



# From Struggle to Resilience: Understanding the Communication Orientations of Refugee Communities in Indonesia on Instagram

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**Abstract.** This research highlights the communication orientations of refugee communities in Indonesia, by looking at the messages in the Instagram posts of @vorindonesia and @helpforrefugees. Hence, a qualitative textual content analysis is employed to study the captions of the Instagram posts of @vorindonesia and @helpforrefugees. Prior to the qualitative textual content analysis, the posts from the two Instagram accounts are extracted using Python and then clustered using Infranodus to see the frequency and relations among the words that constitute the captions. These clusters are further analysed qualitatively to define important themes that would help us understand the communication orientations of the refugee communities as displayed on the two Instagram accounts.

The result demonstrate difference in topic segmentation between the two Instagram accounts that reflect their communication orientations. The communication orientation of @vorindonesia tends to reflect the struggle of refugees in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the communication orientations of @helpforrefugees tends to reflect the resilience of refugees in Indonesia. The theoretical and practical implications of this research are also discussed.

**Keywords:** Co-Cultural Theory · Communication Orientation · Indonesia · Instagram · Qualitative Content Analysis · Refugees

## 1 Introduction

Indonesia is the transit country for more than 9991 refugees and 3158 asylum-seekers, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) Indonesia [19]. UNHCR define refugees as people who have crossed an international border in search of protection in another nation after fleeing war, violence, conflict, or persecution [20]. Refugees in Indonesia comprise citizens from different countries including Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Somalia, among others. Some of them have been residing in Indonesia for more than a decade as they wait for being transferred to resettlement

countries like Malaysia, Australia, and New Zealand [5]. Unfortunately, as Indonesia does not sign the 1951 Refugee Convention, nor its 1967 Protocol, their status in Indonesia remains unclear [16]. Host nations like Indonesia have also been hesitant to integrate them into the host society [22]. This has resulted in obstacles in accessing basic rights wherein they have no formal permit to work nor to attend schools, further leading to poverty [18]. The situation has then triggered a series of protests where refugees call for a quick process of transfer to the resettlement countries [8, 19, 22]. Often, the demonstrations ends with clashes between the refugee protestors with police officials.

Despite such an alarming situation, there is a lack of comprehensive national media coverage addressing the plight of refugees in Indonesia [2]. Lacking of media coverage makes refugees' voices and aspirations remain unheard by both government officials and ordinary citizens [13]. However, it does not stop them from trying to speak about their plight, thanks to the advanced development of technology that gives existence to social media. The current global humanitarian responses to refugees has seen a growing critical interest in the uses of communication technology such as social media [6, 14], including in allowing them to contact with family and friends abroad, find resources for support, and expressing themselves [4, 15]. In a report for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), it was shown that refugees prioritize Internet connectivity over food, education, and healthcare because they view it as important [3].

The majority of research on the use of communication technology including social media by refugee has concentrated on contexts of relocation in the Global North, with little attention paid to such use in the Global South [1, 10], including Indonesia. As a result, the processes, including the challenges, that refugees encounter when attempting to traverse such settings, including by using social media, remain a subject to be further studied [6]. In addition, currently, still little is known about how refugees regularly use social media, how they integrate it into their daily lives in host nations, as well as what drives them to do so [17]. Previous research exploring the use of social media by refugees also have primarily focused on individual use [9, 11, 17], yet research on collective uses of social media by refugee organizations or communities remain scarce.

Social media, particularly Instagram, has become a space for everyone, including refugees and refugee communities in Indonesia, to produce their own contents or news. Some refugee communities in Indonesia has been collectively utilising Instagram to express their identity and aspirations. Among them are Voice of Refugees Indonesia (@vorindonesia) and HELP for refugees (@helpforrefugees). However, despite similarly affiliated to refugee communities, the two accounts seem to be different in terms of messages that they convey.

@vorindonesia claims to be the official news platform of refugees in Indonesia with 1242 followers. It aims to provide information and publish news relating to refugees in Indonesia as well as in other countries. It has been established since 2022. As seen on the Instagram page, the posts of @vorindonesia mostly depict protests and rallies carried out by refugees. Meanwhile, @helpforrefugees offers multy-activity programs, aiming to motivate and facilitate refugees to participate in prolific and productive activities. As seen on the Instagram page, most of the posts inform about their activities with refugees including learning activities, gatherings, as well as recruitments of volunteers. Departing from the difference of Instagram posts between @vorindonesia and

@helpforrefugees, this research aims to investigate the communication orientations of the refugee communities by further analysing the posts of each Instagram account.

According to Co-Cultural Theory, refugees are considered as being part of subcultural or minority groups. Mainly generated from the research carried out by Mark Orbe, Co-cultural theory is a conceptual framework to explain the communication processes of marginalized individuals who have little to no power in social structures [12]. The theory assumes that co-cultural group members use various practices that reflect their particular communication orientation. However, not every member of the same co-cultural group will have similar communication orientation. In other words, members of one co-cultural group may employ different communication orientations.

Previous research on the use of social media by refugees have mainly conducted through interviews with individual refugees to explore their experiences. This research tries to diversify the method in researching the very issue by employing a textual content analysis, to understand their messages on Instagram, the prevailing topics of those messages, as well as what and how particular communication orientations are reflected by those messages.

## 2 Method

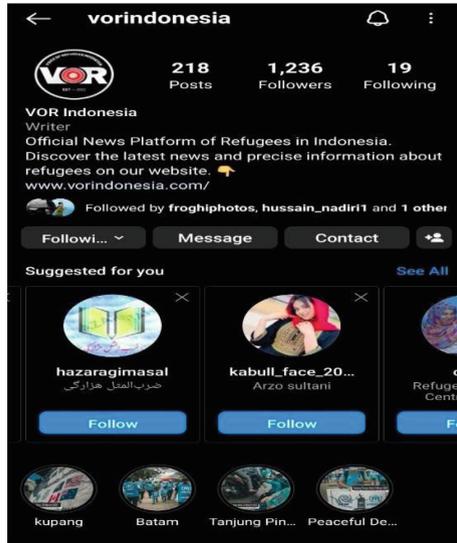
The method employed in this research is qualitative textual content analysis with a summative approach. Typically, the first step in a study employing a summative approach to qualitative content analysis is to identify and quantify specific words or pieces of information in the text in order to comprehend how those words or pieces of material are used in context [7]. A summative approach to qualitative content analysis starts with manual or automated searches and calculations of the specified words in the data. In this research, Instagram posts of @vorindonesia and @helpforrefugees were extracted using Phyton. Then, the words of the captions from the two Instagram accounts were identified and quantified automatically using InfraNodus. InfraNodus is a tool for visualizing text networks that lets users create graphs and represent any text as a network (<https://infranodus.com/>). The automated quantification of the words aims to maximize the precision of the number of the words that constitute the captions, and more importantly to generate a textual network that can precisely represent the textual data from the Instagram captions. The analysis is then continued with interpreting the textual network to define topic segmentation, to further determine the communication orientations of the refugee communities, as mentioned earlier.

## 3 Result and Discussion

The quantification of the words using InfraNodus demonstrate different textual networks of @vorindonesia and @helpforrefugees (Figs. 1 and 2).

The textual network demonstrates textual clusters representing the prevailing words in all captions, the closeness between words in a caption, and how frequently the words and their closeness appear in different captions. The different colors represent words that are close and appear in different captions.





Source: @vorindonesia on instagram.com

**Fig. 3.** The Instagram account of @vorindonesia

There are four prevailing topics that emerge from the Instagram posts of @vorindonesia: 1.) Global/ international humanitarian issues consisting of violations of human rights and deprivation of refugees' basic needs in life; 2.) Poverty and uncertainty of the future faced by the refugees, while solutions from the UNHCR Indonesia remain unclear; 3.) Refugees being stranded, stuck in limbo for decades, leading to their suffering of mental health issues, from being distressed to committing suicide; and 4.) Refugee protests in several cities in Indonesia calling for convincing, durable solutions towards the process of resettlement to 3<sup>rd</sup> countries like Australia (Fig. 4).

All the prevailing topics indicate that the communication orientation of @vorindonesia is to show the struggles of refugees in Indonesia; how refugees in Indonesia have to deal with difficult, depressing circumstances of living in Indonesia without convincing solutions from either UNHCR or Indonesian government (Fig. 5).

### 3.2 The Resilience of @helpforrefugees

The textual network of @helpforrefugees demonstrate several prevailing words, namely "refugee", "learning", "Indonesia", "program", "awareness", "support", "community", "volunteer", "donation", "good", "friend", "education", "student", "step with refugee", "relawan" and "workshop".

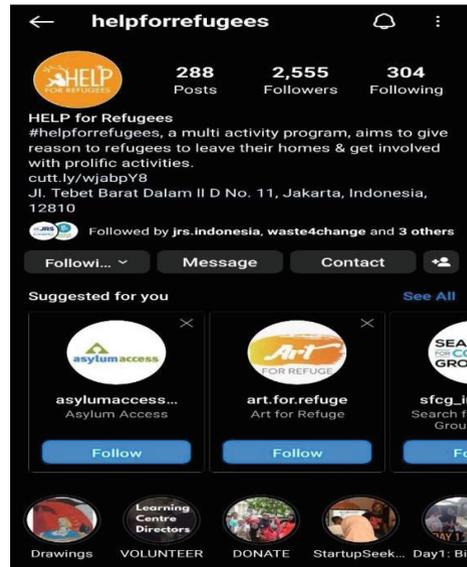
The clusters of these words indicate three prevailing topics: 1.) Educational programs for refugees; 2.) Host volunteering in refugee programs; and 3.) Refugee integration to host social environment.

All the prevailing topics above indicate that the communication orientation of @helpforrefugees is to show the resilience of refugees currently residing in Indonesia. Instead of



Source: @vorindonesia on instagram.com

Fig. 4. Example of post from @vorindonesia depicting a refugee protest



Source: @helpforrefugees on instagram.com

Fig. 5. The Instagram account of @helpforrefugees



Source: @helpforrefugees on instagram.com

**Fig. 6.** Example of post from @helpforrefugees depicting a recruitment of volunteers

showing the forms of struggle of living as a refugee, @helpforrefugees tend to depicts more of their effort to embrace the circumstances that they have to live as refugees in Indonesia. They establish a learning forum for refugees and also invite and recruit members of the host society to join in their activities as volunteers and facilitators (Fig. 6).

The analysis result above demonstrate the difference the prevailing topics of the Instagram posts of @vorindonesia and @helpforrefugees. This result confirms the co-cultural theory assuming that members of co-cultural communities may employ different communication orientations.

## 4 Conclusion

As this study addresses potentials in variations of the communication orientations of refugees communities represented by @vorindonesia and @helpforrefugees, this research helps generate our understanding on how refugee communities in Indonesia differently perceive and express their situations through communication on social media. Theoretically, this research sheds light on the Co-cultural Theory, confirming that refugee communities in Indonesia employ different communication orientations as depicted on their Instagram account. Practically, the result of this research implies on our understanding of factors that officials or civil society in general need to consider in designing efforts, programs, or even policy relating to refugee engagement and handling. In that case, there is a need to apply different communicative approaches to refugees in order to successfully engage and help them.

Finally, the limitation of this research should be acknowledged. The analysis in this research is primarily based on an objective textual content analysis. Thus, future research may employ more advanced text mining technique to generate more precisely quantified textual data, including the textual topic segmentation. This method can then be combined with in-depth interviews to obtain the qualitative data, in order to confirm the textual analysis and contextualize it with their social circumstances. Thus, future research are encouraged to employ a more advanced mix-method.

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