
RESEARCH ARTICLE

When Is Ghosting Considered Acceptable? The Role of Relationship Intimacy and Duration Among Indonesian Young Adults on Dating Apps

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh tingkat keintiman dan durasi hubungan terhadap persepsi keberterimaan ghosting, serta peran sikap sosioseksual dan Dark Triad sebagai moderator. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode eksperimen kuantitatif dengan desain faktorial berbasis vignette (2×4). Partisipan berjumlah 179 dewasa muda yang sedang atau pernah menggunakan aplikasi kencan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ghosting dinilai kurang dapat diterima pada hubungan dengan keintiman tinggi dan durasi yang lebih lama, serta paling dapat diterima pada hubungan dengan keintiman rendah dan durasi singkat. Dari lima hipotesis yang diajukan, empat hipotesis diterima. Sikap sosioseksual terbukti memoderasi hubungan tersebut, sedangkan Dark Triad tidak menunjukkan pengaruh moderasi yang signifikan. Kesimpulan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa persepsi keberterimaan ghosting dipengaruhi oleh konteks hubungan dan perbedaan individu dalam sikap sosioseksual.

Kata kunci: keintiman hubungan, durasi hubungan, sikap sosioseksual, Dark Triad

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effects of relationship intimacy and duration on the perceived acceptability of ghosting, as well as the moderating roles of sociosexual attitude and Dark Triad traits. A quantitative experimental method with a vignette-based factorial design (2×4) was employed. The participants consisted of 179 young adults who are currently using or have previously used dating applications. The results indicate that ghosting is perceived as less acceptable in relationships with higher intimacy and longer duration, and most acceptable in low-intimacy, short-duration relationships. Out of five proposed hypotheses, four were supported. Sociosexual attitude significantly moderates these relationships, whereas Dark Triad traits do not show a significant moderating effect. The conclusion of this study is that the perceived acceptability of ghosting is influenced by relational context and individual differences in sociosexual attitudes.

Keywords: ghosting, relationship intimacy, relationship duration, sociosexual attitude, Dark Triad

INTRODUCTION

The ability to form and maintain intimate relationships through technology has become increasingly convenient. Online dating applications, messaging services, and social networking platforms provide individuals with opportunities to find long-lasting bonds as well as maintaining them (Hobbs, Owen, & Gerber, 2016; Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012). Interestingly, the same can be said in ending them. Leaving a potential unwanted romantic situation can easily occur within a few buttons clicks. By simply blocking, deleting the other person, or even just being unresponsive gives us an immediate disconnect from the recipient (Tong & Walther, 2011). This makes dating apps an easy access for making potential partners while also enabling easy withdrawal, resulting in relationships that are easy to form as well as dispose (Timmermans, Hermans, & Oprea, 2021). This social phenomenon of ceasing all forms of communication online abruptly and without explanation is commonly referred to in popular culture as “ghosting” (Schokkenbroek, Telari, Pancani, and Riva, 2025).

The prevalence of this behavior has grown substantially in recent years. Research by Koessler, Kohut, and Campbell (2019) found that ghosting in the adult population increases each year. Further clarified in the research, a poll conducted by YouGov and Huffington Post in 2014 that surveyed 1000 US adults, found that approximately 13% of the respondents were ghosted previously and 11% engaged in ghosting behavior themselves (Koessler, et. al., 2019).

In another exploratory study by the same author, Koessler et al. (2019) sampled 332 Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) workers and found 64.5% of their participants previously ghosted a partner while 71.9% reported of being ghosted themselves. Furthermore, only 14.2% of the participants had not ghosted their partner before. This pattern is also observed cross-culturally. A study conducted at an Indonesian university found that 85.7% (n = 192) of students had ghosted others, and 89.7% (n = 201) reported having been ghosted (Sukmana, Astutik, Abidin, Agustino, and Widodo, 2022).

Ghosting inflicts serious psychological consequences, including emotional distress, self-harm, and suicidal ideation (Studley & Chung, 2015, as cited in LeFebvre et al., 2020). In a qualitative study by Wu and Bamishigbin (2024) illustrating psychological distress that ghosting caused, involving semi-structured interviews with 29 undergraduate students, found that the participants experienced a wide range of emotional responses, including shock, confusion, sadness, anxiety, anger, and a profound sense of betrayal. These emotional reactions were often accompanied by a loss of psychological needs such as control, belonging, meaning, and self-esteem. The findings align with Williams' (2009) temporal need-threat model, which explains the deep psychological impact of being socially excluded (Wu & Bamishigbin, 2024). The significant psychological impact of this behavior is highlighted by Marini and Sembiring (2021). Their research among 160 Indonesian early adults found that many experienced severe psychological distresses which disrupted their daily functioning. Notably, the study also found that these experiences frequently caused victims to desire revenge.

Due to these severe negative effects of ghosting, this behavior has been widely frowned upon. An analysis of breakup strategies conducted by Sprecher, Zimmerman, and Abraham (2010) concluded that many consider ghosting as the least compassionate and without acknowledgement of the recipient feeling (Koessler et al., 2019)

Despite its negative reputation, ghosting is often viewed to be an acceptable behavior and a common practice in certain context, occurring most commonly in short-term, casual dating relationships characterized by lower levels of intimacy and commitment (Schokkenbroek, et al., 2025). Higher intimacy implies greater responsibility to communicate, whereas lower intimacy lowers this threshold, making withdrawal strategies like ghosting more favorable (LeFebvre et al., 2019; Cody, 1982). Technology further facilitates this process by allowing users to block or ignore communication with minimal effort, making dating apps a convenient and self-oriented avenue for avoiding uncomfortable conversations or conflict (Timmermans, et al., 2021). In turn, short-term online relationships with limited time investment are viewed as appropriate contexts for ghosting (Schokkenbroek, et al., 2025).

In a study by Jonason, Kaźmierczak, Campos, and Davis (2021), participants judged ghosting as more acceptable in short-term relationships compared to long-term ones. This suggests that ghosting is seen

socially as more acceptable in casual or less invested relationships, where emotional obligations are minimal. By contrast, in longer-term relationships, ghosting is considered less acceptable, likely because such relationships carry stronger expectations of commitment, communication, and respect when ending the relationship. In addition to being multidimensional, romantic relationships also develop across varying levels of intensity. Early-stage interactions often involve surface-level engagement and limited emotional investment, reflecting lower levels of intimacy, whereas deeper involvement is characterized by emotional vulnerability, increased interdependence, and stronger relational expectations. These differences in intimacy intensity are likely to shape moral and social expectations regarding how a relationship should be ended, including whether ghosting is perceived as acceptable.

These patterns are further shaped prior experiences in ghosting. Individuals who have ghosted others are more likely to endorse it as an acceptable strategy for short-term contexts (Jonason et al., 2021). Certain personality traits are also key predictors. Dark Triad traits (e.g., narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy) correlate positively with ghosting frequency, while traits from the Light Triad (e.g., humanism) associate with fewer ghosting experiences (Di Santo et al., 2021; Koessler et al., 2019). Furthermore, the openness to short-term, uncommitted sexual relationships or Sociosexuality is a known correlate (Di Santo et al., 2021), aligning with findings that a casual dating orientation increases the likelihood of encountering ghosting (Freedman et al., 2018)

Prior research provides some explanation for the contextual and individual factors that make individuals perceive ghosting as an acceptable behavior. Ghosting most commonly occurs in short-term, casual dating relationships with low intimacy and commitment (Schokkenbroek, et al., 2025). Quantitatively, participants who ghosted their partners reported significantly lower commitment levels ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.33$) than other groups, $F(2, 161) = 22.39$, $*p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .060$ (Koessler et al. 2019). Individual differences also play a role; higher levels of Machiavellianism and psychopathy are significantly associated with a greater propensity to ghost, likely due to a prioritization of short-term gains over relational investment (Prasertwit, 2019). Furthermore, the frequency of ghosting is associated with a behavioral sociosexual orientation (openness to casual sex) and higher extraversion (Di Santo et al., 2021). This aligns with research suggesting that engagement in casual dating or "hookup culture" increases the likelihood of encountering ghosting (Freedman et al., 2018). All of this further exemplifies by prior ghosting experience Individuals who have ghosted others are more likely to endorse it as an acceptable strategy for short-term contexts (Jonason et al., 2021). Demographically, relationships that ended without ghosting were significantly longer ($M = 85.10$ days, $SD = 86.18$) than those where ghosting occurred ($M = 19.43$ days, $SD = 44.14$) (Koessler et al. 2019).

While existing research has identified several factors that influence the perceived acceptability of ghosting, available research examined these factors in isolation and through correlational designs. As a result, prior research has not identified the combined contextual thresholds at which ghosting shifts from a socially acceptable practice to a perceived social transgression. Prior research has also failed to systematically examine how different types of relationship intimacy, together with varying levels of intimacy intensity and relationship duration, shape perceptions of ghosting acceptability. Moreover, it remains unclear how individual differences moderate these contextual effects within dating app environments.

Existing theoretical framework of ghosting is also primarily built upon research conducted in Western, individualistic cultures. The applicability of these findings to a collectivistic society like Indonesia remains unknown and constitutes a significant gap. The tension between modern dating practices and traditional values is evident. For example, a recent mixed-methods study in Yogyakarta found that while Indonesians use dating apps, they actively negotiate this use against religious and cultural norms, often employing strategies like concealing their identities to manage social stigma (Kurnianti et al., 2025). This suggests that the decision to ghost may also be influenced by local cultural pressures that are not considered in Western contexts.

From these findings, it is interesting to further examine ghosting behavior by identifying the context of relationship intimacy and relationship duration that makes ghosting perceived as an acceptable behavior. this study aims to address this gap by experimentally investigating ghosting acceptability among Indonesian young adults using a vignette-based design, in order to identify the variations in intimacy and relationship duration that jointly shape judgments of ghosting acceptability, while

accounting for individual differences within an Indonesian cultural context.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative experimental approach using a vignette-based factorial design to examine the causal effects of relationship intimacy and communication duration on ghosting acceptability. Specifically, the study applied a 2×4 factorial design, manipulating two independent variables: relationship intimacy level (low vs. high) and communication duration (1 week, 1 month, 2 months, and 3 months), yielding eight experimental conditions.

Relationship intimacy was operationalized using the *Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships* (PAIR; Schaefer & Olson, 1988), encompassing five domains: emotional, social, sexual, intellectual, and recreational. Each participant completed five vignettes, one per domain, with experimental conditions independently and randomly assigned per vignette, resulting in 40 unique vignette versions. All vignettes were set within a dating app context in which both parties had mutually matched, establishing relational expectations from the outset. The scope of relationships depicted was limited to heterosexual and monogamous contexts to maintain consistency and avoid confounding sociocultural factors.

The dependent variable, ghosting acceptability, was measured using a single-item scale (1 = *completely unacceptable* to 5 = *completely acceptable*) following each vignette. Dark Triad traits (measured via the SD3 scale) and sociosexual attitude (measured via the SOI-R Attitude subscale; Penke & Asendorpf, 2008) were included as moderators. Prior ghosting experience was controlled as a covariate, while age and gender were treated as control variables.

Participant

The target population consisted of Indonesian emerging adults aged 18 to 25 (Arnett, 2000), identifying as male or female, who had prior experience using a match-based dating application with a private messaging feature (e.g., Tinder, Bumble; Wu & Trottier, 2022). Gender was restricted to biological sex categories given that broader gender identities remain culturally sensitive within the Indonesian context and may introduce unmeasured confounds (Boellstorff, 2016; Ardi et al., 2017).

Participants were recruited through a nonprobability convenience sampling approach with voluntary participation. Survey links were distributed via digital flyers, social media platforms, messaging applications, and personal academic networks using Qualtrics. Due to the nested structure of the design, in which multiple vignette responses are clustered within individual participants, sample size was determined based on practical considerations and benchmarked against comparable vignette-based experimental studies (Maas & Hox, 2005). The final sample consisted of $N = 179$ participants, yielding approximately 895 vignette-level observations for analysis.

Measurement

Perceived ghosting acceptability was measured using a single-item post-test instrument developed by the researcher, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly unacceptable* to 5 = *strongly acceptable*), administered immediately following each vignette. Content validity was confirmed by two expert reviewers with academic backgrounds in psychology and social sciences, both of whom rated the item as fully relevant, important, and clear (all ratings = 4/4). Dark Triad traits were assessed using the Short Dark Triad (SD3; Jones & Buckles, 2014), a 27-item instrument measuring Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, for which the Indonesian adaptation developed by Hasanati and Istiqomah (2018) was used. The adaptation followed internationally recognized cross-cultural translation guidelines including forward translation, back-translation, and expert review for semantic, conceptual, and cultural equivalence (Hambleton & Patsula, 1998), with 16 items retained following confirmatory factor analysis (factor loadings $\geq .50$; RMSEA = .077; CFI = .890; GFI = .907) and good overall reliability ($\alpha = .849$). Reliability in the present sample was acceptable for Narcissism ($\alpha = .710$), while Machiavellianism ($\alpha = .471$) and Psychopathy ($\alpha = .502$) fell below the .70 threshold, consistent with known limitations of brief multidimensional subscales (Jones & Paulhus, 2014); all subscales were nevertheless retained. Sociosexual attitude was measured using the Attitude subscale of the SOI-R

(Penke & Asendorpf, 2008), comprising three items rated on a 5-point Likert scale with item 6 reverse-scored ($\alpha = .774$), translated into Bahasa Indonesia by Ashari (2025) and validated through forward and back translation procedures reviewed by expert judges for linguistic comparability and semantic similarity (Sperber, 2004), with all items rated as fully relevant, important, and clear by both reviewers (all ratings = 4/4). Prior ghosting experience was assessed through two binary items (yes/no) indicating whether participants had previously ghosted someone or had been ghosted themselves. Finally, content validity of the vignette stimuli and manipulation check items was established through expert judgment by two reviewers with academic backgrounds in psychology and social sciences, both of whom confirmed that the intimacy and duration manipulations were clearly conveyed, consistent with the PAIR framework, realistic within a dating app context, and appropriate for assessing ghosting acceptability.

Data analysis

All data were analyzed using Jamovi (version 2.6). Prior to the main analysis, manipulation checks embedded within the survey were used to identify and exclude participants who did not engage with the materials carefully, and normality of the outcome variable was examined using skewness and kurtosis indices alongside homogeneity of variance assessments. Descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations were computed for all primary variables to characterize the sample and provide an overview of ghosting acceptability ratings across conditions. The primary hypotheses were tested using a Linear Mixed Model (LMM), selected for its capacity to handle the partially crossed structure of the data in which multiple vignette responses were clustered within participants. Participant number was specified as the cluster variable to account for the non-independence of repeated observations, and the model was estimated using Restricted Maximum Likelihood (REML). Intimacy level, communication duration, and PAIR domain were entered as categorical fixed factors, while Dark Triad subscale scores, sociosexual attitude, and prior ghosting experience were entered as continuous covariates. Interaction terms were included in accordance with the study hypotheses.

RESULTS

Relationship intimacy level had a significant effect on ghosting acceptability, $F(1, 725) = 40.61, p < .001$, $B = 0.447$, $SE = 0.070$, 95% CI [0.309, 0.585], such that participants rated ghosting as significantly less acceptable in high-intimacy relationships than in low-intimacy ones, supporting H1. Relationship duration similarly had a significant effect, $F(3, 730) = 12.91, p < .001$, with pairwise comparisons indicating that ghosting after 1 week was rated as more acceptable than after 1 month ($B = 0.347$, $SE = 0.099, p < .001$), and ghosting after 3 months was rated as less acceptable than after 1 month ($B = -0.271$, $SE = 0.099, p = .006$), while the 2-month versus 1-month comparison did not reach significance ($B = -0.102$, $SE = 0.099, p = .307$), suggesting the decline in acceptability is not perfectly linear and that a perceptual threshold may exist between one and three months, supporting H2. The interaction between duration and intimacy level was also significant, $F(3, 734) = 5.15, p = .002$, with the 1 Week $\times$ Low Intimacy contrast ($B = -0.592$, $SE = 0.202, p = .003$) confirming that ghosting was rated as most acceptable when both relational investment and emotional closeness were simultaneously at their lowest. A significant Domain $\times$ Intimacy interaction was further observed, $F(4, 735) = 21.57, p < .001$, driven most strongly by the Recreational domain ($B = -1.552, p < .001$), within which the direction of the intimacy effect reversed relative to all other domains; the Domain $\times$ Duration interaction, however, was not significant, $F(12, 735) = 0.84, p = .607$.

None of the Dark Triad subscales significantly predicted ghosting acceptability — Machiavellianism $F(1, 171) = 0.25, p = .619$; Narcissism $F(1, 169) = 1.36, p = .245$; Psychopathy $F(1, 168) < 0.01, p = .980$ — and no moderating effects were observed for any trait, leaving H3 unsupported. Sociosexual attitude, however, was a significant direct predictor of ghosting acceptability, $F(1, 168) = 5.04, p = .026$, $B = 0.223$, $SE = 0.099$, 95% CI [0.028, 0.418], with more unrestricted individuals consistently rating ghosting as more acceptable regardless of relational condition, and the sociosexual attitude $\times$ intimacy interaction was also significant, $F(1, 719) = 4.06, p = .044$, $B = 0.191$, indicating that more unrestricted individuals showed a comparatively smaller decline in acceptability as intimacy increased; the sociosexual attitude $\times$ duration interaction approached but did not reach significance, $F(3, 732) = 2.59, p = .052$, though the individual contrast at 3 months was significant ($B = -0.363, p = .006$), collectively supporting H4. Finally,

having previously ghosted others was a significant positive predictor of ghosting acceptability, $F(1, 170) = 13.08$, $p < .001$, $B = 0.623$, while having been ghosted oneself was not, $F(1, 176) = 1.47$, $p = .227$.

DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this study was to examine how relational intimacy level and communication duration influence perceived ghosting acceptability among Indonesian young adult dating app users, with Dark Triad personality traits (Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy; SD3) and sociosexual orientation (SOI-R) as individual-difference moderators. The Linear Mixed Model analysis of 865 observations from 179 participant clusters produced strong support for the primary hypotheses and generated several theoretically meaningful additional findings.

Hypothesis 1 received strong empirical support: intimacy level was the strongest predictor in the model with participants rating ghosting as significantly less acceptable in high-intimacy compared to low-intimacy relationships. This finding is consistent with the theoretical account that intimate relationships entail substantially higher degrees of commitment, generating stronger implicit obligations around relational behavior (Koessler et al., 2019; Stanley & Markman, 1992). When intimacy is lower, and commitment consequently lower, leaving without justification is considered a justified behavior (LeFebvre et al., 2019; Freedman et al., 2019).

In high-intimacy relationships, this same behavior feels like a betrayal and falling short of the implicit communicative responsibilities that partners come to expect of one another (Wu & Bamishigbin, 2024; Schokkenbroek et al., 2025; LeFebvre, Allen, Rasner, Garstad, Wilms, & Parrish, 2019). This finding extends prior descriptive results by establishing experimentally that perceived intimacy level causally shapes normative evaluations of ghosting acceptability judgments within a vignette context.

Hypothesis 2 also received empirical support: communication duration significantly predicted ghosting acceptability, with longer communication duration associated with lower acceptability ratings. Ghosting was rated as most acceptable at one week and least acceptable at three months.

At shorter durations, ghosting appeared to be viewed as a relatively common everyday practice within the relational context, consistent with Koessler et al. (2019), who found that relationships ending in ghosting were substantially shorter on average than those that did not (Freedman et al., 2019).

This is consistent with the conceptualisation of duration as an index of accumulated emotional investment, shared experience, and relational commitment (Cody, 1982; LeFebvre et al., 2019; Rusbult, 1980). As the longer the communication history, the greater the implied investment, and the more ghosting violates norms of thoughtful and accountable relational dissolution.

Notably, the decline in acceptability was not perfectly linear across the duration intervals tested. The one-month and two-month conditions did not differ significantly from one another, suggesting that the normative shift is threshold-based rather than continuous, with the sharpest perceptual change occurring at the longer end of the duration spectrum.

In addition, the significant Duration $\times$ Intimacy interaction, directly strengthens Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2. The highest acceptability ratings were observed under the short-duration, low-intimacy condition, with the most prominent contrast found in the 1 Week $\times$ Low Intimacy scenarios, demonstrating that when both relational features were simultaneously at their lowest, ghosting was judged as most comprehensible and least norm-violating.

This interaction pattern fills a gap in prior research, which had largely examined intimacy, duration, and personality traits as separate predictors without testing their integrative contributions to ghosting acceptability (Freedman et al., 2019; Koessler et al., 2019). The result suggests that participants employ a proportionality heuristic approach when evaluating ghosting. The degree of consideration owed when ending a relationship is calibrated through the combined relational investment implied by both intimacy and duration, consistent with prior theoretical findings indicating that brief casual acquaintances carry minimal implicit obligations whereas sustained, emotionally intimate relationships carry considerably greater ones (Freedman et al., 2018; Koessler et al., 2019; LeFebvre et al., 2019; Schokkenbroek et al., 2025).

One of the most notable additional findings was the highly significant Domain $\times$ Intimacy interaction, driven most strongly by the Recreational domain of the PAIR framework. Within Recreational relationships specifically, the intimacy effect reversed relative to all other domains. Ghosting in a low-intimacy recreational relationship was rated as substantially less acceptable than in a high-intimacy recreational relationship. This reversal did not emerge for the Emotional, Intellectual, Sexual, or Social domains.

One plausible interpretation is that participants hold domain-specific theories about the meaning of intimacy in recreational contexts. Recreational intimacy is defined within the PAIR framework as shared enjoyment of outdoor activities (Schaefer & Olson, 1981; Patrick et al., 2007). This may be understood as what the type of relationship is from the start. Since it can be inherently activity-based, non-binding, or laid back when illustrated at higher levels in the vignettes, this means that ending contact without explanation is seen as acceptable with the casual nature of relationships such as these (Relational Maintenance Theories, 2009; Freedman et al., 2019).

Conversely, (first shallow interaction) recreational relationships characterized by low intimacy may be perceived as superficial forms of social contact, in which relational expectations are minimal. In these contexts, ghosting may be interpreted less as a casual disengagement and more as a violation of basic social etiquette. Even in low-investment interactions, interpersonal behavior is typically governed by implicit social norms such as reciprocity, acknowledgment, and responsiveness that regulate social exchange (Mahmoodi et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2019). These norms function as informal social contracts that guide expectations of appropriate communication and cooperation in everyday interactions (Kabasakal & Cimsir, 2025). When individuals abruptly terminate communication without explanation, this behavior may violate these expected norms of interaction, leading it to be interpreted as socially inappropriate or discourteous (Burgoon, 2016). An alternative interpretation is that low-intimacy recreational relationships appear to have friendship-like norms, under which ghosting is evaluated as particularly just being dismissive. This aligns with prior findings that ghosting is judged as more acceptable when directed at a friend than at a romantic partner (Freedman et al., 2019), suggesting that when recreational ties are perceived as analogous to early-stage friendships, violating them via ghosting may be seen as a breach of basic social courtesy. Future research should directly investigate participants' reasoning about intimacy and obligation within recreational relational contexts.

In contrast to what was predicted in Hypothesis 4, none of the Short Dark Triad subscales significantly predicted ghosting acceptability: Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy. This null result appears to contradict theoretical accounts linking Dark Triad traits to reduced moral concern for relational partners (Jones & Paulhus, 2014; Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Several explanations may contribute to this finding. First, the dependent variable captured a third-person normative judgment rather than a first-person behavioral intention. Dark Triad traits may be more closely associated with the propensity to ghost than with abstract evaluations of its acceptability. Second, strong situational manipulations may have dominated variance in acceptability ratings, consistent with the argument that powerful situational forces attenuate personality-behavior associations (Mischel, 1977). Third, the use of a general convenience sample is unlikely to yield the extreme Dark Triad scores required for adequate statistical detection, effectively constraining the range of individual differences available for analysis. It is also worth noting that the Dark Triad has more recently been extended to a Dark Tetrad through the addition of everyday sadism as a fourth component (Buckels et al., 2013); given sadism's more direct association with indifference to others' distress, it is possible that this trait would show a stronger and more consistent relationship with ghosting acceptability than the three traits assessed here. Fourth, the relatively low internal consistency observed for the Machiavellianism ($\alpha = .471$) and Psychopathy ($\alpha = .502$) subscales of the SD3 may have further limited the detection of moderating effects.

Additionally, items assessing manipulateness and callousness may be subject to social desirability bias, as participants in a general convenience sample may be unwilling to endorse such characteristics openly, resulting in restricted variance and attenuated correlations with the dependent variable (Paulhus & Buckels, 2013). This combination of low reliability and potential response bias may have reduced the statistical power available to detect trait-level moderation effects for these two subscales specifically.

Hypothesis 4 received full empirical support. The SOI $\times$ Intimacy interaction reached statistical significance, indicating that the effect of intimacy level on ghosting acceptability was moderated by sociosexual orientation: more unrestricted individuals showed a smaller decline in acceptability as intimacy increased, relative to more restricted individuals. The SOI $\times$ Duration interaction was also significant, with effects primarily concentrated at the three-month duration contrast, indicating that at longer relationship durations, higher sociosexual attitude was associated with comparatively lower ghosting acceptability. Additionally, Sociosexual Attitude was a significant direct predictor of ghosting acceptability. Participants with higher, more unrestricted sociosexual attitude rated ghosting as more acceptable overall. This finding is theoretically coherent with the characterisation of unrestricted sociosexual attitude as reflecting openness to short-term relationships outside a commitment context, reduced emphasis on emotional bonding prior to sexual involvement, and lower investment in specific partners (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991; Penke & Asendorpf, 2008). From this perspective, ghosting as a low-effort, sudden dissolution strategy is more normatively congruent with the relational orientation of unrestricted individuals than with the commitment- and intimacy-based preferences of restricted individuals.

An exploratory finding was that having previously ghosted others significantly predicted higher ghosting acceptability, with an effect size substantially larger than those of the primary predictors of intimacy and duration. This result is consistent with cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) and moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999): individuals who have previously ghosted are motivated to view the behavior as more acceptable in order to maintain consistency between their past conduct and current attitudes, or to preserve a positive moral self-image. This interpretation is supported by Cobzeanu (2025), who found that moral disengagement was among the strongest predictors of ghosting behavior, and by Di Santo et al. (2021), who observed that the number of people one has ghosted was strongly correlated with the number of times one has been ghosted in return.

By contrast, having been ghosted was not a significant predictor. This interpretation can be explained with Di Santo et al. (2021), who found that those who have been ghosted are frequently ghosting initiators themselves, which helps explain why the experience of being ghosted does not produce a clear or consistent attitudinal effect.

CONCLUSION

This study found that relationship intimacy level, communication duration, and their interaction each significantly influenced ghosting acceptability among Indonesian young adult dating app users, with higher intimacy and longer duration consistently associated with lower acceptability ratings. Sociosexual attitude emerged as a significant individual-difference predictor, with more unrestricted individuals rating ghosting as more acceptable overall, and its moderating effect on the intimacy-acceptability relationship was also significant. Dark Triad personality traits, by contrast, did not significantly predict ghosting acceptability at either the direct or moderating level. An exploratory finding of notable effect size indicated that prior ghosting experience was a stronger predictor of acceptability than either of the primary experimental variables, while the experience of having been ghosted showed no significant effect.

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DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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