

# Catcalling as Street Harassment: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

**Keywords:**

Catcalling,  
Critical Discourse Analysis  
Street Harassment,  
Women.

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This study aims to explain the issue of catcalling as a form of harassment against women on the street. This research applies descriptive qualitative method which tries to identify, describe and explain phenomena through linguistic data along with the social and cultural context. The data were collected according to the research goal namely to explain the issue of catcalling depicted in the news text. The data were gathered by retrieving news text on catcalling issue from [wollipop.detik.com](http://wollipop.detik.com) and analyzed it using Fairclough's CDA framework. The results of the analysis show that in terms of text descriptions, the news writer used a variety of non-standard languages, informal word choices and the involvement of sources to support the issue. In terms of text interpretation, this media concentrates its news presentation on women-related issues by presenting its news which involves several sources to strengthen its reporting objectives. On the explanatory side of the text, the practice of discourse is associated with the socio-cultural context. [Wollipop.detik.com](http://Wollipop.detik.com) alignment with the victim in this report confirms indirectly that the act of catcalling is a form of harassment against women. Readers are led to the understanding that as subtle as catcalling is, it is still a form of violence against women. Readers are also led to raising awareness of their impact. Readers' opinions are directed to provide a positive image as an active media in providing useful information to women as well as to play an active role in voicing injustice and inequality that occurs in society.

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## INTRODUCTION

Women have full authority over their bodies. Especially in the public sphere, comfort and security are things all women should have gained in carrying out their activities. The increasing awareness of women about their potential in contributing positively to themselves and their environment makes women have fairly high mobility in addition to working in the domestic sphere.

However, one inevitable fact is that women in the public sphere are greatly vulnerable to sexual harassment or violence. A non-governmental organization Lentera Sintas Indonesia (LSI) in 2016 through its survey revealed that verbal sexual harassment was the most common type of sexual violence (Danoekoesomo & Hage, 2016). The survey took place in June 2016, with a total of 25,213 respondents from both cities and regions. 58 percent

of the respondents had experienced verbal sexual harassment. LSI also revealed that according to the National Commission for Women, there are several categories of sexual harassment. Verbal, physical, forced viewing of pornographic content, intimidation or threats during sexual activity, and rape.

One form of verbal sexual harassments is catcalling. Perhaps most women are unfamiliar with this term but if they were asked if they had ever been indecently whistled, called, or shouted in the street, most of them had. According to the Oxford Dictionary, catcalling is defined as whistles, calls, and comments of a sexual nature from a man to a woman who passes in front of him. Catcalling will develop into street harassment, which is a form of sexual harassments carried out in public places.

Seeing the background above, the researcher intends to explain further the phenomenon of sexual harassment on the street, that is, catcalling. This is a form of content analysis by taking news texts on [wollipop.detik.com](http://wollipop.detik.com) which reports about the verbal abuse experienced by Kevin Liliana, *Puteri Indonesia Lingkungan* who won Miss International 2017. This news was chosen because it had gone viral at the end of January 2019 via an instastory upload. With the news title “Mengenal Catcalling, Pelecehan yang dialami Miss International Kevin Liliana” (<https://wollipop.detik.com/love/d-4408986/menenal-catcalling-pelecehan-yang-dialami-miss-international-kevin-lilliana>), the journalist told the chronology of the harassment incident experienced by Kevin as told by Kevin through his instastory upload on Instagram.

Furthermore, this study aims to describe and explain cases of sexual harassment experienced by one of these public figures by employing Fairclough's (1989) critical discourse analysis framework. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) views discourse not merely as a linguistic study, although it uses language in the text to be analyzed. CDA is used to describe the relationship of domination, discrimination, power and control which is manifested through language. In other words, CDA aims to critically investigate social inequalities as expressed, constructed and legitimized using language or discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, pp. 2-3).

In line with the opinion above, Darma (2014, p. 100) asserts that the main agenda of CDA is to reveal how power, domination and inequality are practiced, reproduced and countered by written texts or discussions in social and political contexts. This is in accordance with what Fairclough (1993, p. 135) stated which explained the main purpose of CDA revealing causality and determination relationships between discursive practices, events and texts with broader sociocultural structures, relationships and processes, explaining how texts, events and social practices it emerges and is shaped ideologically by relations of power and those against it.

In his analytical model, Fairclough (1995, p. 58) provides three dimensions of discourse analysis as follows:

1. The dimensions of the text (microstructure) were analyzed linguistically. This is done by looking at vocabulary or diction, semantics and syntax or in other words, looking at the formal properties of the text.
2. Discourse practice (mesostructure) is a dimension related to the process of production, consumption and distribution of texts.
3. Socio-cultural (macro structure) practices are dimensions related to contexts outside the text that influence the media in producing texts.

Furthermore, in the analysis, the text is analyzed through three different stages which include (1) description used to analyze the text, including cohesion and coherence, grammar, and diction, (2) interpretation to analyze text interpretation, including production, distribution, and consumption. text, and (3) explanation to analyze sociocultural practices that include situational, institutional, and social aspects. In this paper, Fairclough's analytical model is employed to reveal social practices prevailing in society regarding cases of verbal abuse reported by the online news portal [wollipop.detik.com](http://wollipop.detik.com) against an Indonesian public figure.

## METHODS

This research is descriptive qualitative research. This is classified as qualitative since it aims to explain socio-cultural phenomena that exist in society through the linguistic data collected. Wolcott (as cited in Cresswell, 2009, p. 36) argues that qualitative research develops a description of the setting, analyzes data into several categories and makes interpretations from a personal point of view based on social and cultural backgrounds. In addition, this research is descriptive in the sense that the data are presented as it is in a systematically and factually regarding the data, its nature and its relation to the catcalling phenomenon. In this case, it is represented by the text and the social practices that are built on that issue.

The data source of this research is a news text about verbal abuse experienced by Kevin Lilliana which was published in the online media [wolipop.detik.com](https://wolipop.detik.com) and published on January 31, 2019. This news text can be downloaded via the link <https://wolipop.detik.com/love/d-4408986/mengenal-catcalling-harassing-yang-dialami-miss-international-kevin-lilliana> (Kartikawati, 2019). This shows the data is important to be discussed in a scientific framework. Meanwhile, secondary data in the form of articles and research results related to issues were also involved to support data analysis.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument in the research, including the data collection process. The data in this study were collected according to the researcher's goal, that is to explain the issue of catcalling which is depicted in the news text. Here, the researcher thoroughly selected the text to reveal the issue of catcalling in Indonesia. The data were collected by means of content analysis by downloading it via the link <https://wolipop.detik.com/love/d-4408986/mengenal-catcalling-pelecehan-yang-dialami-miss-international-kevin-lilliana>. The data were accessed on February 17, 2022. In addition, secondary data in the form of articles and findings relevant to the topic of this paper were also collected in the same way.

Following the above-mentioned research design, this research is under a qualitative framework. Therefore, data analysis methods and techniques were adapted to this framework. The data analysis technique begins with the identification of the data according to the research objectives. The description is carried out from a linguistic point of view which includes aspects of text structure, diction, emotive expressions, and selection of sources. Furthermore, the data were interpreted how the text interacts seen from the producers and consumers of the text. Finally, the interpretation results explain how the text and the socio-cultural context interplay. These steps refer to the data analysis step of the Fairclough model (1989) which has been further explained in the theoretical study.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Through Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, the discussion of this research begins with a description, interpretation, and explanation. At the text description stage, 21 data were identified linguistically to reveal the micro-structural aspects of the text. Linguistic tools used to represent themes and people include (1) the structure of the text, (2) diction, emotive expressions, and (3) the selection of sources. Furthermore, interpretation is carried out on discourse processing such as the process of production, distribution, and consumption of texts. Finally, the explanation is carried out to connect the practice of discourse and social practice.

### Description

#### *Text Structure*

The text structure is a unified form (symbol/textual) and meaning (experiential, logical and rhetorical or interpersonal) of a text which as a whole show certain social goals/functions (Santosa, 2003, p. 60). In this case, the news text as a form of the communicative event generally begins with an orientation, followed by a

sequence of events, then ends with a closing; or briefly, news rhetoric consists of opening, content and closing sections (Sumarlam, 2013, p. 42). For more details, the table 1 is presented as follows. Table 1. text structure.

The news text above is built from four discourse units, namely title, orientation, events, and closing. The title as the first unit functions to convey that there are important events that occur that are worthy of being known by newsreaders. The title 'Mengenai Catcalling, Pelecehan yang dialami Miss International Kevin Liliana' (Recognizing catcalling, sexual harassment experienced by Miss International Kevin Liliana) tries to attract readers' attention with the word catcalling which some readers may not know the meaning of. Topicalization of the discourse Recognizing catcalling is an emphasis on the issue to be conveyed and arouses the readers' curiosity. Moreover, the word harassment and the presence of Miss International complete the issue to be raised. The title is made as attractive, persuasive, even as provocative as possible to draw the reader's attention.

Then, orientation is part of the second unit which aims to introduce the core of the events reported. In this case, the orientation provides information about Kevin Liliana, Miss International as well as *Putri Indonesia Lingkungan* who is a victim of catcalling and has gone viral on social media. Furthermore, the details of the event are built from several data, namely datum 3 to datum 16 which provides more detailed and complete information.

The details of the event begin with the chronology of the incident. This is followed by a direct quote from Kevin herself (datum 4 and 6) taken from the status on her instastory. Then, this is even strengthened by datum 7 which catcalling is experienced by many women not only in Indonesia but in the world. This is reinforced by data 8-11 which present empirical shreds of evidence from research by several organizations and institutions. Furthermore, news writers provide more concrete information about forms of catcalling (data 12-14). This discourse unit ends with datum 15 and 16 which describe Kevin's reaction as a victim who fights against this form of harassment by posting it on social media and urges other victims not to hesitate to fight the perpetrator and the catcalling act.

Finally, the closing as the last unit of discourse presents information that serves to close the delivery of information on the events that occurred. This text closes with a call to fight against all forms of catcalling as it harms women which can lead to self-objectification.

### ***Diction***

The choice of words is exploited by news makers in such a way as to convey information and influence the reader on the issues being raised. The choice of words in this text is dominated by informal or non-standard forms and emotive expressions. This form can be found in quotes written by Kevin through her Instagram (data 4 & 6) such as the use of the words aku ( I), bener-bener (really), kasih klakson (blow horn), nengok (look), ngerasa (feel), ga (no, don't), nengok (look), nyetir (drive), cium-cium sambil merem (showing kissing gesture while closing eyes), jijik banget (extremely disgusted), digituin (being treated such a way). In this context, Kevin as a text producer shares his personal experience without casually with his followers. The variety of informal language is chosen and under the form of personal discourse. In addition, news makers pack their news in a more relaxed language by using interrogative sentences and pronouns kamu (you) as if inviting readers to interact directly discussing the issues raised as in datum 11 'Apakah kamu juga yang termasuk pernah mengalami catcalling?' ('Are you also the one who has experienced catcalling?'). The use of the singular second person pronoun "you" shows an interactive communication pattern by representing informality with close social distance.

Table 1. Text structure

No.	Text	Discourse units
1.	Mengenal <i>Catcalling</i> , Pelecehan yang Dialami Miss International Kevin	Title
2.	Puteri Indonesia Lingkungan yang menjadi juara Miss International 2017 Kevin Lilliana berbagi kisah mengalami <i>catcalling</i> yang kini viral.	Orientation
3.	Dalam ceritanya Kevin mengungkapkan <i>catcalling</i> terjadi saat dia berjalan kaki untuk menunggu taksi	
4.	"Aku bener bener muak sama yang namanya CAT CALLING aku ngetik ini sampai gemeter!!!! Sore ini aku keluar pakai baju formal, ada lengan, panjang rok selutut. Sangat sopan! Tapi badan aku tinggi mungkin cenderung nyita perhatian," tulis Kevin.	
5.	Ia mengaku sengaja jalan keluar dan tidak menunggu taksi di dalam apartemen, karena dengan begitu taksi harus masuk ke kompleks apartemen dan memutar terlebih dahulu. Untuk efisiensi waktu, Kevin pun memilih menunggu dan bertemu taksi langsung di depan apartemennya.	
6.	"Ketika lagi jalan, ada mobil CRV ABU yang tiba tiba kasih klakson kecil (reflek nengok karena ngerasa ga ngalengin jalan) ketika aku nengok yang nyetir itu bapak-bapak botak pakai kacamata terus dia pasang muka CIUM CIUM SAMBIL MEREM! Sumpah jijik banget aku digituin!!!" lanjut Kevin.	
7.	Catcalling seperti yang dialami Kevin pada Rabu (30/1/2019) itu juga terjadi pada banyak wanita di berbagai belahan dunia.	
8.	Riset yang dilakukan organisasi nonprofit bernama <i>Stop Street Harassment</i> menemukan tiga dari empat wanita pernah mengalami catcalling.	
9.	Dan berdasarkan riset <i>Hollaback!</i> bersama Cornell University pada 2014, sebagian besar wanita di seluruh dunia mengalami catcalling pertama kali saat masa puber.	Events
10.	Contohnya di Argentina, 95% wanita di sana mengaku mengalami pelecehan di jalan pertama kalinya sebelum mereka berusia 17. 90% wanita di Inggris juga mengungkapkan hal yang sama.	
11.	Apakah kamu juga yang termasuk pernah mengalami catcalling? Buat kamu yang masih belum memahami, seperti dikutip dari Women Republic, <i>catcalling</i> merupakan istilah ketika seorang pria bersiul, berteriak, memanggil atau membuat komentar yang menyinggung seksualitas dan tubuh seorang wanita di jalan.	
12.	Bentuk catcalling ini bisa bermacam-macam.	
13.	Contoh dari catcalling di antaranya ketika pria sambil bersiul-siul memanggil wanita dengan 'hei cewek, mau ke mana', 'cewek senyum dong', 'hei manis'.	
14.	Dan contoh lainnya seperti yang dialami Kevin Lilliana, si pria memanggil runner up-1 Puteri Indonesia itu dengan klakson kemudian memasang ekspresi mencium sambil memejamkan mata.	
15.	Kevin dengan berani berbicara di media sosial mengenai catcalling yang dialaminya itu.	
16.	Dia pun dengan lantang menyuarakan untuk stop menganggap catcalling adalah sebuah kewajiban.	
17.	Kenapa catcalling ini harus dilawan dan tidak lagi dianggap sebagai hal yang biasa?	
18.	Tentunya selain itu adalah sebuah bentuk pelecehan, catcalling juga berdampak negatif pada wanita.	
19.	Seperti dikutip The Independent, riset dari University of Melbourne mengungkapkan pelecehan seks di jalan bisa menyebabkan mengalami objektifikasi diri sendiri (self-objectification).	
20.	Ketika hal itu terjadi, wanita tidak lagi melihat dirinya sebagai seorang manusia melainkan sebuah obyek.	Closing
21.	Sehingga ini bisa memengaruhi kepercayaan diri mereka, ketika wanita harus terus-menerus memerhatikan penampilannya sebagai seorang obyek.	

In addition, the use of emotive words dominates the findings. The emotive words are found in direct utterances in the form of quotes, including the words *muak*, (*disgusted*), *gemeter* (*trembled*), and *jijik* (*cringed*). These words were chosen by Kevin in her post to show and represent her anger as well as hatred towards catcalling

perpetrators. She did not accept being treated inappropriately while waiting for an online taxi outside her apartment because she felt she dressed herself decently but added that his posture enabled her to attract the perpetrator's attention more. The word *jijik* with the addition of an intensifier *banget* shows Kevin's resentment when the perpetrator makes a degrading expression as if kissing her while closing his eyes. She even approached the perpetrator to reprimand him, but the perpetrator immediately closed his car window. In addition, the use of word capitalization in *CATCALLING* (datum 4) and *CRV ABU, CIUM CIUM SAMBIL MEREM* (datum 6) provides emphasis and an explicit message regarding the perpetrator's actions and what he was driving at that time. In addition, she also took a picture of the perpetrator's car and mentioned the characteristics of the perpetrator (bald men wearing glasses) so that other people could easily identify them if they met him. This is also a form of resistance and empowerment to respond to catcalling.

### *Selection of Sources*

In compiling the report, the news writer involves several sources whose function is to strengthen the catcalling issue raised. The main resource person used was Kevin Liliana, the victim of the catcalling herself, through her post on Instagram. By presenting it in direct quotations (data 4 and 6), the news writer wants to lead the readers to feel what Kevin was experiencing. Kevin's expressive narration further strengthens the message to attract readers' empathy.

Moreover, this media uses several sources and institutions to tone up the news, including (1) Stop Street Harassment, (2) ihollaback, (3) Cornell University, and (4) University of Melbourne. The non-profit organization Stop Street Harassment, which has been aggressively voicing and campaigning against all forms of women's harassment (accessible at [www.stopstreetharassment.org](http://www.stopstreetharassment.org)) stated the vulnerability (3 out of 4) women experienced harassment on the street. In addition, joint research conducted by a US-based organization with the main agenda of fighting all forms of harassment, ihollaback, and Cornell University confirms the fact that many women in the world experience the same thing as Kevin. Furthermore, research conducted by the University of Melbourne revealed the negative impact on victims of catcalling which had been considered trivial. The selection of sources and the interpretation of messages in this news shows there is a reality construction practice of catcalling highlighted in news packaging.

### **Interpretation**

In this stage of analysis, interpretation is made of the production, consumption and distribution of the text. Discourse practices include the ways media workers produce texts. The wollipop news website is under [www.detik.com](http://www.detik.com) management. Detik.com itself is an online news portal that was founded on May 30, 1998. This news site does not have a print edition, only an online edition. In contrast to [detik.com](http://detik.com) which presents news that mostly talks about the world of politics, economy, social, and culture, the wollipop tends to present news or articles about lifestyle, women from different perspectives, including fashion, hijab, beauty, sale and shop, entertainment, love and sex, wedding, home and living, ask the expert, and index. This can be seen if you open the wollipop website, these pages will be immediately presented.

In its presentation, this media uses concise, clear and solid composition yet pliable. The fluid sentence structures make the readers experience reading at ease. This cannot be separated from the targeted readers, namely adolescent and adult women. For instance, regarding the teenagers and young adult readers, the news would be likely packaged in a loose, relaxed composition. In contrast, compared to the more mature target readers, the news would be presented in a more formal yet still relaxed tone. To better persuade the readers of

the issues raised and make it more interesting, this media often complements it with pictures or inserts videos that support the issue.

### **Explanation**

The explanatory dimension is a macro-structural dimension grounding in the premise that the social context outside the media affects how the discourse exists in the media. Editors and journalists are not neutral and value-free parties, rather, they are very much determined by factors outside the media itself. Socio-cultural practices cover three factors, namely economics, politics (particularly related to issues of power and ideology), and culture (related to values and identity) which also influence media institutions and their discourses. The discussion of socio-cultural practices includes three aspects. The situational aspect relates to the production and context of the situation; the institutional aspect is related to the influence of the institution internally and externally, while the social aspect is related to more macro situations such as the political system, the economic system, and the cultural system of society as a whole.

On the situational aspect, the catcalling case experienced by Kevin Liliana went viral on social media on January 30, 2019, when she shared her experience on Instagram and explained the chronology of the incident. The upload was shared by netizens including several online media (voice.com, glitzmedia.co, beritagar.id).

Meanwhile, on the institutional aspect, the text involved several parties, including Kevin as a victim, two non-profit organizations, Stop Street Harassment and ihollaback, two institutions namely Cornell University institutions and the University of Melbourne. This news-making media deliberately displays several direct quotes from victims to draw attention and at the same time emphasize the importance of this issue being known by women. Two non-profit organizations that are consistently voicing the experiences of women on the street provide accurate information and are concerned about the research findings. Furthermore, to strengthen the news, two educational institutions were presented to explain further the rampant catcalling happening all over the globe. Even the University of Melbourne explains the negative impact of catcalling victims with self-objectification. All of this is intended to make readers, especially women, aware of the seriousness of catcalling.

In the aspect of social context, the news produced by wollipop.detik.com is closely related to the existence of the media in providing information about the world of women from various perspectives. There is a certain motivation that is constructed by this media behind the news. Wollipop, detik.com's alignment with the victim in this report confirms indirectly that the act of catcalling is a form of harassment against women. Readers are led to the understanding that no matter how simple the form of catcalling is, it is a form of violence against women and is not justified for any reason.

Readers are also guided to raising awareness about the impact of catcalling. In the Indonesian context, the government recently proved its concern by the passing of the Sexual Violence Crimes law on April 12, 2022. It took place just eight days after the Bandung High Court sentenced Wirawan, a schoolteacher accused of raping 13 students between the ages of 11 and 16, shocked Indonesians when it was made public last December to death following his conviction. Prosecutors had appealed his previous sentence of life imprisonment, which was way beyond the 15-year jail term recommended for sexual violence crimes against children (Guzman, 2022). The long-awaited bill to tackle sexual violence has been finally passed to provide a legal framework for victims to secure justice in a country where sexual abuse has often been regarded as a private matter including in the form of catcalling. Meanwhile, readers' opinions are directed to give a positive image to this

media as an active medium in providing useful information to women as well as playing an active role in voicing injustice and inequality that occurs in society.

## CONCLUSION

Catcalling is a form of harassment that some Indonesians are not aware of. The viral case of Kevin Lilliana's Catcalling was used by the media wollipop.detik.com to spread information about the abuse that is rampantly experienced by women, which has been like an iceberg between what was revealed in the media and the real facts on the ground. Wollipop through its form and style of news presentation takes its stance on women as victims of catcalling. This media portrays itself as an active media providing information about women from various perspectives.

Readers' opinions are led to give a positive image to this media, which actively provides useful information to women and at the same time plays an active role in voicing the injustices and inequalities that occur in society. This is even more enforced by the recent Indonesian lawmakers who have just passed the Sexual Violence Crimes Law on April 12, 2022, for a more secure justice related to sexual violence issues including catcalling.

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