

# Impoliteness (Hate Speech/Incivility)

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**KEYWORDS**

*impoliteness, rudeness, politeness, respect, disrespect, insulting language, vulgarity, aggressive language, incivility, civility*

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**BRIEF DESCRIPTION**

The variable impoliteness is an indicator used to describe violations of communication norms. These norms can be social norms established within a society, a culture or parts of a society (e.g. a social class, milieu or group). In this sense impoliteness is associated with, among other things, aggressive, offensive or derogatory communication expressed directly or indirectly to other individuals or parties. More specifically name calling, vulgar expressions or aspersions are classified as examples of impolite statements (e.g. Papacharissi, 2004; Seely, 2017). While some scholars distinguish between impoliteness and incivility and argue that impoliteness is more spontaneous, unintentional and more frequently regretted than incivility (e.g. Papacharissi, 2004; Rowe, 2015), other scholars include impoliteness into the concept of incivility and argue that the two concepts have no clear boundaries (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014; e.g. Seely, 2017). In many studies a message is classified as impolite if the message contains at least one instance of impoliteness (e.g. a swear word). The direction of an impolite statement is coded as ,interpersonal' / ,personal' or ,other-oriented' / ,impersonal' or sometimes also as ,neutral', meaning it is not directed at any group or individual

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**FIELD OF APPLICATION/THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

Impoliteness is a broader concept of violati-

ons of norms in communication that, in digital communication research, is often referred to in studies on incivility. Politeness can be related to theories on social norms of communication and conversation, for example conversational-maxims (Grice, 1975), face-saving concepts (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1989) or conversational-contract theories (Fraser, 1990).

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**REFERENCES/COMBINATION WITH OTHER METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

Impoliteness is examined through content analysis and is sometimes combined with comparative designs (e.g., Rowe, 2015) or experimental designs (Muddiman, 2017; Oz, Zheng, & Chen, 2017). In addition, content analyses can be accompanied by interviews or surveys, for example to validate the results of the content analysis (Erjavec & Kovačič, 2012).

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**EXAMPLE STUDIES**

**Research question/research interest:** Previous studies have been interested in the extent, levels and direction of impoliteness in online communication (e.g. in one specific online discussion, in discussions on a specific topic, in discussions on a specific platform or on different platforms comparatively).

**Object of analysis:** Previous studies have investigated impoliteness in user comments on political newsgroups, news websites, social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, Facebook), political blogs, science blogs or online consultation platforms.

**Timeframe of analysis:** Content analysis studies investigate impoliteness in user comments focusing on periods between 2 months and 1 year (Coe et al., 2014; Rowe, 2015; Seely, 2017). It is common to use constructed weeks.



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**Level of analysis:** Most manual content analysis studies measure impoliteness on the level of a message, for example on the level of user comments. On a higher level of analysis, the level of impoliteness for a whole discussion thread or online platform could be measured or estimated. On a lower level of analysis impoliteness can be

measured on the level of utterances, sentences or words which are the preferred levels of analysis in automated content analyses.

**Table 1.** Previous manual content analysis studies and measures of impoliteness.

Example study	Construct	Dimensions/variables	Explanation/example	Reliability
Papacharissi (2004)	impoliteness (separate from incivility)	name-calling	e.g. "weirdo", "traitor", "crackpot"	Ir = .91
		aspersion	e.g. "reckless", "irrational",	Ir = .91
		synonyms for liar	e.g. "hoax", "farce"	N/A
		hyperboles	e.g. "outrageous", "heinous"	N/A
		non-cooperation	-	N/A
		pejorative speak	-	N/A
		vulgarity	e.g. "shit", "damn", "hell"	Ir = .89
		sarcasm	-	N/A
		all-capital letters	used online to reflect shou-	N/A
		impoliteness		Ir = .90
Coe et al. (2014)	impoliteness (included in incivility)	name-calling	mean-spirited or disparaging words directed at a person or group of people	K- $\alpha$ = .67
		aspersion	mean-spirited or disparaging words directed at an idea, plan, policy, or behavior	K- $\alpha$ = .61

Example study	Construct	Dimensions/variables	Explanation/example	Reliability
		reference to lying	stating or implying that an idea, plan, or policy was disingenuous	K- $\alpha$ = .73
		vulgarity	using profanity or language that would not be considered proper (e.g., “pissed”, “screw”) in professional discourse	K- $\alpha$ = .91
		pejorative for speech	disparaging remark about the way in which a person communicates	K- $\alpha$ = .74
		impoliteness/incivility		K- $\alpha$ = .73
Rowe (2015)	impoliteness (separate from incivility)	name-calling	e.g., “gun-nut”, “idiot”, “fool”	$\kappa$ = .82
		aspersion	comments containing an attack on the reputation or integrity of someone or something	$\kappa$ = .72
		lying	comments implying disingenuousness	N/A
		vulgarity	e.g., “crap”, “shit”, any swear-words/cursing, sexual innuendo	$\kappa$ = 1
		pejorative	comments containing language which disparage the manner in which someone communicates (e.g., blather, crying, moaning)	$\kappa$ = 1

Example study	Construct	Dimensions/variables	Explanation/example	Reliability
		hyperbole	a massive overstatement (e.g., makes pulling teeth with pliers look easy)	$\kappa = .75$
		non-cooperation	a situation in a discussion in terms of a stalemate	$\kappa = .66$
		sarcasm	–	$\kappa = .71$
		other impoliteness	any other type of impoliteness	$\kappa = .72$
		impoliteness		$\kappa = .78$
Seely (2017)	impoliteness (included in incivility)	insulting language	name calling and other derogatory remarks often seen in pejorative speech and	K- $\alpha = .84$
		stereotyping of poli-	e.g. “typical lying lefties”	K- $\alpha = .88$
		stereotyping using “isms”/discriminatory language	e.g. “if we don’t get rid of idiotic Muslim theologies, we will have growing prob-	K- $\alpha = 1$
		other stereotyping language	e.g. “GENERALS LIKE TO HAVE A MALE SOLDIER ON THEIR LAP AT ALL TIMES.”	K- $\alpha = .78$
		sarcasm	e.g. “betrayed again by the Repub leadership . . . what a shock”	K- $\alpha = .79$

Example study	Construct	Dimensions/variables	Explanation/example	Reliability
		accusations of lying	e.g. “typical lying lefties”	K- $\alpha$ = .80
		shouting	excessive capitalization and/or exclamation points	K- $\alpha$ = .83
		impoliteness/incivility		K- $\alpha$ = .81

Note: Previous studies used different inter-coder reliability statistics: Ir = reliability index by Perreault and Leigh (1989); K- $\alpha$  = Krippendorff's- $\alpha$ ;  $\kappa$  = Cohen's Kappa

Codebook used in the study Rowe (2015) is available under: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369118X.2014.940365>

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