Audiences' Perception of Rape Euphemism In the Sexual Violence News in Online Media

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ABSTRACT

Online media is a form of mass media that is close to society, especially in the era of increasingly massive development of information and communication technology. One type of information that the public is interested in in online media is news, especially cases of sexual violence such as rape. Rape is a serious crime because it harms the victim from physical and psychological aspects. Reporting about rape incidents generally applies euphemisms for verbs that represent heinous acts. In some cases of rape, the criminal act is replaced with several words such as "digagahi", "dicabuli", "dirudapaksa", even if the perpetrator is more than one person, the word choice used is "digilir". The aim of this research is to describe public perceptions regarding the replacement of the word rape in reporting about sexual violence in online media. The results of this research found that respondents felt that it was important for the media to replace the word rape because it made the news more polite and more comfortable to read. The pronouns most frequently read by respondents were molested and fucked. Furthermore, this research also found that some word choices actually perpetuate the dominance of perpetrators, who are mostly male, over victims, who are usually women or minors.

Keyword: *euphemism, news, online media, rape, perception.*

INTRODUCTION

Online media is media that is close to society. Various types of news on online news portals can be accessed anywhere and anytime. Online news has various type information such as entertainment, sports, politics, law, and many kinds of various online news has various types of information such as entertainment, sports, politics, law, and many kinds of other information. In some cases, online media euphemisms for the word rape become *digagahi, disetubuhi, dicabuli*, and *dirudapaksa.* The media use the word euphemism for "pemerkosaan" because, in some communities, it is considered taboo. Word euphemism in the news is the replacement of words considered taboo, rude, impolite, and detrimental by society to more polite ones. If we viewed from a legal perspective, rape is a serious criminal act that has a negative impact on the physical and psychological aspects of the victim. Ashyar (2011), stated that euphemisms in the news aim to disguise criminal incidents, apart from the politeness aspect. Writing news about rape must comply with the code of ethics in journalism and press law in accordance to conveyed with journalistic language ethics.

This can be seen in Article 8, Code of Ethics Journalism that reads " *Wartawan Indonesia tidak menulis atau menyiarkan berita berdasarkan prasangka atau diskriminasi terhadap seseorang atas dasar perbedaan suku, ras, warna kulit, agama, jenis kelamin, dan bahasa serta tidak merendahkan martabat orang lemah, miskin, sakit, cacat jiwa atau Ada 2 butir pada pasal ini: a). Prasangka adalah anggapan yang kurang baik mengenai sesuatu sebelum mengetahui secara jelas b) Diskriminasi adalah pembedaan perlakuan".* Implementing a code of ethic is crucial for journalist because it addresses their moral obligations and professional skills, ensuring the adhere to the standard of their profession. By adhering to a code of ethics, journalist can help safeguard the public misinformation, bias, and other potential negative impacts of media reporting. This protection is critical as journalist have significant influence in shaping public perception and constructing reality.

It means reporting with prejudice and discrimination against women is strictly prohibited. Some news about rape cases replaces the word "pemerkosaan," such as *dicabuli, dirudapaksa, digagahi*, and several other words that aim to euphemize it. Moreover, in rape cases where there was more than one perpetrator, their action is written "digilir". This word choice leads the audience to different perceptions. WHO (2017), defines sexual violence as any sexual act, attempt to commit a sexual act, comments, or suggestions for sexual behavior, intentionally or unintentionally, as well as the act of forcing sexual intercourse. Sexual violence refers to any sexual activity which can be assault or non-assault. Sexual assault can induce suffering in physical injuries, but non-assault can lead to emotional or psychological trauma. Salamor & Salamor (2022) stated that types of sexual violence include being seduced, poked, forced to hug, squeezed, forced to masturbate, oral sex, anal sex, and rape. Sexual violence is an action, both physical and non-physical, by someone who has power over the victim, which aims to fulfill the perpetrator's sexual desires towards the victim, where this action is not desired by the victim (Harahap & Elfiandri, 2021). Sexual violence usually begins with an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. This imbalance is further exacerbated by the perpetrator's control over the victim (Rossy, 2015).

The IJRS survey in 2021 found that in cases of sexual violence, people still have the view that it happened because of the victim's fault, such as being flirtatious, dressing openly, not being able to look after themselves, and several other things that encourage the perpetrator to commit acts of violence (IJRS, 2021). This shows that cases of sexual violence, especially rape that occur are the victim's sexual fault, especially if the victims are women and children. Rape is one of the criminal acts of sexual violence that often appear in the news, both in online and offline media. In several news, the word rape is often replaced with several other words which are considered to soften the word, such as *rudapaksa, digagahi, dicabuli, ditiduri* , and many more. The media often use dramatization and emphasis on sensation to attract attention when reporting rape cases. In the media, text language is used as a determinant of the meaning of news content and a person's self-image. The media also often engages in *pornographizing*, which is an act of exploitation of news content where the news displayed can arouse readers' sexual stimulation. Furthermore, this action makes the media belittle the victims' feelings. Moreover, in this type of news, the media also put the victim in a subordinate position compared to the perpetrator. News in online media often subordinates victims of sexual violence, which can be seen from the word preference used by the media; sometimes, it is sexist and gender biased. In news coverage of rape case, journalist mostly replace the word "memerkosa" with *menggagahi, menggauli, merenggut keperawanan,* and so on (Abrar, A. N, 1995).

Euphemism is an action to refine words in text and dialogue. Sutarman (2017:50), describes euphemism as an expression that society considers to be more refined, polite, and safe. This expression is used to substitute the other expression considered impolite in society. Choosing the right words is crucial to building a polite and pleasant communication atmosphere. The media apply euphemism based on several arguments: 1) Allan (2012) argued that euphemism is applied as an alternative to undesirable expression and to evade loss face possibility; 2) euphemism is used to substitute or cover up words and expressions that are considered taboo, impolite, and inappropriate (Alvestad, 2014); 3) euphemism also to avoid uttering taboo words (Fromklin, 2005). Wardhaugh (2000) defined taboo as a prohibition or behavioral avoidance in society that is believed harmful to the members because they may feel

ashamed or anxious. Moreover, Mayfield (2009) stated that euphemism is used to refine and dissemble action, object, or phenomenon that may seem unacceptable to a society based on their profess value. Pavlenko (2006) also defined the euphemism utilized in the text to protect the alliterator from unwanted emotional stimulation.

Perception is a stage preceded by sensing stimulus through a system of sensory organs called a reaction to recognize a stimulus as a form of response. Furthermore, the stimulus is forwarded and processed to form perception. Perception is formed from a stage that begins when someone's understanding receives the stimulus. Various stimuli leading to understanding have been interpreted according to perception, selected, and applied. Selective attention or selective perception is a stage involving various types of information obtained and stored in the human mind and the release of various information. Selective attention includes acquired characteristics of a person or object, especially size, level, action, and reality. Selective perception is driven by something or someone beyond understanding, such as hearing someone speak a foreign language. One of the stimuli that influences perception is desire, which can lead to different interpretations of what a person sees and experiences, such as online news. Audiences' perception regarding the replacement of "pemerkosaan" is significant to study as input for online media when they are reporting about rape and sexual violence. Furthermore, this research also aimed to describe some words that perpetuate the dominance of male perpetrators over victims who are usually women or minors.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study was conducted in Denpasar with a target population of 20-56 years. This study drew the sample purposive, which means the probability of the elements being the sample is unknown. The criteria for the sample are: 1) read online news actively; 2) be aged 20-56 years; 3) have read news about sexual violence and rape which contains euphemisms. Based on these criteria, the number of samples taken in this research was 75 respondents. The data was collected through a survey with instruments with validity testing with a score of >0,30 and reliability testing with a score of >0,60. In the questionnaire given to respondents, a 1-5 Likert Scale was used, where respondents were free to determine their opinions according to their perception of the indicators in the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics analyzed the data by calculating the percentage of each statement. The descriptive method is a method for analyzing data by describing the data that has been collected as is without intending to make conclusions that apply to general or generalization. There were 12 indicators used to measure the audience's perception, shown in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Perception of Audience Indicators

VARIABLE	INDICATORS
Perception of Audience about Euphemism in Sexual Violence News	1. Knowing that rape is a serious criminal act 2. Awareness about the word "rape" is replace with more polite words. 3. Awareness about the word "rape" is replace with scandalmongering words 4. Replacing the word "rape" makes the news more informative 5. Replacing the word "rape" is done on the basis of politeness 6. Replacing the word "rape" makes the news more interesting 7. Replacing the word "rape" makes the news more comfortable to read 8. Replacing the word "rape" makes these criminal acts seem normal 9. The word "rape" is more acceptable than the other words 10. Replacing the word "rape" obscures these criminal act 11. Replacing the word "rape" makes the news less biased towards the victims 12. Replacing the word "rape" posit male perpetrators in a superior position

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Rape is a type of sexual assault usually involving having carnal knowledge, which is initiated by one or more persons against another person without that person's consent. The act may be carried out by physical force, coercion, abuse of authority, or against someone who is incapable of valid consent, such as one who is unconscious, incapacitated, or below the legal age of consent. The tendency to blame rape victims is not only carried out by society but is also perpetuated by the mass media. Herman (1994) also stated that sexism and rape culture are maintained by the objectification and sexualization of women's and girl's bodies, the use of misogynistic language, victim blaming, and violence against women as a form of entertainment in film and music. Mass media, in this research online media, when reporting on cases of sexual violence and rape, tend to use language that demeans women. The choice of words or language begins in the title section and continues through to the body of the news. The use of euphemisms in news texts is usually used in insensitive conversation, especially in sexual harassment news texts, because news sexual harassment includes many incidents that are considered vulgar, erotic, and impolite towards the victim in the incident. Van Dijk (1993) stated that 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 behaviors about phenomena and policymaking are shaped by media discourse.

On the news, the word "rape" often be replaced with other words which considered more polite or refined the meaning, such as *ruda-paksa, dicabuli, ditiduri, digagahi,* and many more. Rape is one of sexual violence that has harmful to the victim's physical and psychological aspects. Sexual violence is an action, physical and non-physical, by someone who has power over the victim with the aim of fulfilling his sexual desire toward the victim, where this action is not wished by the victims (Harahap & Elfiandri, 2021). This sexual violence began from an imbalance of power between the perpetrators and the victims. This imbalance is further aggravated by perpetrators' control over the victims (Rossy, 2015). More, news about rape and sexual violence often points up sensation and dramatization to draw the audience's attention. These activities are done by the media by doing *pornographizing* that exploits the media content or text to bring the audiences' sexual imagination. By doing *pornographizing,* the media subordinated the victims and also set aside the victim's feelings. This kind of reporting in the news also uses language that is sexist and gender-biased (Abrar, 1995). There are various syntactic choices available to portray how actors, actions, and events are represented, and the choice of one over other alternatives is often a conscious decision made by the producer of a text to represent a certain reality. This conscious decision-making process in text production is influenced by several factors, including the intended audience, the purpose of the text, and the social and cultural context in which the text is produced (Alkaff & McLellan, 2018).

Based on Table 2, we can find that some pronouns that replace "rape" regularly in online news.

Table 2 Pronouns that Replace "rape" in online news

Pronouns	Amounts	Percentage (%)
Digagahi	12	16,4
Dicabuli	55	75,3
Dirudapaksa	30	41,1
Digauli	12	16,4
Disetubuhi	48	65,8
Ditiduri	14	19,2
Digarap	8	11
Dinodai	25	34,2
Lainnya	3	4,1

Source: research data, 2023

Table 2 shows that *dicabuli* is the frequently used pronoun in online news. As much as 75,3% of respondents said they often read *dicabuli* as the pronoun to describe "rape" in online news. Besides that, journalist journalists also replace "rape" with disetubuhi in the news about sexual violence. There was also *dirudapaksa* which aimed to define "rape" and make the news more polite. Apart from several words such as "*disetubuhi," dirudapaksa*, and "*dicabuli*" the word that often appears is "*digagahi*". In Indonesian, the word "*digagahi*" comes from the root word dashing, which means manly, strong, or brave, and is an adjective that is often associated with male characteristics. This becomes a problem when this word, which has a positive meaning, is used to describe a violation because it is considered capable of reducing the burden. Replacing the word "*diperkosa*" with "*digagahi*" might cause contradiction because committing these disgraceful acts will make them brave or manly.

The use of words such as *disetubuhi* in news reports about rape can pose serious problems in in terms of the public representation and perception of these tragic events. Words like *disetubuhi* implicitly denote sexual intercourse that occurs without violence or force. This can obscure the fact rape is an act of violence and coercion, not consensual sexual intercourse. When incidents of sexual violence are described in inappropriate language, readers may not fully realize the violence and suffering experienced by the victim. As the result, respondents feel a lack of empathy and support for victims. As many as 43% respondents stated that these terms can make perpetrators of sexual violence appears less responsible by their actions. They also stated that this can impact how cases are viewed by the public . Although rape includes more than merey coercion, the term "rudapaksa" describes behaviors that give the impression tha the victim is forced inte the act. The word *digilir* characterizes the victim as an interchangeable item, while being *digagahi* gives the impression that rape is an action that indicates a male perpetrator.

Audiences' Perception Toward Rape Euphemism in Online News

This research used 12 indicators to measure audiences' perception of euphemisms. The first indicator is the audience's knowledge that rape is a serious criminal act. As many as 93,2% of respondents stated that they agree that rape is a serious criminal act. Rape is a serious criminal act that violates human rights and also causes physical, social, and psychological suffering for the victims (Kristiani, 2014). Second, the results showed that 52,1 respondents realized that the word "rape" had been changed to a more polite word, as we can see in Table 2. Conversely, the media also used sensational pronouns such as *digagahi, dicabuli, digauli,* and *digarap.* Apart from looking at respondents' knowledge and awareness, this research also found that using some pronouns made the news more informative and interesting. Moreover, the media, on numerous occasions, uses sensational words that often bias and lead society to victim-blaming. Ihsani (2021) stated that bias towards victims is a form of gender bias in journalistic. This cannot be separated from the ability of media to construct reality by using specific words to influence audiences' responses. In some cases, the media still writes controversial and sensational news to draw attention.

Third, Indonesia is a country that prioritizes politeness and refinement in text and dialogue, leading the media to use euphemisms in their news. As many as 45,2% of respondents stated that when the word "rape" was replaced, the news became more interesting to read. Also, 30,1% of respondents said they feel more comfortable reading when the media does the euphemism. But, on the other hand, journalists often unaware that euphemisms and refining some words are demean women (Ihsani, 2021). Indrasty et al. (2018) found that in the news, women are objects, while the press and police institutions are subjects. Women are inferior and marginalized objects through vulgar and bad word choices in the news. Besides that, the media also commodifies the abuse of women in terms of drawing attention from the audiences. The victims will be marginalized in the media because the media have more power over the content of the news (Ihsani, 2021). Additionally, this study discovered that reporting on rape cases using biased and euphemistic verbs is related to the values and beliefs held by the majority of society. A portion of the language used in text supports eastern culture and illustrates the politeness of Indonesian society. As many 42,5% respondent agreed that the preferred verbs reflects media perspective, which is linked to prevailing societal values and ideas. In addition, euphemism are

used in online media to minimize stigma and controversy associated with terms that are deemed offensive or explicit. However, as noted by 60,2% of respondents, this action actually obscures the criminal acts.

The fourth indicator is the audience's responses toward rape as a criminal act. This kind of perception is formed by structural and functional factors. Structural factor refers to the involvement of the individual's sensory system, which is formed from the nature of physical stimulation of the nerves. On the other hand, the functional factor is formed from past experience, needs, and many more. This indicator puts more emphasis on the respondent's feelings when they read news about rape which has been used euphemism. There were 20% of respondents stated that they think rape will become an ordinary criminal act when the media refine those words. However, they still can tolerate the news when the media does not replace or refine the word "rape." Replacing the word "rape" makes the news unbalanced for the victims. In the news report, the media only focuses on the chronology of events and the perpetrators' motives. This argument was approved by 23,3% of respondents, who stated that using euphemisms in the news makes the media not on the victims' side. Moreover, as many as 21,9% of respondents also stated that some words or pronouns that are sensational and more polite put women as inferior to men. Ihsani (2021) also argued that diction selection in the news also demeans women. Indrasty et al. (2018) also found that news puts women as an object, inferior, and marginalized through vulgar and bad words. This situation can be seen from the news angle or journalist's story, which is only from men as the perpetrators. Therefore, audiences get unbalance information, and this puts men superior to women as the victims, especially when the media use "digagahi" to replace "rape.

Mass media has the function of gatekeeper of information for the public, especially on events in human life. The media has the ability to construct reality through language in its reporting, not only to construct news but also to determine the relief of a reality that influences the meaning constructed (Suryadi, 2011: 639). The more frequently an issue is highlighted by the media, the easier it will be remembered by the public. Susilo (2014: 19), stated that women's sexuality is a profitable object for the media to commercialize and exploit. In reporting cases of sexual violence against women, online media often puts women as sex objects by presenting a sensational side and tending to lead to pornography. As to Article 4 of the Journalistic Code of Ethics, "*Wartawan Indonesia tidak membuat berita bohong, fitnah, sadis, dan cabul*" . This can be seen that journalist are prohibited to depicting erotic behavior with photos, illustrations or text meant to arouse passion in order to represent sensual actions. Article 8 also stated that: *"Wartawan Indonesia tidak menulis atau menyiarkan berita berdasarkan prasangka atau diskriminasi terhadap seseorang atas dasar perbedaan suku, ras, warna kulit, agama, jenis kelamin, dan bahasa serta tidak merendahkan martabat orang lemah, miskin, sakit, cacat jiwa atau cacat jasmani.*" In this case, reporting reporting related to cases by journalist must not discriminate through the choice of words that demean women. A total of 67,2% respondent stated that the news that has been in online media tends to devaluate the position of women and elevates men. The prefix *di-* is become more stresses that women are object. This choice of gender-biased diction means that the media fails to protect the victim and they even experience more crimes from the society. News narratives about sexual violence are closely related the fulfilment of victims' right which means whether the media has the fulfilled the rules such as: not revealing the identity of the victim, not stigmatizing the victim as a trigger for violence, not reinforcing stereotypes of the victim, not passing judgement on the victim, not using diction that is biased, not using biased sources, and not repeating violence. The "good women" and "bad women" are the labels that the media can easily apply to women (Santi, 2006: 7-8). Women who have experienced rape are labeled as "bad women" with a perspective that tends to be masculine. Furthermore, Susilo (2015: 223) stated that reporting in online media tries to provide satisfaction with fantasies and images of sexuality to readers of rape news. Sensational word choices are often used to stimulate readers' imaginations about rape news. The chronology of events and narratives is presented in great detail to build the reader's "involvement" in the situations contained in the news. This is done inseparably from the media's efforts to obtain "hits" or high visits from the public.

So far, many media have exploited women as sexual objects, ultimately giving birth to a society that is conditioned by violence against women. It means the media plays a role in perpetuating concepts that demean women and violence towards women. Apart from that, the news that is carried out often provides labels that tend to have a binary opposition and are attached to women's bodies. Although some media have tried to present their coverage with respect to female victims, for example, by hiding their identities and by explaining events only briefly and descriptively, quite a lot of other media actually do this violence by objectifying women victims of violence. The media often has a very negative attitude fair to the victim and more sympathetic to the perpetrator. News of sexual violence is displayed with maximizing sexual imagination increasing the reader's lust, and objectifying women who have become victims.

In viewing women's sexuality, Wood (2005: 232-233) explained that the media has a tendency to be biased by labeling women as dramatic figures and in the right position as victims. Audiences are also subject to biases as a result of their personality disposition and will there view and interpret the same outcomes form uniquely biased perspective (Grub & Turner, 2012). In other words, the reader's perception of the rape victim will be more positive if the journalist writes about him in a good light; on the other hand, if the victim is described adversely by the journalist, the reader will likewise think poorly of him. This is due to the fact that readers' perspectives are immediately affected by what the media reports. Journalists are ethically bound to present facts objectively and respectfully. Avoiding stigmatizing language and providing appropriate context are critical for ensuring that reporting does not exacerbate victims' suffering or unduly affect public opinion. Public perception of sexual violence is significantly influenced by how it is portrayed in the media. Different terminologies have the ability to shape how society perceives and addresses the problem, affecting people's awareness of and behaviour related to preventing and dealing with sexual assault. According to research findings, 31,5% respondents agreed that using biased words or vebs when reporting about rape made them les emphatic towards victims and inclined to blame female victims. In addition, more than 60% respondent stated than substituting the word "rape" with other terminology made the act of rape appear normal.

Wood (2005: 235) also explained that in understanding women's sexuality as portrayed by the media, attention should be focused on media that depicts women's sexuality in a subordinate position compared to men and has masculine tendencies. In the media, women are represented as weak and fragile and are considered unfit to represent their sexuality. This happens because the representation of female sexuality by women themselves in the media is considered taboo. In research conducted by Brooks et al. (2006), the choice of words that tend toward masculinity is something that is often found in the media. There is an unequal relationship between men and women with the use of language labeled feminine and masculine (Butler, 2011b, p. 51). Feminine words or diction can be seen in the use of the words raped, molested, or raped, which is a form of positioning women as objects of sexual violence. These words refer to the assumption that women are passive figures and men are active figures. On the other hand, words labeled masculine can be found in the media with examples of the use of the words rape, sexual intercourse, molestation, and so on, which refer to the active nature of male sexuality. Table 2 shows that the pronoun that is often found in the media is "dicabuli' which is 75,3%. This shows that the media is still labeling using feminine language to refer to victims. In fact, 52.1% of respondents realized that the word rape was replaced in the media with other, more sensational words.

CONCLUSION

On the news, the word "rape" is frequently replaced with other words that are deemed more polite or refines in meaning. A total of 75,3% of respondents stated they frequently saw *dicabuli* as a pronoun to describe "rape" in internet news. There was also *dirudapaksa*, which attempted to define "rape" and make the news more respectful. Apart from many words such as *disetubuhi, dirudapaksa*, and *dicabuli,* the word *digagahi* appears frequently. When sexual violence incidents areportrayed in suitable language, readers may be unable to completely comprehend the victim's pain and suffering. As a result, respondents express a lack of empathy

and sympathy for the victims. More than 43% of respondents believe that these terms make perpetrators of sexual violence appear less responsible for their conduct. Furthermore, prejudices and uphemism verbs to report on rape incidents is associated with the majority of society's values and opinions. Also, 42,5% respondents believed that the favored verbs indicate a media perspective that is tied to current society values and views. In addition, euphemism are employed in online media to reduce the stigma and controversy connected with terminology that are considered a vulgar or explicit. However, asreported by 60,2% respondents, this behaviors obscures the illicit conduct. Apart from often using sensational diction, news in online media is often biased towards the victim, indirectly leading to public opinion blaming the victim. In other words, media content is more biased towards men's perspectives or men's desires, tending to blame women as victims of sexual violence. Ultimately, the female figure is visualized as passive, vulnerable, and helpless. Issues related to rape are still often written about with controversial diction in the name of getting close public attention. However, the Indonesian culture that prioritizes politeness and refinement of things means that the media often replaces the word rape with more polite words. Furthermore, most respondents stated that choosing words other than rape made the news more polite. This word replacement apparently refers to the respondent's opinion that the news does not side with the victim and places female victims in a lower position than male perpetrators. There is an unequal relationship between men and women with the use of language labeled feminine and masculine. Words labeled masculine can be found in the media with examples of the use of the words rape, sexual intercourse, molestation, and so on, which refer to the active nature of male sexuality. The research results found that the pronoun often found in the media is "dicabuli, " namely 75,3%. This shows that the media is still labeling using feminine language to refer to victims.

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