

Promoting Harmony in Communication: The Role of Inclusive Language in Enhancing Equality and Equity in Digital Platforms

¹Bima Kurniawan

¹Universitas Trunojoyo Madura
bima.kurniawan@trunojoyo.ac.id

Abstract

This research aims to enrich academic discourse on inclusive language by exploring its role in creating harmony in digital communication through the use of shared, non-offensive and accommodating language. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach. Triangulation was carried out to identify consistency of data from various sources, thereby increasing the validity of the findings. Data collection methods include interviews, focus group discussions (FGD) with 10 colleagues who have visual impairments, observation, and documentation. As researchers with visual impairments, researchers have a significant role in assessing the accessibility of social media, news platforms, and public service media for users with screen readers. The research results show that common language has been implemented well in various digital communication media. Recommendations for significant improvements were emphasized, especially in the use of accommodating language for accessibility features in news media. It is hoped that the practical implications of this research can provide recommendations to the government and policy makers in managing social media, news media and public service media, to create policies and technical guidelines for implementing a common, accommodating and non-offensive language. These findings will benefit not only individuals with visual impairments, but also people with other disabilities as well as non-disabled individuals, by ensuring inclusive communication for all.

Keywords: Inclusive language, Equity and equality in communication, Adaptive technologies, Disabilities and accessibility, Multicultural communication

How to Cite: Kurniawan, B.(2025). Promoting Harmony in Communication: The Role of Inclusive Language in Enhancing Equality and Equity in Digital Platforms. *Globish: An English-Indonesian Journal for English, Education, and Culture*. 14(2), 267-279.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.31000/globish.v14i2.13645>

INTRODUCTION

The internet has become an integral part of modern human life, with one of its key functions being the facilitation of interactive and communicative relationships (Gregáňová, & Papcunová, 2022; Saravanan, et.al, 2022). It is not just a network tool, but also a global communication channel that opens up limitless possibilities for globalization (Borcuch, et.al, 2014; Tytelova, et.al, 2021). The internet has created a

window of information that helps us understand the world and its phenomena (Fisher, et.al, 2015). Some of the main features of the internet include digital applications, platforms, and social media, which allow individuals to access various types of information such as social networking, location tracking, web browsing, time-stamping and also media for learning (Ehrenreich, 2021; Pujiati & Arjulayana, 2024; Zulkheariyah, et.al, 2024; Bulqis, et.al, 2025; Hasanah, et.al, 2025; Purnawati, et.al, 2025).

The advance of the internet in the digital communication era represents an integration of technology and social relationships among individuals (Beyi, 2018; Alfiansyah & Anshori, 2024). In today's modern era, digital communication has become an everyday necessity for fulfilling individuals' social needs (Cucu & Lența 2020). On one hand, digital communication brings many positive values, such as fostering a sense of brotherhood and shared goals through hashtags, allowing self-expression, encouraging creativity through YouTube videos, and promoting sympathy through likes and subscriptions. On the other hand, digital communication can create social distance between individuals (Frunză, 2019). Enable sexting (Widman, et.al, 2021), propagate harmful ideologies (Cepollaro & Torrenco, 2020) and facilitate behaviors like insulting, harassing, or degrading other individuals or groups (Arich-Gerz, 2023; Ibrohim & Budi, 2019; Rangkuti & Lubis, 2019).

Inclusive language has become a vital aspect of modern communication, serving not only as a tool for exchanging information but also to promote equity and equality Kurniawan, B. (2024). In Indonesia, inclusive language reflects the core values that underpin the nation's way of life. It serves as a medium for expressing experiences, emotions, and thoughts while adhering to spiritual, social, and interactional principles. Previous research has explored the significance of inclusive language strategies in fostering harmony within multicultural business environments (Lauring & A. Klitmøller, 2017; Fredriksson, et.al, 2006; Harzing & Pudelko, 2013), promoting equality and equity in healthcare (Stamps, et.al, 2022). Enhancing interactions in academic settings (Banawan, et.al, 2023; Lauring & Selmer, 2013) and facilitating collaboration across various interdisciplinary sectors (Whitehouse, 2021).

This study aims to enrich the academic discourse on inclusive language by exploring its role in fostering harmony in digital communication through the use of shared language, non-offensive language, and accommodative language. Shared language serves as a communication tool that emphasizes lexical, syntactic, and semantic commonalities, promoting social cohesion within multicultural discourse communities (Arjulayana & Dwi sloria, 2016). It encourages individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds to communicate effectively, highlighting the importance of tailoring language to meet the needs of diverse interactions (Kim & Williams, 2021). Shared language facilitates the construction of common ground through an emergent process of interaction, encompassing shared knowledge and collaborative meaning-making among participants (Kecskes, 2023; Yow & Lim, 2019). In Indonesia, Bahasa Indonesia functions as the national shared language, while English serves as the global shared language.

Non-offensive language, on the other hand, stands as the opposite of offensive language. It is a means of communication that upholds politeness and respect (Mantra, et.al, 2023; Brar, et.al, 2023), fostering Nonviolent Communication (NVC), which emphasizes empathy and compassion. This approach allows individuals to express their needs without hostility (Azgın, 2018; Rosenberg, 2003), reducing the risk of negatively

affecting the mental health of the recipient (Jenke, et.al, 2014; Adaikkan & Thenmozhi, 2024) and minimizing the potential for belittling, insulting, or alienating others (Popa-Wyatt & Wyatt, 2018). Meanwhile, accommodative language is commonly used in alternative and augmentative communication. It serves as a tool to support individuals with communication barriers, often utilizing features such as translation tools, text-to-speech and speech-to-text converters, and other accessibility functions (Sennott, et.al, 2019; Draffan & Banes, 2022). Most of these assistive technologies rely heavily on artificial intelligence.

Overall, inclusive language plays a crucial role in digital communication. Inclusive language is not merely about emphasizing linguistic equality; it plays a role in empowering all groups (Wishart, 2023) by providing accessibility features (Sen & Rajkumar, 2024). that offer innovative solutions, allowing every individual to participate in digital communication (Venkatesan, 2023). A lot of websites remain inaccessible to certain individuals, including those with visual impairments. They face difficulties in finding information and communicating on social media, e-news platforms, and public service sites due to key issues such as color scheme, font size, layouts, and labels that are not compatible with screen readers.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach. The case study is a qualitative research design that enables an in-depth exploration of a program, event, process, or activity involving one or more individuals. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, data triangulation is conducted through diverse methods, including interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), observations, and documentation. The interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) involve ten participants with visual impairments to explore the challenges related to social media, e-news platforms, and public service sites. The researcher, as a person with a visual impairment, conducts direct observations to personally assess and understand the accessibility of these digital communication. Documentation is carried out by gathering information from relevant sources, including articles, news reports, and guidelines, with a focus on inclusive language and digital communication.

The research process follows three stages of narrative construction: description, categorization, and connection (Sugiyono. 2022). In the descriptive stage, the researcher gathers all findings related to social media, e-news platforms, and public services sites through observations, interviews, FGDs, and documentation. In the categorization stage, the researcher systematically reduces and organizes the collected information, focusing on data relevant to the three types of digital communication. Specifically, the study examines social media such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram; national e-news platforms in Indonesia, such as Tempo, Liputan 6, Kompas, Detik, and Tribun; and public service sites, including banking services like BCA, BNI, BRI, and BTN, as well as reporting systems to government agencies, such as Lapor services for the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, National Civil Service Agency (BKN), and its monitoring services. In the final stage, the researcher synthesizes the identified focus areas into coherent and meaningful paragraphs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals that social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and Instagram predominantly use English as a global lingua franca. On Facebook, users have the option to change the language settings to Bahasa Indonesia as the national shared language. However, these platforms are not yet optimized for describing visual content, such as photos and images. Users with visual impairments, including those relying on screen readers, can only hear the term "graphics" without any additional description when navigating visual content. To obtain more specific descriptions, users must utilize certain add-on tools. Among the three platforms, only Instagram provides simple descriptions of images, such as identifying the background of the photo and the number of people in the image. Furthermore, these platforms still lack sufficient accessibility features, such as tools designed to assist users with partial vision impairments or glaucoma.

National e-news platforms in Indonesia show significant limitations in accessibility for individuals with visual impairments. These barriers are largely due to intrusive advertisements, including ads with sensitive content related to romantic or sexual relationships, which are inappropriate for minors. Additionally, these e-news platforms lack an English translation feature, making it difficult for international users to access information from Indonesian local media. They also lack accessibility features, such as audio assistive options for individuals with visual impairments or those who prefer audio format, further exacerbating accessibility challenges.

Public service sites in Indonesia predominantly use Bahasa Indonesia as their primary language. On the Lapor platform for government services, accessibility features are available, including voice modes, layout adjustments, and specific settings for individuals with dyslexia. The registration page on the Lapor platform also includes an option for applicants to indicate if they are people with disabilities. However, challenges persist on the National Civil Service Agency's monitoring platform, which still relies on visual CAPTCHA verification. In banking services, accessibility issues remain evident. These services require CAPTCHA verification solely through visual means and do not provide alternative options for users with disabilities. The following table outlines the implementation of inclusive language in digital communication in Indonesia:

Table 1. Outlines the implementation of inclusive language in digital communication

Media	Categories					
	Inclusive Language					
	Shared Language		Offensive		Accommodative Language	
	Indonesian	English	Language	Less	Moderate	High
Social Media	✓	✓	HP		✓	
E-news platforms	✓		HP	✓		
Public service sites	✓	✓	LP		✓	

note: highly potential (HP) potential (P) low potential (LP)

These findings highlight the importance of inclusive language management in the development of social media, news platforms, and public services. Such efforts may include optimizing shared languages, such as English and Bahasa Indonesia, using non-offensive and accommodative language, enhancing accessibility features, implementing automatic descriptions for visual content, providing voice-based CAPTCHA options, and developing translation features to improve accessibility for international communities. These measures can help create a more inclusive and user-friendly digital ecosystem for all users.

The standard design of web pages typically includes a heading, links, and buttons. These three criteria are essential to ensure user experience and accessibility. For users relying on screen readers. These elements play a crucial role in facilitating navigation in the digital domain. Web pages that fail to include these elements risk being can't not being read by screen readers. Consequently, many web pages remain inaccessible to individuals with visual impairments. Digital communication has evolved over time and varies depending on its context, such as media, entertainment, education, or career purposes (McDougall, 2018; Treglia, et.al, 2019; Pujiati, et.al, 2024).

Therefore, this researcher concludes that digital communication often revolves around social media, e-news platforms, and public service sites. The following discussion explores the role of inclusive language and its impact, as well as the consequences of its absence in digital communication in Indonesia.

Sharing emotions, feelings, and knowledge in social media

One of the primary functions of social media is to serve as a platform for expressing emotions, feelings, and sharing knowledge. Recently, several social media platforms have also been utilized for online learning through live-streaming features. In this era, human life is inseparable from social media, which has become a primary necessity in daily activities. In Indonesia, social media has experienced rapid growth, enabling many users to freely express their emotions and feelings without considering the potential impacts on others or specific groups. Social media is highly susceptible to the rapid spread of offensive content, such as hate speech. Although the ITE Law exists, managing offensive language remains a significant challenge. Offensive language is commonly encountered on social media. A concrete example is the Virtual Police program, established to regulate social media accounts identified for using offensive language. Within its first 100 days of operation (February 23 to May 31, 2021), an estimated 419 social media contents allegedly violated the ITE Law, with Twitter receiving the most warnings (215 accounts), followed by Facebook (180 accounts), Instagram (14 accounts), and YouTube (19 accounts). Language, as a communication tool, is ultimately controlled by individuals. Therefore, raising awareness and providing education on the importance of inclusive language in daily life are crucial.

On the one hand, social media offers numerous positive values; on the other, it can have negative impacts if inclusive language is not employed. The use of a shared language on social media is not the primary issue, as many platforms in Indonesia already accommodate the Indonesian language. Instead, the focus should shift to the use of accommodative and non-offensive language. Social media platforms should also prioritize accessibility features, such as automatic image description tools, screen brightness adjustment, font size scaling, and text-to-speech or speech-to-text conversion modes. In 2023, the number of people with disabilities in Indonesia reached

22.97 million, or approximately 8.5% of the total population. According to data from the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, about 1.5% of individuals with disabilities are visually impaired, equating to roughly 4 million people (Imran, 2024) Additionally, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that around 57.5 million people worldwide suffer from glaucoma. In developed countries, at least 50% of glaucoma patients are unaware of their condition, while in developing countries, including Indonesia, this figure can reach up to 90%. In Indonesia, the prevalence of glaucoma is estimated at 4 to 5 per 1,000 people, meaning approximately 1.35 million Indonesians are affected.

Table 2. Accommodative language support for individuals with visual impairments and glaucoma

Categories	Population	Source of Information	Accommodative Language Needs
Individuals with visual impairments	4 million	Estimates by Indonesian Ministry of Health	Assistive audio, Accessibility features, Brightness adjustment, Text customization options, Screen reader compatibility
Individuals with glaucoma	1,35 million	Estimates by Indonesian Ministry of Health	Assistive audio, Accessibility features, Brightness adjustment, Text customization options

The development of social media should prioritize not only aesthetic aspects but also accessibility for all users. Other key aspects include equality and equity. Negative stigmas against individuals with visual impairments still persist and are sometimes perpetuated by academics. For example, in a community service program conducted by (Imran, 2024) which focused on empowering individuals with visual impairments through the design of a social media newsletter, the target group was not directly involved in creating the newsletter. Interestingly, the program emphasized traditional empowerment activities such as handicraft making, learning music, massage and therapy arts, and selling *kerupuk*, while neglecting technological skills. As an individual with visual impairments, researchers found this troubling, as it underestimates the technological competencies of individuals with visual impairments. Meanwhile, non-offensive language is closely linked to communication ethics. Addressing negative behaviors associated with offensive language use remains a challenging task. Further research on integrating inclusive language education into social media usage is essential.

Exploring Horizons Through e-news platforms

Information is another essential need for every individual. It can be acquired through the process of education or literacy. Literacy can be facilitated by e-news platforms, which should provide equal and fair opportunities for all users. However, in Indonesia, most e-news platforms are not easily accessible, particularly for users relying on screen reader tools. These platforms often lack accessibility features such as display brightness adjustment, options for enlarging or reducing font size, text-to-speech conversion modes, or automatic video transcriptions. Moreover, e-news platforms rarely offer automatic translation tools, which could hinder foreign users from

accessing local news in Indonesia. For instance, on platforms like Tribun.com, certain labels remain unreadable by screen readers.

Advertisements also present a significant challenge for e-news platforms in Indonesia. Previous studies have shown that ads can potentially irritate users, creating an uncomfortable browsing experience. Ads can disrupt users' ability to achieve their browsing goals, as they interfere with the flow of information. To strike a balance, ads should be directed toward informative and entertaining content. Otherwise, users may avoid the news site altogether and form negative opinions (Santini, et.al, 2017). The frequency of ads often disrupts the reading flow, making it difficult for screen reader users to differentiate between the actual news content and distracting ads. Two types of problematic ads are commonly encountered:

Vulgar ads

Vulgar Ads often contain sexual narratives, promoting products such as potency enhancers, contraceptives, or explicit experiences. These ads are highly offensive and can disrupt cognition, especially for children or unmarried individuals.

Taboo Ads

Taboo ads typically make unrealistic promises, such as becoming rich without effort by purchasing certain charms or looking youthful by using specific cosmetics despite being elderly. These ads can offensively affect individuals' emotions, promoting a mindset that seeks instant success or beauty without hard work.

Frequent use of vulgar and taboo language can lead to offensive effects. These forms of language are categorized as offensive language. Based on the ease of accessing news for screen reader users and the minimal use of offensive language, the researcher ranked Indonesian e-news media. Tempo ranked the highest, followed by Liputan 6, Detik, Kompas, and Tribun. However, these platforms are encouraged to enhance their accessibility features and reduce intrusive advertisements to improve usability for screen reader users. As a recommendation, Indonesian e-news media could follow the example of platforms like The Washington Post, which provides free assistive audio.

Enhancing Integrity Through Integrated Service

Public service is a crucial aspect in the study of public administration. It plays a key role in shaping policies to address societal issues. Bureaucratic reform aims to improve the quality of public services to make them more responsive and aligned with the needs of the community (Sinlae, et.al, 2022). One of the groups affected by these challenges is individuals with disabilities, who often face barriers in areas such as health (Dahlan, et.al, 2022), employment, and education. Currently, Indonesian society could improve their integrity in various aspects of life. For those facing challenges, complaints or aspirations can be submitted through integrated services available on the ministry's website. Some of these integrated services, such as in education, civil service, and healthcare, have implemented accessibility features, including voice modes, screen brightness adjustments, font customization, and dyslexia-friendly settings (Arjulayana et al., 2024). However, government employees wishing to monitor career services still face barriers due to the use of visual CAPTCHA. These services should provide an alternative audio CAPTCHA to accommodate employees with visual impairments, as there are around 5,993 individuals with disabilities working as civil servants, including those with visual impairments (Tomczak, et.al, 2021).

On the other hand, banking services remain difficult to access, particularly for individuals with visual impairments. This issue is not unique to Indonesia but is also prevalent in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan (Alayed, 2024 Khan, et.al, 2023). The main problem is the lack of accessibility. Banking applications are challenging to use, perceive, and understand with screen reader tools. In Indonesia, the researcher found that internet banking platforms still require the use of visual CAPTCHA without providing any alternatives. Furthermore, these services have not been modified to ensure comfort and security for users with visual impairments who wish to carry out transactions through online banking.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive language is a crucial aspect of creating harmony in digital communication. A shared language, non-offensive language, and accommodative language function to connect individuals from various social strata, embrace diversity, and foster national unity and cohesion. In digital communication, the role of inclusive language is vital because interactions transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, making inclusivity essential for mutual understanding and respect. Conversely, the absence of inclusive language can lead to significant challenges, such as misunderstandings, communication gaps, and increased social conflicts. In Indonesia, the role of a shared language in digital communication is relatively well-established. However, enhancing the use of non-offensive and accommodative language is urgently needed. Therefore, future research must develop models and technical guidelines for implementing inclusive language, particularly non-offensive language for social media and accommodative language for public service and news media in Indonesia.

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