated public interaction.

Several informants explained that they became more emotionally reactive when discussions involved matters closely connected to identity. One participant stated, "When someone criticizes the community I belong to, it feels personal even if they do not mention me directly." Another participant explained, "Political discussions make me more emotional because it feels like people are attacking what I believe." These statements indicate that emotional intensity did not emerge solely from the literal meaning of online messages. Rather, participants interpreted criticism as symbolic evaluation of their social belonging. In these situations, emotional responses became stronger because the discussion was connected to values, beliefs, and group-based attachments that participants considered important to their self-understanding and social positioning.

Another informant explained that online debates often encouraged defensive responses because participants felt compelled to protect their community or belief system from perceived attack. One participant said, "Sometimes I reply sarcastically because I feel I have to defend my group." Another admitted, "When I think people are underestimating my side, I react more sharply than I normally would." These responses suggest that impolite communication may function as symbolic defense rather than merely spontaneous hostility. In this context, sarcasm, ridicule, and dismissive remarks often emerged as communicative strategies through which participants attempted to maintain dignity, legitimacy, and collective recognition. The perceived need to defend identity therefore shaped both emotional reaction and verbal expression during digital interaction.

Digital observation showed that comment sections involving political issues, religion, entertainment fandoms, and social controversies often developed into polarized exchanges. Users frequently aligned themselves with particular groups and collectively attacked opposing viewpoints. In many discussions, individual comments quickly shifted from argument evaluation toward symbolic labeling, group comparison, and antagonistic positioning. Restated simply, disagreement became more hostile when it involved symbolic belonging and perceived collective threat. The observed pattern indicates that identity-related defensiveness intensified emotional sensitivity and reduced openness toward opposing perspectives. When online communication became organized around group attachment rather than dialogue, impolite expression appeared more easily and was often reinforced by collective approval within digitally networked communities.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that impoliteness among Indonesian netizens is shaped by interconnected psychological processes rather than merely by weak communication ethics or individual moral failure. Emotional impulsivity, perceived anonymity, and identity-based defensiveness collectively influence how users interpret online interaction, evaluate symbolic meaning, and produce verbal responses (Caya et al., 2023; Kassam et al., 2022). These findings support the initial assumption of this study that digital hostility emerges through the interaction between internal psychological dynamics and mediated communicative environments. The data show that impolite communication cannot be understood solely as linguistic deviation or technological consequence. Rather, it develops through emotional activation, cognitive interpretation, and social positioning within digital interaction. In this sense, online hostility appears as a patterned psychological response that is socially produced, emotionally intensified, and repeatedly reinforced within contemporary Indonesian digital communication practices (Nsabayezu et al., 2023).

The first finding shows that emotional impulsivity plays a major role in online impoliteness. Digital environments are characterized by speed, immediacy, rapid visibility, and continuous stimulation. These conditions reduce opportunities for reflection and increase the likelihood of immediate emotional reaction (Menec et al., 2020; Sain et al., 2024). When users experience anger, irritation, frustration, or symbolic

offense, response behavior often becomes reactive rather than deliberate. Participants frequently described replying while emotions were still active, before carefully considering interpersonal consequences. This indicates that online communication often narrows emotional regulation by accelerating the transition from emotional arousal to verbal expression (Peng et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2021). In this context, impolite communication becomes closely related to temporary affective activation, weakened reflective judgment, and reduced awareness of how emotionally driven language may influence the broader social climate of interaction.

The second finding indicates that perceived anonymity reduces communicative accountability. Although users may not be fully anonymous, mediated interaction creates psychological distance that changes how social consequences are experienced. The absence of facial expression, voice tone, immediate feedback, and visible emotional response weakens awareness of how communication affects others (Chen et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2025). This reduced social immediacy contributes to lower self-restraint and greater willingness to employ sarcasm, ridicule, dismissive comments, or harsh verbal language. Participants consistently reported that they would likely be more cautious in face-to-face situations (Raecke et al., 2024; Tian et al., 2022). These findings suggest that impoliteness is facilitated not only by emotional activation but also by the structural characteristics of mediated interaction. Digital communication therefore alters interpersonal regulation by reducing emotional responsibility and weakening the immediate social cues that usually moderate behavior.

The third finding highlights the role of social identity in shaping impolite communication. Online disagreement becomes more emotionally charged when users perceive that their beliefs, group affiliations, values, or symbolic belonging are being challenged (Barnes et al., 2021; Coleman et al., 2023). Under these conditions, communication is no longer interpreted merely as exchange of opinion but as identity-related confrontation. Defensive communication therefore becomes a psychological strategy of symbolic protection. Participants often interpreted criticism directed toward communities, beliefs, or social groups as personally meaningful. As a result, emotional responses became stronger and verbal reactions more confrontational (Gietzen et al., 2023; Rogers et al., 2021; Saleem et al., 2021). This finding expands previous understandings of online impoliteness by showing that verbal hostility may also function as an expression of collective attachment, symbolic boundary maintenance, and group-based emotional defense within digitally networked social environments.

Taken together, the three findings indicate that impoliteness in Indonesian digital communication emerges through the interaction of emotional activation, reduced social accountability, and identity-based interpretation. This means that interventions aimed at improving digital communication should not rely only on moral appeals, etiquette instruction, or normative regulation. More effective efforts should include emotional self-regulation, reflective communication habits, critical awareness of identity-based reactivity, and greater sensitivity toward the psychological consequences of mediated interaction. Understanding impoliteness through this perspective offers a more contextual explanation of why hostile communication becomes recurrent and normalized in contemporary Indonesian digital spaces. It also provides a useful

foundation for developing digital literacy initiatives that promote more reflective, empathetic, and socially responsible patterns of online communication.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that impoliteness among Indonesian netizens in digital communication is shaped by three interconnected psychological dynamics: emotional impulsivity, perceived anonymity, and identity-based defensiveness. The most important lesson from this research is that online hostility should not be understood merely as weak etiquette or moral decline, but as a patterned psychological response emerging from mediated interaction, rapid emotional activation, and reduced interpersonal accountability. The academic contribution of this study lies in extending discussions of digital communication beyond linguistic and technological perspectives by demonstrating how internal psychological processes shape impolite online behavior in the Indonesian socio-cultural context. Nevertheless, this study has limitations. The number of informants was relatively small, and the research focused only on selected social media platforms. Future research may involve broader participant groups, comparative platform analysis, and longitudinal approaches to examine changes over time.

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