

Empathy Gap in Social Media Comments for Sexual Harassment Victim

*Khairunnisya Lubis¹, Indah Chairun Nisa², Pidiatun Dinia Dalimunthe³,
Alemina Br. Perangin-angin^{4*}*

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Sumatera Utara - Medan, Indonesia

Abstract. Indonesian Twitter users who filed a complaint about sexual harassment were studied to see if there was an empathy gap among their tweet responses. The author uses a content analysis method and observes a sample of empathy gap experiences to notice and study empathy gap behaviour in Twitter toward sexual harassment victims. In the research that has been done, the comments tweet as amount 3733 tweets and chosen 60 of them randomly to know-how is the empathy gap with sexual harassment cases. It is concluded that bullies have aggressive and intimidating characteristics. On message production by the bully, actors are supposed to produce messages in expressive, conventional, and rhetorical ways, including negative empathy characteristics. So on the other hand, the research that has been done concludes that people who act as victims have passive and defensive elements. On message reception by the communicant (victim), the victim placed the position of receiving the message in a dominant, negotiating, and oppositional position.

Keywords: Empathy gap, Twitter, Sexual harassment, Cyberbullying

Received 17 August 2021 | Revised 13 November 2021 | Accepted 19 December 2021

1 Introduction

The internet is a natural thing for individuals to use in our period, especially those who enjoy playing social media. Individuals can freely express themselves through social media, and Twitter is a social media platform that enables individuals to debate their opinions openly. As seen by the growing number of users, people using social media rapidly increase. Nowadays, social media is quite significant. According to the hosting comparison site, Twitter has 1.3 billion users, 330 million active users, and 500 million tweets every day. The data demonstrate the general public's reliance on social media. Social media is being used for business, greeting each other, and sharing tales. Existing business processes will be hampered if sexual harassment on social media. In some opinions, companies must keep operating; whatever happens, a backup mechanism must be in place to tackle the situation.

Twitter is a platform for people to communicate, talk, and give feedback on current events. Twitter can be utilized as a transparent medium for expressing public opinion. The internet is widely used in today's society, mainly social media. People can openly express their views on social media because it is an open and limitless method of communication. However, many

*Corresponding author at: Universitas Sumatera Utara - Medan, Indonesia

E-mail address: alemina@usu.ac.id

people nowadays exploit social media to perform undesirable things, such as online sexual harassment. This study was based on previous research or studies in the literature. Using the Nave Bayes classifier method and a digital forensic acquisition approach, the research results revealed a variety of sentiment analysis outcomes. The study detects sexual harassment by analyzing Twitter comments and assessing grouping results using the content analysis method.

Nonetheless, many people nowadays are abusing social media to engage in destructive behaviour. Today, there has been a lot of social media abuse in the community. Cyberstalking, cyberbullying, and sexual harassment are all too widespread [1]. "Cyberbullying," which is the purposeful use of electronic and online communication tools to harass or embarrass one person or group of people, is something to be concerned about [2]. It is possible that the cyberbully will make the victim feel harassed and threatened or that the victim will be embarrassed and excluded from social groups because of the cyberbully. This could happen in direct or indirect ways. It also occurs over time and has a component of the power difference between the bully and the victim [3].

In this case, we do not know how other men feel, so we can only guess how they are affected by picturing how we would think in the same situation. Empathy is a personality trait that can impact many different types of social behaviour. As an example, narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy are all traits of the "Dark Triad." Empathy impairments are one of the 'Dark Triad' traits, as are emotional rather than cognitive empathy impairments. People who have "Dark Triad" traits, like narcissistic exploitativeness, are more likely to bully and act aggressively in a proactive way [4] [5].

The hashtag #metoo became a hot topic on Twitter on October 24, 2017. Although Tarana Burke, an African-American women's rights activist, invented the word in 2006, it gained worldwide notice after actress Alyssa Milano used it as a Twitter hashtag due to sexual assault allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. Milano asks people to use the hashtag #metoo to illustrate how widespread the problem of sexual violence is. This hashtag was used 12 million times in the first 24 hours on Facebook, capturing public and media attention [6].

Meanwhile, on June 09, 2021, Indonesia had a trending issue of sexual harassment involving a public figure on Twitter, which was chronologically formed as a thread by the victim, even though it occurred in August 2018, three years ago. The line received a lot of attention, with 11 tweets, 3,733 replies, 34,000 retweets, and 109.000 likes. Sexual harassment is a complicated topic these days, and based on that number, the victim received the majority of positive remarks from other users. However, we did identify some negative comments as well. From this thread, it was clear that there were empathy gaps. Those unfavourable remarks are turned into data, which is then evaluated to reveal the empathy gap.

2. Literature Review

Empathy

Empathy has been the subject of extensive investigation during the last century. On the other hand, scholars have not reached a consensus over a specific definition of empathy [7]. The idea

that empathy is made up of cognitive and affective components that serve independent roles but work together to elicit empathy has been highlighted for decades. It is still widely recognized [8]. Empathy should be viewed as a context-dependent reaction. By understanding the social context, the empathizer can recreate why others experience a particular emotion, not just that they have one [9].

Interpersonal empathy requires the same skills and insights as social empathy, but it goes beyond emotion and understanding to action based on a sense of social duty [10]. As a result, social empathy uses empathetic understanding to shape public policy, social movements, and other avenues to justice. Segal and her colleagues present a model for social empathy that is both conceptual and pedagogical. First, because humans are more inclined to identify with and consider others who "look like us" deserving of assistance, fostering social empathy entails exposure to, explanation of, and experience with a difference throughout human history, culture, and life span [10].

It takes both emotional intelligence and forethought to be empathetic because humans must know and predict how and why their actions of others. When it comes to empathy, age and gender play a role. There is also evidence that gender differences in empathy are linked to gender differences in offending, which helps explain why there are differences in crime between men and women. Many studies have found that empathy and offending and gender empathy links are accurate. A few people who have looked into this. But few of these studies have looked into how gender socialization and development affect empathy, and none have tried to see if empathy ability can explain how gender affects offending. People may not fully understand how empathy perpetuates gender differences in crime because it may be undervalued [11].

Sexual Harassment

Standard in the community, sexual harassment harms its victims. A person who has been sexually abused by others will experience psychological anguish and personality damage. Sexual harassment can take the shape of sexual content, jokes about sexuality or disdain for one's body parts, or physical contact in the form of touch or the like. According to the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), there have been 239 reports of sexual harassment so far in 2019. According to the Komnas Perempuan, there were 46,698 incidents of sexual harassment in public settings from 2011 to 2019. According to the Komnas Perempuan, there are 23,021 cases of rape, 9,039 cases of sexual harassment, 2,861 cases of sexual harassment, and 91 cases of internet crimes. According to data from the Komnas Perempuan, there has been a considerable increase in cybercrime complaints, with 281 cases reported in 2018 compared to 97 cases in 2018. The majority of cyber cases involve threats and intimidation to prevent the distribution of victim porn photos and videos.

When someone makes an unwanted and inappropriate sexual statement or physical approach at work, in a professional or social context, this is known as sexual harassment. The subject of tweets, particularly the stories of sexual harassment victims, becomes critical for text processing research. The empathy gap in sexual harassment tweets can be found through content analysis. Indonesia adopted Law No. 11 of 2008 on Information and Electronic Transactions to address

this type of online sexual harassment, later revised by Law No. 19 of 2020 on Amendment to Law No. 11 of 2008 on Information and Electronic Transactions (ITE Law). Sending and broadcasting Electronic Information or Electronic Documents that breach decency, constitute gambling, constitute humiliation or defamation, represent extortion, or constitute intimidation are prohibited acts, as described in LAW ITE Article 27 paragraphs (1) to (3). (3). (4).

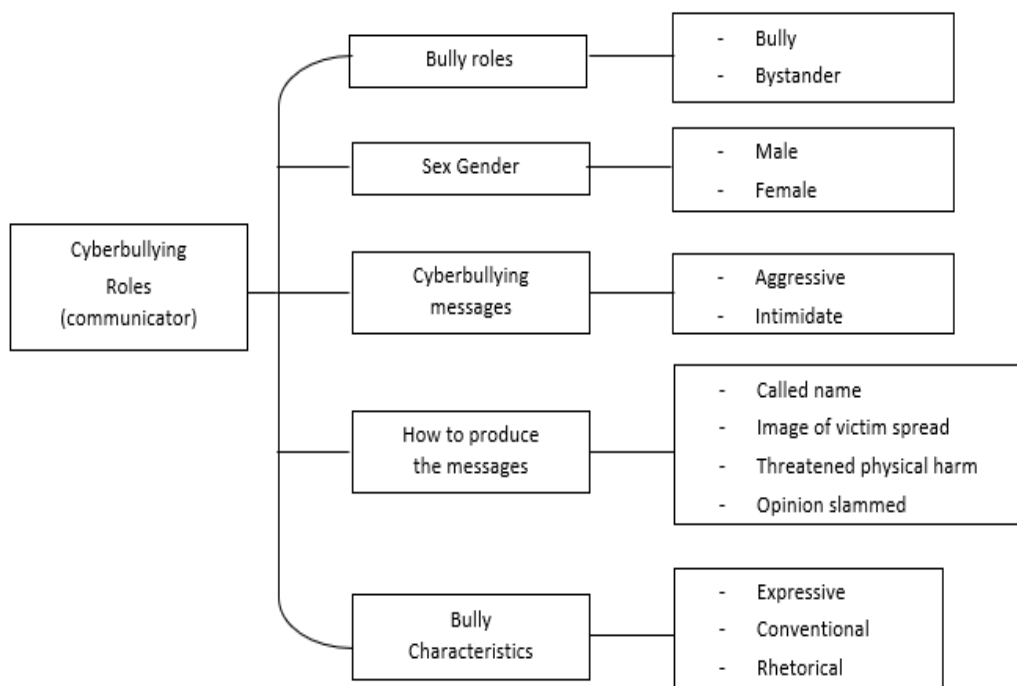
Twitter as a Platform Where Cyberbullying Happened

In Indonesia, Twitter is a free communication channel subject to verbal sexual assault through tweets. Twitter is a simple application that allows you to access a wide range of positive and negative information. Because there are no solid controls or standards to prevent the spread of insufficient data (primarily connected to sexual harassment), Indonesian Twitter users are hesitant to utilize negative information. At the same time, the estimated prevalence of traditional face-to-face bullying ranges from 5% to 10% (Smith, 2014; Solberg & Olweus, 2003), the counted majority of cyberbullying ranges from 5.3 per cent to 31.5 per cent [12].

3. Method

The population and samples utilized in this study were retrieved from Twitter using a collection of comments classified as a word that could lead to online sexual harassment. Because the researchers only focused on negative comments related to the tweets to illustrate the empathy gap, this study used 60 tweets data from 3733 comments to be processed. This study employs a qualitative technique as well as a content analysis method. The study took place on the social media platform Twitter. The content of a status thread has gone viral because it addresses an acute problem, notably sexual harassment, and involves a public figure with a well-known reputation among young people. Purposive sampling is used as a reference for the research sample in this study. These public individuals have sexually harassed several people. The messages evaluated in the content analysis method are classified as follows.

Research Analysis:



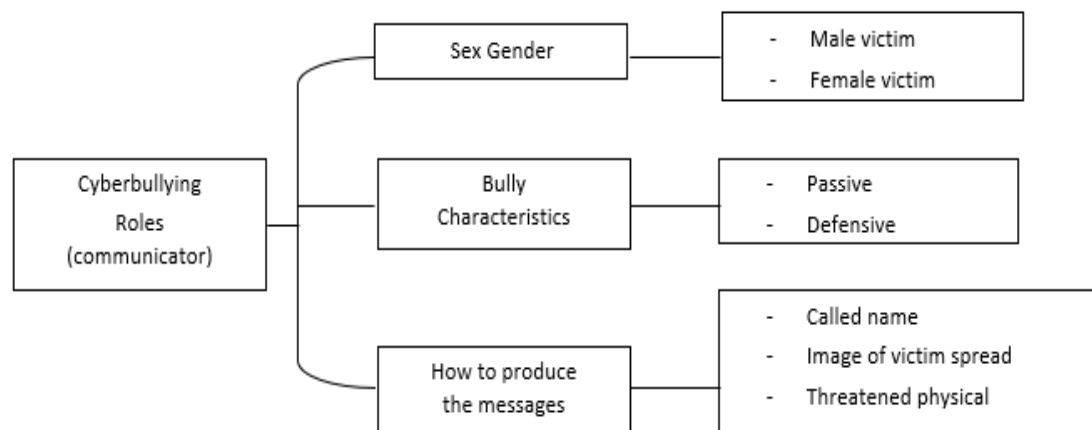


Figure 1. Research Analysis

1. Cyberbullying Roles

In contrast to conventional bullying, where the perpetrator can be a single subject who commits aggression against the victim, on social media, especially Twitter, the perpetrator can be characterized into two, namely the main bully and the bystander. A bully is the one who triggers a person's first start. On Twitter, the bully is seen in posts that become the main trigger, both in the form of status and posts that aim to insult or damage, images spread gossip or rumours, threaten to destroy relationships.

In Twitter, a person can be a bystander if that person plays a role in sending cyberbullying messages on the links, statuses, and images provided by the bully to bully the victim. Bystander becomes a representation of an actual form of cyberbullying where the bystander carries out the majority attack of the victim. In some cases, the bully can also play the role of a bystander, attacking the victim by continuing to send cyberbullying messages on the link he sent himself.



Figure 2. The bully and the bystander

1. Characteristics of Cyberbullying

a. Aggressive

That aggressive behaviour is the stage from which a person ends up bullying. According to him, aggressive behaviour is when a person gains something by using force. Still, his dominance over the target or victim is incidental and unintentional. In contrast, bullying is a desired end

situation and is achieved by using force to hurt others and show someone's dominance towards other people [5]. In this study, it can be seen the forms of aggressive behaviour carried out by the perpetrator to the victim, namely:

- a. The bully sent cyberbullying comments or messages repeatedly (more than once)
- b. Perpetrators send messages that contain elements of cyberbullying with harsh language
- c. The actor also reacted by adding cyberbullying messages from other perpetrators



Figure 3. This picture shows Cyberbullying roles where there were the bully and bystander.

The first comment made by the bully or @Userid1 and the bystander supported him to blame the victim just wanted to be famous only to get endorse and then the @userid2 gave replies ironic comment by saying it was truly sad hahahahaha." Based on that picture comments, it can be seen that the @UserID2 has aggressive behaviour where he sent the repeated cyberbullying comments with harsh language with those words. That comment showed negative empathy to a sexual harassment victim. Where is their morality if they still blamed the victim for being famous behind the perpetrator's name; hence, he is a public figure?



Figure 4. Bystander's comment for another tweet.

On this comment, he replied to another tweet of the thread. He said he was confused by blaming other positive comments, especially some women. Based on his opinion, he thought they knew the perpetrator the most and had the right to judge the sexual harassment perpetrator. He knew that the #womensupportwomen campaign was being hyped nowadays, and he realized so much positive empathy from the victim.

Even though he did not realize he did the same, he discriminated against the women like the holiest. Those statements were categorized as harsh words for subjectivity, and there was no empathy at all.



Figure 5. The bystander sent repeated cyberbullying comments with harsh contains.

On the same date, June 09, @UserID2 sent another comment to break down the victim's mind with other harsh sentences. He pretended that the victim's tweets get sympathy from another woman who has positive empathy for her dominantly by calling the name "attention seeker."

b. Intimidating

In Parsons (2009), Randall states that bullying is aggressive behaviour that arises from a deliberate intention to cause physical and psychological pressure on others. The forms of intimidation found are:

- a. Threatening Internet Freedom
- b. Threatening Safety
- c. Dominate Others
 - Long Enough Time
 - The Birth of the Superior Group
- d. Not Empathetic to Other People's Feelings



Figure 6. One of the not empathetic to other people's feelings.

One of the comments from that thread which showed on June 10, 2021, @Userid3 comments can be categorized as not empathetic to other people's feelings. His statement pretended the victim tried to kill someone's character because worse people exist than the perpetrator. He would have an opinion if you went to the club naturally you had been known there would be a hangover people with another negative behaviour and activity. So, it could be summed up he has negative empathy with the victim.

2. Victim

In cyberbullying, the victim is someone who is the target or target of the oppression carried out by the bully on cyber media. In contrast to the perpetrators who have been bullied and bystanders, in cyberbullying cases studied by the victim, the victim is a single subject or an individual. From the case learned, it is known that the victim was a young adult who is the subject of cyberbullying of some people for the reactions of her thread.



Figure 7. One of the victim's tweets showed how traumatic she was before.

Once someone decided to speak out about their terrible experience automatically, they were ready to get positive and negative responses. People could not expect every answer to be positive because every person has their perspective on one case. That was her first tweet of thread told her traumatic after that moment. She needed around three years just to speak up. She still gets tremors and hidden emotions if she does not accidentally see the perpetrators.



Figure 8. One of the positive tweet's responses to the victim's tweet.

The user showed her empathic by saying “*Nyes banget bacanya ya Allah, semangat ya mbak jangan dengerin kata-kata orang yang nyakitin fokus aja, mereka enggak tahu gimana rasanya*”

apalagi sama-sama perempuan harusnya bisa ngerti gimana rasanya kalau dia ada di posisi yang mbak rasain, yang kena sexual harassment itu seharusnya dibantu, minimal semangat, karena bentuk mental seseorang itu beda-beda." The commentator said that she felt brokenhearted to pieces when she read her thread. She supported the victims by saying not to hear the harsh words, just focused on herself because they did not know how it felt like sexual harassment victim. Even as a woman, we should have understood how was it felt in her position because she needed to help, at least supports, because everyone's mind is different." The user's comment showed positive empathic to the victim.

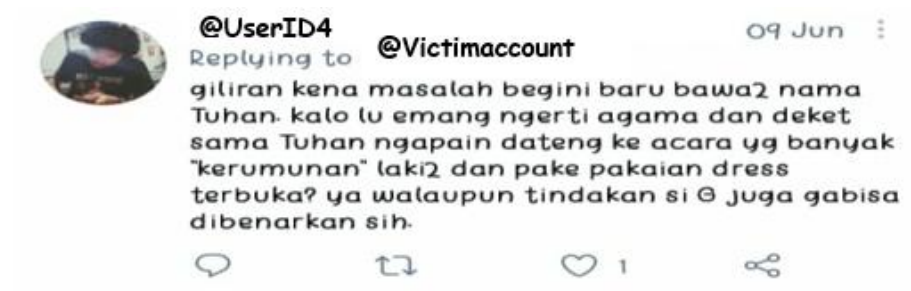


Figure 9. Negative comment's from one of the users.

The user said that the victim just remembered her God after having that bad experience. In his opinion, if she knew about religion and closed with Her Mighty, why did you come to the event, which is a "crowd" of men and wore open dress? Even though G's behaviour could not offend too. He used sarcastic sentences to blame the victim; even he brought religious and dress background, which was inappropriate for the harassment background. Whatever the victim wore and the religious problem, it does not mean he deserved to treat like that.

3. Characteristics of Cyberbullying Victims

a. Passive

Passive behaviour is a communication style that puts the rights of others before placing personal rights and suppresses self-esteem or self-worth. Based on observations, she has a tolerant attitude for some negative comments in that case.

In her sexual harassment case, it appears that she chose not to comment back or react to Cyberbullying attacks directed at her, namely the distribution of harsh words and disbelieve of her story. In the screenshot of her case below, it can be seen that her attitude leads to a passive attitude. Namely, she accepts the Cyberbullying behaviour by not giving any comments.

b. Defensive

Based on the observations made by the researcher on the victim, the victim's defensive attitude was chosen to protect herself from the threats she responded to in a communication situation rather than understanding other people's messages. The communication situation here is where the victim reacts to the cyberbullying attack, either in writing comments containing angry

emotions towards one of the perpetrators or comments in self-defence by insulting the perpetrators who continue to insult the victim.

Based on observations, she chose to react to positive comments only to empathize with her experience. Belong to her, it was better for her mental health.

4. Types of Cyberbullying

A study conducted by Price and Dalgleish (2010) on 548 Australian adolescents and supported by other studies (Patchin, 2009) underscores the forms of cyberbullying carried out by adolescent perpetrators on the internet. The conditions of cyberbullying found include;

a. Called Name (Negative Name Giving)

Giving negative names is a form of cyberbullying attack to label the victim badly. A bullying expert, Sherry Gordon (bullying.about.com, 2014), suggests providing negative words or often called name-calling, is one of the most dangerous forms of cyberbullying. Negative naming is hazardous because it forces you to label someone you are not. Negative names mentioned in cyberbullying against victims include;

1. Animal name: rat, monkey, monkey, dog, pig
2. Name of spirits: kuntilanak, ghost
3. Physical calling: face, body/whole physical

b. Image of Victim Spread

According to Price and Dalgleish (2010), the image of the victim spread is a form of expression of the perpetrator to entertain himself and others by using the victim's photo as an object of entertainment. However, on the other hand, Price and Dalgeish also stated that the distribution of the victim's photo was an act to embarrass the victim.

c. Threatened Physical Harm

Cyberbullying can also threaten the safety of others. In this case, comments containing the words "dead" or "kill" are closely related to the existence of other people's safety in the real world.

d. Slammed Opinion

A condescending opinion is an opinion written by the bully to the victim to insult the condition or appearance of the victim. In observing all cases, some comments contain cyberbullying, namely demeaning the victim.

5. How Individuals Communicate in Cyberbullying

a. Communicator (Actor)

The communicator, the bully, manifests his dislike, hatred, and emotion towards the victim with a message to corner the victim. These messages can reflect the personality of the bully

based on the writings he conveys on social media, such as what Qualman said. O'Keefe (1988), in his theory of message communication, concludes about the message design logic (Message Design Logic) that arises from how individuals construct and package messages divided into three message logics.

Expressive

This idea states that communicators will produce messages that 'override' their mental state and assume that the interlocutor will do the same (O'Keefe, in Edwards et al., 2006).

Moreover, O'Keefe says that communication is the process of expressing one's thoughts or feelings to another. In the sexual harassment cyberbullying cases studied, the bully as a communicator represents expressions in the form of satire or insults to the victim in an expressive form;

- a. Messages Using Capital Letters: affirmation of insults or satire and as contextual support
- b. Symbols: laughing emoticons and sad emoticons
- c. Media images to support statements: pictures of someone 'wanting to vomit' and pictures of the middle finger.

Conventional

Miller (2015) describes the message design logic in this conventional sub-message by saying that there is an element of politeness, appropriateness following the norms in which the message is packaged and addressed. In the case of cyberbullying, the level of formality of a perpetrator is minimal in sending verbal bullying attacks against victims. Perpetrators seem spontaneous and heroic in sending messages that contain elements of cyberbullying. However, it turns out that some people have the opposite behaviour. These people do not attack the victim but provide an understanding of what the victim has done.

Rhetoric

The logical form of rhetorical messages is the view that messages in communication are "negotiations and creations stemming from social environments and personal situations." The point is that rhetorical logic views communication as a way of changing the rules through negotiation where the messages designed tend to be flexible, insightful, and individual-centred [13].

O'Keefe also sees rhetorical design logic as reflecting that communication serves to structure and shape reality. Thus, actors of rhetorical interactions use communication to define situations to facilitate the confluence of the various instruments and objectives at hand. The rhetorical message conveyed by the communicator is a long comment that does not provide any conclusions [14].

b. Victim (Communicant)

The importance approach focuses on studying sense, production, and audience experience concerning interacting with media texts. This process is addressed to the communicant who decodes the received message [15]. The communicant's way of interpreting messages from communicators related to cyberbullying is to divide the message into three positions.

- a. The communicant receives the message as it is (dominant-hegemonic position)

In the cyberbullying case studied, the victim received the cyberbullying message sent by the perpetrator without refusing or resisting. This can be seen from the footage or screenshots of the cyberbullying cases studied that she did not write comments or statuses to respond to the cyberbullying treatment.

- b. The communicant negotiates the message (negotiated position)

In the case of the sexual harassment victim, she remained silent for the harsh comments and did not against the attacks of bullying directed at her. She did not want to negotiate with the bully's words.

- c. The communicant rejects the message (oppositional position)

Message acceptance theory (Hall, 2002) states that the victim is leaving the news because the victim does not accept the context and intent of the perpetrator's message. After all, it does not match the background and understanding of the victim.

5. Conclusion

In the research that has been done, the comments tweet as amount 3733 tweets and chosen 60 of them randomly to know-how is the empathy gap with sexual harassment cases. It is concluded that people who act as bullies have aggressive and intimidating characteristics, including negative empathy. So on the other hand, the research that has been done concludes that people who act as victims have passive and defensive attributes. The bully and victim characteristics reflect that cyberbullying often occurs even though both parties are unaware of it.

Research on message production by communicators (actors) concluded that actors produce expressive, conventional, and rhetorical messages. Definitively, the perpetrator writes a cyberbullying letter using harsh words. Furthermore, conventionally, someone writes a message with an order of manners following social norms. While rhetorically, someone tries to intervene and not interfere in the cyberbullying case.

The research conducted on message reception by the communicant (victim) concluded that the victim received the message in a dominant, negotiating, and oppositional position. In the dominant position, the researcher saw that the victim received the cyberbullying message directed at him so that the victim agreed with the messages. In the negotiating place, a victim

negotiates a message required to him by commenting on the intent of the bully's statement to him because the victim does not accept the idea. While in the opposition position, the victim did not receive the message directed at him; this can be seen from the victim who felt angry with the cyberbullying action required.

REFERENCES

- [1] T. M. Sandes, "Klasifikasi Tweet Pelecehan Online pada Twitter dengan Menggunakan Metode Naïve Bayes," Skripsi: Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, 2018.
- [2] A. Burgess-Proctor, J. W. Patchin, and S. Hinduja, "Cyberbullying and online harassment: Reconceptualizing the victimization of adolescent girls," in *Cyberbullying and Online Harassment*, 2009, pp. 162–176.
- [3] R. S. Tokunaga, "Following you home from school: a critical review and synthesis of research on cyber bullying victimization," *Comput. Human Behav.*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 277–287, 2010.
- [4] D. E. Reidy, A. Zeichner, J. D. Foster, and M. A. Martinez, "Effects of narcissistic entitlement and exploitativeness on human physical aggression," *Pers. Individ. Dif.*, vol. 44, no. 4, pp. 865–875, 2008.
- [5] T. Lubis, "Performansi Partisipasi Pembelajaran Bahasa di Politeknik LP3I Medan," *Basastra J. Kaji. Bhs. dan Sastra Indones.*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 70–87, 2019.
- [6] S. Shaumiwaty *et al.*, "Teacher performance toward students' mathematical literacy in teaching linear program mathematical models," *J. Phys. Conf. Ser.*, vol. 1663, p. 012066, Oct. 2020.
- [7] E.-M. Engelen and B. Röttger-Rössler, "Current Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Debates on Empathy," *Emot. Rev.*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 3–8, Jan. 2012.
- [8] J. Decety and P. L. Jackson, "The Functional Architecture of Human Empathy," *Behav. Cogn. Neurosci. Rev.*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 71–100, Jun. 2004.
- [9] T. Lubis, "Learning Nandong in schools as a medium to inform the Simeuluenese local wisdom: An anthropolinguistics approach," *Stud. English Lang. Educ.*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 262–272, 2019.
- [10] K. Gerdes and E. A. Segal, "A social work model of empathy," *Adv. Soc. Work*, vol. 10, pp. 114–127, 2009.
- [11] T. Lubis, "Indeksikalitas dalam Perspektif Antropolinguistik," in *Seminar Antarbangsa Kajian Linguistik dan Kearifan Lokal*, 2017.
- [12] R. Del Rey *et al.*, "Structural validation and cross-cultural robustness of the European Cyberbullying Intervention Project Questionnaire," *Comput. Human Behav.*, vol. 50, p. 1410147, 2015.
- [13] B. J. O'Keefe and B. L. L., *Effect of Message Design Logic on The Content and Communication of Situation Presentation*. Indiana: University of Illinois, 1988.
- [14] T. Lubis and A. Purba, "Metaphor and parallelism in political advertisements," *Cogency*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 71–88, Dec. 2020.
- [15] S. Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse*. Birmingham, England: Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1973.