

Rahman, A. A., Hanum, F. F., & Firdaus, D. F. (2023). Moral identity and electronic aggression on Instagram users: Self-control as a moderating variable. *Indigenous: Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi*, 8(1), 1-8. doi: <https://doi.org/10.23917/indigenous.v7i1.19831>

Moral Identity and Electronic Aggression on Instagram Users: Self-control as a Moderating Variable

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Submitted: 12 September 2022

Accepted: 09 January 2023

Published: 23 February 2023

Abstract. *Electronic aggression has become a growing phenomenon with the advent of social media platforms, including Instagram. Instagram's characteristics include easy access and the ability to speed up communication and information dissemination, which leads to electronic aggression. This phenomenon is highly concerning. One of the factors that may help Instagram users avoid electronic aggression is the internalization of moral values. However, moral values are not always realized in every context of life. As a result, other factors that can strengthen Instagram users' control over electronic aggression are required. This can be achieved, for example, through good self-control ability. The purpose of this research is to investigate the effect of moral identity on electronic aggression using self-control as a moderating variable. The research used a correlational design, involving 250 Instagram users as respondents. Data were collected using a moral identity questionnaire scale developed by Black and Reynolds; a self-control scale by Tangney, Baumeister, and Boone; and an electronic aggression scale by Bennett, Guran, Ramos, and Margolin. The findings of the research indicate that moral identity and self-control have a negative impact on electronic aggression among Instagram users. Furthermore, self-control ability can increase the effect of moral identity on electronic aggression by 10.7%.*

Keywords: *Moral identity; self-control; electronic aggression; Instagram users.*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesians are avid social media users. According to the Hootsuite (We Are Social) survey (2022), there were 58.4% (191 million people) active social media users, with an average spending time of around 3 hours 17 minutes in Indonesian. Surprisingly, this figure has risen year after year. The most popular social media platforms are WhatsApp (88.7%), Instagram (84.8%), and Facebook (81.3%) (Hootsuite, 2022).

The term "social media" refers to an internet-based communication medium that allows its users to interact with one another, either directly or indirectly, and benefit from this interaction (Carr and Hayes, 2015). On the one hand, social media is a tool that can help people communicate and expand their social networks (Zeitsoff, 2017). On the other side, social media has a negative impact. According to David-Ferdon and Hertz (2009), a rapidly growing body of literature suggests that electronic modalities such as e-mail, text messages, and social media websites can be used to harm, embarrass, or threaten others.

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Instagram is one of the social media platforms used to spread a hoax, bullying, hate speech, and electronic aggression. Instagram is primarily a photography-based social media platform. Instagram is derived from the words "insta" (instant) and "gram" (telegram, or sending messages quickly). Instagram users can upload photos or videos with specific filters, as well as add particular locations and people. With this application, users can share their photos and videos online. Research by the Royal Society for Public Health (2017) on the positive and negative impacts of social media on mental health ranked Instagram as the worst social media platform, followed by Snapchat.

This research focuses on electronic aggression. David-Ferdon and Hertz (2009) stated that electronic aggression is violence in the form of harassment or bullying (such as teasing, lying, making fun of someone, making rude or mean comments, spreading gossip, or making threats or aggressive comments), which can be delivered via e-mail, chat rooms, instant messages, websites, text messages, videos or images posted on websites or sent via mobile phones.

Young people are the most vulnerable to aggressive behavior (Ybarra et al., 2010). Young people are generally technologically literate and use social media extensively, but their psychological maturity is insufficient to properly control their behavior. Dowell et. al. (2009) found that the majority of young people use the internet to attack people they do not know.

The truth is that the majority of Instagram users who engage in electronic aggression are young people. Even though they do not know each other, they are willing to argue and use harsh words against one another. The topics of the debate can range from politics, religion, sports, public figures, and others. Pyzalski (2012) created a typology of the relationship between perpetrators and victims of electronic aggression. This typology divides electronic aggression into six categories: electronic aggression towards peers, electronic aggression towards those who are weaker than the perpetrator, random electronic aggression, electronic aggression towards groups, electronic aggression towards celebrities, and electronic aggression towards school personnel.

Bennet et. al. (2011) argued that electronic aggression takes four forms, including hostility, exclusion, humiliation, and intrusiveness. Hostility is the direct expression of information that is uncomfortable and threatening to others, whereas intrusiveness is the use of electronic media in the form of monitoring, spying, or deceiving other people in order to obtain personal information on the internet. Then humiliation is the act of publishing photos, videos, or comments through electronic media that can embarrass or humiliate other people; and finally, the exclusion is the act of removing or blocking someone's account in electronic media.

One of the factors that are often thought to influence behavior is moral values. However, these moral values do not automatically regulate and control one's behavior. Cognitively understood moral values (Kohlberg, 1969), identified within oneself (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Hardy & Carlo, 2011), integrated with the body to produce moral emotions (Hoffman, 2000), believed to be strong and stable (Haidt & Graham, 2007), are moral values that have a strong influence on behavior.

The moral values identified within are ones that will have a strong influence on behavior (moral identity) (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Hardy & Carlo, 2011). The concept of moral identity emerged in the early 1980s as a result of Blasi's assessment of the relationship between moral reasoning and moral behavior. Blasi (1983) opined that moral reasoning does not automatically affect a person's moral motivation, and moral motivation does not originate solely from moral reasoning. He added moral motivation can also stem from internalized moral values. That is, people with a strong moral identity tend to have a higher moral motivation. Blasi's statement is supported by later researchers such as Bergman (2002), Aquino & Reed (2002), as well as Hardi & Caro (2011).

Moral identity is a person's perception of the moral characteristics that are important to

him (Aquino and Reed, 2002), or the degree to which a person believes that being a moral person is important to him (Hardi and Carlo, 2011). Moral identity can be classified as a component of self-identity, specifically self-identity related to moral values (Bergman, 2002), or as a part of social identity (Aquino and Reed, 2002). Aquino and Reed said that moral identity is part of social identity, which is a type of one's social self-schema.

Aquino and Reed (2002) further argued that moral identity has two components; internalization and symbolization. Internalization refers to the extent to which a person believes that certain moral characteristics are important for his self-concept, whereas symbolization refers to how much a person displays moral symbols in everyday life. Black and Reynolds (2016), in contrast to Aquino and Reed, proposed two different components of moral identity, namely moral integrity, and moral self. Moral integrity refers to a person's consistent desire between his intentions and behavior, as well as the importance he places on values, whereas moral self reflects the degree of a person's belief that it is important to be a moral person (Black dan Reynolds, 2016).

Moral identity predicts moral behavior and can interact with other variables. Gino et. al. (2011) discovered a connection between moral identity and self-control when predicting cheating behavior. People with strong moral identities but low self-control do not exhibit excessive cheating behavior. This is consistent with Reynolds and Ceramic (2007), who found that a person's strong moral identity can inhibit academic cheating behavior, as well as research by Aquino et. al. (2007), which discovered that people with a strong moral identity are less likely to engage in moral disengagement.

Yang et. al. (2018) found that moral identity supports the negative effects of moral disengagement on cyberbullying. There was no significant relationship between moral disengagement and cyberbullying among adolescents with high levels of moral identity. This is in line with the findings of Hardy et al., (2014), who claimed that moral identity reduces the connection between moral disengagement and antisocial behavior such as aggression and rule-breaking. A strong moral identity can mitigate the negative effects of moral disengagement, implying that moral identities may have enough self-regulatory power to compensate for maladaptive social cognition.

Another factor to consider in reducing electronic aggression is self-control abilities. Self-control ability refers to a person's capability to manage responses that function to adapt to ideal norms, morals, social expectations, and long-term achievements (Baumeister et. al. 2007). Self-control, according to Denson et. al. (2012), is critical in determining how individuals act against and ignore aggressive impulses. Experiments have also revealed that low self-control increases aggression, high self-control decreases aggression, rumination followed by provocation reduces self-control and increases aggression, and prefrontal cortical control processes override aggressive drives.

A person's self-control ability is based on three aspects: self-discipline, breaking habits, and resisting temptation. Self-discipline refers to the ability to control one's thoughts, feelings, and behavior according to established rules; breaking a habit is the ability to behave out of the ordinary; and resisting temptation means the ability to avoid and ignore temptation (Tangney, 2004).

In the context of using social media, the ability to control oneself is worth noting. According to Wilcox and Stephen (2013), the effect of using social media on self-control is quite concerning. Many people spend a significant amount of time on social media these days. Wilcox and Stephen's research informed that 5 minutes of social media use significantly reduces self-control.

METHOD

This research employs the correlational method, which is a method aimed at testing the relationship between several variables (Rahman, 2016). There are three variables in this research,

such as moral identity as an exogenous variable, self-control as a moderating variable, and electronic aggression as an endogenous variable. The hypothesis is that self-control strengthens the relationship between moral identity and electronic aggression.

The subjects of this research were 250 randomly selected college students who used Instagram. Research instruments were distributed online to the subjects. Based on gender distribution, there were 74 (29%) male respondents, and 176 (70.4%) female respondents. In terms of time spent on Instagram, 137 (54.8%) respondents used it for 1-3 hours per day, 97 (38.8%) used it for 4-6 hours per day, and 16 (6.4%) respondents used it for 7 hours or more per day.

Three different scales were used to collect data. The moral identity questionnaire (MIQ) developed by Black and Reynolds (2016) was used to collect data on moral identity, with a total of 20 items. Data on self-control were collected using the Tangney et. al. (2004) scale, which included 36 items, and data on electronic aggression were obtained using the Bennett et. al. (2011) electronic aggression scale, which amounted to 21 items.

The moderated regression analysis (MRA) was used to analyze the research data. MRA is the development of multiple regression to examine the role of moderating variables in the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis results show that moral identity and self-control simultaneously influence Instagram users' electronic aggression ($R^2 = 0.186$, $F(2) = 28.240$, $p < 0.001$). This demonstrates that moral identity and self-control influence Instagram users' electronic aggression by 18.6%, while the remaining 81.4% are factors not investigated in this research. The influence of moral identity and self-control on the electronic aggression of Instagram users is classified as a low category. Partially, moral identity ($b = -0.425$, $t = -3.573$, $p < 0.000$) and self-control ($b = -0.462$, $t = -5.560$, $p < 0.000$) appear to have a negative effect on electronic aggression. This means that a person's moral identity and self-control can predict their level of electronic aggression. People with low self-identity and self-control are more likely to engage in electronic aggression, and vice versa. Correlation analysis of the influence of moral identity and self-control on all aspects of electronic aggression also reveals a significant correlation, in the low category (Table 1).

Table 1
Correlation between moral identity and self-control with aspects of electronic aggression

Variables	Exclusion	Intrusiveness	Hostility	Humiliation
Moral identity	-0.290	-0.155	-0.225	-0.191
Self-control	-0.266	-0.284	-0.359	-0.289

The subsequent analysis was carried out to determine whether self-control can act as a moderator of the effect of moral identity on electronic aggression. The results of the MRA (moderated regression analysis) show that the effect of moral identity on electronic aggression increased by 10.7% after the self-control variable was added as a moderating variable, from $R^2 = 0.084$ to $R^2 = 0.191$. That is, the research hypothesis that self-control can act as a moderating variable in the relationship between electronic aggression and moral identity has been proven.

In addition to inferential analysis, the researchers also performed descriptive analysis. The results show that 1) 56.4% of respondents have a moral identity in the above-average category, while 43.6% are in the below-average category; 2) 57.2% of respondents have self-control in the above-

average category, while 42.8% of respondents are below average; and 3) 52.8% of respondents have electronic aggression in the above average category, and 47.2% of respondents are in the below average category.

This is understandable given that any form of aggression, including electronic aggression, is incompatible with religious or cultural values. Respondents who are generally of Sundanese ethnicity and Muslims are thought to be influenced by these values. "Silih asuh, silih asih, and silih asuh" [which mean, teaching, caring, and loving to each other] are Sundanese values that prioritize social harmony (Saleh et al., 2013). This will undoubtedly have an impact on the Sundanese's personality and character. According to Rahman et. al. (2018), these values shape the character of the Sundanese, who have friendly, polite, gentle and compassionate, religious, and tolerant characteristics. Similarly, Islamic values that teach respect for others, as illustrated in Surah Al-Hujarat verses 11-12, which prohibit defamation, condescension, prejudice, and backbiting, also shape the character and personality of the respondents. The prophet Muhammad Saw commands a Muslim to always say good or remain silent (Hadith narrated by Bukhari), to keep his mouth and hands from hurting others (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim), and to love others as he loves himself (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim).

These results support the findings of previous studies. Moral identity, which is the character of a person who makes moral values an important part of oneself, is one of the factors that can influence a person's moral behavior. Black and Reynolds (2016), argued people with a high moral identity will prioritize morality in their lives (moral self), and live a life consistent with moral values (moral integrity), whereas according to Aquino and Reed, (2002), people who have a high moral identity are characterized by the internalization and symbolization of moral values in behavior. People with a strong moral identity have strong moral awareness (Lapsley & Lasky, 2002), as well as strong motivation to act in accordance with the moral values they believe in (Hardi, & Carlo, 2011). Cognitively, people with high moral identities will extract, weigh, and integrate relevant information when faced with moral dilemmas, whereas people with low moral identities rely on personal desires to make decisions (Xing et al., 2015). They will act in accordance with the moral values in which they believe (Blasi, 1983; Aquino & Reed, 2002). Even if they fail to exhibit behavior that is consistent with the moral values in which they believe, they will experience negative emotions that will allow them to correct their actions (Stet & Burke, 2003).

However, it appears that the influence of moral identity and self-control is not significant. This can be explained by the low level of internalization and symbolization of these values. Reed and Aquino (2003) suggested that the internalization and symbolization of these values are important in forming a person's moral identity, which will then influence daily behavior.

This research also demonstrates that self-control can enhance the effect of moral identity on electronic aggression. In terms of moral identity, people with strong self-control will carefully consider cognitive factors before acting. One of the factors he considers is his own moral values as well as the moral values prevalent in society. Regarding electronic aggression, people with strong self-control are not easily swayed by emotions or situations, so they avoid aggressive behavior, including electronic aggression (Tangney et al., 2004). People with good self-control, as stated by Tangney et. al. (2004), will have good self-discipline, do something out of the ordinary, and be able to resist temptation well. As a result, it is understandable that strong moral identity and self-control have a negative impact on electronic aggression. These findings support the findings of previous research, such as Gini et. al. (2022), who discovered that moral disengagement influences the effect of moral identity on aggression, both reactive and proactive aggression.

CONCLUSION

This research yields a number of conclusions that can be used to provide an overview and explanation of the relationship between moral identity, self-control, and electronic aggression. The following conclusions are drawn from the finding of this research: 1) Partially and simultaneously, moral identity and self-control have a negative effect on electronic aggression with a low category. The effect of moral identity and self-control is nearly identical for all aspects of electronic aggression. 2) Self-control has been shown to act as a moderating variable, or it can amplify the negative effect of moral identity on electronic aggression. 3) As many as 56.4% of respondents showed a moral identity in the above-average category; 57.2% of respondents demonstrated self-control in the above-average category; and 52.8% of respondents showed electronic aggression in the above-average category.

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