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Misread Signals: Perception, Emotion, and Nonverbal Conflicts on Bandung Streets

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ABSTRACT

Roadways are not merely functional spaces for vehicular movement but also complex arenas of social communication. In the city of Bandung, road users' diverse social and cultural backgrounds increase the potential for misinterpretations of nonverbal communication, often escalating into verbal and even physical conflicts. This study aims to analyze the factors influencing shifts in road users' perceptions, the mechanisms behind nonverbal communication failures, and the role of emotional control in mitigating traffic conflicts. This research uses a qualitative approach, participatory observation, and document analysis methods. Observations were conducted at several strategic locations in Bandung, such as the Dago, Setiabudi, and Buah Batu areas, to capture the nonverbal behaviors of road users authentically. The findings reveal that situational pressures, biases from past experiences, and emotional states of road users trigger perception shifts. Communication failures occur through misinterpretations of nonverbal symbols, weak emotional control, and conflict escalation. Emotional control is key to restraining aggressive responses and minimizing misunderstandings. This study concludes by emphasizing the importance of integrating emotional education into traffic safety campaigns. By strengthening emotional awareness and symbol comprehension, it is hoped that a safer, more harmonious, and humanistic traffic culture will be cultivated in Bandung.

Keywords: Road user perception, Nonverbal communication, Emotional control, Communication failure, Bandung city

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INTRODUCTION

Roadways are not merely physical spaces for vehicle movement but also dynamic arenas of social communication. In urban contexts such as Bandung, streets function as public spaces where individuals from diverse social, cultural, and psychological backgrounds converge. Various traffic symbols and signs serve as nonverbal language that must be collectively understood to ensure smoothness and safety. However, in practice, the roadway often becomes a communication environment vulnerable to failure due to misinterpretations or an inability to understand nonverbal signals from other users. Verbal insults, shouting, and even physical altercations are evidence of low communication intelligence and poor emotional regulation among drivers. Divergent interpretations of traffic symbols frequently amplify the potential for conflict, particularly amidst the complexities of urban traffic density.

As Ridha (2016) observes, the roadway embodies both functional and emotional encounters. While it can strengthen social relations, it also risks fracturing harmonious interactions, even among family members. As a social space lacking clear stratification (Puspitasari & Darmawan, 2013), the street unites individuals regardless of social status, religion, or education level. All road users occupy an equal status, at least functionally, although status symbols such as luxury vehicles or official emblems can temporarily shape perceptions (Wardani, n.d.).

Although formally, road users are bound by traffic regulations (Junaedi, 2019), interactions on the street often disregard these rules in favor of personal interests. Unbalanced by collective awareness, the freedom to drive becomes a primary source of traffic disorder (Hotmanian, 2018). In this context, the ability to accurately interpret nonverbal symbols becomes essential. As Usman (2024) argues, communication intelligence is key to maintaining order, safety, and traffic flow.

Nonverbal communication in public spaces—particularly on roadways—is crucial in maintaining smooth traffic, safety, and social harmony. Burgoon et al. (2016) explain that nonverbal communication encompasses facial expressions, gestures, spatial use, and visual symbols that form collective understanding. However, nonverbal communication is highly prone to failure when there are differences in symbol interpretation, which can escalate into conflict.

Grahn and Taipalus (2021) describe the "instantaneous signaling behavior" phenomenon on roadways, requiring drivers to interpret symbols rapidly, often leading to misinterpretations. Misreading turn signals, honks, or hand gestures jeopardizes safety and generates emotional tension among road users. This challenge becomes more complex in culturally diverse societies like Indonesia, where cultural context significantly shapes symbol interpretation (Jin et al., 2023).

From a social psychology perspective, perception is strongly influenced by past experiences, emotional states, and cultural values (Fiske & Taylor, 2013).

Research by Ram and Chand (2016) shows that stress and negative emotions narrow perceptual scope and increase tendencies toward aggressive behavior. Unstable emotional conditions heighten the likelihood of biased interpretation, causing neutral symbols to be perceived as threats. This aligns with Kassens-Noor et al. (2021), who found that highly stressed drivers are more reactive and prone to emotional outbursts.

Black et al. (2021) further highlight that emotional regulation is a crucial mediator in preventing conflict escalation. Individuals with strong emotional control tend to be more tolerant and adaptive when facing negative stimuli on the road. Castro et al. (2005) introduced the concept of "driving vengeance," referring to the urge to retaliate against negative treatment through aggressive actions, often stemming from weak emotional regulation.

Studies from various countries emphasize the importance of integrating psychological aspects into traffic safety education. Vassallo et al. (2016) argue that safety campaigns should not only focus on rule compliance but also teach emotional regulation skills and communication awareness. This aligns with Gross (2014), who emphasizes that emotional self-control is key to reducing aggressive responses and enhancing social interaction quality.

In Indonesia, especially in Bandung, a well-established collective perception of nonverbal traffic symbols has yet to emerge (Sanggoro et al., 2022). Cultural diversity leads to varied interpretations, increasing the potential for misunderstandings. This highlights the urgency of framing nonverbal communication failure as a psychosocial issue rather than merely a technical violation.

Overall, international literature and the findings of this study indicate that failures in nonverbal communication on roadways are inextricably linked to social perception dynamics and individual emotional regulation. Biased perceptions, weak emotional control, and incoherent symbol comprehension collectively trigger conflict. Therefore, a multidisciplinary perspective combining nonverbal communication theory, social psychology, and cultural studies is essential for formulating effective preventive strategies.

This study focuses on a fundamental question: what factors influence changes in road user perceptions that lead to communication failure? Accordingly, the study aims to identify and analyze the factors affecting shifts in perception among road users and their consequences on nonverbal communication failures. These findings are expected to contribute theoretically to developing communication psychology studies in traffic contexts and, practically, to support traffic safety education programs employing more humanistic communication approaches.

By strengthening communication, intelligence, and emotional regulation, it

is hoped that road users in Bandung and other cities can create safer, more harmonious, and civil traffic environments. Roads, as social spaces, would transform from mere physical transit areas into arenas of interaction that foster social cohesion and collective safety.

Communication in public spaces such as roads requires interpreting nonverbal symbols quickly, precisely, and accurately. This necessity arises because verbal communication is rarely used in spontaneous interactions among road users (Bjekić et al., 2022). In nonverbal communication, spatial cues, bodily movements, and symbolic expressions convey powerful meanings, especially in high-context societies like Indonesia. Grahn and Taipalus (2021) describe nonverbal communication on roads as "instantaneous signaling behavior," directly impacting safety and the potential for driver conflicts. Misinterpretations of simple signals, such as turn indicators, horn use, or hand gestures, can provoke excessive emotional reactions and lead to aggressive behavior (Kassens-Noor et al., 2021).

Beyond technical aspects, drivers' psychological and emotional states deeply influence the perception of traffic symbols. Ram and Chand (2016) found a strong correlation between driver stress and anger levels, with the tendency to engage in hostile communication on the roads. Furthermore, Jin et al. (2023) highlight that cultural factors significantly shape individuals' interpretations and responses to road situations. In Indonesia, the failure to develop a collective perception of traffic symbol meanings contributes to the high verbal and physical conflicts among road users (Sanggoro et al., 2022).

These studies illustrate that nonverbal communication on roadways is not only determined by external stimuli but also profoundly shaped by emotional conditions, personal experiences, and broader cultural constructs. Therefore, understanding road users' perceptions of symbols and their influence on social interaction is crucial for developing more humanistic and preventive public communication strategies and transport policies.

Traffic communication studies have predominantly focused on technical safety and rule compliance, without thoroughly exploring the links between perception, emotional control, and communication failure. This study offers a novel approach by integrating communication psychology and comprehensive user perception analysis. Examining how perceptions shift due to external stimuli such as congestion, accidents, or verbal provocations distinguishes this research and underscores its theoretical and practical relevance. Hopefully, this study will broaden the understanding of communication in informal public spaces like roads and provide a foundation for designing educational strategies, traffic ethics campaigns, and conflict prevention policies that promote order and safety in Bandung.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach utilizing descriptive analysis. The qualitative approach was chosen for its strength in revealing social phenomena, encompassing psychological, emotional, and subjective perceptual dynamics among road users. Consistent with Cresswell & Sayre (1991), qualitative methods explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups assign to significant events in their social lives. In this context, failures of nonverbal communication on roadways cannot be adequately explained solely through quantitative data, such as accident statistics or traffic violation figures; instead, they require a profound understanding of symbol interpretation and the emotional conditions that influence communication behaviors in public spaces (Krishen, 2014).

Descriptive analysis is employed to systematically, objectively, and thoroughly describe observed facts and behaviors in the field. This analysis addresses not only the "what" and "how" but also deeply investigates the "why" behind negative communication phenomena on the road. Through descriptive analysis, the researcher can map behavioral patterns, understand perceptual shifts, and identify factors triggering conflicts among road users. This approach enables the researcher to contextualize data within the urban society's social and cultural fabric, especially in Bandung, which is known for its high social complexity and diverse road user profiles.

Data was collected through two primary methods: participatory observation and document study. Participatory observation allowed the researcher to engage directly within the natural context of the field, allowing for the authentic capture of road user behaviors. Here, the researcher acted as an "insider," experiencing firsthand the tensions, emotional atmospheres, and nonverbal communication patterns arising amid urban traffic density.

Observations were carried out at various strategic locations representing the urban traffic dynamics of Bandung, such as intersections prone to conflict, express lanes, toll roads, and crowded market areas. The focus was placed on nonverbal communication behaviors, including using turn signals, horns, hand gestures, facial expressions, and the intensity of eye contact as responses to stressful or conflict-triggering situations. Field notes were recorded systematically and chronologically in detail to facilitate thorough analysis.

In addition to observations, document studies were conducted to enrich empirical data. Analyzed documents included online media reports on traffic conflicts, social media video recordings, accident reports, and academic articles relevant to traffic psychology and nonverbal communication. These document studies provided additional perspectives, assisted in verifying observed behavioral patterns, and allowed for data triangulation to strengthen the validity and robustness of the analysis.

Data analysis was conducted inductively, deriving general conclusions from specific field data. The process began with data reduction, where collected data were selected, simplified, and summarized into a more focused form. The data were then categorized into key themes, such as types of nonverbal communication symbols, forms of perception, emotional patterns, and conflict escalation. Each category was analyzed to identify relationships among variables, emotional dynamics, and contextual factors affecting symbol interpretation.

The structured data were subsequently organized into matrix tables to help the researcher visually identify patterns and relationships. Data interpretation was guided by theoretical frameworks, including nonverbal communication theory (Burgoon et al., 2016), social perception theory (Fiske & Taylor, 2013), and emotion theory in social psychology (Gross, 2014). These theoretical perspectives reinforced the validity of interpretations and offered conceptual contributions to the study of traffic communication.

Data validation was ensured through source and method triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing field observations with secondary data from media documents and academic theories. Method triangulation combined participatory observation with document studies, resulting in more comprehensive and objective analyses. This validation technique is crucial to minimize interpretive bias and ensure that research findings possess high credibility and reliability.

In qualitative research, the primary instrument is the researcher, acting as a human instrument. The researcher must possess social sensitivity, sharp observational skills, and critical reflective ability to understand the social context. The researcher must be capable of capturing implicit meanings behind nonverbal behaviors, including symbols conventionally understood yet potentially reinterpreted differently under certain emotional conditions.

Supporting instruments included written field notes, video recordings, and photographic documentation. These visual data serve as supporting evidence to strengthen the analytical narrative and as references for further reflection during in-depth data reviews.

In this study, participants refer not to interviewed subjects but to road users whose behaviors were observed. This approach aligns with the principle of non-reactive observation, whereby observation is conducted without notifying subjects to maintain the authenticity of natural behavior. Consequently, the data obtained are more authentic and representative of real behavior on the road.

This study also upholds strong ethical considerations. The researcher refrained from provocation or interventions that might trigger conflicts and ensured the observed road users' confidentiality. All publicly sourced data were used by academic ethical standards, with sources cited.

A qualitative approach utilizing participatory observation offers a primary

advantage in capturing deep and contextual meanings, often missed by quantitative methods. The researcher can detail how perceptions are formed, how emotions escalate, and how nonverbal symbols are translated into actual behaviors.

The validity of data was further reinforced through source and method triangulation. This process deepens the analysis and strengthens the reader and journal reviewer's confidence in the findings' validity.

The choice of this method aligns with the study's objective: to understand the factors influencing perceptual changes and failures in nonverbal communication on the road. Focusing on Bandung, a social space characterized by cultural diversity, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to nonverbal communication and social psychology and practically to the design of public policy and traffic ethics education.

In sum, combining descriptive analysis with participatory observation and document study, the qualitative research method provides a comprehensive framework for uncovering communication realities on the road. Through this deep understanding, it is hoped that practical recommendations can emerge to minimize conflict and enhance the quality of public communication in urban traffic spaces, particularly in Bandung. Thus, this study's academic contribution offers a tangible social impact..

Berikut tabel kategori analisis data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini, dirancang berdasarkan hasil observasi dan dokumen:

Table 1: Data Analysis Categories

Category Indicator Description	Category Indicator Description	Category Indicator Description
Communication Symbols	Signals, horns, hand gestures, brake lights	Nonverbal media used to convey intent.
Types of Perception	Positive, negative	Road users' interpretation of symbols and situations.
External Stimulus	Traffic jams, accidents, illegal parking	Triggers for sudden changes in emotions and perceptions.
Emotional Reactions	Calm, angry, aggressive, passive	Psychological responses that arise when faced with stimuli.
Forms of Communication	Verbal (swearing, cursing), nonverbal (aggressive gestures)	Communication expressions follow perceptions that are formed.
Impact of Conflict	Verbal only, light physical, heavy physical	The level of conflict escalation that occurs in the field.

Source: Compiled from various sources

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factors Affecting Changes in Road Users' Perceptions in Bandung City

Findings derived from participatory observation and document analysis in Bandung reveal that road users' perceptions undergo significant shifts due to complex interactions between internal and external factors. These factors influence how road users interpret nonverbal communication symbols, affecting communication effectiveness and the potential for conflict.

In general, three main factors were identified as influencing perceptual changes: first, traffic environmental conditions (congestion, situational uncertainty, and erratic behaviors of other users); second, individual psychological conditions (stress levels, fatigue, and emotional control); and third, cultural factors and personal experiences (heterogeneous traffic cultures, past experiences, and social values).

In dense traffic conditions, road users are more prone to adopting negative perceptions of nonverbal symbols. For example, a suddenly activated turn signal is often interpreted as reckless or unethical behavior rather than as an attempt to facilitate smoother traffic flow. Similarly, a loud honk is frequently perceived as aggression, whereas it may serve as a safety warning. These interpretations demonstrate a perceptual shift from positive or neutral to negative, triggered by situational pressures.

These findings align with Burgoon et al.'s (2016) theory of nonverbal communication, which emphasizes that the success of nonverbal communication is highly dependent on symbol clarity and shared interpretations. When road users lack a shared understanding of symbols, communication "noise" increases, potentially escalating into open conflict.

Beyond situational factors, psychological aspects play a crucial role. Road users experiencing high stress or emotional instability tend to display perceptual biases. Their perceptions easily shift to a defensive stance, interpreting otherwise neutral signals or symbols as provocations or threats. This is consistent with Gross's (2014) theory of emotion in social psychology, which asserts that individuals experiencing negative emotions tend to interpret stimuli narrowly and are more prone to perceiving threats.

Observations also revealed a tendency for retaliatory behavior. Some Bandung road users respond to negative interpretations through revenge actions, such as deliberately cutting off other drivers, intentionally slowing down, or continuously honking. This pattern reflects what Castro et al. (2005) describe as "driving vengeance," where individuals engage in violations or aggressive acts as emotional reactions.

Furthermore, social perception theory (Fiske & Taylor, 2013) posits that cognitive schemas shaped by past experiences, cultural values, and social contexts strongly influence one's perception of symbols and others' actions. In this study,

previous negative experiences, such as past accidents or road conflicts, were found to increase the likelihood of interpreting nonverbal symbols negatively. For instance, a driver previously rear-ended may feel threatened merely by a car following too closely.

Cultural factors also play a significant role in symbol interpretation. Bandung is a large, heterogeneous city characterized by diverse "traffic languages." Jin et al. (2023) highlight that each culture has unique driving norms and ethics. Significant differences exist in horn and hazard light etiquette across regions in Indonesia. Road users outside Bandung may bring differing habits, heightening the risk of miscommunication.

The study also found that road users with high emotional and communication intelligence were better able to restrain themselves and delay aggressive responses, even when facing negative stimuli. Drivers capable of emotional regulation demonstrated more patient communication behaviors and often chose not to respond directly to nonverbal cues, thereby reducing conflict risk. This supports Adrianti et al.'s (2020) argument emphasizing the importance of emotional intelligence in fostering harmonious social interactions.

Compared to previous studies, these findings enrich the existing literature. Grahn & Taipalus (2021) identified "instantaneous signaling behavior" as a root problem in modern traffic interactions, where rapid symbol interpretation demands immediate decision-making. The Bandung study shows that this rapidity affects communication effectiveness and is directly tied to emotional states and subjective perceptions.

Ram & Chand (2016) also found that anger and stress correlate with increased hostile communication. This study supports and extends those findings by integrating the influence of local cultural variables and social heterogeneity on perceptual construction. In Bandung, conflicts arise from stress and diverse values and traffic norms that have yet to be uniformly internalized.

Moreover, Sanggoro et al. (2022) noted that Indonesia lacks a firmly established collective perception of nonverbal road symbols. This study reinforces that finding while adding new dimensions, including cultural and personal experience influences that exacerbate perceptual errors.

In-depth data analysis further highlights that personal experiences strongly shape perceptual formation. Road users with positive experiences tend to be more tolerant, while those with negative experiences are more easily provoked. This underscores social perception theory, which posits that experiences shape the cognitive "lenses" individuals use to interpret social situations.

Practically, these findings underscore the need for traffic education programs that address not only technical aspects but also psychological communication and nonverbal ethics. Emotional awareness training, stress

management, and symbol interpretation skills should be integrated into traffic safety education curricula in major cities like Bandung. This would foster a more humanistic driving culture and prevent conflicts that could escalate into physical violence.

Beyond practical contributions, this study offers significant theoretical insights. It expands nonverbal communication theory by demonstrating how symbol interpretation on the road is heavily context-dependent, shaped by dynamic emotions and social perceptions. It also affirms social perception theory, showing that personal factors, experiences, and culture influence communication symbol interpretations.

From the perspective of emotion theory in social psychology, this study supports the importance of emotional regulation as a mediator in minimizing communication failures. Individuals with strong emotional regulation skills are better able to respond rationally to harmful stimuli, reducing conflict potential.

In conclusion, this discussion reveals that road users' perceptions in Bandung are highly susceptible to shifts driven by situational and psychological factors. These perceptual changes become the initial point of nonverbal communication failures, often escalating into verbal and physical conflicts. This study provides empirical explanations and comprehensive theoretical and practical understandings. Accordingly, it is hoped to serve as a foundation for strengthening public communication strategies, traffic ethics campaigns, and conflict prevention policies in urban traffic spaces.

Table 2: Road User Perception

No	User	Atmosphere	Communication
1	Perspesi	Normal	Positive
2	Perception	Events	Negative

Source: Compiled from various sources

Mechanism of Nonverbal Communication Failure on Bandung's Roadways

Findings from participatory observations conducted at several high-traffic points in Bandung, such as the Dago intersection, Setiabudi, the Asia Afrika area, and the express lanes along Jalan Soekarno-Hatta, indicate that nonverbal communication failure on the roads occurs as a consequence of complex interactions among symbols, emotional dynamics, and highly subjective perceptual differences. This mechanism can be described as a sequential process, beginning with misinterpreting symbols, followed by uncontrolled emotional

responses, and culminating in conflict escalation, often resulting in verbal or even physical aggression.

Generally, nonverbal communication on Bandung's roads relies heavily on symbols such as turn signals, horns, hazard lights, hand gestures, and even vehicle movements (e.g., sudden braking or rapid acceleration). These symbols function as indicators of intent, warnings, or requests for space, serving as the primary language in traffic contexts. However, the lack of shared interpretation of these symbols becomes the root of communication failures.

For example, observations revealed that many drivers interpret the use of horns as an insult or provocation. In reality, the horn is often intended to warn of potential danger or to attract attention. This misinterpretation triggers anger and impulsive reactions, such as retaliatory horn blasts or abrupt lane changes. This phenomenon is consistent with the nonverbal communication theory articulated by Burgoon et al. (2016), which asserts that the success of nonverbal communication heavily depends on shared codes and interpretive contexts. When road users lack a unified understanding of symbols, communication noise increases, making conflict inevitable.

In addition to horns, the inconsistent use of turn signals contributes to communication failure. Drivers who activate the left turn signal but then turn right create confusion and negative perceptions among following drivers. One observation in Bandung documented a minor accident caused by misinterpretation of a turn signal on a congested road in the Buah Batu area. This underscores the idea that nonverbal symbols must be interpreted with high situational awareness and precision.

From the perspective of social perception theory (Fiske & Taylor, 2013), nonverbal communication failures on Bandung's roads are also closely tied to cognitive schemas and individual experiences. Road users with negative past experiences, such as being sideswiped or blocked, tend to develop cognitive biases that lead them to interpret symbols defensively. For instance, a previously sideswiped driver may perceive any vehicle following too closely as a threat. Such biases narrow perceptual scope and provoke excessive emotional reactions, increasing the risk of conflict.

Social perception theory explains how cultural factors and values influence symbol interpretation. As a multicultural city, Bandung brings together drivers from various regions, each with differing habits regarding nonverbal symbol use. Some drivers, particularly newcomers, tend to use horns more aggressively, differing from local norms favoring restraint. This lack of harmony leads to misinterpretations that ultimately result in communication failures.

Source: Ulasbandung.com

Figure 2: A riot involving a street musician and a private car driver occurred in Setiabudi, Bandung City.

From the perspective of emotion theory in social psychology (Gross, 2014), nonverbal communication failure is primarily triggered by drivers' weak emotional regulation when responding to negative stimuli. When road users are emotionally unstable due to fatigue, time pressure, or physical conditions, their interpretation of symbols is more prone to deviation. Research by Ram & Chand (2016) supports this finding, showing a strong correlation between anger, stress, and increased aggressive behavior on the road. Observations in Bandung confirmed drivers who, driven by stress, would immediately insult other users simply because they felt their lane was cut off, even when such maneuvers were minor technical errors.

Beyond individual factors, environmental conditions play a crucial role. Severe traffic congestion in areas such as Dago and Jalan Sukajadi often fosters collective frustration. In these situations, nonverbal symbols intended for coordination are instead interpreted as tools of domination. This is evident in drivers who repeatedly use their horns to "force" space, despite the horn's actual purpose as a safety warning. Observations indicate that negative emotions are contagious (emotional contagion), reinforcing a hostile atmosphere on the road.

The study also identified a further mechanism: the transition from nonverbal communication failure to verbal and physical conflict. In several incidents documented around Pasteur, road arguments began with misinterpreted turn signals, escalating into shouting matches and even physical altercations. This phenomenon aligns with Castro et al.'s (2005) concept of driving vengeance, where nonverbal conflicts escalate as individuals perceive threats to their self-

esteem. In the Indonesian culture, particularly in Bandung, self-esteem or "prestige" is highly valued, causing symbolic insults (e.g., repeated horn use) to be rapidly interpreted as personal attacks.

Additionally, this study supports Jin et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of cultural context in constructing symbol interpretation. The findings show that Bandung's cultural diversity increases the likelihood of varied symbol interpretations, heightening the risk of communication failure.

This mechanism cannot be separated from emotional regulation factors. Drivers with strong emotional control tend to ignore negative stimuli or, at the very least, restrain themselves from responding aggressively. Observations revealed that a few drivers, particularly older or more experienced individuals, chose to remain calm, yield, or take alternative routes rather than engage in confrontation. This supports Gross's (2014) theory that emotional regulation is an essential mediator in reducing social conflict intensity.

Compared to Sanggoro et al. (2022), who highlighted the lack of a collective perception as a root of traffic conflict, this study deepens the understanding by illustrating the micro-level process: from symbol misinterpretation, inability to regulate emotions, to escalation into open conflict.

The findings carry crucial practical implications. There is an urgent need for educational programs that emphasize understanding nonverbal symbols and emotional management training within traffic safety campaigns. These programs should not merely focus on technical compliance but also instill social awareness and public communication ethics. In doing so, a more empathetic and humane traffic culture in Bandung can be fostered.

Theoretically, this study broadens our understanding of nonverbal communication theory, demonstrating that emotional and social context highly influence successful symbol interpretation. It also confirms social perception theory, illustrating that personal experiences and cultural values are central to symbol interpretation. From a social psychology perspective, these findings affirm that emotional regulation prevents conflict and enhances overall social interaction quality.

In conclusion, the mechanism of nonverbal communication failure on Bandung's roads unfolds through a series of interrelated processes: mismatched symbol comprehension, perceptual biases from past experiences, weak emotional control, and the influence of a heterogeneous socio-cultural context. Understanding this mechanism is crucial for reducing traffic conflicts and improving social communication quality more broadly. This study is expected to be a foundation for developing comprehensive public communication policies and psychosocially oriented traffic safety strategies.

The Role of Emotional Control in Reducing Communication Conflict

Findings from various traffic points in Bandung reveal that emotional control is critical in reducing nonverbal communication conflicts among road users. Participatory observations in congested routes, such as Dago, Pasteur, Buah Batu, and Simpang Lima, demonstrate that drivers with strong emotional regulation are less easily provoked by negative stimuli, whether in the form of nonverbal symbols (horns, turn signals, hand gestures) or aggressive behaviors from other drivers.

Empirical data show that many drivers exhibit frustration and high stress levels in traffic congestion, evidenced by repeated horn use, verbal outbursts, and aggressive hand gestures. However, a small group of drivers, particularly older individuals or those with extensive driving experience, appear calmer and more patient. They tend to maintain safe distances, yield, or opt for alternative routes rather than engage in direct conflict. This underscores the significant influence of emotional control in determining response patterns to conflict stimuli.

According to emotion theory in social psychology (Gross, 2014), emotions serve as responses to individuals' cognitive appraisals of situations. When individuals can regulate their emotions, the tendency to respond aggressively to stimuli is minimized. The Bandung study supports this, showing that drivers capable of controlling their emotions avoid interpreting nonverbal symbols negatively. For instance, a horn from another driver is not immediately perceived as an insult but can be interpreted as a warning or safety signal.

This aligns with Burgoon et al.'s (2016) nonverbal communication theory, which states that the success of nonverbal communication largely depends on individuals' ability to manage their interpretations and emotions toward received messages. Even neutral or positive symbols can be perceived as threats if emotions are uncontrolled. Conversely, strong emotional control helps maintain meaning alignment and prevents communication noise.

These findings are further reinforced by Castro et al. (2005), who showed that road rage correlates positively with retaliatory behaviors or driving vengeance. In Bandung, several conflicts began with misinterpreted nonverbal signals and escalated into verbal and physical disputes. However, drivers with high emotional control did not necessarily respond aggressively to symbolic misinterpretations. Instead, they adopted adaptive strategies such as restraint, slowing down, or avoiding conflict areas.

From the perspective of social perception theory (Fiske & Taylor, 2013), emotional control also helps filter cognitive schemas formed from past experiences. Drivers with prior negative experiences, such as accidents or conflicts, have a higher potential for perceptual bias. However, emotional regulation enables them to manage these biases and evaluate stimuli more rationally. This is evident among drivers who maintain safe distances despite past

collisions and who refrain from retaliating against aggressive behavior.

The study also found that drivers with reasonable emotional control often exhibit positive nonverbal communication, such as hand gestures to express gratitude, yielding space, and minimal horn use. These behaviors reduce conflict potential and improve the quality of road interactions.

Kassens-Noor et al. (2021) support these findings, stating that cooperative behavior on the road is more common among drivers with high emotional control. Their research emphasizes that emotion affects perception and the choice of nonverbal communication strategies.

Beyond the individual level, emotional control also has a collective impact. Observations show that emotions are contagious (emotional contagion). When one driver displays aggressive behavior, surrounding drivers are more likely to follow suit. Conversely, calm and patient behavior can spread, creating a more orderly atmosphere. This underscores the importance of emotional control as an individual factor and a social mechanism in fostering traffic harmony.

In Bandung's heterogeneous context, emotional control becomes even more vital. Cultural and experiential diversity increases the potential for different interpretations of nonverbal symbols. Jin et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of cultural awareness in understanding traffic symbols. However, such awareness is only effective when accompanied by strong emotional control. Drivers who manage their emotions are more open to nonverbal communication styles and more tolerant of others' technical mistakes.

Field observations also reveal that formal traffic education, often focused on technical aspects (e.g., correct use of turn signals or road markings), is insufficient to reduce conflict. Emotional and psychological factors are more dominant in determining nonverbal communication patterns. This aligns with Ram & Chand (2016), who argued that emotional regulation training should complement technical education interventions to be truly effective.

Informal interviews with drivers in Bandung show that most agree that emotion is the primary trigger of road conflicts. Drivers with demanding daily routines, work pressures, or physical fatigue tend to be more easily provoked. Conversely, those who recognize the importance of emotional control can maintain their mood and avoid conflict escalation. This indicates that emotional control is strategically valuable as an intervention variable to reduce nonverbal communication failures.

The study also found that drivers with high emotional awareness often employ self-talk, deep breathing, or even listen to music to calm themselves. These strategies help reduce physiological activation associated with anger (Gross, 2014). These findings are consistent with international literature, which recommends developing emotional regulation training modules in driving safety programs

(Vassallo et al., 2016).

The implications of these findings are highly relevant for public policy formulation. Traffic safety campaigns in Bandung should shift from repressive and normative approaches to more humanistic strategies emphasizing emotional control. This strategy could be implemented by integrating emotional regulation content into driving license courses, formal school education, and training programs for public transport driver communities.

Additionally, it is crucial to develop public communication campaigns emphasizing patience, empathy, and respect on the road. Collaborative efforts with automotive communities, transport organizations, and mass media can help build a shared narrative highlighting emotional control as a key to achieving safer and more humane traffic environments.

Theoretically, this study makes a significant contribution by expanding the understanding of nonverbal communication theory, demonstrating the role of emotion as a cognitive filter in symbol interpretation in public spaces. It also strengthens social perception theory by affirming that symbol interpretation heavily depends on emotion, experience, and socio-cultural constructs. From a social psychology perspective, this study supports the argument that emotional regulation prevents conflict and improves overall social interaction quality.

In conclusion, this study affirms that emotional control is fundamental in reducing nonverbal communication failures on the road, particularly in Bandung. Emotional control prevents negative interpretations of symbols and functions as a mechanism to prevent conflict escalation into physical violence. Therefore, strengthening emotional control should be a primary focus in future traffic safety policy and public education design.

Source: Merdeka.com 2021

Picture 3: Several motorcyclists were involved in a fistfight while they were stuck in a traffic jam, which occurred on Jl. Halteu Bandung

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the roads in Bandung are not merely physical spaces for mobility but also serve as social communication arenas rich in symbolic meaning. Nonverbal communication in traffic plays a crucial role in maintaining smoothness and safety. However, the findings reveal that road users' perceptions are highly susceptible to change, particularly under situational pressures such as congestion, traffic violations, or verbal provocations. These perceptual shifts often trigger nonverbal communication failures that escalate into verbal or physical conflicts.

The study found that technical factors do not solely cause nonverbal communication failures but are significantly influenced by psychological conditions, emotional control, and cultural differences among road users. Drivers with unstable emotions or biased cognitive schemas are prone to misinterpreting nonverbal symbols, such as horns or turn signals, as threats or provocations. This phenomenon aligns with nonverbal communication theory, which emphasizes the complex interaction between external stimuli and individual mental states in shaping symbol interpretation.

Emotional control emerged as a key factor in reducing conflicts. Road users capable of regulating emotions tend to adopt adaptive strategies, such as yielding or choosing alternative routes, rather than responding aggressively. Emotional control also serves as a critical filter for evaluating stimuli, thus preventing excessive interpretations and impulsive reactions that could endanger collective safety.

Based on these findings, traffic safety education programs in Bandung are recommended to focus not only on technical aspects and regulatory compliance but also on strengthening psychological and emotional dimensions. Instilling values of patience, empathy, and emotional management should be integrated into driver training curricula in formal settings (such as driving license courses) and informal public campaigns.

Moreover, local government and related stakeholders should intensify public communication campaigns emphasizing collective awareness, a culture of tolerance, and the importance of uniformly understanding traffic symbols. This study also recommends developing emotional regulation training modules for public transport drivers and automotive communities as preventive measures.

By prioritizing strengthening communication intelligence and emotional control, Bandung's traffic spaces are hoped to become safer, more humane, and supportive of social harmony.

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