

Verbal Aggressiveness against Public Figures' Language: An Analysis of Tweeps' Comments on Twitter

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Accepted: 15 June 2022 | Published: 30 June 2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55057/ajbs.2022.4.2.8>

Abstract: *Aggressive communicators take opportunities to attack the self-concept of others on Twitter. Among other Twitter users, public figures tend to receive more verbally aggressive comments. This study identified the forms of verbal aggressiveness contained in the tweeps' comments and analyzed the underlying rationales of the tweeps to express such verbally aggressive behavior. From 120 tweeps' comments analyzed, character attack was found in 10 tweeps' comments (8.3 %), competence attack was found in 3 tweeps' comments (2.5 %), physical appearance attack was found in 22 tweeps' comments (18.3 %), the dominant kind of verbal aggressiveness—insult was found in 38 tweeps' comments (31.8 %), the minor kind of verbal aggressiveness—malediction was found in 1 tweep's comment (0.8 %), teasing was found in 33 tweeps' comments (27.5 %), and profanity was found in 13 tweeps' comments (10.8 %). Of all verbal aggressiveness forms, politicians received verbal aggressiveness in the forms of character attack, competence attack, physical appearance attack, insult, teasing, and profanity. Then, celebrities received all kinds of verbal aggressiveness. However, practitioners only received physical appearance attacks, insults, teasing, and profanity. Environmental influence, pseudonymity, and dissatisfaction became the primary rationales of the tweeps to attack the self-presentation of public figures on Twitter.*

Keywords: verbal aggressiveness, public figures, Twitter

1. Introduction

Nowadays, with the prompt expansion of technology, the interpersonal exchange of ideas, information, views, facts, thoughts, feelings, or opinions has traveled far from the concept of face-to-face communication to online communication. The fact that social media users can mask their identities and maintain anonymous or pseudonymous profiles while posting any content and implementing comments, has driven them less responsible. The users are accustomed to being easy to partake in hurtful acts since in an online communication context, they have a moral disconnection to pursue the secondary goal of communication such as making a good impression, maintaining a positive relationship, and being supportive with the interlocutors (Roberto et al., 2006). Thus, they produce verbally aggressive behavior to bring psychological pain. One theoretical approach which can be used to explain such a situation is Deindividuation Theory (Festinger et al., 1963). This theory explained that online communicators engaging in anti-social behavior believe that anonymity or pseudonymity can not be personally identified, easily traced, and directly accountable for their actions within a

group. Loss of self-awareness, self-evaluation, and a sense of individuality are the indicators of deindividuated communicators (Simão et al., 2018).

Verbal aggressiveness, as one of the aggressive communication types, is defined as an attack on the self-concept of other people instead of attacking the opposing arguments which arise on topics of communication (Hutchens et al., 2014; Infante & Wigley, 1986). Generally, verbal aggressive communicators tend to dominate, humiliate and manipulate others, express feelings of anger, rely on criticism and blame, and have their own set of talked and discussed points to inflict psychological pain. Their only goal is merely to provoke conflicts and embarrassment, not to have actual communication (Ferreira, 2020). From a pragmatic perspective, verbal aggressiveness can be present in the relational domain which focuses on the person, not the content. Consequently, aggressive communicators tend to ignite hostility and humiliate others instead of arguing constructively. In an online communication context, such attitudes are realized by leaving negative or uncivil comments. These destructive tones, indeed, will promote negative outcomes.

From the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory, cognitive competencies, environmental influences, and internal dispositions are associated with verbal aggressiveness. Communicators' expectations, beliefs, self-perception, goals, and intentions determine how they behave (Bandura, 1986; Chen et al., 2017). In addition, anonymity, pseudonymity, and asynchronicity predispose verbally aggressive behavior in a social media setting (Allison & Bussey, 2017; Appel et al., 2012).

Twitter is preferable to other social media because of its effectiveness and efficiency (Murthy, 2012; Chen et al., 2017; Shane-Simpson et al., 2018). The 280-character limit makes the Twitter users succinct. They have to convert long articles, full-length conversations, and extensive information into simple and digestible facts, thoughts, ideas, and concepts. Then, Twitter's cross-sectional communication pattern that promotes the exchange of opinions causes interpersonal interaction among its users to go more dynamic (D'Errico et al., 2017). Therefore, it is not surprising that Twitter users, including public figures, are increasing day by day. When the tweets have contradictory expectations, beliefs, self-perception, goals, or intentions about the tweet makers, verbally aggressive comments will be landed on Twitter's comment columns. Since public figures have more followers than others, their self-presentation packaged via their tweets has great potential to be attacked. Afterward, verbal aggressiveness takes place. Public figures' special class has made them become the center of public attention. Hence, the followers of public figures on Twitter will stay informed and connected to their activities and events. However, the followers, sometimes, forget to be positive and constructive in responding to their tweets (Dyner & Poopi, 2020; Bartoli et al., 2016; Wicaksono & Arif, 2018).

In an online interaction context, verbal aggressiveness can be found in online mass media, blogs, or even social media platforms. In online mass media, Bykov et al. (2018) and Chakrabaty (2020) found that people posted comments in the forms of insulting, prosecuting, blaming, threatening, negative forecasting, obscenity, threats, and insult. Then, Rösner and Krämer (2016) found offensive and vulgar words, sarcasm, insults, and slander in blog visitors' comments. On Facebook, Rachoene and Oyedemi (2015) found insults, threats, and outings as the other forms of verbal aggressiveness. Moreover, Vidyullatha et al. (2021) identified verbal aggressiveness in the forms of hate speech, insults, threats, and defamatory acts on Twitter.

Since Twitter is open, inclusive, and asymmetric (Dijk, 2011; Murthy, 2012; Takhteyev et al., 2012), verbally aggressive comments are more likely to occur on Twitter. Thus, Twitter is

selected for this study. Unlike previous studies, this study will employ Schrodt and Wheelless' theory (2001) to classify the forms of verbal aggressiveness. So, character attack, competence attack, physical appearance attack, insult, malediction, teasing, and profanity found on tweeps' comments posted by anonymous or pseudonymous accounts will be identified. Then, these forms of verbal aggressiveness will be further analyzed by using relevant theories.

Specifically, the tweeps are the followers of public figures (politicians, practitioners, and celebrities). So, this study is aimed at: (1) Identifying the categories of verbal aggressiveness posted by the tweeps using anonymous or pseudonymous accounts when implementing comments, (2) Analyzing the tweeps' underlying rationales by associating the profiles of public figures, the content of the tweets, and the content of the tweeps' comments. Finally, it is believed that this study will provide society with a clear description of verbal aggressiveness forms to detect their extensive use on any social media platforms and important evidence to understand the phenomenon of verbal aggressiveness. Hence, individuals can adjust their language use when creating and maintaining particular social relations (societal-communal-relational-individual).

2. Literature Review

Online Communication

Simply, online communication is defined as any form of communication between individuals or a group of individuals which occurs on the internet. Although communication can occur in many ways, immediate message delivery to the receivers, a high level of interactivity between receivers and senders, and low costs have become the primary reasons why people prefer online communication to traditional communication (Best et al., 2014). To communicate virtually, at least, one sender, one message, one channel, one receiver, and one feedback are needed. This may sound simple, but communication is truly a very complex process. First, senders formulate a message they want to communicate and then they encode it. When the encoding process is accomplished, the senders select a proper channel and then they start sending the message. Next, the message travels over the selected channel. At this stage, the transmitting process is started. Once the message is received by the receivers, they decode it. In the decoding process, the receivers analyze and try to understand the message. At this stage, the result of communication is determined. When the senders and receivers share the same understanding and meaning, their communication will run smoothly. Positive feedback given by the receivers is an indicator of good communication. However, it is frequently found that the receivers are not cooperative with the senders. They respond to the senders' messages negatively.

In online communication, the receivers' responses to feedback could be various. Some give negative-punitive comments on senders' past and future acts, some give positive-affirmative comments on senders' past and future acts, and the rest gives negative-punitive feedforward and positive-affirmative feedforward on senders' past and future acts (Tausczik et al., 2018). Feedback, in online communication, plays a crucial role in shaping assertive or aggressive communication. It depends on the senders' self-presentation reflected in their messages. Once the receivers agree, they will give positive feedback and impression. Otherwise, poor feedback will be directed to the senders (Graham, 2007; Walther et al., 2011). Since feedback is a reciprocal interaction, it is very possible and plausible that both sender and receiver are involved in a misunderstanding.

The widespread of interactive digital platforms have altered basic process of the online communication process. Their communication model allows everyone to be either a source or

a receiver for it has multiple directions. It means that the message conveyed by a certain sender (a source on one platform) can be reproduced by another receiver (a sender on the other platforms) when they move to them. Automatically, this process will lead to more democratic communication which may induce the emergence of constructive or destructive feedback (Humphreys, 2016; Floredu & Cabiddu, 2016).

Recently, platforms of online communication are widely used by people across the globe to seek and discuss relevant information, express personal life, exchange experience, or make knowledge sharing. Prior to message production, the sender has to be aware of self-control, self-evaluation, and trustworthiness when presenting information to avoid false and destructive feedback coming from the receiver which distracts interpersonal, small group, or public communication. Whenever the receivers find gaps, they have to tolerate disagreement (Valkenburg, 2017). To achieve this goal, either sender or receiver of the message should communicate non judgementally, only manage their own personal boundaries and respect others' personal boundaries, and share an equal portion of taking turns in responding to each other (Faourie, 2017; Whitting et al., 2017).

Verbal Aggressiveness

Infante and Wigley (1986) define verbal aggressiveness as a behavioral disposition which bases individuals to bombard others' self-concept. Individuals show verbal aggressiveness in many forms such as yelling, threat, character attack, profanity, insult, sarcasm, belittling, physical appearance attack, teasing, profanity, background attack, malediction, swearing, flaming comments, online harassment, defamation, crude remarks, and ridicule (Appel et al., 2012; Avtgis & Rancer, 2010; Bekiari et al., 2017; Ferreira et al., 2020; Howe & Cionea, 2021; König & Jucks, 2019; Rösner & Krämer, 2016; Simão et al., 2021; Svobodova & Nováková, 2019). The locus of attack in verbal aggressiveness is others' self-concept and self-image, not the opinions related to the topic being presented or discussed. Thus, the opponents will feel less favorable about themselves. Anger, hurt feeling, depression, hopelessness, feeling of inadequacy, despair, humiliation, and embarrassment are some psychological pains associated with verbal aggressiveness (Infante & Wigley, 1986). Specifically, Scrodth and Wheelless (2001) introduced seven forms of verbal aggressiveness, namely; character attack, competence attack, physical appearance attack, insult, malediction, teasing, and profanity.

There are so many predictors contributing to verbal aggressiveness. Sex, education, and religion are some of them. Many studies indicate that men are more prone to verbal aggressiveness than women. (Denson et al., 2018). Then, verbal aggressiveness is also linked to the ability of the receiver of the message to understand arguing with his/ her opponents. The study found that message receiver with a high level of education shows respect and appreciation toward controversial matters discussed or presented in the message (Theocharis & Bekiari, 2017). Finally, some researchers agreed that religion also plays a significant role in deactivating verbal aggressiveness. Religious principles provide footholds, norms, or values for any receiver of the message to show acceptance, prevent harassment, or even inflict psychological pain on others (Firat & Karakurt, 2021).

Rationales of Verbal Aggressiveness in Online Communication

Verbal aggressiveness occurs if only the sender and the receiver of the message are facilitated by dyadic channels. A norm of reciprocity adopted by dyadic channels allows both parties to exchange messages. When exchanging messages, online communicators can be provoked by environmental influences such as aggression cues, reciprocity, and modeling behavior (Hamilton, 2011; Appel et al., 2012; Parvaresh & Tayebi, 2018; Patterson et al., 2017). Social

cognitive theory furtherly mentioned that both sender and receiver of the message are active agents who influence and are influenced by the environment. Verbal aggressiveness, then, occurs through a sequence of three processes; attentional, retention, and production (Bandura et al., 1961). In the attentional process, the communicators observe and model the forms of verbal aggressiveness they encounter via social media. Then, in the retention process, they remember the observed forms of verbal aggressiveness, recall them, and reconstruct them. Finally, in the production process, they employ verbal aggressiveness forms.

In a social media setting, anonymity and pseudonymity are two factors that lead to disinhibited behaviors. Communicators with anonymous and pseudonymous accounts could lose their self-control, self-awareness, and social responsibility when implementing comments since they believe that they cannot be identified by the online community. Such behaviors will lead to deindividuation—personal selfhood degradation inducing anti-normative as well as anti-social behavior. Deindividuation theory claimed that when individuals are submerged in a crowd, they will reduce their repression of self-awareness and loosen their normal inhibition to behave in uncivilized ways (Festinger et al., 1963; Vilanova et al., 2017). Social media users who are deindividuated (anonymous and pseudonymous) tend to become so participative in communal activities that they disregard their own significance. Consequently, they cannot monitor their behavior when being involved in a group discussion.

Moreover, social influence becomes another rationale for verbal aggressive communicators to attack others. Simply, social influence is defined as a condition in which people change their beliefs, behaviors, thoughts, and actions because of social interaction. Kelman (1958) mentioned three social influence processes, namely; compliance, identification, and internalization. The “compliance” takes place when individuals take influence and lured behavior for being accepted by the community. Then, they create or maintain the desired relationship in the “identification” process. Finally, they internalize the acceptance of influence and the adoption of induced behavior into new behavior. Satisfaction becomes a key feature in social influence theory (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). When people are satisfied with others’ induced behaviors, they will be obedient to the rules or norms provided by the groups. In online communication, social influence can be accepted or rejected. Although the sender of the message posts a positive message, the receiver of the message may respond to it negatively. An Individual’s likelihood of conformity or anti-conformity depends on the level of satisfaction. Thus, verbal aggressiveness may be directed to intimates, acquaintances, strangers, or even individuals in superior-subordinate relationships.

Verbally Aggressive Communication on Twitter

Nowadays, Twitter has become a widely used channel of communication in society. In 2020, 350 million people use it and they send over 500 million tweets every day (Haupt et al., 2021). People use Twitter to update news and information, pass the time, present self-presentation, get in touch with friends and others with the same or unique interests, follow famous people, share news and information, have personal and professional networks, follow trending topics, promote and review products and services, or have an entertainment (Yoo et al., 2014; Sundstrom & Levenshus, 2017). Since Twitter’s default is not limited to subscribed friends and followers, its users can post the message (tweet) publicly and their posts can be seen by the other visitors (tweeps) tracking the stream of Twitter. Thus, both the tweet maker and the tweep can initiate discussion, exchange comments, and follow others’ communication.

Communication metrics (original tweet, @reply, retweet, hashtag, and URL) have made Twitter the most choice microblogging platform for communication on the Internet. The tweeps

may communicate assertively or aggressively. However, many studies proved that most tweeps are verbally aggressive communicators. Chatzakou et al. (2019) found that there were 1.6M tweets over 3 months containing verbal aggressiveness. Then Risch and Krestel (2020) found that among 21.384 toxic comments, 11.304 comments are categorized as insults and 2.117 comments are grouped into identity hate. Next, Watanabe et al. (2018) found that there were 14.000 hate speech tweets reflected in the tweeps’ semantic features. Those findings asserted that Twitter is not immune from verbal aggressiveness. The tweeps in any layer of communication (micro layer—personal relationship; meso layer—follower- followee relationship; and macro layer—hashtag relationship) can be the perpetrators or victims of verbally aggressive behavior.

3. Methodology

This study was qualitative research. A self-reflective analysis of the researcher’s own Twitter timeline was done to collect the primary dataset. The researcher is a follower of the subjects of this study (4 politicians, 3 celebrities, and 2 practitioners). These public figures are active users of Twitter. Their activeness, in this study, is marked by a higher number of followers, followings, tweets, and retweets per year. The indicators of public figures’ activeness can be presented in the following table:

Table 1: Public Figures’ Activeness in Using the Twitter from January 2020 to December 2020

No.	Public Figures	Number of Followers	Number of Followings	Number of Tweets	Number of Retweets
1.	Politician 1	632.222	1.041	684	235
2.	Politician 2	534.853	1.015	669	217
3.	Politician 3	262.495	1.344	774	107
4.	Politician 4	273.378	6.364	392	638
5.	Celebrity 1	1.036.073	559	694	171
6.	Celebrity 2	1.138.771	352	588	213
7.	Celebrity 3	2.546.218	417	617	117
8.	Practitioner 1	268.022	289	379	312
9.	Practitioner 2	246.318	115	356	264

However, the data of this study were obtained from 120 tweeps’ comments responding to the tweets of 4 politicians, 3 celebrities, and 2 practitioners between November 2020 and December 2020. To identify the forms of verbal aggressiveness found in the tweeps’ comments, this study used the framework of Schrodtt and Wheelles (2001). Then, to analyze the tweeps’ verbally aggressive behavior directed to public figures in each form of verbal aggressiveness, the framework of the theory of Infante and Wigley (1986) was used. In addition, to know the tweeps’ underlying rationales for doing aggressive behavior, relevant theories were used to verify them. The theory of Social Cognitive proposed by Bandura (1986) was used to explain the motives of the tweeps to behave verbally aggressive including whether or not they performed verbal aggressiveness because of environmental influence. Then, Deindividuation Theory proposed by Festinger et al. (1963) was used to verify the concept of anonymity or pseudonymity in the existence of verbal aggressiveness in the tweeps’ comments. Therefore, anonymous or pseudonymous accounts were analyzed. Another theory, Social Influence Theory proposed by Kelman (1958) was used to clarify the concept of dissatisfaction in the occurrence of verbal aggressiveness.

Specifically, the procedures of data analysis in this study were done by; (1) selecting public figures who are active in sharing news, thoughts, feeling, information, or personal matters on Twitter, (2) reading all the tweeps’ comments responding to public figures’ tweets, (3) listing all relevant comments on the researched area, (4) identifying verbal aggressiveness found in the tweeps’ comments, (5) grouping the tweeps’ comments based on the forms of verbal aggressiveness proposed by the experts, (6) analyzing each form of verbal aggressiveness together with the tweeps’ underlying rationales of doing it, and (7) inferring the results of the study by connecting them to related theories. Those sequential procedures definitely could achieve the objectives of this study, namely; (1) identifying the categories of verbal aggressiveness posted by the tweeps using anonymous or pseudonymous accounts when implementing comments, and (2) analyzing the tweeps’ underlying rationales by associating the profile of public figures, the content of the tweets, and the content of the tweeps’ comments.

4. Findings and Discussion

To explore the phenomenon of verbal aggressiveness, the forms of verbal aggressiveness were firstly identified and analyzed. In the next stage, the profiles of public figures, the contents of the tweets, and the content of the tweeps’ comments were connected to relevant theories to analyze the rationales of tweeps to comment verbally aggressive.

Identification and Analysis of Verbal Aggressiveness Forms

Verbal aggressiveness identification of 120 tweeps’ comments taken from 9 Indonesian public figures’ tweets (4 politicians, 3 celebrities, and 2 practitioners) used the categories proposed by Schrodt and Wheelers (2001). The findings can be displayed in the following table:

Table 2: Verbal Aggressiveness in Tweeps’ Comments on Public Figures’ Tweets

No	Forms of Verbal Aggressiveness	Number	Percentage
1.	Character Attack	10	8.3
2.	Competence Attack	3	2.5
3.	Physical Appearance Attack	22	18.3
4.	Insult	38	31.8
5.	Malediction	1	0.8
6.	Teasing	33	27.5
7.	Profanity	13	10.8
	Total	120	100

The findings showed that among all forms, insult was mostly used by the tweeps to express their verbal aggressiveness (found in 38 comments or 31.8 % of all comments) while malediction was the least used by the tweeps (only found in 1 comment or 0.8 % of all comments). Then, character attack was found in 10 comments or 8.3 %, competence attack was found in 3 comments or 2.5 %, physical appearance attack was found in 22 comments or 18.3 %, teasing was found in 33 comments or 27.5 %, and profanity was found in 13 comments or 10.8 %.

Specifically, verbally aggressive comments of the tweeps responding to each public figure’s tweet can be listed as follow:

Table 3: The Findings of Forms of Verbal Aggressiveness (VA) Found in Tweeps' Comments on Each Category of Public Figures

Public Figures	Politicians	Celebrities	Practitioners
	(Number/ percentage)	(Number/ percentage)	(Number/ percentage)
Forms of VA			
Character Attack	9/ 15.25	1/ 1.89	0/ 0
Competence Attack	2/ 3.39	1/ 1.89	0/ 0
Physical Appearance Attack	1/ 1.70	19/ 35.84	2/ 25
Insult	23/ 38.99	14/ 26.41	1/ 12.5
Malediction	0/0	1/ 1.89	0/ 0
Teasing	20/ 33.89	10/ 18.88	3/ 37.5
Profanity	4/ 6.78	7/ 13.20	2/ 25
Total	59/ 100	53/ 100	8/ 100

The findings listed in the table showed that there were 59 verbally aggressive comments responding to politicians' tweets, 53 verbally aggressive comments responding to celebrities' tweets, and 9 verbally aggressive comments responding to practitioners' tweets. In responding to politicians' tweets, the tweeps expressed insult the most (found in 23 comments or 38.99 % of all comments), followed by teasing (found in 20 comments or 33.89 % of all comments), character attack (found in 9 comments or 15.25 % of all comments), profanity (found in 4 comments or 6.78 % of all comments), and physical appearance attack (only found in 1 comment or 1.70 % of all comments). However, there was no malediction found in the tweeps' comments responding to politicians' tweets.

Then, all forms of verbal aggressiveness were directed at celebrities. The largest number of verbal aggressiveness directed at celebrities is in the form of physical appearance attack (found in 19 comments or 35.84 % of all comments), followed by insult (found in 14 comments or 26.41 % of all comments), teasing (found in 10 comments or 18.88 % of all comments), and profanity (found in 7 comments or 13.20 % of all comments). Verbal aggressiveness in the forms of character attack, competence attack, and malediction is only found in 1 comment (1.89 % of all comments). Thus, celebrities received all forms of verbally aggressive comments from the tweeps.

In responding to practitioners' tweets. The tweeps expressed teasing the most (found in 3 comments or 37.5 % of all comments), followed by physical appearance attack and profanity (both forms of verbal aggressiveness are found in 2 comments or 25 % of all comments), and insult (only found in 1 comment or 12.5 % of all comments). Yet, there were no character attacks, competence attacks, and malediction found in the tweeps' comments. The trends of verbal aggressiveness expressed by the tweeps in their comments can be drawn in the following chart:

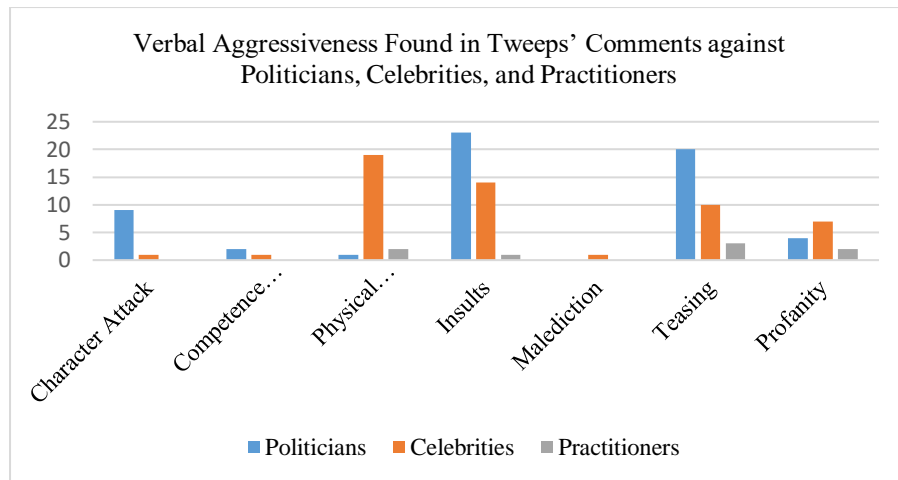


Figure 1: Verbal Aggressiveness Found in Tweeps' Comments Responding to Politicians', Celebrities', and Practitioners' Tweets

Verbal aggressiveness forms expressed by the tweeps in their comments were characterized by; (1) the attack on public figures' self-concept to decrease self-confidence and make them feel powerless, (2) the absence of evidence and opinion following the comments, and (3) the absence of guilt and embarrassment. These characteristics were relevant to the theory of Infante and Wigley (1986). Here are the examples of the first characteristic:

Tweet of Politician 2:

Alhamdulillah, hari ini (25/11) atas kerja keras seluruh pengurus & kader, @PDemokrat dianugerahi penghargaan oleh Komisi Informasi Pusat sebagai "Badan Publik Informatif". Status ini naik 2 peringkat dari yang sebelumnya "cukup informatif" menjadi status tertinggi dari penilaian KIP

[Thanks to God, because of hardworks of administrators and cadres, @PDemokrat was awarded as "Informative Public Agency" by Central Information Commission. This status has gone up 2 level higher from the previous status "quite informative". This new status is the highest appreciation from Central Information Commission.]

Comment 1: Self-concept attack to decrease self-confidence (form: competence attack)

Pangeran tanpa ilmu dari kerajaan Cikeas!

[Less competent prince from Cikeas kingdom!]

Comment 2: Self-concept attack to make others feel powerless (form: competence attack and teasing)

Karena bapak lo makanya lo bisa ada disitu. Dasar pemimpi, bukan pemimpin!

[You are there because of your father. You are a dreamer, not a leader!]

The phrase "less competence" in the first comment means that the tweep judged the politician as a low qualified and skilled leader. This phrase implies that the tweep tried to decrease the politician's self-confidence by attacking his quality of competence. Then, in the second comment, the tweep explicitly asserted that the politician became the leader because he had a qualified father in politics. But, the competence of his father could not be inherited from him. This tweep's comment was certainly intended to make the politician feel powerless by comparing the quality of his father to his self attributes. The clause "Because of your father" and the sentence " You are a dreamer, not a leader" implied the tweep's self-concept attack.

Then, the absence of evidence and opinions became the second characteristic of verbally aggressive tweeps. As the tweeps wanted to boost their ego and entertain themselves, not to have real communication, their comments were not relevant to the content of the tweets and they did not provide any relevant evidence and opinions. Here are the examples:

Tweet of Politician 4:

“Revolusi Mental” adalah jargon yang dipopulerkan pak Jokowi. Rizieq bilang istilah itu dipakai gembong komunis. Berarti Rizieq secara implisit mengaitkan @jokowi dengan “gembong komunis”

[“Mental Revolutionary” is a jargon familiarized by Mr. Jokowi. Rizieq said that the term is used by Communists. So, Rizieq implicitly relates @jokowi to Communist kingpin]

Comment 1: The absence of evidences and opinions (form: character attack)

Yang ngomong sama dengan yang diomongin. Mulutnya sama- sama sumber fitnah!

[The talker is similar to the third party being talked to. Both of you have slender mouths!]

Comment 2: The absence of evidence and opinions (form: insult)

Urus dulu akhlak lu!

[Just mind your morals!]

The first and second sentences showed that the tweeps did not provide any evidence or opinions to support their statements. The first tweep, when commenting “Both of you have slender mouths”, did not provide any supporting evidence and opinions to justify his/ her statement. Then, the second tweep also did not give any reason in the form of facts or opinions why the politician had to refix his morals before asking others to do the same thing. So, they were interested in attacking others’ self-presentation, not the content of communications.

The analysis of the last characteristic of verbal aggressiveness (the absence of feeling guilt and embarrassment) can be exemplified as follow:

Tweet of Celebrity 2:

Makasih ya sayang, dah nemenin aku pelantikan hari ini @erevano7

[Darling, thank you for accompanying my inauguration today @erevano7]

Comment 1: The absence of feelings of guilt and embarrassment (form: profanity)

*Tadi gue udah b**ak 6 kali lihat ini foto*

[I have defecated six times because of seeing this picture]

Comment 2 as a reply of comment 1:

@sevo Ih..kamu gak pantas ngomong begitu. Masa kamu samain dia dengan kotoran?!

[It is not proper to say it. Do not compare her with the p**p]

Comment 3 as a reply to comment 2: The absence of feelings of guilt and embarrassment (form: teasing)

Alah..sok suci!

[You are holy s**t]

The interaction between the first and second tweeps showed that the first tweep as an initiator of verbal aggressiveness did not feel guilty and ashamed to convey profanity. When the second

tweep responded to his comment by saying “It is not proper to compare the celebrity with the p**p”, the first tweet even added another verbal aggressiveness in the form of teasing by saying “You are holy s**t”. The sentence “You are holy s**t” confirmed that the first tweet felt innocent repeating his verbally aggressive behavior.

Environmental Influence as the Rationale of Verbal Aggressiveness

Verbal aggressiveness expressed by the tweeps in their comments was slightly affected by environmental influence. When a tweet observed the other tweeps attacking the self-concept of the target, s/he learned it, was provoked by the flow of verbally aggressive communication, and spontaneously imitated and implemented it. So, when a tweet commented on a tweet verbally aggressive, other tweeps promptly observed, learned, and replicated it. The following examples will show how swift the tweeps replicated other tweeps’ verbal aggressiveness:

Tweet of politician 1:

Secara pribadi saya gembira melihat Habib Rizieq bisa kembali ke Indonesia dan berkumpul kembali dengan sahabat- sahabat FPI, sanak famili di Indonesia, serta kembali bisa berdakwah. Mari kita jaga NKRI dan Pancasila bersama- sama demi Indonesia yang lebih maju, adil, dan makmur.

[I am very grateful to see that Habib Rizieq can return to Indonesia, reunite with his friends in FPI and his relatives, and preach at the mosque. Let’s protect our country and *Pancasila*—five moral principles—together for a more advanced, prosperous, and equitable country (Indonesia)]

Comment 1 of tweet 1 (form: teasing)

Eh, masih hidup rupanya
[I thought you were dead]

Comment 1 of tweet 2 (form: teasing)

Hidup makmur pun, dulu menghina pemerintah, sekarang menjilat pemerintah
[He lives prosperously. He used to offend the government. But today, he curries favor with the government]

Comment 1 of tweet 3 (form: teasing)

Contohnya mantan seteru politik ini. Dulu idealis sekarang materialis
[Please exemplify this political opponent. He used to be an ideal person, but now he is money-oriented]

These three examples presented the social cognitive processes (Bandura, 1986). When the first tweet initiated verbal aggressiveness in the form of teasing, the second and third tweeps observed it (attentional process), recalled it (retention process), and then replicated it (production process). Thus, Bandura’s theory was relevant to the fact that environmental influence (a tweet’s verbally aggressive comment) affected other tweeps to comment verbally aggressive.

Pseudonymity as the Rationale of Verbal Aggressiveness

From 120 tweeps’ analyzed in this study, it was found that 92 tweeps used pseudonymous accounts, and 28 tweeps used real accounts. But, none of the tweeps used an anonymous account. The anonymities are marked by the absence of tweeps’ names, their profile pictures, and other personal information while pseudonymities are marked by unusual or fake naming with real or fake profile pictures and limited personal information (Peddinti et al., 2017; Chibuwe et al., 2021). The tweeps with pseudonymous accounts (deindividuated tweeps) lost

their self-awareness and self-identity leading to anti-social behavior. The following are some examples of verbally aggressive comments from pseudonymous accounts:

Tweet of celebrity 1:

Capres main tik- tok, why not? Follow me on tik- tok ya, bro and sis.

[Presidential candidate plays “tik- tok”, why not? Please follow me on “tik- tok”, my brothers and sisters]

Comment 1 (form: competence attack)



Figure 2: Pseudonymous Account

Capres? Siapa yang mau milih tong? Anak kemarin sore, ilmu cetek.

[Presidential candidate? Who wants to vote for you? Less experience, less competence]

Comment 2 (form: teasing)



Figure 3: Pseudonymous Account

Wey, bang lu nyadar. Kapasitas lu udah mumpuni blom jadi Capres? Lu jadi imam keluarga dulu yang bener.

[Hey, It is better to wake up. Are you capable enough to be a presidential candidate? It is better to be an appropriate husband for your family before being a president]

These two examples showed that the tweeps with pseudonymous accounts attacked the self-concept of the celebrity more open. Their self-identity manipulation decreased their self-awareness to comment verbally aggressive. The expressions “Less experience”, “Less competence”, and “It is better to wake up and to be an appropriate husband” are the proofs. Such verbally aggressive comments were supported by Deindividuation Theory (Festinger et al., 1963) asserting that deindividuated situations (pseudonymous accounts and pseudo profile pictures) cause accountability reduction to behave verbally aggressively as the tweeps believed that they could not be detected by the community (celebrity and other tweeps). Thus, it is true that pseudonymity became another rationale for verbal aggressiveness.

Dissatisfaction as the Rationale of Verbal Aggressiveness

On Twitter, public figures and their fans are connected to a meso-layer communication (follower-followee relationship). Thus, their fans stay constantly informed of their past and present updates. Once public figures cannot fulfill the demand for perfection in their image presentation, their fans will show dissatisfaction with anti-conformity behaviors. Verbally aggressive comments are examples of anti-conformity behavior on the Twitter domain. The following are some examples of tweeps’ verbally aggressive comments:

Tweet of politician 3

Tweeps,

Masih soal kasus artis GA yang dikait-kaitkan dengan video “19 detik” itu, kalau soal file yang sudah dihapus memang dapat dimunculkan kembali. Ini dulu foto- foto (yang sempat dihapus juga) di kasus anak buah artis MZ yang mempersekusi AG di hotel IB Slipi tahun 2008 silam.



[Tweeps, this is still about the case of a celebrity “GA” connected to a nineteen-second video. Although the file has been removed, it can be recalled. The following are the removed pictures of a celebrity staff “MZ” persecuting “AG” in IB Slipi Hotel in 2008]

Comment 1 (form: teasing)

Kalo panci yang hilang, bisa dimunculkan kembali gak pak?

[Can the lost pan be recalled?]

Comment 2 (form: teasing)

Nyanyikan lagu Indonesia Raya dong pak!

[Please sing the National Anthem of Indonesia (Indonesia Raya)]

Comment 3 (form: insult)

Eneg liat lo nongol disini

[I am queasy to see you here]

Comment 4 (form: character attack)

Maling panci

[You are a pan thief]

These examples showed that the tweeps expressed verbal aggressiveness because they were dissatisfied with the politician’s self-disposition. In the first and fourth comments, the politician was associated with his viral event when he quit his years of service as a minister. At that time, he moved from the minister’s official house by bringing all house appliances including pots and pans. Since that time, he was remembered as a “pot” minister. Thus, the tweeps posted comments like “Can the lost pan be recalled?” to show verbal aggressiveness in the form of teasing and “You are a pan thief” to show verbal aggressiveness in the form of character attack. The third comment “Please sing the National Anthem of Indonesia (Indonesia Raya)” implied another inappropriate attitude performed by the politician in the past. In 2013, the public was shocked because the minister forgot the lyrics of the National Anthem. The worst, this incident was caught by the camera. As the politician did not meet the demand for perfection, the tweeps expressed dissatisfaction by rejecting the positive social influence of the politician and expressing anti-conformity by implementing verbally aggressive comments. Such behaviors are relevant to the theory of Social Influence (Kelman, 1958) confirming that satisfaction is a primary determinant of compliance (accepting positive influence), identification (creating or maintaining a good relationship), and internalization (creating new positive behavior) leading to conformity. Since the politician failed in predisposing positive social influence, the tweeps became dissatisfied. In this case, dissatisfaction provoked the tweeps to comment aggressively.

5. Conclusion

On Twitter, the tweeps express verbal aggressiveness in the form of character attacks, competence attacks, physical appearance attacks, insults, malediction, teasing, and profanity. The tweeps' verbally aggressive comments are marked by the attack on public figures' self-concept, not the content of the tweets or discussed matters. The act of decreasing self-confidence and power, the absence of evidence and opinions when implementing comments, and the absence of guilt and embarrassment become the characteristics of verbally aggressive tweeps.

The analysis has shown that the tweeps' verbal aggressiveness is caused by environmental influence, pseudonymity, and dissatisfaction. In terms of environmental influence, a tweep adopts other tweeps' verbal aggressiveness by observing, recalling, and replicating it either in similar or different forms. Such patterns are confirmed by Social Cognitive Theory. In terms of pseudonymity, the tweeps attack the self-concept of public figures more open since they believe that they cannot be identified and traced by the online community. Such a deindividuated situation makes the tweeps lose their self-awareness when implementing verbally aggressive comments. This phenomenon is relevant to Deindividuation Theory. Then, in terms of dissatisfaction, the tweeps express their anti-conformity by rejecting public figures' positive social influence. Meso layer connection (follower-followee relationship) has made the tweeps keep updating past and present events of public figures. Every single mistake of public figures is widely brought up and discussed by the tweeps. Although public figures have presented good self-images reflected in their tweets, the tweeps still implement verbally aggressive comments. This gap has been explained by Social Influence Theory. Through a specific classification of verbal aggressiveness typology and an in-depth analysis of its extensive use on Twitter, the society will be knowledgeable about tweeps' toxic internal dispositions and their underlying rationales for doing such behaviors. Accordingly, society can avert aggressive communication on social media to respect others' self-esteem and dignity when implementing comments.

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