



Beyond Awareness: Exploring Netiquette Practices among Adolescents in School Group Chats

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Abstract: This study aims to examine how limited formal netiquette education may contribute to poor netiquette practices among adolescents in school group chats. An exploratory mixed-methods pilot survey was conducted with 30 students from Grades 7 to 12. Data were collected through an online questionnaire comprising closed-ended items and open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages, while open-ended responses were categorized thematically. The findings showed that 86.7% of respondents reported encountering rude language or insults, while 83.3% reported experiencing message or sticker spamming in group chats. Students frequently reported learning online communication behaviors from informal sources, including friends or peers (63.3%), parents or family members (56.7%), and social media or online videos (46.7%), whereas 46.7% identified teachers or school lessons as formal sources of learning. These findings suggest a gap between netiquette awareness and actual digital communication practices. The study highlights the need for explicit, practical, and peer-supported netiquette education as an integral component of school-based digital citizenship programs.

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Introduction

Digital communication has become a routine part of students' academic and social lives. For many teenagers, peer interaction, academic coordination, and group identity are no longer formed only in classrooms, hallways, or schoolyards, but also through digital spaces such as school and class group chats (Nesi et al., 2018a; OECD, 2021; Smahel et al., 2020). These group chats can support fast information exchange, assignment discussion, and peer connection beyond school hours. However, their speed, informality, and limited adult supervision may also encourage rude language, teasing, excessive messaging, careless jokes, and disrespectful responses to disagreement (Nesi et al., 2018b; Suler, 2004). Therefore, school group chats should not be understood merely as communication tools, but also as informal social learning spaces that shape how students practice respect, empathy, and responsibility online.

Netiquette refers to respectful and responsible behavior in online communication. Shea (1994) emphasizes that internet users should remember the human being behind the screen, a principle that remains relevant because digital communication often reduces facial expressions, tone of voice, and immediate emotional feedback. Without these cues, messages may sound harsher than intended, while senders may fail to recognize their emotional impact on others. Suler (2004) explains this tendency through the online disinhibition effect, in which digital environments can reduce social restraint and make individuals more likely to communicate impulsively or aggressively. Among teenagers, this issue becomes more



complex because peer acceptance, humor, emotional reactions, and group belonging strongly influence communication behavior (Nesi et al., 2018a, 2018b).

The educational importance of netiquette is closely related to research on cyberbullying, adolescent online behavior, and digital citizenship. Harmful online interaction has been associated with psychological distress, weaker well-being, and lower school belonging among adolescents (Kowalski et al., 2014; Livingstone & Smith, 2014; Zhu et al., 2021). Although poor netiquette is not always the same as cyberbullying, repeated insults, mocking, public embarrassment, exclusion, and hostile responses in group chats can contribute to an unsafe digital climate. Global and regional reports also show that cyberbullying and peer violence remain concerns among school-age children in increasingly digital learning and social environments (UNICEF, 2019; WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2024). This suggests that schools need to treat group chat behavior as part of students' broader social and emotional learning.

Digital citizenship education provides an important framework for addressing this issue. Ribble (2015) argues that students need to learn how to use technology responsibly, safely, ethically, and respectfully. Later studies have expanded digital citizenship into competencies related to online respect, digital participation, digital rights, digital empathy, and responsible communication (Choi, 2016; Choi et al., 2017; Jones & Mitchell, 2016; Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021). However, digital citizenship education in schools often focuses on broad topics such as online safety, privacy, digital footprints, and cyberbullying prevention. While these topics are important, they may not sufficiently address everyday group chat situations, such as rude jokes, spamming, peer pressure, impulsive replies, disagreement, and bystander silence (Nesi et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2024; WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2024).

A key problem in student digital communication is the gap between knowing netiquette and practicing it consistently. Many students may understand that online communication should be polite, yet this awareness does not always lead to respectful behavior in fast-moving peer group chats. Previous studies suggest that adolescents' online behavior is shaped by peer norms, self-efficacy, emotional regulation, online disinhibition, and the quality of digital citizenship education (Barlett & Gentile, 2012; Bickham et al., 2021; Lu & Gu, 2025; Martin et al., 2020). When formal and practical netiquette education is limited, students may rely more heavily on peers, family, social media, and trial-and-error experiences to learn how to behave online (Cortesi et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2024). Such informal learning may support positive communication, but it can also normalize rude jokes, spamming, exclusion, and attention-seeking behavior when these practices are accepted within the group.

What distinguishes this study from much of the existing literature is its specific focus on everyday netiquette practices within school group chats rather than on cyberbullying or digital citizenship as broad categories (Choi, 2016; Jones & Mitchell, 2016; Kowalski et al., 2014; Nesi et al., 2022). The study examines not only the forms of disrespectful communication reported by adolescents, but also the relationship between their awareness of appropriate online behavior, the informal and formal sources from which they learn such behavior, and the peer dynamics that may shape their actual practices (Cortesi et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2020; Nesi et al., 2018b). By bringing these dimensions together within an exploratory mixed-methods pilot survey, the study provides a context-specific view of the gap between knowing appropriate online conduct and practicing it consistently in school-related digital interaction.



The study was conducted in Badung Regency, Bali, Indonesia, primarily within one school community, with most participants drawn from the same school environment and a smaller number from other schools. Participants were students in Grades 7 to 12, and data were collected within a school-related digital communication context in which class and school group chats were routinely used for peer interaction. These peer-driven digital spaces provided the social setting for examining how students understood, experienced, and practiced netiquette in everyday online communication.

Based on this concern, this study examines how limited formal netiquette education in schools may help explain poor netiquette practices among teenagers in student group chats. More specifically, the study explores the forms of poor netiquette reported by students, the perceived causes of such behavior, the sources from which students learn online behavior, and the educational responses that students consider helpful for reducing disrespectful communication.

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it connects netiquette, digital citizenship, online disinhibition, and social interaction theory to explain why awareness alone may not be sufficient to produce respectful online behavior. Goffman's (1955) concept of face is useful in this regard because teenagers often manage their social image in front of peers through humor, teasing, and group alignment. In group chats, however, the absence of face-to-face cues can make this social performance more risky and emotionally harmful. Practically, the study provides evidence for schools to design more specific digital citizenship education that directly addresses group chat behavior through lessons, peer discussions, student campaigns, mediation, and shared norms for respectful online communication.

Research Method

This study used an exploratory mixed-methods pilot survey design to examine netiquette practices among teenagers in school group chats. The quantitative component identified the frequency and distribution of students' experiences, attitudes, perceived causes, sources of learning, emotional effects, and suggested solutions. The qualitative component consisted of short open-ended responses that provided additional context to students' perceptions. This design was appropriate for generating preliminary descriptive and contextual evidence while combining numerical response patterns with students' own perspectives (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

Participants were recruited using non-probability convenience sampling through school WhatsApp group chats and private messages. The sample consisted of 30 students from Grades 7 to 12, most of whom came from one school environment, while a smaller number came from other schools. The respondents represented early to late adolescence, with most students aged 14 to 17 years. Seventeen respondents identified as female and thirteen as male. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Because the study involved teenage respondents and self-reported data, the findings were interpreted cautiously and were not intended for broad statistical generalization.

Data were collected using an online questionnaire developed specifically for this study and administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of 18 items covering five areas: background information, experiences with poor netiquette in school group chats, attitudes and awareness of netiquette, perceived causes and sources of online behavior learning, and perceived emotional effects and possible solutions. The questionnaire included multiple-choice items, Likert-scale statements, multiple-response items, and open-



ended questions. The items were reviewed and revised prior to distribution to improve clarity, appropriateness, and comprehensibility for teenage respondents.

The survey was distributed through school WhatsApp group chats and private messages. The questionnaire was finalized on 15 October 2025, distributed on 21 October 2025, and closed on 31 October 2025 after 30 responses had been collected. No student names or identifying information were collected. Respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary, their answers would be used only for research purposes, and their responses would be reported anonymously.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies and percentages. Inferential statistical tests were not applied because the sample size was limited and the study was exploratory. Qualitative responses were analyzed through simple thematic categorization, informed by the general principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Short written answers were reviewed and grouped into recurring themes, such as thinking before sending messages, being kind, respecting others' feelings, avoiding harmful jokes, and treating others as one wants to be treated. These qualitative themes were used to support the interpretation of the quantitative findings.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings obtained from 30 teenage respondents. The results are organized into five main areas: respondent profile and digital use, frequency and forms of poor netiquette, netiquette awareness and attitudes, perceived reasons and sources of online behavior learning, and perceived emotional effects and suggested solutions.

Table 1 presents the respondents' demographic characteristics, digital use, and the prevalence of poor netiquette in school group chats. The sample consisted of 17 female and 13 male students, with most respondents aged 14 to 17 years. Twenty-five respondents (83.3%) reported using school or class group chats. Poor netiquette was commonly encountered, with 53.4% reporting that they sometimes saw rude messages, teasing, or spam. The most frequently observed forms were rude words or insults (86.7%), message or sticker spamming (83.3%), and mocking or making fun of someone (70.0%). In addition, 12 respondents (40.0%) reported having been targeted in a chat because they expressed a different opinion.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics and Prevalence of Poor Netiquette in Group Chats

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	17	56.7%
	Male	13	43.3%
Age group	11–13 years	10	33.3%
	14–17 years	19	63.4%
	18–20 years	1	3.3%
Daily online activity	1–2 hours	7	23.3%
	3–4 hours	16	53.3%
	5–6 hours	5	16.7%
	More than 6 hours	2	6.7%
Use of school/class group chat	Yes	25	83.3%
	No	5	16.7%
Frequency of seeing rude messages, teasing, or spam	Always	1	3.3%
	Often	6	20.0%
	Sometimes	16	53.4%
	Rarely	6	20.0%



	Never	1	3.3%
	Rude words or insults	26	86.7%
	Spamming messages or stickers	25	83.3%
	Mocking or making fun of someone	21	70.0%
	Posting embarrassing photos or videos	19	63.3%
	Ignoring someone who disagreed	11	36.7%
	Sharing private messages publicly	9	30.0%
	Blackmail	1	3.3%
	None of the above	3	10.0%
Forms observed or experienced*	Yes	12	40.0%
	No	18	60.0%

Note. Percentages for multiple-response items are based on N = 30 and do not sum to 100.0% because respondents could select more than one option. Percentages for single-response items were adjusted for rounding to sum to 100.0%.

Table 2 presents students' awareness and attitudes toward netiquette. The responses suggest that many students recognized the emotional impact of online communication. Seventy percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that words in a chat can hurt people's feelings. Most respondents also agreed that they would help a friend who was bullied online and that schools should teach more about netiquette. However, only 40% agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what netiquette was, which indicates that students' practical awareness may still be uneven.

Table 2. Students' Awareness and Attitudes Toward Netiquette

Statement	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Agree/Strongly Agree
I know what netiquette is.	33.3%	26.7%	40.0%
Words in a chat can hurt people's feelings.	13.3%	16.7%	70.0%
Some rude messages are only jokes.	44.8%	13.8%	41.4%
I would help a friend who is bullied online.	0.0%	16.7%	83.4%
Schools should teach more about netiquette.	12.6%	18.8%	68.8%
I think before sending messages.	13.0%	22.6%	64.5%

Table 3 shows students' perceived reasons for poor netiquette and their sources of learning online behavior. The most frequently selected reason for rude messages or spam was the desire to be funny or gain attention, followed by anger or emotional upset, peer pressure, lack of understanding about harm, and the desire to get likes or reactions. In terms of learning sources, students most frequently reported learning online behavior from friends or peers, followed by parents or family. Teachers or school lessons were selected by 14 students, the same number as social media or videos.

Table 3. Perceived Reasons and Sources of Online Behavior Learning

Area	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Perceived reasons	To be funny or gain attention	25	83.3%
	Because they are angry or upset	22	73.3%
	To join the group or because of peer pressure	19	63.3%
	They do not understand the harm	18	60.0%



	To get likes or reactions	18	60.0%
	Revenge	1	3.3%
	Validation	1	3.3%
Learning sources	Friends or peers	19	63.3%
	Parents or family	17	56.7%
	Teachers or school lessons	14	46.7%
	Social media or videos	14	46.7%
	Did not learn anywhere	8	26.7%
	Logic and self-learning	1	3.3%

Table 4 presents students' perceptions of the emotional effects of poor netiquette and their suggested solutions. Most respondents believed that being treated badly online could make someone sad or stressed. Many also reported that poor online treatment could lead a person to avoid group chats or social media and lose trust in others. For solutions, peer mediation or class discussions were the most frequently selected option, followed by school lessons or workshops, parental guidance, clear school rules, and student-led campaigns or posters. The open-ended responses further emphasized thinking before sending messages, kindness, and consideration for others' feelings. Representative responses included "think before you send," "treat others the way you want to be treated," and "always be nice." These responses complement the quantitative findings by showing that students were able to articulate principles of respectful online communication in their own words, even though such awareness was not always consistently reflected in actual group-chat behavior.

Table 4. Perceived Emotional Effects and Suggested Solutions

Area	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Perceived effects	The person becomes sad or stressed	27	90.0%
	The person stops or avoids group chats or social media	20	66.7%
	The person loses trust in others	18	60.0%
	The person asks adults for help	11	36.7%
	Other responses	4	13.3%
Suggested solutions	Peer mediation or class discussions	21	70.0%
	School lessons or workshops about netiquette	18	60.0%
	More parental guidance	18	60.0%
	Clear school rules	18	60.0%
	Student-led campaigns or posters	14	46.7%
	Other responses	3	10.0%

Discussion

The findings indicate that poor netiquette practices in student group chats are not isolated experiences, but part of students' everyday digital interaction. Most respondents reported encountering rude words or insults, excessive messages or stickers, and mocking in group chats. These results show that poor netiquette among teenagers appears in both direct and indirect forms. Direct forms include insults, mocking, and rude language, while indirect or socially mediated forms include ignoring disagreement, sharing private messages, posting embarrassing content, and creating a chat environment in which some students may feel unsafe expressing their opinions.

The frequent occurrence of rude words, spamming, and mocking suggests that school group chats operate as peer-regulated digital environments (Kowalski et al., 2019; Nesi et al., 2018b). Although these spaces are connected to school life, their everyday norms are often shaped by students themselves. This may help explain why awareness of netiquette does not



always prevent disrespectful behavior. Students may understand that respect is important, but in fast-moving group chats, peer humor, emotional impulses, and the desire for attention may become more influential than general knowledge about proper online conduct. This finding is consistent with the online disinhibition effect, in which digital distance can reduce self-monitoring and encourage impulsive communication (Suler, 2004).

A key finding is the discrepancy between students' moral awareness and the prevalence of disrespectful communication. Although 70.0% of respondents agreed that words in a chat can hurt people's feelings, 86.7% reported having observed or experienced rude words or insults in group chats. This suggests that awareness of potential harm does not automatically translate into respectful behavior in peer-driven digital situations. The discrepancy becomes more understandable when considered alongside the finding that 41.4% agreed that some rude messages are "only jokes," while 83.3% identified being funny or gaining attention as a reason for rude messages. In other words, students may recognize harm at an abstract level while simultaneously interpreting particular acts of teasing or rudeness as socially acceptable humor within the group, a pattern consistent with research showing that adolescent online behavior is strongly shaped by peer norms and group processes (Kowalski et al., 2019; Nesi et al., 2018b).

Goffman's (1955) concept of face provides a useful explanation for this awareness–practice gap. In group chats, students communicate not only with the direct recipient of a message but also before a peer audience. Appearing funny, confident, or socially aligned with the group may help students maintain or enhance their social image, even when such performances risk threatening another person's face. This dynamic can create a peer-performance paradox in which students understand that a message may be hurtful but still participate in, tolerate, or reward rude communication when it serves humor, attention, belonging, or social positioning. The finding that 63.3% of respondents identified peer pressure as a reason for poor netiquette further supports this interpretation. Thus, the central issue is not simply insufficient knowledge of netiquette, but the difficulty of applying that knowledge when peer-group rewards compete with empathy and respectful communication (Goffman, 1955; Nesi et al., 2018b).

Peer pressure also emerged as an important factor. More than half of the respondents indicated that students may send rude messages or spam to join the group or because of peer influence. This finding supports research showing that adolescent online behavior is shaped by peer relationships and group norms (Kowalski et al., 2019; Nesi et al., 2018b). When teasing and spamming are normalized as humor, students may participate even when they understand that such behavior can hurt others. Some students may also remain silent because they fear becoming the next target or being excluded from the group. Therefore, netiquette education should not only focus on individual manners, but also address group norms, bystander responsibility, and peer-supported correction.

The finding that many students learn online behavior from friends and peers rather than from teachers or school lessons is central to understanding the role of formal netiquette education. Limited school-based netiquette instruction may leave informal sources as stronger influences on students' online behavior. Friends and social media can be powerful sources of learning, but they do not always model ethical or emotionally safe communication. Informal learning may teach students what is popular, funny, or acceptable within a peer group, but not necessarily what is respectful, responsible, or considerate. This aligns with digital citizenship scholarship, which argues that responsible online behavior requires explicit education, guided practice, and ethical reflection (Choi, 2016; Jones & Mitchell, 2016; Ribble, 2015).



The results suggest that schools are not entirely absent from students' learning about online behavior, but their role appears less influential than peer-based learning. Only 46.7% of respondents selected teachers or school lessons as a source of learning online behavior. This indicates that some school-based digital guidance may exist, but it may not be strong, consistent, or specific enough to shape students' everyday group chat practices. Many schools address digital technology through rules about device use, online safety, or cyberbullying prevention. These topics are important, but students may also need practical guidance on ordinary chat situations, such as how to respond when a joke becomes hurtful, how to disagree respectfully, how to avoid spamming, how to respond to exclusion, and how to repair harm after conflict.

The perceived emotional effects reported by students strengthen the educational urgency of this issue. Ninety percent of respondents believed that being treated badly online can make someone sad or stressed. Many also selected avoidance of group chats or social media and loss of trust in others as possible consequences. This finding is consistent with studies showing that negative online interactions can affect adolescent well-being, peer belonging, and school-related adjustment (Kowalski et al., 2014; Livingstone & Smith, 2014; Zhu et al., 2021). In school contexts, harm that begins in group chats can move into offline relationships. A student who is mocked in a chat may feel uncomfortable in class the next day, avoid participation, or distrust classmates. For this reason, group chat culture should be understood as part of the broader school climate.

Another important insight is that students already possess moral language related to respectful communication, but this awareness is not always translated into behavior. In the open-ended responses, students emphasized kindness, respect, thinking before sending messages, avoiding harmful jokes, and treating others as one wants to be treated. These responses suggest that many teenagers recognize the values behind respectful online communication. However, the frequent observation of poor netiquette practices shows that moral awareness needs to be supported by practical skills and shared norms. Effective digital citizenship education should therefore help students identify risky communication patterns, understand emotional consequences, practice respectful responses, and develop collective agreements for group chat interaction.

The solutions suggested by students provide useful direction for school practice. Peer mediation or class discussions were the most frequently selected response, followed by school lessons or workshops, parental guidance, clear school rules, and student-led campaigns. This pattern suggests that students do not view punishment as the only solution. They also value dialogue, peer involvement, and practical guidance. This is consistent with evidence that digital citizenship programs can improve knowledge, beliefs, and intended behaviors when they are structured, developmentally appropriate, and connected to students' social realities (Bickham et al., 2021). Therefore, schools should combine explicit instruction with participatory approaches that involve students as active contributors to healthier digital communication norms.

A practical model for school-based netiquette education may include four components (Nesi et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2024). First, schools can provide structured lessons that connect netiquette principles with real group chat situations, including teasing, spamming, sharing screenshots, excluding classmates, and responding to disagreement. Second, schools can develop peer-led activities because students often learn digital behavior from other students. Campaigns, posters, short videos, and student ambassadors may help shift group norms from within peer culture itself. Third, schools can establish restorative discussion mechanisms after



online conflict. Instead of relying only on punishment, schools can facilitate guided reflection on impact, accountability, apology, and repair. Fourth, schools can strengthen collaboration with parents, since family guidance remains an important source of students' online behavior learning.

The findings also have implications for teachers. Teachers may not be present in every student group chat, but they can still influence students' digital communication norms through classroom culture. Teachers can discuss respectful disagreement, establish communication agreements for academic chat groups, model appropriate digital responses, and invite students to reflect on how online words affect classroom relationships. Educational technology use should therefore include ethical communication, not only technical skill. This aligns with digital citizenship research showing that responsible technology use involves attitudes, values, social responsibility, and participation, not only access and competence (Choi et al., 2017; Lu & Gu, 2025).

Conclusion

This study concludes that poor netiquette in school group chats is closely related to the gap between students' awareness of respectful online communication and their ability to practice it consistently in peer-based digital interaction. The findings show that students commonly observed rude language, teasing, spamming, ignoring disagreement, posting embarrassing content, and sharing private messages in group chats. Although many respondents recognized that online words can affect others' feelings, this awareness did not always prevent disrespectful communication. The study also suggests that limited formal netiquette education may leave students more dependent on informal sources of online behavior learning, such as peers, family, and social media. In this context, peer pressure, emotional reactions, humor, and the desire for attention may become stronger influences than general knowledge about proper online conduct. Therefore, netiquette education needs to move beyond conceptual awareness and provide explicit, practical, and continuous guidance that helps students apply respectful digital communication in real group chat situations.

Recommendation

Based on these findings, schools are recommended to strengthen netiquette education as part of digital citizenship learning by making it more practical, contextual, and connected to students' daily use of group chats. Netiquette should not only be introduced as a general concept, but also taught through realistic situations, such as responding to rude jokes, avoiding spam, respecting disagreement, protecting private messages, and supporting friends who are treated badly online. Schools can also develop peer discussions, student-led campaigns, class agreements, restorative conversations, and mediation activities to build a more respectful group chat culture. Teachers can support these efforts by integrating netiquette into everyday classroom practice. They can discuss respectful disagreement, establish clear communication agreements for class or school group chats, model appropriate responses to conflict, and use realistic group-chat scenarios to help students reflect on the emotional consequences of online communication. Teachers can also facilitate restorative discussions when online conflicts affect classroom relationships, so that students learn not only the rules of respectful communication but also how to apply them in actual peer interactions. Future research should involve a larger and more diverse sample from different schools and examine other digital platforms, including social media, online games, and messaging applications outside school contexts. Further studies may also test whether



structured netiquette lessons can reduce rude messages, teasing, spamming, and other forms of poor netiquette. However, several limitations should be considered, including the small number of respondents, reliance on self-reported data, possible socially desirable responses, and the narrow focus on school group chats.

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