



Analysis of Social Media User Responses to Verbal Violence in the Cyber World

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Abstract

Violence on social media comes in various forms, one of which is verbal, such as rude or hateful comments, threats, or insults. This research will provide an overview of the responses of social media users to the verbal violence they experience in cyberspace. Researchers conducted interviews with five informants aged 19 – 21 years who had experienced violence on social media. Apart from that, researchers also completed the data by conducting interviews with expert informants in media literacy. The research results showed that all informants received indirect types of verbal violence through their social media in the form of teasing and body shaming, both from friends and strangers. Specifically, some informants experienced direct and indirect verbal violence, as well as repressive violence. The responses of the informants in responding to verbal violence were at the attitude and behavior level, including remaining silent because they felt like they were in the minority and did not need to reply, hiding their stories or status on social media from the perpetrator, and even contacting the perpetrator to get an explanation. Expert informants assess that violent behavior that appears in the media is caused, among other things, by the various backgrounds of media users, both in terms of economic education and literacy levels. Many responses or ways can be made in responding to online violence, but according to expert informants, the ideal way is to provide an answer or warning politely. It also aims to educate fellow media users

Keywords: Response analysis, verbal violence, social media.

Introduction

Online violence is the use of a computer system that can cause, facilitate, or threaten violence against individuals, resulting in (or likely to result in) physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm or suffering and can include the exploitation of circumstances, characteristics or individual vulnerabilities (Council of Europe, 2018). Violence that occurs in the cyber world comes in various forms, ranging from rude or hateful comments, threats, insults, or what is commonly known as verbal violence to things that lead to criminal acts or cyber crimes.

Types of cyber cases known to the public include illegal access, phishing, OTP (one-time password) fraud, illegal content crimes, and even terrorism (PuTI, 2022).

In the context of verbal violence in the cyber world, especially on social media, studies or research on this matter are still being carried out. Verbal violence or verbal abuse is a form of violence that is psychologically related by using verbal language to vent the actions that the perpetrator has experienced. Acts of verbal violence are carried out intentionally, and this is a form of mental and moral crime (Wibowo & Parancika, 2018).

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Research on social media accounts such as Instagram and Facebook found that harsh comments appeared in the form of swearing, hyperbole, dysphemism, stigmatization, negative nicknames, and associations with animals (Nurhidayah & Nurhayati, 2022; Utoro, Susetyo, & Ariesta, 2020). Similar things were also found in research by Adelia dan Pratiwi (2021), who analyzed various types of verbal violence in the comments column of Instagram accounts of transwomen who are public figures in Indonesia. This research analyzes rude comments made by netizens in schemes of body shaming, insults, blasphemy, and sexual harassment. Additionally, verbal violence often appears on social media accounts with sports themes, such as football and badminton (Putri, Sudarsono, Wardani, 2021; Fitriansyah, 2018). Swearing and insults were written by netizens in the comments column who felt disappointed or dissatisfied with the procession and results of the matches as well as the performance of the athletes, which did not meet their expectations.

Not only on Instagram and Facebook applications, verbal violence is also found on Twitter. The results of a survey conducted by Amnesty International and released by Geek in 2018 showed that as many as 1.1 million tweets on Twitter contained harassment or problematic tweets, the targets of which were women. It can even be said that, on average, every 30 seconds, a woman becomes a victim of verbal violence on Twitter. The case that women often experience is harassment through the perpetrator's bad comments (Siregar, 2020).

The fact that proves that verbal crimes continue to occur is the existence of Law Number 19 of 2016, an amendment to Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning Information

and Electronic Transactions as the law that regulates cybercrime in electronic media. (Adelia & Pratiwi, 2021). The formation of legal regulations indeed aims to place limits on the actions of people in a country who are wary of violating norms, including verbal crimes in the form of judging, insulting, bullying, and expressing hatred towards other users without paying attention to the negative impact of their actions for both the victim and the perpetrator.

The impact that arises from online violence can be in the form of negative emotions such as anger, discomfort, sadness, depression, fear, lack of self-confidence, and hurt. Still, it can also give rise to positive emotions, such as excitement (Sulubere, Anjar, Nusuary, 2023). However, these acts of violence can also give rise to quite serious problems for victims, namely mental health disorders. Victims of cyberbullying are at higher risk of experiencing depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts, and these adverse effects last for a longer time (Maurya, Muhammad, Dhillon, & Maurya, 2022). Victims, as well as perpetrators of cyber violence, are more susceptible to depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicide attempts, and antisocial behavior than those who are not involved (Skilbred-Fjeld, Reme, & Mossige, 2020).

This online violence also has an impact on the nation's future generations. Online media verbal violence can be one of the causes of hampering or hindering character formation for children. Supporters of verbal violence are based on what they see and get from the surrounding environment. In this digital era phenomenon, they get it based on what they see through social media or online (Wibowo & Parancika, 2018). An experimental study by

Alhujaili, Karwowski, Wan, and Hancock (2020) shows that social exclusion and verbal violence can trigger negative emotions. In the same study, verbal violence through the use of impolite language can increase hostility and anxiety rather than social exclusion.

Many studies have been conducted previously regarding verbal violence in cyberspace and its impact on victims. However, in the researchers' observations, not much has been revealed about the victims' responses when receiving or facing verbal violence attacks. This research wants to look at the types of verbal violence experienced by victims. It mainly focuses on the reactions of research informants who receive this violence through their social media accounts. Analysis of media users' responses, in this case, verbal violence in cyberspace, can help understand human behavior patterns and interactions.

The results of this study analysis can be used as a reference for 1) to help understand individuals' experiences and behavioral patterns in dealing with violence they experience in cyber media, 2) to help future researchers identify factors that contribute to violence, as well as how to reduce them effectively to produce recommendations for overcoming the traumatic psychological impact of victims, 3) contribute to the creation of laws and policies that focus on the protection and welfare of victims.

Literature Review

Verbal violence uses words, sentences, and other language elements (Baryadi, 2012). In the context of communication, verbal can mean communication speech acts conveyed verbally or in writing, either in words or images. Thus, online verbal violence can be

interpreted as all forms of violence conveyed by online media users verbally and in writing to comment on other media users to provide criticism that can bring down mental health, hurt, threaten, or intimidate. The violence is usually directed at certain account owners through the comments column feature or personal message column.

Verbal violence or violent speech acts can be classified into several types (Galtung, 2002 dan Salmi, 2003 dalam Baryadi, 2012), namely: 1) indirect violent speech acts, 2) direct violent speech acts, 3) repressive violent speech acts, 4) speech acts of alienative violence. Speech acts of indirect violence are violence that occurs but does not directly affect the victim at that moment but through media or a chain process. Examples of indirect violent speech acts appear as slander, stigmatization, and stereotyping. Direct violent speech acts are verbal violence that occurs and affects the victim while the verbal communication is taking place. Examples of direct violence are shouting, cursing, insulting, threatening, ridiculing, accusing, insulting, belittling, expelling, etc. Next, speech acts of repressive violence are speech acts that pressure or intimidate the victim, for example, by forcing, instructing, ordering, threatening, frightening, calling names, and so on. The fourth violent speech act is alienating, namely an act of violence that is intended to distance, alienate, or even eliminate the victim from their community or society. It is done by the perpetrator by silencing, expelling, isolating, humiliating, etc.

A response is a reaction or answer (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2016). In psychology, the term response is a reaction to a stimulus or stimulus received by the five senses, which is preceded by an individual's

attitude because attitude is the individual's tendency or willingness to behave when faced with certain stimuli (Sobur, 2003). Azwar (dalam Arkam, 2022) states that attitudes are always related to behavior within the limits of reasonableness and normality, a response or reaction to social and environmental stimuli.

Response-forming factors consist of internal and external factors (Walsito, 1999). Internal factors originate from within the individual, including spiritual and physical elements. These two elements will influence how a person responds to a stimulus, and the intensity will differ from one individual to another. Spiritual elements include existence and feelings, reason, fantasy or imagination, views, mentality, thoughts, and others. Meanwhile, the physical or physiological elements include the existence, integrity, and workings of the sense organs, nerves, and certain brain parts. External factors are factors that come from the environment. This factor is the intensity or stimulus factor that relates to the object that causes the stimulus and will touch the sensory organs. In line with this statement, Sarlito (dalam Thoha, 2018) stated that this difference in response begins with differences in perceptions that arise within a person towards an object, which is influenced by attention, needs, mental set, and value system.

Chafe (in Wijayanti, 2017) divides responses into three aspects: 1) cognitive responses, which are closely related to a person's knowledge, skills, and information about something. This response arises when there is a change in the knowledge experienced by the individual; 2) affective response, namely a response related to the individual's emotions, attitudes, and assessment of something; 3) psychomotor response, namely

a response related to individual behavior, which includes actions or habits. Sujanto (in Wijaya, 2018) describes several types of responses, namely: 1) responses according to the observing senses, consisting of auditive, visual, and tactile responses; 2) responses according to the occurrence, consisting of memories, fantasies, and thoughts, and 3) responses according to the environment, including responses to objects that approach or are nearby.

Method

This research is qualitative and uses a descriptive approach. Data collection was obtained through interviews with informants related to the issues raised. The primary informants in this research consisted of 5 (five) social media users in Medan City aged 19 – 21 years. The informants were students and alumni from several universities in Medan City.

Tabel 1. Research Main Informant

No	Sex	Age
1	Woman	21 y.o
2	Woman	20 y.o
3	Woman	22 y.o
4	Woman	21 y.o
5	Man	20 y.o

Researchers will explore the informants' experiences regarding verbal violence, such as the type of violence they received and the informants' responses when they received this treatment. Apart from that, the researcher also interviewed 1 (one) expert informant in the field of media literacy to obtain views and confirmation regarding the themes studied. The researcher prepared an interview draft containing several questions deemed appropriate to find answers and an

overview of the focus of the problem in this research. The research was carried out from July to August 2023.

Result and Discussion

Informant 1 conveyed her experience of verbal violence on WhatsApp social media. This incident began when Informant 1 confided in his friend, but the friend retold it to other friends with exaggeration. Until reaching the breaking point, Informant 1 was put into a WhatsApp group, and he experienced bullying. Informant 1 was confused about why suddenly there was a group that he herself didn't know about. She even left the group, but his friends brought him back in repeatedly for three days. Her friends also uploaded content that satirized Informant 1 and even spread bad things about her. Informant 1 responded to the incident by contacting the perpetrator.

"Over time, I also get carried away with emotions and even make negative comments, but respond directly to the person, not like what they make by spreading it publicly." (Informant 1, interview, July 18, 2023)

According to Informant 1, this matter could be resolved well without going public because what she conveyed in his confide was not excessive, like what her friend said to others. The incident experienced by Informant 1 can be classified into the category of indirect violent speech acts because it was carried out through social media. The response she gave was a type of behavioral response. Informant 1 felt the need to confirm the problem that had occurred to the perpetrator directly.

Informant 2 described her experience when she received verbal violence on Instagram. The verbal attacks he often

received usually targeted physical things, such as being called 'black' and 'fat'. It happened when he studied at a secondary school where most students were ethnic Chinese while Informant 2 was ethnic Batak. Informant 2 believes that his school friends have a different perspective, which considers those outside their ethnicity unsuitable to mix. Apart from that, she is one of the students whose teachers are often involved in activities organized by the school, which has the potential to cause envy from his friends. That's not enough; it turns out there are also teachers who call her nicknames like those above (black or fat) and do it directly in the school environment (not via social media). In responding to the bad comments he received, Informant 2 remained silent because she felt like she was in a minority group in that environment.

"Can't be angry because I am a minority." (Informant 2, interview, August 1, 2023)

Her actions included deleting bad comments made by the perpetrator on her social media, and until now, she has rarely uploaded his activities to social media. Based on the classification, the violent speech acts experienced by Informant 2 were direct, namely by teachers at his school, and also indirectly by several friends because they were conveyed through the comments column in Instagram posts.

The response shown by Informant 2 in response to the verbal violence he experienced fell into the attitude category, namely being silent or not responding to the statements made by the perpetrators and not posting content on her social media accounts. Informant 2 did this to prevent more unpleasant comments from appearing.

Informant 3 has also experienced verbal violence on social media. It happened when she uploaded a selfie photo on WhatsApp, and her friend commented on his 'acne'. According to her, it was not a joke but led to bullying behavior.

"It hurts me to be said like that, but it's up to him. And I responded with a little emotion." (Informant 3, interview, July 18, 2023)

The action taken by Informant 3 in response to this incident was to mute the perpetrator's contact from her WhatsApp story so that the perpetrator would not see the story status and could not comment badly on Informant 3's post. According to Informant 3, Indonesian people's behavior in using social media is still only understanding and looking from only one point of view, and they lack literacy, so bad comments tend to arise in media users' posts.

The verbal violence experienced by Informant 3 fell into the indirect category, namely by conveying comments that physically attacked the informant on his social media. Informant 3 responded effectively, namely, taking a stance to avoid the perpetrator.

Verbal violence was also experienced by Informant 4 on WhatsApp media. The perpetrator was Informant 4's closest friend. He experienced threats from his friend not to approach the man his friend liked, even though the man in question had been a friend of Informant 4 for a long time.

"Until college, she also threatened me." (Informant 4, interview, July 18, 2023)

Informant 4 responded by contacting his friend directly and discussing the matter carefully.

The verbal violence incident experienced by Informant 4 falls into the type of repressive

verbal violence. Namely, speech acts that lead to pressure or intimidation of the victim, including forcing, ordering, threatening, frightening, calling names, and so on—informant 4, in this case, clearly experienced threats.

Furthermore, Informant 5 also experienced verbal violence on Instagram social media. Informant 5 is one of the outstanding students on the University of North Sumatra (USU/ Universitas Sumatera Utara) campus and is included as a model in promotional content on the campus' official account. The mocking or sarcastic comments he received in the promotional content stated that models only had 'too many styles' to become BA or brand ambassadors.

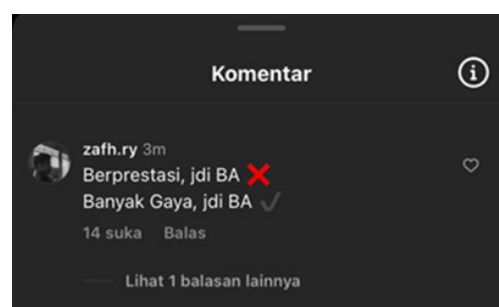


Figure 1. Footage of the Comment Column on Informant 5's Instagram Account

Informant 5 just ignored the harsh comments that appeared on social media. According to him, netizens in Indonesia provide comments depending on the posts they receive. If the post is good, the comments will be good, and vice versa; if the post is bad, the comments will be bad.

"There tend to be bad posts; Indonesian people are more daring to comment publicly. Many Indonesians make comments that seem funny, but some offend them without thinking about it, offend a certain party and what the impact will be. The important thing is that they make funny comments to get lots of likes and become top comments." (Informant 5, interview, July 22, 2023)

The events experienced by the five informants in this research were included as indirect violent speech acts because they occurred in the realm of their social media. In particular, for Informant 2, the verbal violence he received also occurred directly in the real world apart from on social media. Informant 2 received unpleasant remarks from a teacher in high school. Teachers are expected to be protectors of students at school. Parents and teachers have an essential role in monitoring and preventing increasing cases of violence, especially in the school environment. The teacher's role in preventing harassment is to provide supervision, guidance, and advice, and strengthen students' self-confidence to overcome incidents or problems involving harassment to reduce harassment in schools. (Kapile, Nuraedah, Junarti, & Nugroho, 2023). It was the case with Informant 4, who experienced violent speech acts through the media in the form of repression, namely threats.

Examples of indirect violent speech acts experienced by informants appeared in the form of body shaming, slander, stigmatization, and stereotyping. It can be observed from the comments the perpetrators conveyed to the informants via private messages, group messages, or posts uploaded to their social media accounts. Verbal violence occurred via WhatsApp and Instagram. The informants' responses varied in terms of cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses. This response appears as simply remaining silent, replying to comments, hiding the status or story (mute story), and directly contacting the perpetrator to explain the root of the problem.

The harsh comments received by the informants had almost the same impact, namely feeling sad and carried away by

emotions. Still, only 3 of the five informants responded directly by responding to these comments, namely Informants 1, 3, and 4. Of the three informants who answered comments, Informant 3 admitted that he did not show his status or story in the media to the perpetrator. Another informant rarely uploaded posts on social media to avoid bad comments, namely Informant 2.

There are many ways or responses that victims of cyber violence can take to protect themselves from this violence, such as not replying, recording evidence, talking to superiors, contacting law enforcement, telling stories to people they trust, consulting with legal counsel, reporting to features on web pages, severing friendship with perpetrators, blocking, even changing numbers or social media accounts (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). Apart from that, social control is also essential in monitoring cyberbullying, such as supervising and providing social sanctions to perpetrators of violence so that they will behave according to norms (Maududi & Yunan, 2023). Efforts to prevent verbal violence can also be achieved through early character education to learn about good and bad personal understanding and a humanistic nature (Febriyanto, Patimah, Rahayu, & Masitoh, 2020). This education aims to create a good personality in children so that they have respect for themselves and others, tolerance, politeness, courtesy, and noble character.

The role of family and school is, of course, significant in efforts to build students' character. Even verbal violence by parents can affect a child's self-confidence. It means that the more often or more parents use verbal violence against their children, the lower their children's self-confidence (Antu, Zees, & Nusi, 2023).

Something also worth considering in reducing the negative impacts of using social media is to carry out a digital detox, such as managing time and limiting the use of digital devices, limited internet access, adopting a healthy lifestyle such as exercising or socializing, and following accounts about social media detox (Sitepu, Harahap, & Rajagukguk, 2022).

The expert informant in this research is a media literacy expert in Medan City, namely Dra. Mazdalifah, M.Si., Ph.D. According to her, one of the causes of verbal violence on social media is the differences in the backgrounds of media users, both in terms of economics and education, including literacy levels. Regarding the response that victims can give when receiving verbal violence, there are several things they can do, such as hide, ignore, or respond directly. However, the most appropriate strategy in media is to use the right of reply. It means that the victim has the right to explain the verbal attack he received. Even in a different context, if someone knows that what someone else has conveyed is inaccurate or inappropriate on social media, such as distributing photos or videos of accidents, then that person should convey that the message's sender should not have done this. Furthermore, expert informants also emphasized that answering or explaining to fellow media users should still be delivered in polite language. In this way, every user can provide education regarding media literacy.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Cases of verbal violence in cyberspace can occur in various social media applications. In this research, this case appeared on WhatsApp and Instagram media. Apart from that, rude

comments can also attack women and men. The responses that emerge from victims also vary, such as replying to comments and inviting the perpetrator to talk, but some just remain silent. According to expert informants, the most appropriate step is to exercise the right to reply as a social media user, which must be conveyed politely. It aims to educate and campaign for suitable communication methods in cyber media.

Healthy social media usage patterns need to be conveyed as widely as possible to users, considering that the effects or impacts can disturb a person's emotions from low scales, such as sadness, to high levels, such as causing depression and feelings of wanting to commit suicide. Education related to digital media literacy must be disseminated to all levels of society, even starting with elementary education, because gadgets have also spread to children. Victims of verbal violence need to recognize the attacks thrown at them and have the right to respond by providing answers or explanations to the perpetrator. In some instances, that can threaten safety and life. The response is not enough to answer but can block or report the account to the authorities. This response is an effort to prevent acts of violence in the media from continuing. Media users can also implement a digital detoxification pattern to give themselves space to respond or deal with the negative impacts that may arise from using cyber media.

Further research on responses to verbal violence can be expanded by researching a more demographically diverse segment of informants, both in terms of age, gender, and socio-cultural aspects. In this way, a deeper understanding of how individuals respond to verbal violence can be obtained. The field

of study can also take various factors such as psychology, social, legal, and health. New methods or models can be developed to produce wise communication strategies to overcome verbal violence in cyberspace.

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