



Choice of action for victims of cyber gender-based violence (sexting) via WhatsApp

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Keywords:</i> choice of action cyber gender-based violence sexting WhatsApp</p>	<p>This research is motivated by the development of information and communication technology, amid the widespread Internet network and the popular use of social media. This condition has increased the intensity of people's use of social media, one of which is WhatsApp. The use of WhatsApp not only brings positive value, but also has the potential to become a space for acts of harassment, which has an impact on the rise of cyber gender-based violence, one of which is sexting. The purpose of this study is to find out about the cyber gender-based violence (sexting) that occurs through WhatsApp in the campus environment. In particular, it aims to find out the victim's choice of action against the perpetrator in the case of cyber gender-based violence (sexting) via WhatsApp. The study uses a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach. Supported by George Herbert Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism, the results of this study show that sexting occurs in verbal and nonverbal forms. The perpetrators of sexting come from inside and outside the campus, with the status of the closest person to a stranger. The victim's actions toward the perpetrator are divided into three types of actions, namely, reporting, not reporting, and fighting back against the perpetrator. The action of not reporting is divided into four types of actions, namely, reprimanding, redirecting the conversation, blocking, and rejecting the perpetrator's call.</p>

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Introduction

The development of information and communication technology proves the progress of time in people's lives. It is undeniable that the presence of the internet is very important to support community activities, both for education and socialization and other activities. The internet has become increasingly complex with the emergence of social media as a new medium (Feryna & Fadhil, 2018: 39). Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, WhatsApp, etc. are also present to meet the needs of the community and are preferred as personal communication tools. This can be seen from the large number of social media users in the community, ranging from teenagers to adults. As noted in the Indonesian digital report, Hootsuite We Are Social Indonesian Digital Report (2021), the average active social media user is about 170,000 people, dominated by the 18-24 and 25-34 age groups, social media usage takes 3 hours a day, and 94.5% actively contribute to social media.

The WhatsApp messaging platform is a social media that is widely used by the general public. In the Hootsuite We Are Social Indonesian Digital Report (2021), 87.7% of social media users in Indonesia are WhatsApp users. WhatsApp is a social media that provides a two-way interaction feature between users. It is used as a tool to communicate, interact and share information. The use of WhatsApp not only provides positive benefits, but also has the potential to become a space for harassment, which has an impact on the rise of cyber gender-based violence. Research by Barak, Kowlaski et al. (2017) shows that technological advances have facilitated cyber gender-based violence, making this case an important issue that needs to be specifically addressed (Jatmiko, 2020: 322).

Cyber gender-based violence is a form of violence facilitated by technology. This violence mirrors real-world gender-based violence, with actions aimed at harassing someone based on their gender and sexuality, with women as the most common victims (Purwanti, 2020: 26-27). According to the annual report of Komnas Perempuan (2020), cyber gender-based violence in Indonesia has increased during the pandemic. In 2019, there were 126 cases, and in 2020, there were 510 cases. Komnas Perempuan refers to this case as an increasingly complex form of harassment because it takes place in the virtual realm (Ihsani, 2021: 13).

Sexting is one type of cyber gender-based violence experienced by women. In the case report data above, sexting has 16 case reports (Komnas Perempuan, 2020: 48). In the survey results of the SAFEnet organization (2020), sexting found on WhatsApp has a percentage of 40%. This data is a complaint of cases reported by the community, there is still data on similar cases that are not known and reported. It cannot be denied that there are still victims behind the scenes who choose to act differently, such as keeping silent or ignoring what happened. Of course, each victim has several considerations for choosing to act in the sexting incident experienced. According to sociologist George Herbert Blumer (1937) in his concept, individual responses are not only immediate to the action, but are based on the meanings that have been formed towards events or actions of others to him. Thus, human interaction is bridged through the use of symbols, interpretation and discovery of meaning, which become tools for choosing and organizing actions (Dadi, 2008: 309).

Sexting as a form of cyber gender-based violence has happened to students of the Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences, Trunojoyo University Madura in their

interactions on WhatsApp. When work from home (WFH) was implemented at the end of 2021, several female students admitted that they received messages from WhatsApp contacts/known people, sending words, pictures/photos and invitations with sexual intentions. This was followed by the beginning of 2022, the rise of sexting terror in the Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences, several female students claimed to have received video calls and sent pictures from strangers showing genitals. This incident is certainly an issue that indicates that sexting has mushroomed among female students of the Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences, Trunojoyo University of Madura. In taking action when experiencing sexting, various choices of actions are taken such as anger, blocking, and so on. Although there are victims who dare to fight the perpetrator, speak out on social media and report cases. Apparently, sexting is still misunderstood by victims, treated as a small thing, and then normalized. By choosing to act differently, such as not responding too much and ignoring it. Therefore, cases of sexting on WhatsApp are a problem that is still vague and less noticed. This condition can lead to sexting as a "normal" interaction situation.

The phenomenon of sexting as cyber gender-based violence is an interesting topic to study. A lot of literature examines cyber gender-based violence from different countries, focusing on the forms, factors, and consequences of violence. To date, not many studies have looked specifically at cyber gender-based violence in one type of case and one social media space. Thus, the uniqueness of this study relates to the case of sexting cyber gender-based violence through WhatsApp, and takes an in-depth look at the victim's actions towards the perpetrator in the sexting case on WhatsApp. Because the sexting case seems to be an issue that is still in a vague space. There is a blurred

line about what falls under the category of sexting, this depends on the actions of the victim in responding to the perpetrator in the sexting incident experienced. Therefore, the researcher is interested in examining the actions taken by the victim against the perpetrator in the sexting incident via WhatsApp.

Method

This study uses a type of qualitative research. Qualitative research is a method that examines the informant's perspective. Research that prioritizes appreciation as a way to understand and explore an event in the field to find out what happens to phenomena, symptoms or events (Ghony, 2007: 13). One of the reasons for using qualitative methods is that researchers aim to explore and understand an event in depth in order to obtain meaningful data. In general, it can make it easier for researchers to explain the case of sexting as cyber gender-based violence experienced by several students of Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences, Trunojoyo University of Madura, specifically to explain the formulation of problems in this study. Thus, the data collected may include in-depth perspectives of informants.

The approach in this study is based on a phenomenological approach. Similar to qualitative methods, phenomenology is an approach that clarifies the meaning in an event and its relationship with individuals who experience situations in life (Ikbar, 2013: 113). In phenomenology, the experience is explained in its entirety, starting from perception, thoughts, feelings, to form (Clark, 1994: 35). Therefore, this approach seeks to analyze the meaning of individual experiences about events, which comes from the subject's awareness in interpreting, interpreting experiences through interactions (Hasbiansyah, 2008:

166). The phenomenological approach was used in the study with the aim of describing the case of sexting via WhatsApp according to the subjective experience of the victim, as well as understanding the event with the meaning of each victim who was in the situation experienced by several students of the Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences, Trunojoyo University Madura.

Data collection techniques can be done in different ways and sources to collect information needed in research. Data collection techniques commonly used in qualitative research are observation and interview (Salim, 2006: 13). Researchers collected data from informants through passive participation observation, semi-structured interviews and documentation in an open and careful manner.

Informants in this research are individuals who can provide information about the situation and conditions to be studied. In the research on the choice of action of victims of cyber gender-based violence (sexting) through WhatsApp, the selection of methods used has gone through several other considerations, such as the ethics of data collection, pseudonym guarantees to protect the identity of informants, and the interview process, which is carefully conducted by adjusting the psychological condition of the victim. There are two informant selection techniques, namely; snowball sampling and purposive sampling. Firstly, the researcher used the snowball sampling technique which was done manually. The researcher sought informants by approaching and asking each individual through personal communication and being careful to expand the search for more informants. Researchers chose one or two people, then looked for other people to complete the data, so that more and more. Second, the use of purposive sampling technique. Researchers sort the subjects according to predetermined criteria.

Informants who are believed to know the most about the case are selected to obtain relevant information. This technique makes it easier for the researcher to know the object or event to be studied (Sugiyono, 2016: 219).

Results and Discussion

Cyber gender-based violence (sexting) that occurs via WhatsApp

Social media is a digital platform that is easily found on electronic devices. WhatsApp is one of the social media that focuses on two-way messaging communication. WhatsApp is known as the most popular social media chat in Indonesia. Supported by the results of the annual We Are Social Digital Report (2021), WhatsApp received a percentage of 87.7%, where this figure is in the second top position after YouTube. This shows that WhatsApp is a messaging and social media application that is widely used by the public.

WhatsApp provides a chat feature to send messages in the form of text, images, audio, location and documents that are convenient to use. Not only that, WhatsApp also provides contact sharing, telephone and video call group features that include many people in one call (Wicaksono & ranajaya, 2018: 60). WhatsApp users are also equipped with an end-to-end encryption feature, where user privacy is more guaranteed in terms of communication security.

The use of WhatsApp among the community has inevitably opened up space for acts of harassment, the majority of which are experienced by women. This is triggered by the high intensity of WhatsApp use during the pandemic, which affects the way individuals engage in deviant acts while communicating (SAFE-net, 2020: 19). These deviant acts have brought different forms of problems. Many circulating WhatsApp chat rooms are used as acts of harassment by

attacking certain genders, which is known as cyber gender-based violence (Hayati, 2021: 46).

Cyber gender-based violence as an act with the aim of harassment based on gender and sexuality online. The shift in communication to all online provides access to gender-based violence in virtual space (Jatmiko. 2020: 322). Therefore, gender-based violence can involve multiple parties. However, of all the parties involved, men are often the perpetrators and women are the victims. Therefore, gender-based violence that occurs is based on patriarchal principles (Purwanti, 2020: 1). In cases of gender-based violence, most interventions often lead to sexual intent committed against women.

One form of gender-based violence that appears in various forms on social media is sexting. Sexting is an activity that involves sending explicit messages with sexual intent between mobile phones. Sexting first appeared in the early 21st century through text messaging. As technology began to develop, people used social media as a new tool to behave/express sexuality (Davidson, 2014: 3). Through smartphones equipped with messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, sexting activities can be easily carried out. This condition was experienced by all the informants, and according to their perceptions, each informant received sexual messages in various forms.

Sexting activities that occur on WhatsApp have 2 forms of messages, namely, verbal and non-verbal messages. In verbal messages, sexting is realized through words/language/sentences with sexual intentions (seduction, flirting to indecent conversations). Meanwhile, non-verbal messages are realized by sending pictures/photos, emoticons and gestures with sexual intent. As WhatsApp's features evolve, sexting activities are becoming more diverse, such as video calls and group video

calls, to spreading the victim's number to be accessed by others who want to sext. As shown in Table 5 regarding the classification of forms of sexting that occur via WhatsApp.

Gender-based cyber violence dominates the cases of violence against women with a percentage of 16.6%. This situation shows the vulnerability of women to become victims. It was found that 36% of the perpetrators were strangers (people not directly known), 32% had anonymous identities, 29% were people known through social media, and 16% were a group of strangers (Islami, Prima. 2021: 6). In line with sexting as a type of cyber gender-based violence experienced by informants. This condition is interesting where the results of case observations show that the perpetrators come from people on and off campus who have close relationships (friends, boyfriends, seniors) to a group of unknown people who allegedly often terrorize several female students of FISIB Trunojoyo University Madura.

Cases of sexting can occur at any time without any time limit compared to direct gender violence. In the virtual world, with its advantages and sophistication, everyone can connect without having to travel long distances to communicate. This allows the perpetrator to carry out his actions freely at any time without being noticed by others. Therefore, communication on WhatsApp with easy access cannot be separated from the shadow of messages, often inserted with sexual material by irresponsible users.

Women in virtual space still seem to be in inherent stereotypes, namely as desire gratifiers and sexual objects, due to gender inequality in society (Islami, 2021: 5). Sexting exists as a product of gender inequality incarnated in the form of everyday communication language. In this condition, women are given a passive position that is used as an object of interest for sexual behavior/expression. This is supported by a

research study from JAMA Pediatric, which reveals that cases of sexting are increasing and seem to be considered "normal" by some people (Kusuma, 2021: 84).

The dominance of social media spaces that are still wrapped in a patriarchal perspective and masculinity ego perpetuates sexting activities in social media realities such as WhatsApp. Some perpetrators see sexting activities as normal, especially for young couples, and it has now spread to friendship relationships. Cyber gender-based violence is no longer just bullying, harassment and discrimination of women on social media. However, it is increasingly moving into the sexual realm as a place to express sexual desire by making women objects.

Choice of action of victims of cyber gender-based violence (sexting) against the perpetrators

In the reality of social media, sexting has been felt by some female students of the Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences, Trunojoyo University of Madura when communicating online. Each victim has different action steps in responding to the perpetrator in the sexting they experience. The victim does not act immediately whether to report the case or not (Trihastuti & Nuqul, 2020: 3). The victim goes through several stages of interpretation, evaluation, and discovery of meaning before deciding what action to take against the perpetrator of sexting on WhatsApp. In line with Blumer's concept, which is based on three premises, people act towards something based on the meaning of something for the individuals involved.

The meaning that is obtained comes from the interaction of individuals with other people, then the existing meaning is applied or modified as the interaction progresses through interpretation (Sunarto,

2004: 36). Thus, human action is the result of its interpretation of the existing reality.

From all of the victims' accounts above, it is clear that responses are not made directly to the perpetrator's actions toward them, but on the basis of the meaning given. Therefore, during the interaction process, the victim examines, determines, and then transmits the meaning according to his or her subjective self. In line with Blumer's idea, individuals are not agents surrounded by objects that can shape their actions, but individuals themselves shape existing objects, because individuals are conscious and reflective actors (Ritzer, 2014: 254-255). The following table illustrates the victim's choice of action against the perpetrator of cyber gender violence (sexting) through WhatsApp.

The theory of symbolic interactionism in Blumer's concept helps the author to explain the victim's actions towards the perpetrator in the sexting incident via WhatsApp. Of the eight victims who became informants, it is known that each victim has different actions ranging from reporting the perpetrator to the case service agency, not reporting (diverting the conversation, blocking, reprimanding, rejecting calls), and fighting back against the perpetrator. Although it is known that the subject of the case is the same category of action (sexting). This is because each victim has a variety of subjective meanings, definitions, values that vary when experiencing sexting via WhatsApp. Then it is adapted to the situation and where the individual is located. Thus, the same stimuli can have different meanings for different people (Johnson, 2006: 16).

Online interaction activities can enter the symbolic interaction process. Sexting on WhatsApp is an online communication framed by the discussion of sexual material. When done on WhatsApp, the act of sexting is exchanged in the form of symbols in

writing, verbally, or in the form of images as a visualization of words. Then, the victim forms a meaning of the message from the perpetrator's actions. Therefore, communication on WhatsApp emphasizes the role of language as a tool that can shape interpretation and meaning, including messages that lead to sexting.

In WhatsApp sexting incidents, all victims examine the messages sent by each perpetrator, interpret, judge, and then make sense of the perpetrator's actions according to their subjective selves. The victim then decides to act on the basis of the meaning formed. Like Blummer's "self-indication," individuals are able to unify the objects they encounter. In a sense, the individual communicates when he knows, evaluates, and then forms a meaning to take action in a social context.

The meanings available in society have been used and modified by the victims. This is because victims can determine the choice of actions to be taken, so the available meanings can be applied or modified by each victim through interpretation. Therefore, the process of definition by the victim creates a relative view. In line with Blummer's idea that "the nature of an object, comes from the meaning provided by the individual who uses it," in the sense that objects can have different meanings for different people (Ritzer & Goodman, 2014: 394).

The findings of the research generally show that the sexting that occurs takes different forms. Sexting is not only in the form of text and images, but also in the form of private and group video calls, and there is also the distribution of the victim's WhatsApp number to access online sexual services. The perpetrators come from inside and outside the campus, with the status of the closest person to a group of strangers. A group of foreign perpetrators allegedly often terrorizes several UTM students, including

FISIB. From the sexting incidents that are now rampant in the environment of FISIB UTM students, it shows that in the online space, women are still in the stereotype of "sexual objects" because the reality of social media is still wrapped in patriarchal principles and masculinity ego.

The results of this study show that the meanings formed by victims towards the actions of sexting offenders are divided into two, namely; 1) a form of harassment 2) not an act of harassment. Victims with the category of interpreting forms of harassment, they form the following meanings; 1) the perpetrator harasses online / acts obscene; 2) the perpetrator does sexting; 3) the perpetrator does not have good intentions and just does something. Victims with the category of interpreting not an act of harassment, they form the following meanings; 1) the perpetrator has problems; 2) the perpetrator has a mental disorder; 3) the perpetrator seeks attention, has no activities and jokes. It is known that the meanings that individuals have come from existing meanings (in general) to those obtained from the results of their own construction.

As with the chosen meanings and actions, the victim's actions in responding to the texter are preceded by a period of reflection. Stimuli from the perpetrator are translated through interpretation by looking at the situation and the tendency of the action. From this process, different meanings and choices of actions of the victims are produced. Victims with the category of reporting, he interpreted the situation as; 1) the existing conditions felt increasingly unsafe and disturb the comfort of the victim; 2) the victim did not want to continue to be terrorized by unknown numbers; 3) there was encouragement and help from friends to report.

Victims in the not reporting category interpreted the situation as; 1) having a close

relationship with the perpetrator; 2) the victim did not understand how to report; 3) the act of reporting was considered a futile thing; 4) the victim did not want the case to be known by many people who would later embarrass and blame him/her; 5) the perpetrator's actions were not something disturbing; 6) the incident was only online/indirect; 7) the victim did not want to look like a temperamental person.

Victims in the category of fighting back against the perpetrator interpret the situation as; 1) every perpetrator deserves to be treated badly according to his actions; 2) the perpetrator must be fought and humiliated in order to feel deterred and aware; 3) if not, the perpetrator will underestimate and repeat his actions to others; 4) the victim has the courage to fight the perpetrator regardless of the status of the perpetrator. Thus, the meaning formed and the actions taken, each victim has passed the stage of consideration through interpretation by looking at the situation, personal condition and reactions of others. Thus, there are victims with the same category of meaning but different actions, or the same actions but different meanings.

Conclusion

Sexting that occurs on WhatsApp based on the results of this study found that the perpetrators come from outside and inside the campus, with the status of the closest person to an unknown person. Interestingly, the perpetrators of unknown persons are currently often contacting multiple FISIB students. At the time of the sexting action, the stimulation provided by the perpetrator to the victim was carried out verbally and non-verbally through chat messages, private video calls and some even through group video calls by uttering sentences with sexual intent. The symbols used by the perpetrator

in sexting are words/text/language, pictures/photos, and gestures. Each victim interpreted the symbols they received differently.

All eight victims interpreted the perpetrator's actions as both harassment and non-harassment. Victims with the category of interpreting acts of harassment, they form the following meanings: 1) the perpetrator harasses online/acts obscene; 2) the perpetrator does sexting; 3) the perpetrator is not in good faith and just does something. Victims with the category of interpreting non-harassment actions, they formed the following meanings: 1) the perpetrator has problems; 2) the perpetrator has a mental disorder; 3) the perpetrator is seeking attention, has nothing to do, and is joking.

The eight victims took different actions against the sexting perpetrators they met on WhatsApp. The victim's actions are divided into 3 types, including reporting the perpetrator to a case service agency, not reporting the perpetrator, and fighting back against the perpetrator. The action of not reporting the perpetrator is divided into 4, namely, taking action by advising the perpetrator, blocking, some redirecting the conversation, and some ignoring or rejecting the perpetrator's call.

The meanings formed and actions taken by different victims are the result of the reflection stage through the interpretation of the situation, which includes: the status of the perpetrator, the situation, the state of the victim's self, and the reactions of others. Victims in the reporting category have interpretations of the situation such as 1) feeling increasingly insecure; 2) getting help from close friends; 3) not wanting to continue to be terrorized by strangers. Victims in the nonreporting category have interpretations of the situation such as 1) having a close relationship with the perpetrator; 2) not wanting to appear temperamental; 3) not understanding how to report; 4) feeling that

reporting is useless; 5) not wanting to cause conflict/expand the problem; 6) not wanting the case to be known to many people because of embarrassment and fear of being blamed; 7) the victim does not feel disturbed by the perpetrator's actions; 8) the incident is only in a virtual space. In addition, victims with the category of fighting back against the perpetrator have an interpretation of the situation: 1) the perpetrator deserves to be treated badly according to his actions; 2) if not taught a lesson, the perpetrator tends to underestimate and commit similar acts elsewhere; 3) the victim has the courage to fight the perpetrator to embarrass him; 4) the perpetrator needs to be fought so that he realizes his mistakes and feels ashamed.

Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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