Netizens are Always Right: A Study of Cyberbullying in *Instagram*

Erni Dewi Riyanti[1], Nita Anisatul Azizah[2], Winona Nur Annisaa[3], Zulfa Rahmaniati[4]

Abstract

Recently, social media has an important role in daily life because social media is one of communication tools that can be used even remotely. Instagram is one of social media used by various generations worldwide nowadays. Every individual can access Instagram easily. It enables the users to communicate their activities with other people and see others' activities. With this form of sharing, this platform receives various responses from the users—or popularly called *netizen*—mainly in form of comments. This research seeks to identify comments made by Instagram users which indicate cyberbullying, especially ones that directed to women. In this inquiry, the researchers examine netizen's comments on online prostitution case involving VA, a famous Indonesian celebrity. The case became viral as some Instagram accounts reported the case in a relatively short time and received various responses. The researchers observe some prompt comments from followers of three gossip accounts in Instagram and classify the comments with the tendency of cyberbullying. The results show that netizens' comments indicate cyberbullying in form of flaming, online harassment, and denigration. The results also point out doxxing and tendency of victim-blaming on VA as the only actor in this case.

Keywords

Instagram, cyberbullying, netizen, comments

INTRODUCTION

As an interactive media that has a capacity to accommodate various forms of communication today, the internet has a large impact on its users. Communication channels, such as, short messages, electronic mail, messaging applications, and various social media platforms are highly dependent on the availability of internet networks. The need for adequate internet networks is a kind of primary need, especially for young people. In terms of utilizing online networking or social media, young people are the main contributors who help to build the market, as well as determine the direction of the social media's development policy. One social media that is currently popular in Indonesia is Instagram. This social media platform is popular because it enables its users not only to write narratives typically like other social media, but also to provide further explanation by using photos or videos that complement the existing written narratives.

This media has become favorite application in various countries. Many commercial and non-commercial activities are using this media for campaigning. In fact, there are some campaigns that successfully attract netizens' attention through the use of hashtag (#). One example is #metoo. It is a movement that, in 2018, was popular in some social media platforms and brings out the importance of women's awareness on sexual harassment issues in workplace. The essence of this movement is protesting over extensive cases of sexual harassment that occurred to women, especially in entertainment industry. The impact of #metoo mainly shocked Hollywood entertainment business executives, since the hashtag led to conviction of a number of executives and shareholders in this entertainment business. This hashtag became increasingly popular as "intervention" came from Hollywood celebrities and other entertainment workers who also speak up upon cases that occurred to them.

Similar case also occurred in Indonesia, especially in Yogyakarta. At the end of 2017, there was a viral news on sexual violence case happened to Agni (alias name), a university student who carried out community service assignment in eastern part of Indonesia. As quoted from Balairung Press (2018), first media which conducted an in-depth investigation on this case, Agni asked for advocacy assistance from a local NGO, *Rifka Annisa* and then looked for her campus intervention on behalf of her case. However, truce option offered by

---

her campus led to disappointment. As a form of protest, #saveAgni hashtag appeared on social media. The hashtag appeared not only to support Agni, but also to show netizen's disapproval to other sexual violence cases and the way the cases treated by far. It is also a form of denial to victim-blaming which becomes a culture in society.

Furthermore, every technological development undeniably has both positive and negative sides. On the positive side, social media is certainly an option to fulfill the need of fast-paced information acquisition. On the other side, social media presents problems that tend to threaten social and psychosocial conditions of its users (Watts et al, 2017). One of the problems that recently arises, still closely related to massive use of social media, is the tendency of cyberbullying among social media users. This type of malice sadly appears among users who do not know one another. They can freely comment or express their opinions by hiding in their anonymity, as Whittaker and Kowalski (2014) point out that in several occurrences, cyberbullying happens to those who are unknown to each other, in contradiction to previous studies on cyberbullying which primarily focused on peer-to-peer cyberbullying. In this inquiry, the researchers seek to capture types of cyberbullying arises over a viral online prostitution case appeared on several gossip accounts on Instagram. The researchers analyze cyberbullying that appears in the comments section. Therefore, the researchers can draw conclusions on the types of cyberbullying used by the netizens, as well as related this research to studies or theories that

CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying, according to Chisholm and Day (2013), is an action that is detrimental and tends to reappear through electronic media, such as, computers, mobile phones, or other devices. Additionally, Chisholm and Day state that unlike the case of traditional abuse, where there are differences in authority between abusers and victims, cyberbullying cases involve unique psychological processes. Cyber abusers tend to act quickly, using the anonymity of their identity, and tend to attack other people who are also anonymous. In this case, anonymity is key because cyberspace acts as a mediated space for harassments or attacks. Thus, this virtual nature influences the way the victim reacts to the abuse. When someone intends to cast a mockery or joke over a certain content uploaded on social media, another individual may accept it as an insult or blame.

Li (2007) and Willard (2005), in Watts et al., 2017, mention seven types of cyberbullying, namely flaming, online harassment, cyberstalking, denigration, masquerading, trickery and outing, and exclusion. Flaming is the act of sending messages to others, either personally or massively in certain groups that contain anger, offensive words, insult, or disapproval through text messages or emails. Online harassment is the act of sending messages that are intended to attack. While cyberstalking is a follow-up action from online harassment, where the abuser threatens the victim through messages. Denigration is the act of abuser that spreads messages to others containing defamation or news that aims to hurt the victim's feelings. Next, masquerading is an act of abuse which is a mixture of online harassment and denigration. In this case, the abuser pretends to be someone else and spreads the message to many people which contents threaten or harm the victim. Trickery and outing occur when the abuser traps the victim with news or messages about themselves that are embarrassing, personal, or sensitive. Finally, exclusion is the act of the offender who intentionally denies the presence of the victim in an online group and causes the victim to get a negative stigma from other members of the group.

In general, abuse-victims tend to doubt that what happened to them is a form of violence, especially in verbal form. Because victims of verbal abuse tend to be unaware of the occurrence of this violence and also ignore the effects that might appear. Sherri Gordon in her article entitled How to Recognize Verbal Abuse and Bullying states that verbal abuse has a long-term impact on its victims. She asserts that victims of verbal abuse can experience various mental health problems, such as excessive anxiety, depression, and also PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). In line with Sherri Gordon's statement, the results of a study carried out by O'Brien and Moules (2010) shows that the impact of cyber abuse can reduce self-confidence, decrease self-esteem, and disrupt the victim's mental and emotional condition. The study also confirms that young people who are abuse-victims tend to isolate themselves from their environment and to feel that abuse happened to them is as bad as abuse in general sense.

ONLINE PROSTITUTION

Different from the traditional one, online prostitution business utilize technology to reach consumers out in this digital age. Furthermore, the business also makes use various social media to facilitate its work, such as, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Thus, the online system creates lenience in making contacts and deals. The practice of prostitution in Indonesia has existed long ago. In 1852, the colonial government made a regulation that allowed commercialization on sex industry with a set of regulations which aimed to prevent crimes arising from the activities. Recently, prostitution not only takes place in localization area, but also has penetrated the digital age. According to Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informasi Republik Indonesia (2015), Indonesian government has established a regulation on Information and Technology, especially on article 27 verse 1 on cybercrimes to punish those who are involved in online prostitution. This act is then used to sentence the people who were caught on viral online prostitution case in early January 2019. VA, a famous celebrity, is the suspected prostitute in this viral case. She certainly becomes center of attention due to her celebrity status. Therefore, media put wide coverage on this case for several days since the case sprung.

One of the media that provides nationwide and worldwide information is Instagram. However, information presented on Instagram sometimes have not been sorted properly, since it can act like personal source of information. In terms of dealing with the aforementioned viral case, information offered may lead to cyberbullying, either in form of posts or comments. Cyberbullying is a part of abuse in the form of online bullying. The impact of abuse itself tend to be negative, especially when the abuse put heavier pressure on a person without strong mentality. Moreover, it can lead to persistent psychological effect.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed descriptive-qualitative approach, where the data source for this research was taken from comment section in some Instagram accounts. According to Social Media Research Group (2016), this research can be categorized as social media based research because the data source is collected from the relevant social media. Social media-based research can be divided into first, social media which is used as a research tool (in the form of surveys conducted on certain social media) and second, research based on the activities or contents of social media. Here, the researchers adopted the second type since the data collected were from users' comments in the online prostitution case. The posts were chosen because they made headlines or went viral in various media and brought mixed reactions. The account chosen by the researchers are three gossip accounts, namely @lambe_turah (6,300,000 followers), @lambenyinyir (1,900,000 followers), and @makrumpita (879,000 followers), The researchers chose first 10 comments from each account that posted the online prostitution case on January 5, 2019. This case was chosen because it reflected the purpose of this research, to determine abusive language used by netizens.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are thirty comments taken from three gossip accounts in Instagram namely @lambe_turah, @lambenyinyir, and @makrumpita. The comments were taken at all the aforementioned accounts' post on 5 January 2019 when VA's online prostitution case first publicized. From these accounts, the researchers classify the comments into categories based on classification by Li and Willard (in Watts et al., 2017). The results indicate that there are thirteen comments belong to flaming, seven comments belong to online harassment, and three comments belong to denigration.

As a start, Li and Willard define flaming as the act of sending messages to others, either personally or massively in certain groups that contain anger, offensive words, insult, or disapproval through text messages or emails. First of all, the researchers find netizens' comments aim at insulting VA and the fact that she involved in prostitution industry despite her renown status. Some sample statements are as followed.

Pura2 kaget aja ah (emoji) (Let me pretend to get shocked (emoticons))
@xolovedepi

Hilaf??? Hahaha ... (Making mistakes??? Hahaha…)
@irmadityo_shop

Yg haram emang mantulll … (What is (religiously) forbidden is certainly pleasing …)
@ayuu_acil

The above statements show that netizens insult VA for getting caught as a prostitute. Long before VA's case, there were similar prostitution cases which got viral since there were list of celebrities names involved. With the fact that VA is another celebrity who got caught in the same case, netizens found it actually not surprising. Furthermore, another finding indicates that netizens attack VA by mentioning terms related to female's physical attributes, as shown in the sample statements.

Rasanya gimana ya? (What does it taste like?)
@ixvxcii

Tidak cantik 80 juta kok ada yang minat .. (She is not pretty; however, someone orders her for 80 million …)
@angellahwang

Itu lubangnya isi apa kok sampe 80 juta (emoji) (What does that 'hole' fill with? How could it cost 80 million? (emoticon))
@teja.arum18

Netizens use words, like, "rasanya", "lubangnya", and "80 million" to give emphasis on the case that VA involved in. It indicates that the blame is on VA; the one who is accused as the source of the problem. Moreover, the above statements have prolonged the so-called 'victim-blaming' tradition, as Thornberg and Knutsen (2011, in Garland, et.al., 2016) point out, which occurs when bullying behavior is facilitated and put the blame to the victimized one. In some cases, victim blaming occurs because individuals who witness the bullying either verbally support the bullies or being silent or ignoring bullying behavior around them. Here, netizens act as bullies or give supports to the bullies.
The second finding refers to online harassment. This type of cyberbullying point out at the act of sending messages that are intended to attack. In this case, netizens who put their comments mainly attack and judge VA. She becomes the source of denunciation and compares her to other prostitution cases involving celebrities. The following is some of the examples.

Oh jadi slama ini rejekinya dari wik wik wik (Oh, all this time, she gets money from 'wik wik wik' (prostitution))
@mr.ubay20

Emang VA rasanya enak banget ya sampe tarifnya 80 jt.. uang segitu udah bisa buat biaya hajatan nikah enak" seumur hidup. Bingung gw.. 'enak banget pasti ya.. pk gaya apa sih… (Does she 'taste' that good, so that it costs 80 million to sleep with her. With that cost, (I) can hold a wedding party, 'having fun' for the rest of (my) life. It confuses me. It should be 'that good'. (I) wonder what 'style' she used (in bed) …)
@dewimargi

Tarif standar artis skuter keknya segitu ya? Dulu AA juga kisaran 80 juta.. atau AA tarif nya udah naik sekarang... soalnya 80 juta berapa tahun yang lalu pas kegerebek (emoji)… (Does standardized tariff of a 'mediocre' artist range in that number? AA was also in the range of 80 million… or, AA has increased her tariff now... It seems she was paid for 80 million few years ago when she got caught (emoticons))
@rindualuna23

The comments illustrate that netizens try to associate VA's status with the way she got money from the prostitution business she was accused into. Words like 'wik wik wik' which is a slang for prostitution, 'tarif', and '80 million' turn to be netizens' justification on this case. In addition, they try to compare the money VA earned with typical cost to hold a wedding ceremony in Indonesia. One of the comment points out that one can have fun for a lifetime with much lesser cost and questions the satisfaction that one can get by spending 80 million for one-night stand.
These comments are cyberbullying evidences that aimed on VA. As mentioned in previous section, bullying, that spread through cyber space, can reduce self-confidence, decrease self-esteem, and disrupt the victim's

mental and emotional condition. Viva.co.id (2019) cites that VA experiences shocks. She keeps crying and feels uncomfortable on the accusation that persistently addressed to her. It becomes worse, since unknown media spread her nude photos in the internet. Apparently, VA becomes a victim of doxxing, which Strickland and Dent (2017) define as publishing personal information about a person, that may include sex videos and photos, which is sometimes called 'revenge porn.'

The third finding is on denigration. It is defined as the act of abuser that spreads messages to others containing defamation or news that aims to hurt the victim's feelings. The data show that netizens' comments aim to defame VA and make her uncomfortable. Here are the examples.

Ini tmnnya yg kmren kn. klo g slh smpt nyinyir jg … (She is a friend of the other one (AA, who is previously caught by police officers), right? She used to condemn this kind of thing …)
@anisa116

Ooowwowww km kecidukkkk... jd inget dlu ngomong smpe ndowerr klo dia bukan … (Ooowwowww you got caught… it reminds me, she used to deny that she is not a …(prostitute))
@rebell_webster

Masya Allah mba jane baik banget tanggepannya... kemarin si FYN kena kasus langsung dimaki-maki sama Vanessa… (Praise the God. She is actually nice in reacting to this case… when FYN got caught, she was the target of Vanessa's rage…)
@anismaulanahikmah

This finding shows that the comments exemplify netizens' sarcastic attitude. It can be seen from the use of 'nyinyir', 'ndower', or 'dimaki-maki' which essentially tend to condemn VA for previously denying her connection to online prostitution; yet, she was convicted—popularly termed as 'keciduk'—sometime later. This sarcasm tendency leads back to victim-blaming discussed in the first point of this section. Garland, et.al. (2016), further elaborates Lerner's just world hypothesis, determines that victims of bullying typically different from people in general; consequently, they got what they deserved and should be responsible for the condition they are involved with. In this case, the researchers perceive the attempt that netizens made through the comments as a way to put blame or to punish VA for being deceitful and she deserved it.

CONCLUSION

This research aims at analyzing cyberbullying that appears in the comments section of three gossip accounts in Instagram namely @lambe_turah, @lambenyinyir, and @makrumpita. The results indicate the occurrence of cyberbullying, in form of flaming (13 comments), online harassment (7 comments), and denigration (3 comments). In addition, the results indicate doxxing and tendency of victim-blaming on VA as the sole player in this case. As a result, the accusation made by the netizens tends to put the blame on VA and repeatedly corners her. The fact that there is procurer who set up the online prostitution business is not highlighted in any comment. Hence, further study that covers up both sides is surely expected, as well as another study on cyberbullying which covers more cases in other social media platforms. Future studies are expected to reveal deeper understanding on the impact of cyberbullying on its victims and map the trends on online abuse in Indonesia.

REFERENCES

Balairung Press. 2018. *Nalar Pincang UGM atas Kasus Perkosaan.* Retrieved from http://www.balairungpress.com/2018/11/nalar-pincang-ugm-atas-kasus-perkosaan/

Chisholm, J.F. & Day, S.K. (2013). Current trends in cyberbullying. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless.* 22, 35-57. DOI: 10.1179/ 1053078913Z.0000000007

Garland, et.al. (2016): Blaming the Victim: University Student Attitudes Toward Bullying. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma.* DOI: 10.1080/10926771.2016.1194940

Gordon, S. 2018. *How to recognize verbal abuse and bullying.* Retrieved from https://www.verywellmind. com/how-to-recognize-verbal-abuse-bullying-4154087

Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informasi Republik Indonesia. (2015, 17 April). *Kominfo: Pegiat Prostitusi Online Bisa Dijerat UU ITE*. Retrieved from https://kominfo.go.id/index.php/content/detail/4743/ Kominfo--Pegiat-Prostitusi-Online-Bisa-Dijerat-UU-ITE/0/sorotan_media

O'Brien, N. & Moules, T. (2010). *The impact of cyber-bullying on young people's mental health*. Retrieved from https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/132195235.pdf

Social Media Research Group. (2016). *Using social media for social research: an introduction*. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/ uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/ file/524750/GSR_Social_Media_Research_Guidance_-_Using_social_media_for_social_research.pdf

Strickland, P. & Dent, J. (2017). Online harassment and cyber bullying
. Retrieved from http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7967/CBP-7967.pdf

Tim Viva. (2019, 7 January). *Jane Shalimar Ungkap Kondisi Psikologis Vanessa Angel*. Retrieved from https://www.viva.co.id/showbiz/gosip/1109838-jane-shalimar-ungkap-kondisi-psikologis-vanessa-angel

Watts, L.K. (2017). Cyberbullying in higher education: a literature review. *Computers in Human Behavior*. 69, 268-274. DOI: 10.1016/ j.chb.2016.12.038.

Whittaker, E. & Kowalski, R. M. (2015). Cyberbullying Via Social Media. *Journal of School Violence*. 14:1, 11-29, DOI: 10.1080/15388220.2014.949377