

Expressions of Digital Nationalism and Civic Ethics: An Analysis of Indonesian Netizens' Responses to the @umparum3 Account's Cultural Stereotypes

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the phenomenon of the shift from expressions of digital nationalism to cyber aggression among Indonesian netizens when responding to narratives that stereotype foreign cultures. Specifically, a post by the X account @umparum3 that disparaged the tradition of eating with one's hands triggered mass mobilization under the guise of defending the nation, which clashed with the ethics of digital citizenship. Through content analysis of netizen interactions on the X platform, reduced using the Miles and Huberman model, this study evaluates these communication patterns. The findings reveal the dark side of participatory culture, where the collective energy of netizens instead slips into digital chauvinism and mass cyberbullying, rather than fostering rational and constructive cultural diplomacy. Solidarity sentiments lacking ethical maturity ultimately harm the nation's image of maturity on the global stage. In conclusion, this phenomenon demands the revitalization of Pancasila and Civic Education (PPKn) through a Project-Based Learning approach to instill the principles of moral responsibility, caution (filter before sharing), and practical digital literacy in the younger generation.



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INTRODUCTION

Philosophically, human existence in cyberspace retains its inherent nature as moral beings bound by values of humanity, civility, and national identity. This transition highlights the urgency of understanding digital citizenship, which refers to standards of appropriate and responsible behavior regarding the use of technology (Sari, 2023). Within the digital realm, democratic values such as freedom of expression and social responsibility find a new, more complex context. In the context of Indonesian society, the culture of collectivism rooted in the spirit of mutual cooperation in the real world often undergoes massive transformation in the virtual world. This collective spirit, when faced with situations where the identity of a group or nation feels threatened, often triggers the emergence of “defensive nationalism,” which manifests in the form of mass mobilization or cyber warfare.

Legally, public activities in the digital space are strictly regulated to maintain a balance between freedom of expression and the protection of public moral values. In Indonesia, the primary regulation serving as the central instrument for governing digital communication is Law No. 11 of 2008 on Information and Electronic Transactions (IET Law), which has undergone several amendments and was subsequently enacted as Law No. 1 of 2024. This regulation explicitly prohibits the dissemination of information that may harm others, including Article 27, which prohibits the distribution of content containing violations of public decency, insults, and defamation, as well as Article 28 regarding hate speech based on ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (Widjaja, 2026). Communication laws in the digital age imply that any act of defending one's identity on social media must still adhere to communication ethics (Widjaja, 2026). However, empirical realities on the ground often present a paradox: on one hand, mass actions on social media are claimed to be forms of nationalism and diplomacy to defend cultural honor, but on the other hand, the aggressive methods employed frequently violate legal norms and digital communication ethics (Meidiaputri & Mukhlis, 2023).

The phenomenon of defensive nationalism in the digital sphere has increasingly taken its most organized form through the existence of popular culture communities, particularly K-Pop fandoms. Over time, fandoms can no longer be understood merely as entertainment communities; rather, they have evolved into social actors who actively participate in shaping public opinion and national discourse on social media (Witarti et al., 2026). Through the framework of participatory culture, these fan groups massively engage in clicktivism, metavoicing, and assertion to voice social concerns and national solidarity (Andini & Akhni, 2021). Social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter) provide a space for them to form affiliations, express themselves, solve problems collectively, and rapidly circulate narratives through retweets and the use of hashtags (Witarti et al., 2026). The mobilization power they typically use to support their idols is now being repurposed to advocate for national issues and defend regional identity.

One example of a global cyber conflict that perfectly illustrates the intersection between fandom culture and defensive nationalism is the feud between Southeast Asian netizens (SEAbings) and South Korean netizens (KNetz). According to Jurnalposmedia (2026), this conflict originated from an incident involving a violation of concert regulations by a foreign fansite at a DAY6 concert in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in early 2026. Criticism of the concert's conduct quickly shifted direction when a counter-narrative emerged from KNetz that was perceived as racist, physically demeaning, and perpetuating negative stereotypes about Southeast Asian communities. These sentiments sparked communal outrage among netizens from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and other ASEAN countries, who spontaneously united under the identity of SEAbings (Southeast Asia and siblings). This case demonstrates how a social identity bound by a shared fate, when belittled by an outgroup, triggers massive backlash on social media (Binus University, 2026).

This transnational conflict reached a critical point for Indonesia when an X account named @umparum3 posted a stereotypical narrative that specifically insulted the cultural tradition of eating with one's hands, a common practice in Indonesia by calling it unhygienic. The provocative post, which garnered 5 million views, sparked a massive outcry from Indonesian netizens. The digital alliance launched a counterattack in the comments section, dominated by satire, the sharing of memes promoting natural beauty without plastic surgery, and aggressive cyber abuse. This collective behavior can be explained through the concept of the online disinhibition effect, where the boundaries of anonymity and the absence of face-to-face interaction in cyberspace make individuals feel free to let go of the ethical restraints they typically adhere to in the real world (Binus University, 2026). The initial intent to advocate for and educate on culture is instead overshadowed by verbal aggression that triggers a crisis in digital citizenship ethics.

A review of the existing literature indicates that studies on netizen digital activism, particularly among the younger generation and fandom communities, remain focused on issues of domestic political participation and humanitarian causes. Research by Meliana & Al Jannah (2023) and Kurniawan & Manar (2022) specifically highlights the success of K-Pop fan communities in Indonesia in mobilizing opposition to the Job Creation Bill (Omnibus Law). On the other hand, Syfa, 2023 discusses the role of fandom as an actor in digital activism during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. A more recent study by Witarti et al. (2026) has touched on aspects of digital nationalism, but its focus remains on civil resistance advocacy, such as the Emergency Alert (*Garuda Biru*) movement. There is currently limited scholarly literature that specifically examines the intersection between regional identity solidarity sentiments (SEAbings) and the emergence of defensive nationalist aggression in response to narratives of racism and cross-border cultural stereotypes. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in the shift in the locus of analysis of digital activism: from the realm of domestic political participation toward the stakes of Indonesia's image and cultural diplomacy in the international arena, which is rigorously evaluated using the pillars of communication ethics (digital etiquette).

Based on the background of the issue and the gaps in the literature, this study aims to describe and analyze the communication patterns and narratives constructed by Indonesian netizens in response to cultural stereotypes in the case of the X account @umparum3. This analysis is intended to evaluate the extent to which such digital patriotism aligns with or, conversely, conflicts with the principles of digital citizenship ethics. The contributions and benefits of this study are divided into two aspects. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on the development of Digital Sociology, Communication Science, and Civic Education regarding the fine line between digital nationalism and cyberbullying in the post-truth era. Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a

reference for educators and policymakers in developing digital literacy strategies, so that netizens are able to respond to global cultural provocations critically, elegantly, and with dignity without violating the legal boundaries of the IET Law.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study was designed using a descriptive qualitative method with a content analysis approach. The choice of this descriptive qualitative approach was based on the primary objective of the study, namely to explore, understand, and interpret the deeper meaning of a sociological phenomenon in cyberspace. As explained by Creswell, the descriptive qualitative method aims to interpret the meaning of a phenomenon based on the analysis of narrative and contextual data (Kumala & Situmeang, 2025). In the context of this study, the phenomenon being analyzed is collective behavior in the form of expressions of digital nationalism and civic ethics demonstrated by Indonesian netizens. The material focus of this research is on narratives, texts, and interactions occurring on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), specifically in the comment section of a post by the foreign account @umparum3, which uploaded a stereotypical narrative regarding the cultural tradition of eating with one's hands in Indonesia. A content analysis approach was used to dissect the written and visual content (such as memes or satirical images) uploaded by netizens to identify dominant communication patterns.

The population in this study encompasses all digital interactions including direct replies, quote retweets, and retweets related to Indonesian netizens' responses to provocative posts by the @umparum3 account in early 2026. Given the massive volume of data on social media, the researcher employed purposive sampling combined with a netnographic approach to identify subjects and select the data sample. The netnographic approach enables the researcher to directly and naturally trace behaviors, interactions, and fandom or community practices within the digital space (Witarti et al., 2026). The data sample was selected based on specific inclusion criteria, namely comments with high engagement levels—such as the number of likes and retweets representing collective approval—as well as comments explicitly containing narratives of cultural defense, regional sentiment (SEAbings), or cyber abuse. Data collection was conducted through non-participant observation by archiving digital data in the form of screenshots and text documentation to record the original digital traces before the possibility of content deletion by users (Wulandah, 2023).

To analyze the complexity of this data, this study comprehensively operationalizes three main theoretical frameworks. The first theoretical framework is Digital Communication Ethics (Netiquette). Communication ethics in cyberspace relate to the moral standards that have been established in society, which require the use of appropriate language so as not to harm others (Sari, 2023). In analyzing the category of aggressive responses, the legal operationalization of this communication ethics is aligned with Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 1 of 2024 on the Second Amendment to the IET Law, specifically referring to the provisions of Article 27. The analysis indicators in this section focus on tracking the presence or absence of the distribution of content containing insults, defamation, hate speech, and cyberbullying carried out under the pretext of defending the nation's honor.

The second theoretical framework serving as the central analytical tool is the Theory of Digital Citizenship proposed by Mike Ribble. Digital citizenship is defined as the rules of appropriate and responsible behavior regarding the use of technology (Ribble, 2015). This analysis focuses on three of Ribble's nine key elements. The first element is digital communication, used to measure the extent to which netizens can engage in constructive dialogue and exchange information without manipulation. The second element is digital etiquette, which serves as a parameter to evaluate whether resistance to cultural stereotypes is carried out while maintaining decorum or instead falls into the online disinhibition effect, where anonymity causes individuals to disregard norms of politeness. The third element is digital rights and responsibilities, which is used to assess netizens' awareness that freedom of expression on the internet demands moral accountability regarding the nation's image and dignity in the international community.

The third theoretical framework consists of Civic Nationalism Theory and Social Identity Theory. Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel dan Turner (1979), explains that individuals tend to categorize themselves into specific social groups (ingroups) and distinguish them from other groups (outgroups). This theory is operationalized to analyze the sociological roots of the emergence of sarcastic and emotional responses from netizens. The parameters of the analysis focus on how the identity narrative of the "SEAbings" region and Indonesian national identity are defensively

constructed when facing KNetz as an outgroup. This theory assists the research in explaining the psychological and communal reasons why cultural advocacy, initially well-intentioned, can escalate into reactive mass mobilization, thereby yielding a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between patriotic sentiment, fanaticism, and the erosion of ethics in cyberspace. Finally, to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study employs data source triangulation and theoretical triangulation techniques, in which excerpts from netizens' comments are cross-verified against the ITE Law regulatory documents as well as various relevant journal literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal highly complex dynamics regarding how the digital space in the post-truth era no longer functions merely as a medium for the exchange of information, but has transformed into an arena for the contestation of identities, symbolic power relations, and nationalist sentiments. Content analysis conducted on thousands of digital interactions by Indonesian netizens on the social media platform X in response to a post by the @umparum3 account—which disseminated a demeaning, stereotypical narrative about the tradition of eating with one's hands—reveals an escalation of the phenomenon of defensive nationalism. Ginting et al., (2021) assert that while the ease of access to social media does make communication extremely fast, this boundless space is highly vulnerable to being used to spread provocation and forms of cross-border identity defamation. This digital solidarity, shielded behind the identity of "SEAbings" (Southeast Asian netizens) against "KNetz" (South Korean netizens), demonstrates that online communities possess a participatory culture capable of massively mobilizing the public to advocate for cultural values. However, when these interaction data are mapped and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, the emerging practices of digital nationalism reveal behavioral gradations that present a sharp paradox regarding the pillars of digital citizenship ethics.

Based on the results of data analysis, netizens' communication patterns in responding to these cultural stereotypes do not appear in a single form, but are fragmented into three response typologies. The first response typology highlights educational and informative forms of communication. A small portion of the data indicates that some netizens wisely utilize the comment section to provide cultural clarification (cultural counter-narrative). In these responses, netizens provide historical and logical explanations regarding the hygienic tradition of washing hands before eating, as well as how the tradition of eating with one's hands is a rich cultural heritage of the Nusantara region commonly practiced in various Asian countries. The narrative texts in this category contain absolutely no elements of retaliatory insults, as evidenced in the following Table 1:

Table 1. Data of Educative/Informative Responses

No	Original Comment Text	Theoretical Indicator
1	"FYI bukan hanya Indonesia yang makan pakai tangan. Malaysia, India, Arab Saudi cara makan mereka juga pakek tangan kok. gunakan produk sabun antiseptik untuk cuci tangan sebelum dan sesudah makan yaa"	Digital Etiquette: Provide factual information politely without belittling others.
2	"Eating with hands is a cultural practice in many countries... Hygiene depends on washing your hands not on whether you use a spoon or your fingers."	Cultural Literacy & Civic Empathy: Advocating for a culture of hygiene based on cross-border logic.

When analyzed from a theoretical perspective, the communication practices in Table 1 align with the view of Mutiah & Albar (2019), who state that media ethics is not merely about written discourse, but rather the presence of good intentions expressed with patience and empathy to foster cross-cultural understanding. Based on Ribble's (2015) Theory of Digital Citizenship, this first typology represents the most ideal implementation of digital etiquette. These users are fully aware of their role as agents of cultural diplomacy in cyberspace. Their advocacy demonstrates a high level of digital literacy, as they actively engage in logical, civil discourse that adheres to the social norms of the global community without manipulating information. This response serves as evidence that, within certain groups, interactions on social media can still function as a rational, deliberative public sphere.

Although there are elegant cultural diplomacy efforts, as seen in the first typology, unfortunately, such approaches do not reflect the majority of interactions among Indonesian netizens. Instead, conflicts escalate very rapidly into more emotional forms of communal defense, as represented in the second response typology: communication marked by sarcasm and irony. This category dominates digital interactions, marked by the massive spread of satirical memes, physical comparison images, and the use of rhetorically sarcastic phrases. Netizens collectively uploaded visuals of Southeast Asian women to highlight natural beauty as a way to satirically counter the artificial beauty standards associated with South Korea's plastic surgery culture (Witarti et al., 2026). Evidence of this shift in communication narratives can be seen in Table 2 and the accompanying representative images:

Table 2. Data of Sarcasm and Emotional Responses

No	Original Comment Text	Qualitative Analysis Notes
1	"daripada lu makan bubur pake sumpit kocak"	Verbal Irony: Using absurd comparisons to mock the opponent's logic.
2	"bentar emang megang sumpit tuh gapake tangan?"	Sarcastic Logic: Challenging the other party's premise by using rhetorical questions.



Figure 1. Sarcastic Meme Used by Netizens to Counter-Attack @Umparum3 Narrative

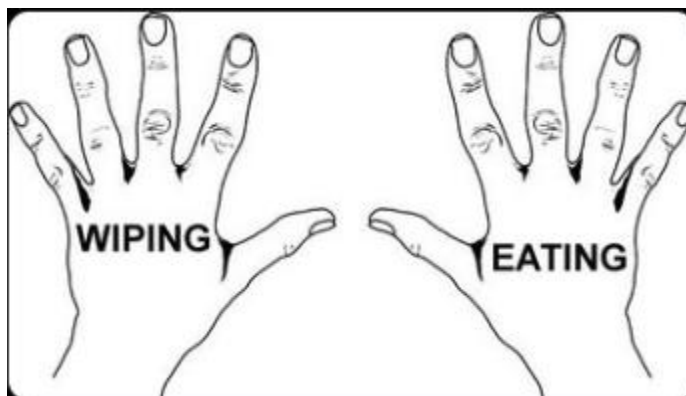


Figure 2. Visual Representation of Regional Beauty Standards Used as A Digital Defense Mechanism

The phenomenon of meme wars and verbal irony in the second typology can be fully explained through the lens of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) According to this theory, individuals categorize themselves into social groups or ingroups (in this case, the SEAbings solidarity) and create a clear demarcation with the outgroup (Korean netizens) to maintain their group's collective self-esteem. Satire and memes in cyber interactions are essentially used as coping mechanisms to transform feelings of inferiority into psychological superiority over the opposing group. Furthermore, when analyzed using the Hierarchy of Digital Activism concept by George & Leidner (2019), this practice of spreading memes falls under the activities of metavoicing and assertion. Netizens reinforce their national solidarity values and information through constant collective reactions, repeatedly reproducing satirical images to ensure their group's dominant narrative dominates trending topics on social media.

This massive mobilization of sarcasm is also inextricably linked to the role of social media algorithms. McComiskey (2017) explains that social media users in the post-truth era are unwittingly “trapped” in filter bubbles or echo chambers. Within this echo chamber, users are constantly fed narratives of anger from their in-group peers. This, in turn, dulls citizens’ objectivity and empathy, as netizens feel their sarcasm is always validated by their group. The feeling that “we” are under attack by “them” hardens, exacerbating the polarization of inter-regional conflicts, and ultimately paves the way for more extreme and anarchic forms of cyber resistance.

The blurring of emotional boundaries caused by collective sentiment within these echo chambers ultimately completely erodes the fine line between cultural advocacy and cybercrime. This gives rise to a third type of response: verbal aggression and cyberbullying. This third type is the most prevalent in quantitative terms and represents the greatest anomaly within the ethical framework of Indonesian society’s communication practices. The comment sections of targeted accounts are filled with crude insults, profanity, flaming, threats, and hate speech that blindly and vulgarly attack the personalities of foreign account holders, as summarized in the empirical data representation in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Data of Aggressive Responses / Cyberbullying

No	Original Comment Text	Violation (UU ITE / Policy)
1	"Kok g blok bgt??... Gak pernah cebok makanya g blok"	Flaming: The use of profanity and insults that degrade human dignity.
2	"Otak anda kurang sampai atau memang bodoh... jangan setengah-setengah sempak, buka lebar-lebar mata mu"	Harassment: An aggressive attack on an individual's intellectual capacity.
3	"KITA MAKAN PAKE TANGAN KANAN, CEBOK PAKE TANGAN KIRI YEE KOCAAKKK... Kasian ga bisa capslock wleee"	Mocking: Mocking or belittling the opposing side with provocative language.

The verbal aggression presented in Table 3 is a stark illustration of the cyber moral crisis. Despite the highly damaging psychological effects of this type of cyberbullying, it is strange that there is very little public support or sympathy for these foreign victims, simply because the public feels their actions are legitimized by a spirit of “nationalism” (Mutiah & Albar, 2019). In fact, Situmorang (2019) highlights a unique paradox in Indonesia where being the subject of cyberbullying often actually invites popularity or virality that normalizes such behavior. Psychologically, this extreme response from netizens indicates a failure in emotional regulation or extremely low emotional control, where an individual’s feelings of offense escalate uncontrollably into impulsive bullying actions (Suciartini & Sumartini, 2018). This phenomenon confirms the validity of the concept of the Online Disinhibition Effect (Suler, 2004), where the shield of screen anonymity makes netizens feel that their true identities are hidden, causing them to lose control over the norms of propriety (restraint) that they typically adhere to in the real world.

From a legal perspective, this outburst of collective anger constitutes a grave violation of Indonesia’s legal framework. Law No. 11 of 2008 on Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE Law), which was amended into Law No. 1 of 2024, serves as the central instrument in regulating digital communication traffic (Hakim et al., 2018). The dissemination of abusive and insulting language in public cyberspaces such as X fundamentally and fully meets the elements of defamation and slander strictly regulated under Article 27 of the EIT Law (Andriansyah & Kusnadi, 2024). Acts of defending the nation should not be used as a basis for legal immunity to legitimize aggression. Although the application of the ITE Law is often criticized as a “rubber clause” that has the potential to subjectively limit freedom of expression (Julianja, 2018), restrictions in the digital space are, in fact, a crucial instrument for preventing hate speech and ensuring that public communication does not descend into anarchy (Pratama et al., 2022).

The results of this study present a finding that stands in stark contrast to the conclusions of various previous literature reviews on digital activism. In previous studies, digital participation mobilized by netizen solidarity communities and popular culture fandoms has almost always been romanticized as a positive force for democracy. Kurniawan & Manar, 2022 and Meliana & Al Jannah, 2023 for example, found that cyber activism is effective in fostering critical awareness to reject pro-

oligarchy state policies such as the Job Creation Bill (Omnibus Law). In line with this, Syfa, 2023 highlights the participatory capabilities of netizen fandoms in conducting humanitarian advocacy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Contrary to this optimistic narrative, this study empirically exposes the dark side of digital participatory culture in Indonesia. When this collective energy collides with transnational identity sentiments, mass mobilization can very easily slip from rational activism into toxic digital chauvinism that undermines human dignity.

Overall, the discourse constructed in the case of the response to @umparum3 underscores that there is an urgent crisis of ethical literacy among Indonesia's digital citizens. remind us that communication ethics—which prioritize the principles of honesty, courtesy, and social responsibility—should be the guiding spirit of cyberlaw enforcement. Digital nationalism, which is celebrated by the public but lacks the maturity of civic ethics (Ribble, 2015), has backfired. The practice of mass insults does nothing to improve or correct cultural stereotypes regarding Indonesian traditions. On the contrary, such behavior only reinforces the international community's perception of how immature Indonesian netizens' communication is.

Therefore, this phenomenon calls for structured intervention by educational institutions, specifically through the reorientation of Civic Education (PKn). confirms that Civic Education must transform by adopting a Project-Based Learning model to promote digital ethics and responsibility in a practical way to the younger generation. The public and students need to be educated on the concept of smart citizenship—a critical awareness that the task of upholding the nation's dignity in the global arena must be achieved through the production of argumentative and intelligent cultural counter-narratives, not through cyber aggression. The awareness to verify emotions and information before sharing statements (filter before sharing) is an absolute foundation for realizing the ethical responsibility of digital citizens to foster public civility in cyberspace (Rejeki et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, the form of digital nationalism expressed by Indonesian netizens in response to cultural stereotypes on social media platform X (formerly Twitter) remains trapped in patterns of verbal aggression and collective cyberbullying, rather than constructive cultural diplomacy. This behavior has dangerous implications for the pillars of digital citizenship, where patriotic sentiment is instead misused as a justification for violating the ethics of civility and the legal foundations of the ITE Law. As a strategic solution to this crisis of character in the digital realm, Pancasila and Civic Education (PPKn) must immediately revitalize its teaching approach, including through the adoption of Project-Based Learning, to instill practical digital literacy skills. By fostering the principle of caution (filter before sharing), Indonesia's young generation of digital citizens is expected to be able to express their national solidarity in a rational, ethical, and civilized manner to maintain peaceful interactions on the global stage.

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