Online Disinhibition Effect and Verbal Aggressive Behavior on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of social media has transformed communication patterns in society, making interactions faster and more open. However, this transformation has also led to various social issues, including the increasing prevalence of verbal aggression in digital interactions. One psychological factor associated with this phenomenon is the Online Disinhibition Effect, which refers to individuals' tendency to express their thoughts and emotions more freely in online environments compared to face-to-face communication. This study aims to examine the relationship between the Online Disinhibition Effect and verbal aggressive behavior on social media through a literature review approach. The method used in this study is a systematic literature review of scientific articles published between 2020 and 2025 obtained from academic databases such as Google Scholar and ScienceDirect. The search keywords included online disinhibition effect, verbal aggression, cyber aggression, cyberbullying, and social media behavior. Articles that met the inclusion criteria were analyzed descriptively to identify research patterns related to the factors influencing online disinhibition and its relationship with verbal aggression on social media. The findings indicate that characteristics of digital communication, such as anonymity and invisibility, can reduce social restraints and increase individuals' tendency to express negative emotions impulsively. In addition, psychological factors such as low emotional regulation and self-control also contribute to the emergence of aggressive behavior in digital interactions. Therefore, efforts to reduce verbal aggression on social media should involve improving digital literacy, strengthening online communication ethics, and increasing users' awareness of the psychological impacts of communication in digital spaces.

Keywords: online disinhibition effect, verbal aggression, social media, cyber aggression, digital communication

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology in recent decades has brought significant changes to the way people communicate. Advances in the internet and the increasing use of digital devices have enabled individuals to interact more quickly, easily, and widely without being limited by geographical distance or time. This transformation

has created new virtual communication spaces where individuals can participate in various social activities, such as sharing information, engaging in discussions, and expressing opinions openly to a broader audience.

Social media has become one of the platforms that plays the most significant role in this transformation. The emergence of platforms such as Instagram, Twitter/X, TikTok, and Facebook has made social media a primary medium for people to communicate, build social networks, and access information in real time. Through social media, individuals can easily express opinions, share experiences, and interact with people from diverse backgrounds without meeting face-to-face. This convenience has made social media an essential part of daily life, particularly for younger generations who have a high intensity of internet use.

In addition to facilitating communication and information exchange, social media also contributes to the formation of new social dynamics in the digital space. Interactions that previously occurred face-to-face are increasingly shifting to online environments, making communication more open and participatory. Every user has equal opportunities to express opinions, provide comments, and respond to circulating information on these platforms. While this situation creates broader discussion spaces, it also presents various challenges in maintaining the quality of social interaction in digital environments.

Despite the many benefits offered, the use of social media has also given rise to several social and psychological problems. One phenomenon that has become increasingly common is the rise of verbal aggressive behavior in online communication. Verbal aggression may appear in the form of harsh comments, ridicule, insults, or personal attacks directed at individuals or groups. The open nature of social media interactions, which are accessible to a wide audience, often triggers communication conflicts and exchanges of opinions that are not always expressed constructively. Research indicates that digital communication environments tend to provide greater opportunities for individuals to express negative emotions compared to face-to-face communication (Nisrina et al., 2024).

Verbal aggressive behavior is a form of psychological aggression expressed through words that attack, insult, demean, or emotionally hurt others. In the context of social media, verbal aggression may appear in the form of harsh comments, mockery, hate speech, or personal attacks directed at individuals or particular groups. Studies show that interactions in digital spaces often trigger more aggressive forms of communication compared to face-to-face interactions. This occurs because online communication environments possess different characteristics, such as limited social cues, psychological distance between users, and lower levels of social control in online interactions (Ferreira et al., 2021). In the context of social media, verbal aggression may appear in the form of harsh comments, ridicule, hate speech, or personal attacks directed at individuals or certain groups. Research also shows that social media interactions often encourage more aggressive communication behaviors compared to face-to-face interactions due to the distinct characteristics of digital communication (Fredyne & Fikry, 2023).

One psychological concept that helps explain this phenomenon is the Online Disinhibition Effect. This concept refers to the tendency of individuals to express thoughts, emotions, or behaviors more freely—sometimes even more extremely—when interacting in online environments compared to face-to-face interactions in the real world. This condition may arise due to several factors such as anonymity, invisibility (the lack of physical presence), and reduced social norms that typically regulate behavior in direct communication. When individuals feel that their identity is not fully revealed or

that they are not directly facing their interlocutors, they tend to experience reduced self-control in expressing emotions and opinions (Stuart & Scott, 2020). Individuals are more likely to express their thoughts and emotions freely in online environments compared to face-to-face communication. This occurs because digital communication allows individuals to feel more anonymous, physically unseen, and not immediately confronted with the emotional reactions of others (Gumelar et al., 2024). Such conditions can reduce the social control that usually regulates individual behavior in direct interactions. The phenomenon of online disinhibition is also closely related to the emergence of aggressive behavior in digital communication. In many social media discussions, particularly those related to social or political issues, individuals often demonstrate a tendency to use more confrontational and attacking language. This situation can trigger communication conflicts, deteriorate the quality of social interactions, and increase the potential for cyber aggression in digital spaces. Studies show that the dynamics of communication on social media allow verbal aggression to escalate because users can easily respond, comment, or share messages without fully considering the emotional impact on others (Tsoumou, 2021).

Anonymity is one of the main factors that trigger the Online Disinhibition Effect in digital communication. When individuals feel that their identity is not fully known to others, they tend to experience reduced social control in expressing their thoughts and emotions. This condition allows individuals to feel freer to express opinions without considering the social consequences of their words. In online communication environments, anonymity can create psychological distance between users, reducing the influence of social norms that typically regulate face-to-face interactions. This situation may encourage individuals to express negative emotions more openly, including through comments that attack or demean others (Tsoumou, 2021). Research shows that anonymity in digital communication can increase individuals' tendencies to engage in aggressive behaviors such as cyberbullying and verbal aggression on social media (Zakiah & Iswari, 2023). Studies on adolescent behavior on social media also indicate that digital interactions frequently involve forms of aggression such as insults, mockery, and cyberbullying conducted publicly or privately. These findings suggest that the social media environment can amplify the likelihood of communication conflicts and increase the intensity of verbal aggression among users (Sobkin & Fedotova, 2021).

In addition to anonymity, characteristics of online communication such as invisibility also influence individual communication behavior. In online interactions, users cannot directly observe facial expressions, body language, or the emotional reactions of others. The absence of these nonverbal cues can reduce empathy in communication, making individuals more likely to express harsh or attacking comments. Research on communication practices on social media shows that digital interactions often facilitate expressions of complaints or criticism that may develop into more aggressive forms of communication compared to direct interaction (Vladimirou et al., 2021). This condition can increase the likelihood of harsh or attacking comments in online interactions (Juliati et al., 2025). Furthermore, the dynamics of communication on social media are also influenced by the structure of digital interactions that allow messages to be delivered rapidly and spread widely. This condition can intensify communication conflicts because negative comments can easily be responded to by other users through broader verbal attacks. In this context, social media not only functions as a platform for individual expression but also becomes a discursive space where opinion conflicts can evolve into collective verbal aggression (Tsoumou, 2021). Research also

indicates that psychological factors such as low social accountability in online communication can strengthen the Online Disinhibition Effect. When individuals feel less responsible for their statements in digital spaces, they tend to express emotions more spontaneously and extremely. This condition increases the likelihood of hate speech, personal attacks, and other forms of verbal aggression in social media interactions (Pirzadeh, 2023).

The phenomenon of verbal aggression on social media not only affects individuals who become targets of attacks but also influences the overall quality of social interactions in digital spaces. Communication environments filled with negative comments, hate speech, and personal attacks can create unhealthy discussion atmospheres. Such conditions may trigger conflicts among users, reinforce social polarization, and reduce the quality of public dialogue in digital spaces. On many social media platforms, aggressive interactions often develop rapidly because users can easily respond to, reply to, or share provocative comments with wider audiences. This demonstrates that the characteristics of digital communication enable verbal aggression to spread more quickly and widely compared to face-to-face communication (Zavalska, 2023).

Aggressive behavior in digital environments also indicates that communication dominated by negative expressions can influence the dynamics of social relationships among social media users. Individuals who are frequently exposed to verbal aggression in digital spaces may experience psychological pressure, decreased emotional well-being, and increased interpersonal conflicts in online interactions. Studies on aggressive behavior on social media also show that exposure to aggressive communication is associated with increased cyberbullying behavior, particularly among adolescents who are active users of social media. This suggests that digital communication environments can become vulnerable spaces for aggressive behavior if they are not balanced by adequate social control (Wang et al., 2024). The use of language that demeans, insults, or attacks others in online interactions demonstrates how social media can become a space where communication conflicts develop openly through various forms of aggressive linguistic expression (Zavalska, 2023). Psychological factors also play an important role in the emergence of aggressive behavior in online communication. Several studies indicate that individuals who experience disinhibition in digital communication tend to express negative emotions such as anger, frustration, and dissatisfaction through attacking comments more easily. This condition is associated with lower self-control and the emergence of toxic online disinhibition, which refers to the tendency of individuals to express more extreme or aggressive behaviors in digital communication environments (Nugraha et al., 2023). Such conditions may encourage communication conflicts and worsen the quality of social relationships among social media users (Tan, 2023).

Based on the explanation above, this study aims to examine the relationship between the Online Disinhibition Effect and verbal aggressive behavior on social media through a literature review approach. This approach is used to identify, analyze, and synthesize various relevant research findings regarding communication behavior dynamics in digital environments. By examining various empirical and conceptual studies published in recent years, this research seeks to understand how characteristics of online communication—such as anonymity, invisibility, and reduced social control—can influence individuals' tendencies to express verbally aggressive behavior on social media. Through a systematic literature review, this study also aims to identify psychological factors that contribute to the emergence of verbal aggression in digital

interactions, including the role of online disinhibition, emotional regulation, and social dynamics that develop within online communities. Understanding these factors is important in explaining why individuals tend to display more aggressive communication behavior in online environments compared to face-to-face interactions. This study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of research on digital communication behavior, particularly regarding the relationship between the Online Disinhibition Effect and verbal aggression on social media. In addition, the findings of this review are expected to serve as a foundation for developing educational and preventive strategies to reduce aggressive behavior in online communication, thereby fostering a healthier, more constructive social media environment that supports positive social interaction in digital spaces.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a literature review method to examine various studies related to the Online Disinhibition Effect and verbal aggressive behavior on social media. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to systematically examine empirical and conceptual findings that have been previously published. Through this approach, researchers can identify patterns in research findings, understand the development of studies on digital communication behavior, and synthesize various study results in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being investigated.

The literature review in this study was conducted systematically through several main stages, including the process of literature searching, article selection, analysis of research content, and synthesis of findings. This approach aims to integrate various relevant research results in order to provide a clearer overview of the relationship between the Online Disinhibition Effect and the emergence of verbal aggressive behavior in social media interactions.

Data collection was conducted by searching for scientific articles published in national and international journals over the last five years, specifically during the 2020–2025 period. This time limitation was applied to ensure that the analyzed literature represents the most recent studies reflecting current developments in digital communication research and aggressive behavior on social media. The literature search process was conducted through several credible academic databases, such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and various national journal portals that provide scientific publications relevant to the fields of psychology, communication, and digital media studies.

In the literature search process, the researchers used several main keywords related to the research topic, including *online disinhibition effect*, *verbal aggression*, *cyber aggression*, *cyberbullying*, and *social media behavior*. The use of these keyword combinations was intended to obtain a broader range of literature while ensuring that the identified articles were relevant to the phenomenon of aggressive communication behavior in digital environments.

Furthermore, the article selection process was carried out based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria in this study include: (1) scientific articles discussing the concept of the Online Disinhibition Effect or aggressive behavior in social media communication, (2) articles published within the last five years (2020–2025), and (3) articles that have direct relevance to the research topic and are available in full text, allowing for in-depth analysis. Meanwhile, articles that are not related to digital communication behavior, do not discuss verbal aggression in social media, or are not available in full text were excluded from the analysis.

After the literature selection process was completed, the articles that met the criteria were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive analysis approach. At this stage, the researchers identified the main findings from each study, including the concepts used, the research methods applied, and the results related to the dynamics of the Online Disinhibition Effect and verbal aggressive

behavior on social media. The analysis process was conducted by comparing various research findings to identify similarities, differences, and patterns emerging across the studies.

Through this literature synthesis process, the study seeks to identify psychological and social factors that influence the emergence of the Online Disinhibition Effect, as well as how this phenomenon contributes to the increasing occurrence of verbal aggressive behavior in digital interactions. Therefore, the literature review method used in this research is expected to provide a more systematic and comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the characteristics of online communication and the tendency toward aggressive behavior on social media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the literature review, the **Online Disinhibition Effect** is one of the psychological factors that plays an important role in influencing individuals' communication behavior on social media. The characteristics of digital communication, which allow anonymity and create psychological distance between users, can reduce the social restraints that normally function to regulate individual behavior in face-to-face interactions. When individuals do not have to directly confront their interlocutors or do not fully disclose their identities, their level of self-control in communication tends to decrease. This condition makes individuals feel freer to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions openly in digital spaces (Gumelar et al., 2024).

This phenomenon indicates that the dynamics of online communication differ significantly from those of direct communication. In face-to-face interactions, individuals typically consider social norms, the emotional expressions of their conversation partners, and the potential social consequences of their statements. However, in online communication, these constraints become more relaxed because users cannot directly observe others' emotional reactions. As a result, individuals may express their views more spontaneously, sometimes in the form of confrontational or aggressive comments. The Online Disinhibition Effect is also associated with individuals' tendency to express negative emotions more intensely in digital environments. Feelings of anger, frustration, or dissatisfaction that might not be expressed directly in real life are often more easily conveyed through social media. This condition makes social media a space where various emotions can be openly expressed without immediately considering the social consequences for others.

Several studies indicate that the online disinhibition effect is not always negative. In certain situations, individuals may also express support, empathy, or personal experiences more openly in digital environments. Nevertheless, in many cases related to social media interactions, the Online Disinhibition Effect is more frequently associated with the emergence of aggressive communication behaviors, such as the use of harsh language, insults, and personal attacks against other users.

One of the primary factors that triggers the Online Disinhibition Effect is anonymity in digital communication. In social media environments, users often do not have to fully disclose their personal identities, creating conditions in which individuals feel more protected from the social consequences of their behavior. When a person's identity is not fully known to others, the level of social accountability becomes lower, and individuals tend to feel freer to express their opinions, including comments that are attacking or degrading. This condition makes users more likely to express negative emotions or extreme views in online communication.

Several studies show that anonymity and the low level of social control in digital environments can increase the tendency for verbal aggression to emerge on social media.

Individuals who interact online often feel safer delivering criticism, insults, or personal attacks because they are not directly facing their interlocutors. This situation strengthens the emergence of aggressive behaviors such as cyber aggression and cyberbullying in digital interactions. Research conducted by Ma'ruf et al. (2025) shows that various psychological factors such as loneliness and low self-control can increase the tendency for verbal aggression among social media users, particularly among adolescents.

Studies on the mechanisms of online disinhibition also emphasize that individual behavior in digital spaces is influenced by motivational and situational factors that can reduce psychological restraints in communication. When individuals experience high levels of disinhibition in online interactions, they tend to express attitudes or emotions more extremely compared to face-to-face communication (Wen & Miura, 2025). The phenomenon of verbal aggression in digital spaces is also related to social dynamics that develop within online communities. Research on verbal aggression in the digital era shows that the use of attacking, insulting, or degrading language often becomes part of communication patterns within certain online interactions. Such communication patterns can reinforce social conflict and trigger repeated aggressive behavior on social media (Laurensia et al., 2024).

In addition to anonymity, the factor of invisibility—the absence of physical visibility—also plays a role in increasing the likelihood of verbal aggression in online communication. In face-to-face interactions, individuals can directly observe facial expressions, body language, and emotional reactions from their conversation partners. The presence of these nonverbal cues functions as a social mechanism that helps individuals adjust their communication style to remain consistent with social norms and to consider others' feelings. Visible emotional responses often serve as reminders for individuals to control their words so that communication remains polite and constructive.

However, in online communication, users cannot directly see the expressions or emotional reactions of their interlocutors. The absence of these nonverbal cues creates greater psychological distance between users, making individuals less able to perceive the emotional impact of their statements. This situation can reduce empathy in digital interactions because individuals do not directly witness how others emotionally respond to their comments. As a result, social media users may more easily deliver harsh criticism, rude remarks, or verbal attacks without considering the emotional consequences that others might experience.

Invisibility also allows individuals to feel freer in expressing their thoughts and emotions spontaneously. When physical identity is not visible and interactions occur through text or other digital media, individuals often feel more protected from social judgment that typically arises in direct interactions. This feeling can reduce self-control in communication, thereby increasing the likelihood of provocative, degrading, or attacking comments. Thus, the characteristics of online communication that remove elements of physical presence can strengthen the emergence of the Online Disinhibition Effect, namely the tendency for individuals to express more extreme or aggressive behaviors in digital environments.

Several studies also show that the limitations of social cues in online communication contribute to an increased potential for communication conflicts on social media. When individuals cannot interpret facial expressions, tone of voice, or body language, messages are often interpreted differently from their original intent. Such misunderstandings can trigger more negative emotional responses and increase the likelihood of aggressive comment exchanges. Therefore, invisibility in digital

communication not only influences how individuals express their opinions but also affects the overall dynamics of social interaction on social media (Juliati et al., 2025).

The Online Disinhibition Effect is also closely associated with the increasing occurrence of various forms of aggressive behavior in cyberspace, such as cyber aggression and cyberbullying on social media. In the context of digital communication, individuals who experience online disinhibition tend to show reduced self-control when expressing their thoughts and emotions. This condition makes individuals more impulsive when responding to information, comments, or opinions that appear on social media. Consequently, their responses are often emotional, confrontational, and sometimes attacking others. Research shows that individuals who experience high levels of online disinhibition are more likely to become involved in digital communication conflicts because they express emotions more spontaneously without considering the social consequences of their behavior (Nisrina et al., 2024).

This phenomenon is further reinforced by the characteristics of social media that allow communication to occur rapidly and openly to a broad audience. When someone posts a comment or opinion on social media, other users can easily respond directly through comments, replies, or reposts. Such rapid interactions can trigger reactive communication dynamics in which individuals respond emotionally without careful reflection. Under these conditions, communication conflicts can escalate quickly and trigger increasingly aggressive exchanges between users. Therefore, the Online Disinhibition Effect is often considered one of the psychological factors contributing to the rise of cyber aggression in digital interactions.

In addition to the characteristics of the digital environment, the tendency for verbal aggression to emerge on social media is also influenced by individual psychological factors. One important factor is the individual's ability to manage emotions, including the ability to control anger, frustration, and other negative emotions when interacting in digital spaces. Individuals with good emotional regulation skills tend to be better able to control their emotional responses when facing differences of opinion or criticism from other users on social media. As a result, they are more capable of expressing their opinions constructively without using language that attacks or degrades others.

In addition to emotional regulation, emotional intelligence also plays an important role in determining how individuals communicate in digital environments. Individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence generally have better abilities to understand others' feelings, manage their own emotions, and consider the impact of their words on others. These abilities help individuals maintain an empathetic attitude and respect others even when differences of opinion arise in social media discussions. Conversely, individuals with low emotional regulation skills tend to be more easily provoked emotionally and may express anger through aggressive or provocative comments. Research shows that individuals with strong emotional regulation and emotional intelligence are more capable of controlling expressions of anger in digital communication, making them less likely to engage in verbal aggression toward other users on social media (Fredyne & Fikry, 2023).

Thus, it can be understood that the emergence of verbal aggression on social media is not only influenced by the characteristics of digital communication—such as anonymity, invisibility, and the ease of interaction—but also by individual psychological factors related to emotional management and behavioral control in communication. The interaction between these digital environmental factors and psychological factors creates

complex communication dynamics on social media, where the Online Disinhibition Effect can strengthen individuals' tendencies to express negative emotions more openly in digital spaces. These findings indicate that verbal aggression on social media does not occur in isolation but is the result of a complex interaction between digital communication technologies and individual psychological factors. Social media provides a communication environment that is relatively anonymous, rapid, and characterized by minimal direct social control, thereby reducing the social restraints that typically limit aggressive behavior in face-to-face interactions. This condition often leads to the phenomenon of online disinhibition, in which individuals express emotions, criticism, or even anger more freely and extremely in digital spaces. When this condition interacts with psychological factors such as poor emotional regulation, high impulsivity, a need for social validation, or tendencies toward frustration, the potential for verbal aggression on social media becomes greater.

The dynamics of social media algorithms that encourage user engagement can also reinforce provocative or controversial communication patterns. Content that triggers strong emotions, including anger or conflict, tends to receive greater attention in the form of comments, likes, and shares. This situation indirectly reinforces aggressive behavior because users may receive social feedback in the form of attention or support from certain groups. Over time, such patterns may shape digital communication norms that are more permissive toward aggressive speech, especially when they are not accompanied by adequate social control or moderation mechanisms.

Efforts to reduce aggressive behavior on social media need to adopt a multidimensional approach. One important step is improving public digital literacy, particularly the ability to understand online communication dynamics, recognize potential conflicts, and use social media responsibly. Digital literacy is not limited to technical skills in using technology but also includes critical thinking, ethical awareness, and an understanding of the social and psychological consequences of communication behavior in digital spaces.

Strengthening online communication ethics is also an essential aspect of creating a healthier digital environment. Education about digital ethics can help users understand the importance of respecting differences of opinion, avoiding hate speech, and fostering constructive dialogue. Such educational programs can be integrated into formal education curricula as well as implemented through digital literacy campaigns in society. Increasing users' awareness of the psychological impact of digital communication is also crucial. Many social media users are not fully aware that aggressive comments or degrading language can cause significant psychological harm to others, including stress, anxiety, and decreased psychological well-being. Therefore, promoting digital empathy becomes an important element in building healthier interactions in online environments.

Thus, efforts to reduce verbal aggression on social media cannot rely solely on platform regulations or technological policies but also require changes at both the individual and societal levels. Through improved digital literacy, strengthened online communication ethics, and increased psychological awareness among users, it is expected that a more constructive, safe, and psychologically supportive digital communication ecosystem can be created.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review, it can be concluded that the Online Disinhibition Effect is one of the important psychological factors influencing the

emergence of verbal aggressive behavior on social media. The characteristics of digital communication, such as anonymity, invisibility, and the psychological distance formed between users, can reduce the social restraints that normally regulate individual behavior in face-to-face interactions. This condition allows individuals to express their thoughts, emotions, and opinions more freely in digital spaces, including through comments that may be aggressive or attacking in nature.

In addition to the characteristics of the digital environment, the tendency for verbal aggression on social media is also influenced by individual psychological factors, such as emotional regulation and emotional intelligence. Individuals who possess good emotional regulation skills tend to be more capable of controlling their emotional responses in online interactions, making them less likely to engage in verbally aggressive behavior. Conversely, low self-control and high impulsivity may increase the likelihood of expressing negative emotions spontaneously in digital communication.

Therefore, verbal aggression on social media can be understood as a phenomenon resulting from the complex interaction between digital communication technologies and individual psychological factors. Efforts to reduce aggressive behavior in online environments should involve comprehensive approaches, including improving digital literacy, strengthening online communication ethics, and increasing users' awareness of the psychological impact of communication in digital spaces. These efforts are expected to contribute to the development of a healthier, more constructive, and more respectful digital communication environment.

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