

Analyzing the Conflict Potential of Unauthorized Viralization on Social Media through Galtung's Conflict Theory

Kartika Septiani, S.H.¹

¹Indonesia Defense University , Indonesia

Kolonel Caj Dr. Arifuddin Uksan, S.Ag., M.Ag., CIQnR.²

²Indonesia Defense University , Indonesia

Kolonel (KH) Dr. Yusnaldi, S.H., S.E., S.Ag., M.Pd., M.M.³

³Indonesia Defense University , Indonesia

Mayjen TNI Dr. Rachmat Setiawibawa, S.IP., M.M., M.Tr. (Han)⁴

⁴Indonesia Defense University , Indonesia

Corresponding Author: kartika.septiani@kn.idu.ac.id

Abstract

The phenomenon of making someone go viral without consent on social media has emerged as a pressing social issue, primarily linked to the violation of privacy rights. This study aims to analyze the potential conflicts arising from such practices by applying Johan Galtung's conflict and violence theory. The research employs a qualitative library research method through the review of relevant literature. Findings reveal that viral content without consent contains complex dimensions of conflict. Based on Galtung's Conflict Triangle (Contradiction, Attitude, Behavior), conflicts arise from the contradiction between privacy rights and freedom of expression, evolve into attitudes of mutual blame, and manifest in behaviors such as mass online shaming (cyberbullying), doxing, and even legal or social sanctions. Furthermore, the application of Galtung's violence theory highlights the presence of direct, structural, and cultural violence that reinforce one another. The study concludes that there is an urgent need for specific regulations on digital privacy protection, the promotion of ethical digital literacy, enhanced reporting mechanisms on social media platforms, and psychosocial support services for victims. These measures are expected to foster a safer, fairer, and more humane digital space.

Keywords: Conflict, Social Media, Privacy, Galtung's Theory, Digital Violence.



INTRODUCTION

Human beings as *zoon politikon*, or social creatures, imply that by nature humans cannot live in isolation. In the effort to fulfill their needs, humans always require the presence and involvement of others, whether in physical, emotional, social, or intellectual aspects (Herimanto & Winarno, 2012). Therefore, social interaction constitutes the fundamental foundation of communal life, not merely as a functional necessity but also as the very essence of human existence. This view is consistent with Aristotle's philosophical perspective, which asserts that humans are social and political beings (man is a social and political being) (Machmudin, 2010).

Within society, social interaction serves as a bridge to unify interests, foster cooperation, and create harmony that sustains social structures, norms, values, and cultures that characterize a nation. In essence, such interaction cannot occur without two fundamental components: social contact and communication. According to Soerjono Soekanto (2007), these two components are indispensable prerequisites for the occurrence of social interaction, as communication enables humans to convey thoughts and emotions, while social contact provides the medium through which communication takes place, whether directly or indirectly.

Along with the advancement of information and communication technology, the sphere of human interaction has undergone a highly significant transformation. Social media has now become an actual form of digital social space that connects individuals across time, space, and social backgrounds. The human need to communicate, build networks, and express oneself continues to be actively carried out within this digital sphere. Nevertheless, the presence of social media not only offers opportunities and conveniences in establishing social relations but also brings new challenges to the quality of interaction and the dynamics of inter-individual relationships. One phenomenon that reflects the complexity of these challenges is the widespread act of making others go viral without consent, namely recording and disseminating someone to the public without the approval of the person concerned. This phenomenon may initially be intended to share information, raise awareness, or encourage digital solidarity. However, in practice, such actions often lead instead to social tensions, stigma, public controversy, and even psychological trauma for the individuals who are made viral.

The phenomenon of making others go viral without consent is fundamentally problematic not only from an ethical standpoint but also as a reflection of the violation of an individual's right to privacy. In many cases, individuals whose faces, voices, or actions are widely disseminated on social media experience verbal attacks, digital harassment (cyberbullying), and even social persecution without being given the opportunity to explain the actual circumstances. Privacy, as



a fundamental human right, is increasingly eroded due to digital penetration that is not accompanied by moral awareness and strong regulation. Therefore, such violations of privacy cannot be regarded merely as the consequences of technology, but rather as a social symptom with the potential to trigger conflict.

Although there have been studies highlighting the legal aspects of this phenomenon, it is still rare to find approaches that analyze it in depth through the lens of conflict theory. In particular, few studies have linked it to the conflict triangle approach (Contradiction, Attitude, Behavior) and the theory of violence (direct, structural, and cultural violence) developed by Johan Galtung. Yet, Galtung's framework is highly relevant for understanding how conflict can be latently rooted within the structures of society and manifest through behaviors that appear "ordinary" or "normal" in digital spaces, but in fact carry significant symbolic and psychological violence. For instance, the act of making others go viral without consent can be understood as a form of cultural violence, since there is a social legitimacy that regards such practices as valid in the name of transparency or the "public's right to know," while in essence causing harm to the affected individuals.

Therefore, this study aims to further examine the conflict potential arising from the act of making others go viral without consent on social media, by employing Johan Galtung's conflict and violence theory as the analytical framework. This research seeks to demonstrate that the viral phenomenon contains both latent and manifest conflict potentials that may escalate if not addressed critically and wisely. By identifying the dimensions of conflict in structural, cultural, and behavioral terms, this study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of contemporary conflict studies, while also offering practical recommendations for policymakers, educators, and the wider society in fostering a more just and humane social media ecosystem.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of building collective awareness regarding the impacts of digital actions that may appear simple, such as disseminating videos without consent. Such actions can disrupt reputations, provoke collective verbal violence, and even trigger mental health disturbances for the victims. Therefore, conflict analysis through Galtung's framework becomes highly significant as a reflective instrument to understand the dynamics of contemporary social relations, which have now shifted into digital spaces and are increasingly laden with clashes of values, perceptions, and interests. Thus, the issue of privacy violations in the context of making someone go viral without consent is not merely a personal matter but has become a socio-political issue that requires comprehensive attention.



THEORETICAL INSIGHT

The Theory of Conflict and Violence Developed by Johan Galtung

The theory employed to analyze the conflict potential within the phenomenon of making others go viral without consent on social media (hereinafter in this paper referred to as “viralization”) is Johan Galtung’s conflict and violence theory. Through his theoretical framework, Galtung offers a deeper understanding of how conflicts emerge, develop, and can be managed. By identifying the variables that cause conflict, conflict resolution efforts are expected to be carried out without necessarily resulting in violence. This is crucial, considering that violence is one of the negative consequences of conflicts that are not properly managed. Yet, conflict does not always end in violence; on the contrary, conflict can serve as an opportunity for growth, mutual understanding, and the emergence of positive outcomes as well as progressive innovations (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall, 2016).

In conflict theory, Galtung introduces the concept of the Conflict Triangle (ABC) as an analytical tool to comprehensively understand the dynamics of conflict. Galtung identifies three main components of conflict that interact with one another and can exacerbate the situation if not properly addressed. These three elements are: (1) contradiction; (2) attitude; and (3) behavior. Contradiction refers to the existence of fundamental differences or incompatibilities in interests, values, or goals between two or more parties. This represents the very root of conflict itself. Without such contradiction, conflict would not arise. Contradictions may be objective, for instance, differences in economic, political, or natural resource needs. When the interests of both parties are incompatible and cannot be simultaneously fulfilled, conflict becomes inevitable. However, it is important to note that contradiction in itself does not necessarily lead to violence; its resolution depends on the attitudes and behaviors that emerge in response.

Attitude refers to perspectives, prejudices, hatred, or mistrust that develop between parties involved in a conflict. Such attitudes can greatly influence how a conflict evolves. For example, if one party perceives the other as an enemy or a threat, this will exacerbate tensions and complicate the conflict resolution process. Negative attitudes, such as ethnic prejudices or clashing ideological views, can reinforce and prolong conflicts, even in the absence of immediate aggressive behavior. Behavior refers to direct actions that are aggressive or violent, such as physical attacks, verbal abuse, or sabotage, but it can also include non-violent actions that sustain tensions, such as boycotts, protests, or rejection. Behavior emerges as a response to attitudes shaped by underlying contradictions. If both parties in a conflict are unable to manage their differences constructively, physical or psychological violence may arise as behaviors that escalate



the conflict.

In the theory of violence, Galtung classifies violence into three forms: (1) direct violence, which refers to tangible actions that inflict physical harm or emotional suffering on individuals or groups. This type of violence is visible and often manifests in forms such as assault, verbal harassment, intimidation, or online bullying (cyberbullying); (2) structural violence, which refers to situations where social, political, or economic structures systematically cause injustice, suffering, or restrict a person's rights and access to basic resources. This form of violence is not always immediately visible, yet its impacts are deeply felt in everyday life, for example, through discriminatory policies enforced by governments; (3) cultural violence, which refers to the legitimization of discriminatory practices as part of traditions or inherited culture, even when such practices perpetuate injustice. For instance, in patriarchal practices where women's roles are considered inferior to men's and such views are widely accepted within society. Cultural violence often goes unnoticed or is even perceived as "truth" embedded in culture, despite leading to oppression and injustice against certain individuals or groups.

The relationship between conflict and violence is close but not identical. Conflict may develop into violence if not managed constructively. Therefore, understanding these two theories is essential in analyzing the potential for conflict, including in the context of viralization without consent on social media, so that peaceful solutions can be prioritized before the conflict escalates into broader violence.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach through a literature study (Darmalaksana, 2020). A literature study is an activity carried out to collect information and data by utilizing various sources available in libraries, such as reference books, relevant previous research findings, articles, notes, and journals related to the topic under investigation (Sari, 2020). This approach also makes it possible to obtain an in-depth understanding of phenomena that are difficult to grasp and articulate through quantitative methods (Nugrahani, 2014).

RESULTS

Identifying the Potential for Conflict in the Phenomenon of Viralizing Without Consent

The phenomenon of viralizing someone without consent, as previously described in the background of this paper, generates various potential conflicts such as violations of the right to privacy. The right to privacy, or personal right, is an individual's entitlement to determine and



control the extent to which information about themselves may be disseminated to the public (Kartika, 2023). In the context of social media, this personal right is often disregarded due to the mistaken perception that everything occurring in public spaces automatically becomes free for consumption, recording, and dissemination (viralization).

However, a person's presence in public spaces does not automatically negate their right to privacy. Individuals still retain the right to control personal information about themselves, including images, recordings, or activities conducted in open spaces. This right does not disappear simply because the activity takes place in a public area.

Thus, recording and sharing a person's activity without consent, even if it occurs in public, still carries the potential to violate such rights. This phenomenon becomes increasingly complex in the digital era, where the speed of information dissemination amplifies the consequences of privacy violations, making them broader in scope and harder to control. Conflict potential emerges when the person who has been made viral demands protection or justice for the violation of their personal rights, while the party who viralized them may believe that their action was legitimate or inconsequential. Differences in perceptions among viewers regarding the appropriate response to such viral content can further catalyze this phenomenon into a conflict.

The lack of awareness about ethical conduct on social media within society also exacerbates the potential for conflict and creates hidden latent dangers. Many social media users have yet to understand the boundary between freedom of expression and respect for others' privacy rights. In practice, the drive to gain attention, social recognition, or merely to follow viral trends often outweighs ethical and moral considerations. As a result, actions such as recording, uploading, and disseminating content about others without consent have become normalized, with little thought given to the psychological, social, or legal consequences for the individuals victimized.

Over time, the accumulation of such unethical practices can create a digital atmosphere marked by distrust, tension, and a heightened risk of conflict escalation. In certain contexts, viralizing someone without consent may even evolve into a deliberate act of character assassination, deepening social wounds and increasing the likelihood of retaliation, whether through legal action or in the form of other digital violence such as cyberbullying or doxing.

Nevertheless, in Indonesia, there is still a lack of regulation that specifically governs the protection of personal rights in public spaces. Existing legal provisions are generally more focused on privacy within domestic or private domains, such as prohibitions against entering someone's home without permission or data breaches by data processors, while activities in public spaces



are often assumed to be exempt from similar protection. Consequently, recording and disseminating someone's activities in public without their consent frequently go unsanctioned.

This regulatory gap increases the likelihood of privacy violations, heightens the risk of conflict between individuals, and complicates dispute resolution efforts, whether through social or legal avenues. Therefore, understanding the principle of consent in recording and viralizing should be emphasized as a fundamental principle in safeguarding individual privacy rights. Any act of documentation shared on social media should first be preceded by the consent of the person concerned. Without such consent, recording and dissemination risk breaching privacy boundaries, triggering discomfort, and opening the door to interpersonal conflict.

Accordingly, violations of personal rights through the act of viralizing are not merely individual issues but hold the potential to develop into broader social conflicts, especially when such viralization involves sensitive issues that remain unregulated in Indonesian law.

Case Studies of Viralizing Without Consent on Social Media

There are numerous cases of viralizing without consent circulating on Indonesian social media. This paper highlights only a few examples that have drawn significant public attention. First, the case of the viral content involving young girl street performers dressed as clowns (2022). This case began when a netizen recorded two young girls working as clown street performers at a traffic light. The video was then disseminated widely on social media without concealing the faces of the two girls. In an interview broadcast on the television program Brownies, the girls expressed their discomfort at being recorded and made viral by netizens. This act violated their privacy because it was done without their consent. The violation was even more concerning given that the girls were minors, who should not have been exposed and exploited as viral content without permission.

Second, the case of the cleaning service staff cleaning a café customer's shoes in a mall (2023). This case began when a netizen recorded a cleaning service staff member squatting and cleaning the shoes of a young woman who was a café customer, using cleaning tools. The video clearly displayed the customer's face and was then widely circulated by the netizen without consent. The viralization triggered public backlash against the young woman, with coverage across national media and personal information about her being exposed. In reality, the cleaning staff had voluntarily offered to clean the shoes due to specific circumstances. However, the viralization left the young woman feeling unsafe, afraid to leave her home, and subjected her to a significant violation of her privacy.



Third, the case of a mall security guard allegedly abusing a dog at Plaza Indonesia (2024). The incident began when the security guard attempted to rescue a cat being bitten by a dog. Because the dog's grip was too strong, the guard struck the dog's head to release the cat. However, the viral video that circulated online was incomplete, capturing only the moment when the dog was struck. As a result, the security guard faced widespread public condemnation and was dismissed by his agency. When the guard tried to clarify the incident, many netizens refused to believe him. Only after CCTV footage was released, showing the full context, did the guard gradually manage to restore his reputation.

From these three cases, it becomes evident that viralizing others without consent not only carries the potential to violate privacy rights but also poses serious risks to the reputation, sense of safety, and psychological well-being of the individuals involved.

DISCUSSION

Analyzing the Potential for Conflict and Violence through Galtung's Theory

To understand the potential conflicts arising from the act of viralizing someone without consent on social media, Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle (ABC) can serve as an effective analytical framework. This model divides conflict potential into three main aspects, namely Contradiction, Attitude, and Behavior. These three aspects interact with one another and shape the dynamics of conflict, not only at the level of visible actions but also within the underlying mindsets and social norms. The following is a mapping of conflict potential based on each of these aspects.

First, Contradiction arises from the clash between perceptions and the collision of privacy rights with the belief held by some members of society that activities in public spaces may be freely recorded and disseminated. The right to be protected from unauthorized exposure stands in opposition to the claim of freedom of expression and content sharing. In the digital era, the imbalance between privacy rights and the norms of information sharing constitutes a primary source of tension. The ambiguity of boundaries between private and public spaces in social media practices further amplifies the potential for violations. Additionally, differing public perceptions of the content they consume become catalysts for the escalation of social conflict.

For example, in the case of the mall security guard striking a dog, the viral video only captured the moment when the security guard hit the dog, without providing the context that the action was taken to save a cat that was being attacked. The public, seeing only this fragment of information, perceived the security guard as a perpetrator of animal cruelty, whereas in fact he



was attempting a rescue. This contradiction demonstrates how vulnerable public perception is to incomplete framing of information, thereby creating a conflict gap between the individual depicted in the video and the broader public.

Second is Attitude, where negative attitudes may develop from both sides. Victims of unauthorized viralization often feel harmed, violated in their privacy rights, and subjected to emotional distress such as anger, shame, fear, or social distrust. On the other hand, those who disseminate such content, whether consciously or not, often feel blameless, considering their actions legitimate as part of freedom to share or even believing they are performing a “social good” by exposing an issue. This mutual blaming and self-justification deepen the conflict divide and reinforce polarization between victim and perpetrator.

Continuing with the same case of the dog-beating video, public attitudes toward the content were heavily influenced by incomplete information. Netizens, without verification, developed negative attitudes in the form of condemnation, insults, and demands that the security guard be sanctioned. Conversely, the security guard, as the victim, felt wronged, unfairly treated, and suffered severe emotional distress due to reputational damage that occurred in a short period of time. Feelings of frustration, anger, and mistrust toward social justice emerged as a result. This tendency to rush into judgment illustrates the low levels of digital literacy and empathy among social media users, which ultimately exacerbate the escalation of conflict.

Third, Behavior. The observable behaviors in this conflict include the act of making content viral without permission, mass insults on social media (cyberbullying), dissemination of personal data (doxing), and even legal actions such as defamation or privacy violation lawsuits. It is not uncommon for victims to choose to issue clarifications through social media or even bring the case to court in order to restore their reputation. Meanwhile, the collective behavior of netizens whether in support or condemnation often prolongs the cycle of conflict, making the restoration of social relations increasingly difficult.

When reviewed in relation to the previous case of the dog-beating incident, the behaviors displayed in this case were highly complex. It began with the circulation of an incomplete video without consent, followed by mass insults (cyberbullying), and pressure on the company where the security guard worked, which ultimately led to his dismissal. When the security guard attempted to clarify, many netizens refused to believe him, demonstrating a rejection of clarification or new information that contradicted the initial narrative already formed. Only after the complete CCTV evidence was revealed did the public gradually begin to accept the actual facts, allowing the security guard to restore his reputation. However, the emotional and social impacts



he experienced could not be fully and quickly repaired. This case illustrates that reckless and ethically unconsidered behavior on social media can inflict real and significant harm on a person's life.

Based on the above analysis using Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle (ABC) approach, it can be concluded that the act of making someone go viral without consent carries a significant potential to escalate into conflict. In the dimension of Contradiction, conflict arises from the clash between an individual's right to privacy and the freedom to share information in the digital public sphere, exacerbated by differing perceptions of the content being viewed, where public judgments of such content may be either positive or negative.

In the Attitude dimension, this act can generate negative responses such as anger, shame, fear, and distrust from both the person who has been made viral and the viewers of the content. On the other hand, the perpetrator often perceives their action as legitimate, or even justifies it as a form of social participation. From the perspective of Behavior, the responses that emerge from viral content without consent include online harassment (cyberbullying), the dissemination of personal data (doxing), as well as legal measures for clarification and the restoration of reputation. These three aspects reinforce one another and collectively heighten the risk of conflict escalation.

When further analyzed using Johan Galtung's theory of violence, the phenomenon of making someone go viral without consent is not merely an ordinary social phenomenon, but rather reflects the presence of violence in three dimensions: direct, structural, and cultural violence. Direct violence is visibly manifested in the form of verbal attacks, mass insults, and cyberbullying experienced by the person who has been made viral. This is the most apparent form of violence, both physically and emotionally, as it directly targets individuals through harsh words, insults, and even threats. However, the root of the problem goes deeper than what appears on the surface.

Structural violence occurs when individuals who become viral subjects do not receive adequate legal protection or institutional support to defend themselves. For example, in viral cases, many victims are immediately subjected to social or even institutional punishment, such as being dismissed from their jobs, without undergoing a fair process of clarification. The social and legal structures, which have not yet fully regulated or guaranteed justice in digital spaces, create a power imbalance between the content disseminator and the victim. This demonstrates that the existing system allows injustice to occur, thereby falling into the category of structural violence.

Meanwhile, cultural violence is evident in the normalization of making others go viral as



part of digital culture, which is regarded as legitimate or even morally justified. The culture of “cancel culture”, the tendency toward hasty judgment, and the belief that disseminating information equates to contributing to truth serve as factors that reinforce such actions. The values embedded within digital society render these practices of violence unrecognized as violence, as they are cloaked in the guise of morality and the desire to regulate social norms. However, without complete context and proper ethical considerations, such practices instead reinforce systemic violence that impacts individuals both psychologically and socially.

These three forms of violence, direct, structural, and cultural, are interconnected and mutually reinforcing in creating chronic conflict conditions that are difficult to resolve without collective awareness. Therefore, understanding this viral phenomenon through Galtung’s theoretical lens opens a space for reflection that violence does not always manifest in physical form, but can also be embedded within systems, cultures, and even misguided good intentions. Consequently, systematic efforts are required, including raising ethical awareness in the use of social media and establishing regulations that explicitly protect individuals’ rights to privacy in public spaces, in order to reduce the potential for conflict arising from the practice of making others go viral without consent.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis using the Conflict Triangle (ABC) approach and Johan Galtung’s theory of violence, it can be concluded that the act of making others go viral without consent on social media is a practice with a high potential to generate conflict. This conflict is not only interpersonal but also structural and cultural, which may affect the reputation, psychological well-being, and sense of security of the individuals who become victims of viral exposure. Such tensions arise from the contradiction between the right to privacy and the perception of freedom of expression in digital public spaces, further reinforced by a digital culture that has not yet fully embraced ethical standards.

Therefore, concrete measures are required to systematically prevent and address this phenomenon. First, the government and relevant institutions need to formulate more specific regulations on privacy protection in digital spaces, including prohibitions against disseminating photos, videos, or personal information without consent, as well as law enforcement mechanisms that are swift and victim-oriented.

Second, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with digital platforms and civil society organizations, must develop a digital literacy curriculum that is not merely technical in nature but



also instills the values of empathy, ethical communication, and the protection of digital rights.

Third, social media platforms should provide a more efficient and transparent reporting system for content that violates privacy, as well as algorithms that do not prioritize viral content with the potential to harm individuals.

Fourth, psychological institutions and social recovery agencies are expected to provide counseling services or assistance for individuals who experience distress or losses as a result of being made viral without consent. Through these concrete measures, it is hoped that Indonesia's digital sphere will evolve to become safer, more humane, and reflective of the spirit of social justice in accordance with the values of Pancasila and human rights.

FURTHER STUDY

Every research is inevitably subject to certain limitations, and this study is no exception. The primary limitation lies in the use of a qualitative library research approach, which restricts the analysis to secondary data without direct engagement with affected individuals or wider audiences on social media. As a result, the findings may not fully capture the lived experiences, emotional depth, or nuanced perceptions of those who have been directly impacted by the phenomenon of being made viral without consent. Additionally, the study focuses mainly on the theoretical lens of Johan Galtung, leaving room for exploration through other conflict resolution theories, psychological frameworks, or legal perspectives.

Future studies are encouraged to expand the scope by employing empirical methods such as surveys, interviews, or focus group discussions with victims, perpetrators, and digital platform stakeholders. Comparative research across different cultural and legal contexts could also provide a broader understanding of how privacy violations are perceived and managed worldwide. Moreover, interdisciplinary approaches that integrate law, sociology, psychology, and media studies would enrich the analysis and offer more comprehensive recommendations for policy and practice.

REFERENCES

- Herimanto, & Winarno. (2012). Ilmu Sosial & Budaya dasar. Jakarta Timur: PT Bumi Aksara.
- Dudu Duswara Machmudin. (2010). Pengantar Ilmu Hukum Sebuah Sketsa. Bandung: Refika Aditama.
- Soerjono Soekanto, 2007, Sosiologi Suatu Pengantar, Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada.
- Sari, M. (2020). Penelitian Kepustakaan (Library Research) dalam Penelitian Pendidikan IPA.



Natural Science: Jurnal Penelitian Bidang IPA Dan Pendidikan IPA, 6(1), 53.

Dharmalaksana, W. (2020). Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Studi Pustaka dan Studi Lapangan. Pre-Print Digital Library UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung.

Nugrahani, F. (2014). Metode Penelitian Kualitatif dalam Penelitian Pendidikan Bahasa. Deepublish.

<https://www.grid.id/read/043272136/saya-kabur-viral-gadis-cantik-jadi-badut-di-jalanan-ternyata-kerap-alami-hal-ini-sampai-ketakutan-begini-pengakuan-sang-bocah?page=all>.

<https://aceh.tribunnews.com/2022/06/13/viral-seorang-wanita-minta-cleaning-service-bersihkan-sepatunya-netizen-soroti-adabbya?page=1>.

