



A Critical Discourse Analysis of Sexual Harassment Against Women in Online Mass Media

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Abstract

This study used Fairclough's critical discourse analysis theory to analyse the news articles published in Magdalene and Femina magazines in 2020. The authors particularly emphasised finding one of three aspects of Fairclough's socio-cultural practice: power. From this point, the authors attempted to find out the depiction of women and the stance of the contributors in the news articles about sexual harassment. This study found that the aspect of power constructed by contributors from news articles and magazines depicted women and men as vulnerable groups to sexual harassment. However, the harassment is described as still predominantly experienced by women. The findings also suggested that the contributors attempted to oppose male domination and power relations in the scope of work, especially in cyber sexual harassment.

INTRODUCTION

The mass media hold the key to all power. The power of mass media is reflected in the form of editorial policy, vision, and hence ideology as the source of the power game. Moreover, the mass media has acted as a new social institution that correlated to the production and distribution of knowledge. Thus, the public's knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours about phenomena and policymaking are shaped by media discourse (Van Dijk, 1993).

Of the many online news in Indonesia, magazines have been transformed from printed into online platforms. Some of these online media

consistently publish news articles about women. For example, Femina is one of Indonesia's women's magazines that has been circulating for decades. Founded in 1972, it has a target readership of women by featuring news articles mainly about family and lifestyle. Meanwhile, *Magdalene* is a relatively new online media platform established in September 2013 and focused on gender issues and advocacy, especially for women. However, it also publishes news articles on gender in a broader scope.

Gender as a social entity plays an essential role in the community so that various interests and ideologies are involved. This study aimed to examine

Fairclough's socio-cultural practices and emphasised the analysis of power. Thus, the study results were expected to show how the mass media can shape the depiction of sexual harassment to women and how article contributors show their power in their news article writing.

Previously there were some related studies of gender in the media. A study showed that women's media could portray their problems analysed through the idea inside. The contents of popular magazines articles and writers' guidebooks showed that women were becoming victims and had to be responsible for keeping their sexual harassment problems privately (Berns, 1999). Furthermore, all texts forced the women to find solutions to this domestic violence. It also discovered that leading popular teen magazines used to analyse the differences in how young women face the social revolution. The changes in young men's images characterised as sensitive and respectful become emotional and superior. The findings revealed that young women were more likely to be amazed by men who personally improved themselves than anything close to social or political areas (Prusank, 2007).

Furthermore, a study found that some other gender issues had been found in the magazines. Ten leading titles during ten years depicted unbalance of responsibility between men and women. Moreover, domestic violence exposed women as a gender who experience culpable treatment, while men as actors who had no guilt when hurting women. This condition triggered a worse impact where the appropriate identities for both men and women could not be

accomplished (Nettleton, 2011). It is supported by the findings from the study that described news media still framing women who experience inappropriate attitudes from others. Starting from domestic to wider scopes, women seem inconceivable to have a balance status. Furthermore, a study found a limitation for the news media in reporting women's rights ultimately. These issues are about females' violence and other harmful treatments (McDonald & Charlesworth, 2013).

Gender superiority also happened in Japan. It can be depicted from media containing political, economic, and social aspects. Japanese female victims were domestically categorised as powerless and in need of help. Meanwhile, the #MeToo movement had promoted the initiation of Japanese feminists. This action became optimistic for the equality of men's and women's identities in Japan (Zhang et al., 2022). In addition, gender-based violence is not only portrayed in online media but also experienced in daily life. This phenomenon has closely associated with women in Morocco. The research tried to affirm the relationship between stereotypes and violence committed against women. Their existence in the power structures was devoted to inequality of gender roles, even leading to violence in a public places. Moreover, women likely have no wide spaces to explore themselves, either in public or private, compared with men (Chafai, 2017).

A case such as sexual violence has attracted wide world attention. In New Delhi, for example, some parts of the news media had published one criminal case. It happened to a young woman

being raped and murdered by a brutal gang. The US news media used verbal and visual texts to represent this issue. The results placed men as the fierce gender and women as minor actors, and the state was also more likely responsible for rendering women to sexual violence (Durham, 2015).

Furthermore, the female journalists as victims felt fear to speak about their problems to the public in the journalistic industry. Their significant perception was revenge that they might experience after reposting their cases. Then, being silent was the best way to keep them safe at their workplace (North, 2016).

Recognising public reaction toward sexual assault has crucially been discussed by some researchers. One of them was an accident done by two leading verdicts from Ireland and Spain in 2018. The Irish media have mostly reported the case of this sexual violence on a broader scope. Also, the media revealed no critics of the court system. In comparison, Spanish media reported broader discussion particularly related to feminism matter (Prendergast & Quinn, 2020).

On top of that, women have become a prominent object of gender inequality. It is included in the media and political sectors. The #MeToo movement as a leading media disclosed the persecution done by the male political leaders. On the other side, no statement tried to raise this issue. Moreover, this condition seems to be acknowledged as a natural condition in the workplace (Dalton, 2019).

Lastly, CDA and trauma studies' linguistic discourse was used to investigate the emotion of the magazine's customers. The research tried to

demonstrate the significance of the discursive practices of emotion for Cosmopolitan to construct a discourse of empowerment. The findings revealed that Cosmopolitan's readiness to allow the accounts of sexual violence relies on the discursive practices employed in the self-narratives (Rodi-Risberg & Höglund, 2018)

This study aimed to look at socio-cultural practice components of Fairclough's (1992) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory, specifically socio-cultural practices in two online media called *Magdalene* and *Femina*. This study aims to uncover one of three components of socio-cultural practice that is power. The author attempted to examine how women were depicted in the news article and investigated how the contributors positioned themselves in the news articles.

METHOD AND THEORY

There were two selected news articles to be analysed in this study. These articles were selected from news articles from *Magdalene* written by Haryadi (2020) and *Femina* written by Liswijayanti (2020). Two fundamental reasons were applied in the selection. First, the news articles were written by female contributors who shared their perspectives on sexual harassment against women during the new normal. Secondly, both platforms have consistently presented news articles regarding gender, especially women.

This study examined the power of online media in Indonesia by employing Fairclough's three dimensional, primarily socio-cultural practice. In Fairclough's CDA theory, a three-dimensional model is called text, discursive practice and social practice. According to Fairclough, every communicative event has three

dimensions: first, it is a text (speech, writing, visual images or these three aspects combined). Second, it is a discursive practice that entails creating and consuming texts. Finally, it is, third and foremost, a social practice. According to Fairclough, every communicative event has three dimensions: first, it is a text (speech, writing, visual images or these three aspects combined). Second, it is a discursive practice that entails creating and consuming texts. Finally, it is, third and foremost, a social practice.

Fairclough also established three stages of CDA as the framework for text and discourse analysis: description (the linguistic description of the text's formal properties); interpretation (the interpretation of the relationship between discursive processes/interaction and the text, where text is the end product of a text production process as well as a resource in the text interpretation process); and explanation (the relationship between discourse and social and cultural reality).

Text (Description)

The text includes linguistic features such as vocabulary (wording), grammar (transitivity, passive form), and text structure (thematic choice, turn-taking system) should be rigorously studied throughout the description stage. It is the initial phase, and the object is text. Text is mainly involved with the vocabulary section, grammar section, and textual structures section. The vocabulary section mainly deals with the choice of different words; grammar is about the grammatical features.

Discursive Practice (Interpretation)

Discursive practice defines interpretation as the relationship between text and interaction, whereas the text is the product of production and the recourse in the process of interpretation. In this dimension, discourse is not merely regarded as text but also a discursive

practice which implies that besides the text, factors such as speech act and intertextuality must be given attention. Text as a discursive practice includes two processes called institutional process, and the other is discourse process. It is related to how people produce and interpret the news discourse should be considered. Thereby, the news source and reporting modes should be worthy of exploration in the interpretive stage of news reports.

Social Practice (Explanation)

Social practice emphasises the relationship between interaction and social context with the social determinants of the process of production and interpretation, along with their social effects. Social practice is related to the historical, social, and cultural contexts. In this practice, factors like ideology or power are taken into account to fully explain the interaction between social-cultural context and the production and consumption of texts.

There are parts of social practice. Firstly, power means to influence and dominate to influence others. The process of influence can be done by force and or purposive. It suits the purpose of the influencer. Thus, the more power the influencer has, the stronger the effect of this power domination. It also applies to language as the source of power in discourse that relates to social institutions. Language manipulation and control can be categorised as power such as instruction, evaluation of the participant's verbal behaviour, questions, interruption, tone, explicitness, controlling topic, reformulation, and repetition.

The second is the identity which is how the individuals relate to the society, and thus it allows to capture how individuals affiliate or distance themselves in the particular society. In addition, identity also determines what kind of information individuals aim to convey about themselves and how this

information resonates with the ideas that others hold about them. It is impossible to claim that individuals are neutral, value-free, or apolitical in discourse as there is always ideological value within each individual.

Lastly, the third aspect of social practice is the relation. Relations are established by the people who interpret it and the relationship between the public and audiences, writer and the reader, speaker and the hearer. However, although all three aspects are inseparable, the author emphasised only the use of power in the online news article in this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There are two articles studied in this study. The first news article was sourced from *Magdalene* entitled "Survei: Pelecehan Seksual di Tempat Kerja Pindah ke Dunia Maya di Tengah Pandemi" (Survey: Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Moves to the Virtual World during the Pandemic").

It was published on 17 June 2020. The second news article was sourced from *Femina*, entitled "Pelecehan Seksual Pekerja Marak Terjadi Saat WFH" (Sexual Harassment of Workers Recurring During WFH). It was published on 13 October 2020. Since the news article from *Magdalene* was published before *Femina*, it became the first daSocio-cultural *Practice in Magdalene*

In this study, there were six findings of power forms in *Magdalene* as follows:

1. *Dalam situasi kerja dari rumah akibat pandemi virus corona (COVID-19), para pekerja ternyata masih rentan terkena pelecehan seksual.*

(In working from home situations due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, workers are still vulnerable to sexual harassment).

2. *Bukan lagi di kantor, para pelaku kini melancarkan aksinya melalui medium*

teknologi komunikasi digital seperti aplikasi pesan, media sosial, dan webinar.

(No longer in the office, the perpetrators are now launching their actions through the medium of digital communication technology such as messaging applications, social media, and webinars).

3. *Fakta tersebut juga diperburuk dengan tidak adanya kebijakan tertulis yang dibuat sebagian besar perusahaan guna menangani kasus pelecehan seksual.*

(This fact is also exacerbated by the absence of written policies made by most companies to deal with cases of sexual harassment).

4. *Sikap perusahaan yang seolah belum menganggap penting pencegahan maupun penanganan kasus pelecehan seksual membuat para pekerja memiliki kepercayaan yang minim terhadap perusahaan bila kasus itu menimpa dirinya.*

(The company's attitude that seems to have not considered the importance of preventing or handling cases of sexual harassment makes the workers have minimal trust in the company if the case happens to them).

5. *Tantangannya, ujar Valentina, belum ada definisi yang jelas mengenai terminologi pelecehan seksual itu sendiri.*

(The challenge, said Valentina, is that there is no clear definition of the term sexual harassment itself).

6. *Ellen dari SAFENet mengatakan, saat ini adalah momentum bagi perusahaan-perusahaan untuk membangun situasi kerja yang lebih baik, terlebih dalam hal pencegahan dan penanganan pelecehan seksual di dunia kerja.*

(Ellen from SafeNet said that now is the momentum for companies to build a better work situation, especially in preventing and handling sexual harassment in the workplace).

Socio-cultural Practice in Femina

Similarly to the previous finding, there were six findings on the form of power in *Femina* as follows:

1. *Tuntutan untuk bekerja dari rumah atau work from home (WFH) yang terjadi di tengah pandemi, nyatanya tidak mengurangi terjadinya kasus kekerasan seksual di lingkungan kerja.*

(The demands to work from home or work from home (WFH) that occurred during a pandemic did not reduce the occurrence of cases of sexual harassment in the work environment).

2. *Pelecehan seksual selama WFH ini bisa terjadi pada siapapun, tidak terbatas pada gender wanita saja, pria pun bisa mengalaminya.*

(Sexual harassment during WFH can happen to anyone, not just women, men can experience it too).

3. *Adapun tenaga kontrak atau outsourcing menjadi kelompok yang paling rentan mengalami pelecehan seksual.*

(Contract workers or outsourcing are the most vulnerable group to sexual harassment).

4. *Adanya relasi kuasa yang kuat dalam praktik pelecehan seksual, membuat pelaku biasanya memilih korban yang lebih lemah dari dirinya, entah berdasarkan usia, status kerja, atau lainnya.*

(The existence of a strong power relationship in the practice of sexual harassment makes perpetrators usually choose victims who are weaker than themselves, whether based on age, work status, or others).

5. *Yang menarik, dalam lingkungan perusahaan yang mayoritas pekerjanya adalah pria, kasus pelecehan seksual lebih rentan muncul, dibandingkan perusahaan yang memiliki karyawan laki-laki dan perempuan yang seimbang.*

(Interestingly, in a company environment where most employees are male, cases of sexual harassment are more prone to

emerge than in companies that have equal male and female employees).

6. *Fakta bahwa banyak perusahaan yang belum memiliki kebijakan terkait pelecehan seksual selama WFH membuat kasus pelecehan seksual saat WFH seakan belum menjadi perhatian.*

(The fact that many companies do not have a policy regarding sexual harassment during WFH makes cases of sexual harassment during WFH seem not to be a concern).

Discussion

In the first news article, the title already showed the manifestation of power. The word 'survey' indicated that the circumstance was already investigated academically. Furthermore, the news article's position of males as superior and dominant while women remained in a vulnerable position in the workplace was described in *Magdalene's* news article using two ways, namely using the language of the contributor and the language of the experts. *Magdalene* attempted to strengthen the power to voice about sexual harassment not only by the contributor who wrote the news article and gave her views regarding sexual harassment. It was also inserted quotes from at least three experts who also commented on the circumstance. However, in the *Magdalene* news article, the contributor only emphasised women as the most vulnerable group and prone to be the victims. Meanwhile, men, especially those with power in the company, were depicted as harassers.

On the other hand, the second news article title showed lesser power than the previous one. It was only stated that sexual harassment constantly occurs during the WFH. Moreover, the contributor did not support the title with powerful words such as 'survey' like in the news article published by *Magdalene*. Besides, the author only describes the form of sexual harassment without support from external voices such as

excerpts from experts' interviews. However, in contrast to *Magdalene*, who only focuses on sexual harassment against women, *Femina* clearly stated its concern that men can also be the victim of sexual harassment.

CONCLUSION

Both women and men can be vulnerable and become victims of sexual harassment in the workplace during WFH. In this study, both news articles gave different emphasise on both genders. As depicted by *Magdalene*, women tended to be victims, while *Femina* showed that men could also be the victim. The similarity is that both media attempted to influence and convince the readers about workplace power relations that transformed into digital harassment during the current circumstance. However, men with power and dominance are still portrayed as the harasser, while women are victims of both men and the workplace system.

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