

# **Student Perceptions of Catcalling Activities and Background Factors in the Campus Environment**

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## **Abstract**

This research is motivated by catcalling activity that commonly happened in Universitas Medan Area environment. Catcalling activity leads to a various perception of students. However some of them thought that catcalling was not a form of sexual harrashment. Otherwise, many of students thought that catcalling was a dissrespectfull behavior. The purpose of this research is to understand the students of Universitas Medan Area perceptions about catcalling activity and as well as any of the factors behind it. This research was conducted at Universitas Medan Area and the method of this research was qualitative descriptive. This research used S-O-R theory and semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Pierce. Data collected method of this research was interviews and observations. The result of this research shows that man and woman both can be a victims and perpetrator of catcalling and the various response towards catcalling activity like some of the subject feels outrage and bravely against the perpetrator and some of them not even care if being catcalled and also some of them are happy being treated or catcalled that way by stranger.

## **Keywords**

Perception, Catcalling, and Semiotic.

## **1. Introduction**

One way humans interact with other humans is to communicate, both verbally and non-verbally. Communication is a very important aspect used in socializing with the social environment which is usually done face-to-face directly between the communicator and the communicant. In interacting with the surrounding environment, it is not uncommon for someone to use communication to attract the opposite sex. Communication becomes something important when someone wants to start a relationship with another person. In this case a person's desire to communicate with the opposite sex is sometimes carried out in an inappropriate way and even makes a person feel uncomfortable.

Ways that often make someone feel uncomfortable when receiving messages from other people are by whistling, teasing and commenting using sexually explicit words. When someone feels uncomfortable with verbal communication with sexual tendencies made by others and considers that it is inappropriate to do so, then the act can

be classified as verbal sexual harassment. According to Hidayat and Setyanto (2019) that sexual harassment in this verbal form is often referred to as catcalling.

In Indonesian, catcalling is defined as cat calling. When viewed from its true meaning, catcalling is a form of verbal sexual harassment that often occurs in public spaces. Catcalling is behavior or things that lead to sexual activity that is usually carried out at a loud volume although not necessarily explicitly (directly) including whistling, exclaiming, giving gestures, or commenting to someone who is passing on the street (Gloria, et al, 2018).

In this case, women become a group that is vulnerable to verbal sexual harassment (catcalling) and will feel insecure and uncomfortable in public spaces and of course will limit their space for movement. According to Gardner in Prasetya (2017) that women who get harassed on the street and get sexist comments from unknown men on the streets will make them feel that their bodies are like objects to be enjoyed by foreign men. Objectification of women will show that men have power over women.

As for the comments that are often experienced by some women when they are passing on the road, such as "Hey beautiful, why are you alone, do you want to be with me?", "Oh, why are you jealous, please smile. It's a beautiful smile, how come you're a jerk? Smile a little to make it beautiful." These comments are included in the objectification of women because when a man asks a woman to smile, it is impressed that the woman's job is to always smile and look beautiful so as to give pleasure to the man (Akim et al., 2019; Suharyanto et al., 2019; Suharyanto, 2019). In 2016, a survey was conducted by a support group for survivors or victims of sexual harassment, Lentera Sintas Indonesia, in collaboration with the online petition forum Change.org and women's media regarding awareness and experiences of people in various districts and cities related to sexual violence. The results of the survey conducted with 25,213 respondents consisting of men and women are that 58% of respondents both men and women have experienced verbal abuse such as catcalling (Rusyidi, et al, 2019). The average catcalling victim will feel uncomfortable, disturbed, scared, traumatized and even mentally disturbed (m.cnnindonesia.com). The survey results show that it is not only women who are vulnerable to verbal sexual harassment, but also the possibility that men can become victims of this catcalling act. In this case, both men and women have the potential to be the perpetrators of catcalling.

Perpetrators of verbal sexual harassment are also not those who come from low or middle economic categories, let alone less and not educated at all, but the perpetrators include all strata or social groups from the lowest to the highest (Sumera, 2013; Kusmanto et al., 2020). The way to reduce this catcalling action or punish the catcaller is still quite minimal because there are no specific penalties or rules to be used as the basis for this action. Catcalling is categorized as an act of verbal sexual harassment which is far from being vile and violent. Therefore, there are no definite rules to regulate the limits of catcalling and also the penalties for this action.

In Indonesia itself, the act of catcalling is also almost every time felt by users of public places such as public transportation, roads, work environments and even in the campus environment. It is also known that the campus environment is a neutral place, but this is not an excuse for someone not to catcall. Catcalling actions that occur on campus are usually due to sheer fun. The perpetrators of this catcalling act also did it to other people and their own friends. This has been experienced by one of the students of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Medan Area University, where she felt that the clothes she wore were polite clothes and did not seem seductive to the opposite sex, but still she got the catcalling treatment, especially those who did that. is his own friend (Tawai et al., 2021; Sahputra, 2020; Hasibuan, 2020). The same thing was experienced by students of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Medan Area. Where when he was walking alone and passed several groups of women, he got comments that had sexual tendencies. The comment refers to the body shape he has. Where one woman commented that her body shape is very tempting. This made him very uncomfortable.

As for other comments that have sexual tendencies that occur in the campus environment by men against women, for example, such as "Hey beautiful, big huh", "Beautiful lady, where are you going?", "Why are you alone? Do you want to be with me" or men who get comments from women such as "Hi, handsome brother, tease your brother," or other comments such as "Wow, he has a good body, bro, that's okay and sometimes comments like praising "His smile is so cute." bro". The comments above may sound as harmless as nonverbal acts of violence (touching and touching) but in reality they are just as dangerous. Reporting from cnn.com, according to a survey conducted in New Jersey, United States that catcalling can make victims unconsciously make self-assessments like self-objectification.

## **1.1 Objectives**

This objectification occurs when someone continues to pay attention to their appearance and tries hard to change themselves to always look perfect (Hermawan and Hamzah, 2017). If this continues to happen, it will interfere with one's self-confidence. Seeing the catcalling phenomenon that often occurs in the campus environment makes researchers interested in digging deeper into the perceptions that arise from catcalling activities among students, because not all students agree that catcalling is harassment, as well as not a few who consider it to be insolent behavior.

Based on the description of the background above, the researcher is interested in conducting a study entitled "Student Perceptions of Catcalling Activities in the Medan Area University Campus. The researcher considers that it is very important for students to understand deeply about catcalling, especially regarding perceptions and views about it.

## **2. Literature Review**

According to Robert and Paul in Mulyana (2015) perception is a process within a person to select, organize and interpret a stimulus or stimulus from the environment and that process will affect our behavior. The perception of each individual can be different even though what is observed is the same thing. Talking about perception then talks about how a person interprets a stimulus obtained from interaction with the surrounding environment. According to Rakhmat (2012) perception is a person's experience of objects, events and relationships previously obtained by concluding an information and interpreting messages. The way humans infer information and interpret it is by processing the stimuli received by the senses which are then given meaning.

Catcalling is still a complex phenomenon because there is no clear answer whether it is something positive or negative. The origin of the term catcalling is from a cartoon show created by Tex Avery. According to Shannon in an article entitled The History (and Future) of the Catcall that the term "catcall" was believed to be first used in the 17th century when audience members would make a hissing or shrieking sound (like a feral cat) as an act of derision to a performer on stage. In the Oxford dictionary, catcalling can be translated as whistling, shouting and comments of a sexual nature towards women passing by. According to Ramadan (2018) the typical behavior of catcalling is commenting on a woman's appearance. Perpetrators are accustomed to catcalling in a spontaneous way (directly) and consider it a normal thing to do with the aim of getting the attention of women who are victims.

According to Chhun in Farmer and Jordan (2017) that catcalling as the "use of crude language, verbal expression, and non verbal expression that takes place in public areas such as streets, sidewalks, or bus stops. Which can be interpreted that catcalling is the use of harsh language, verbal and nonverbal expressions that occur in public places, such as roads, sidewalks or bus stops. Chhun also explains in O'Leary, Catcalling As a "Double Edged Sword": Midwestern Women, Their Experiences, and The Implications of Men's Catcalling Behaviors, that verbal expressions of catcalling tend to involve wolf-whistles or comments that evaluate a woman's appearance. Nonverbal expressions often include leers as well as physical gestures that act as a means to rate a woman's physical appearance. Nonverbal expressions are often in the form of glances and include meaningful physical gestures to assess a woman's physical appearance.

According to Puspitasari (2019) verbal sexual harassment (catcalling) has an impact on psychological health, namely: Psychological impacts are divided into two, namely short-term impacts and long-term impacts. Impacts that occur in the short term, for example, are experienced shortly after the incident. Victims are usually angry, irritated, humiliated, and embarrassed. These include symptoms of difficulty sleeping (insomnia) and reduced appetite (lost of appetite). The long term impact is negative attitudes or perceptions towards men due to trauma. As for a study conducted on approximately 3,000 high school students in Norway, explained that non-physical sexual harassment such as catcalling can increase a person's mental disorders. Starting from depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and negative body image (m.klikdokter.com). Catcalling can also have a broad impact on various other types of harassment, such as physical verbal abuse (touching the victim, hugging and kissing) and even rape.

Thus, the most important element of preventing sexual harassment, both verbal and non-verbal, is the victim's rejection and unwillingness to all forms of sexual attention. This is done so that the act of catcalling can be prevented and if it is not desired by the victim then the act can be categorized as verbal sexual harassment. The theory used in this study is the theory of Hovland, namely the S-O-R Theory. According to Effendy (2003) S-O-R stands for Stimulus - Organism - Response which comes from psychology. If it is then used and becomes a communication theory, this is not surprising because the material objects of psychology and communication science can be said to be the same,

namely discussing humans whose soul includes components: attitudes, behavior, opinions, cognition, conation and affection (Siregar, 2012; Utari & Siregar, 2015; Waridah, 2017; Wahidar, 2016).

According to this theory, the effect that will be seen is how certain reactions are to a particular stimulus, so that individuals can estimate the suitability of the message and also the communicant's reaction. So the elements in this theory are message (Stimulus, S), communicant (Organism, O), and effects (Response, R). (Effendy, 2003).

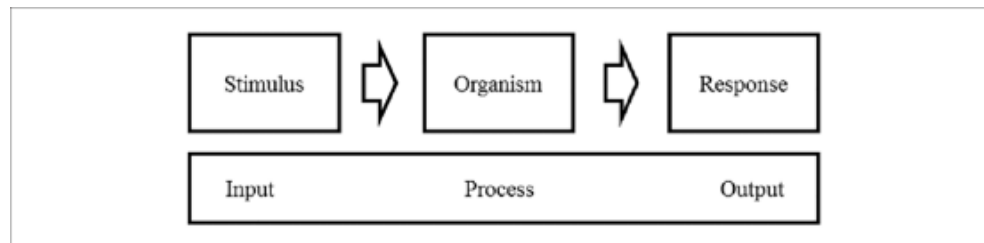


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of S-O-R theory.

(Source: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Conceptual-framework-of-S-O-R-theory\\_fig1\\_329126976](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Conceptual-framework-of-S-O-R-theory_fig1_329126976))

Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory (SOR). According to SOR theory (see Figure 1), individuals respond to their environment in one of two general ways. Approaching behavior includes all positive behaviors, such as seeking, staying, possessing, or desiring a task, whereas avoidance includes the opposite. Such as the desire not to act positively (Mehrabian and Russell 1974). SOR theory emphasizes the emotional or affective nature of the environment which is perceived as aesthetic agitation (Wohlwill 1976). Whereas Mehrabian and Russell (1974) focused solely on emotional response, Bitner (1992) combined cognition and physiology in SOR theory and extended their application to the servicescape. Recently, an integrated SOR framework has been proposed, with cognitive and affective systems that integrate all prior experiences related to long-term memory (Jacoby 2002). Kim and Lennon (2013) expanded Mehrabian and Russell's SOR theory to identify internal (website quality) and external (reputation) information sources as stimuli that influence purchase intention (response) through consumer cognition and emotions (organisms).

### 3. Research Methods

In this study, the method used is a qualitative research method with a descriptive type of research. According to Bogdan and Taylor in Kaelan (2005) that qualitative research method is a research procedure that will produce descriptive data in the form of words, notes that have a relationship with meaning, value and understanding. Qualitative descriptive research also has the aim of explaining or describing a phenomenon as deeply as possible, through data collection. Qualitative research does not prioritize the size of the population to be studied, but what is more emphasized is the depth (data quality) not the amount (quantity) of data (Kriyantono, 2014).

In qualitative research, researchers try to understand and explain human behavior in certain situations by making systematic, factual and accurate descriptions. This qualitative descriptive research also allows researchers to obtain complete, definite, deeper, more complete, meaningful and high credibility data so that they will easily achieve the objectives of this research (Bah, 2020a; 2020b). This study discusses catcalling activities that exist in the Medan Area University campus environment, where the author explains how the perceptions of students and college students who have been victims and perpetrators of the catcalling act are. Not only perception, but the author also explains the factors that become the background of the catcalling action in the Medan Area University campus.

### 4. Data Collection

The subjects in this study were students from the 2016-2019 class from every faculty at the University of Medan Area Campus 1, namely from the Faculty of Psychology, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Biology, Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Social Sciences and Faculty of Law. In this case the researcher will take one representative from each faculty, both students and college students. The selection of informants from representatives of each faculty is because researchers feel that to see the catcalling phenomenon that occurs in the Medan Area University campus environment, subjects from each faculty are needed so that the data obtained can be comprehensive. The following are some of the criteria for informants that have been determined by researchers as representatives in fulfilling the information needed, namely: Registered as an active student in each faculty at the University of Medan Area; Know the term catcalling; Have you ever been a victim and have done catcalling?

Tabel 1. Interview List

No	Faculty	Interview List
1	Faculty of Psychology	Registered as an active student in each faculty at the University of Medan Area; Know the term catcalling; Have you ever been a victim and have done catcalling
2	Faculty of Engineering	Registered as an active student in each faculty at the University of Medan Area; Know the term catcalling; Have you ever been a victim and have done catcalling
3	Faculty of Biology	Registered as an active student in each faculty at the University of Medan Area; Know the term catcalling; Have you ever been a victim and have done catcalling
4	Faculty of Agriculture	Registered as an active student in each faculty at the University of Medan Area; Know the term catcalling; Have you ever been a victim and have done catcalling
5	Faculty of Social Sciences	Registered as an active student in each faculty at the University of Medan Area; Know the term catcalling; Have you ever been a victim and have done catcalling
6	Faculty of Law	Registered as an active student in each faculty at the University of Medan Area; Know the term catcalling; Have you ever been a victim and have done catcalling

## 5. Result and Discussion

Catcalling is basically verbal sexual harassment that often goes unnoticed, whether it happens to men or women. It is also undeniable that the perpetrators of catcalling can be from people who are completely unknown and can even be from the closest people. To find out about the students' experiences with catcalling actions on the Medan Area University campus, the author asked the first informant, Eva.

Eva is a 2016 Biology Faculty student who actively participates in Teaching and Learning Activities (KBM) on campus. In the interview, Eva described her catcalling experience by saying: "My experience with catcalling is quite frequent because during my 4 years of college, almost every day I get catcalling, both from other students and my own friends. Therefore I feel very annoyed and do not like being catcalled. When I'm traveling alone and traveling with my friends, catcalling is inevitable but it often happens when I'm walking alone."

Based on Eva's answer above, it can be seen that she often gets catcalling treatment, whether she is walking alone or walking with her friends. Eva admitted that she got the catcalling behavior almost everywhere on campus. In the interview, Eva said: "During 4 years on campus and almost every place I was catcalled, so I remember very well the most frequent location was at the bus stop". The author also asked Eva about the factors that cause someone to become a catcalling actor and also the reason why someone can become a catcalling victim. In the interview, Eva said: "I saw it from the male and female side. For men, I think it could be for fun, such as feeling lonely and needing entertainment. So they flirt with girls and it looks like the guy needs a friend, just doing it the wrong way. When it comes to women, I usually see those who look too pretty in catcalling, those whose appearance is too tacky (tacky) in catcalling and those who look plain in catcalling too. So in my opinion it is because of the woman's appearance that she can be catcalled."

Based on Eva's answer to the author's question, it can be concluded that according to Eva, the main factor that causes catcalling is loneliness and also just joking. The main factor so that someone becomes a victim of catcalling is because of their appearance. Next, the researcher asked another informant, namely a 2017 Psychology student, Margareta. She is a student who actively participates in teaching and learning activities on campus and often carries out activities on campus such as participating in organizational activities or just hanging out with friends. To the writer, Margaret confessed that she had been a victim as well as a perpetrator of catcalling. In the interview, Margaret said: "You could say often, but I am the one who catcalls men more often than the men who catcall me".

The catcalling activity was obtained and carried out when Margaret walked around the cafeteria, bus stops and campus parking lot. The author again asked Margareta about her opinion on what factors make a person a perpetrator or a



victim of catcalling. In the interview, he said: "I think the reason is because other people are interested in us. It could be that they are just for fun to make the atmosphere lively, it could be because the person actually wants to get acquainted, it's just in the wrong (in my opinion) way". Based on Margareta's answer above, according to Margareta, the factor that causes someone to become a catcalling actor is the attraction between the perpetrator and the catcalling victim. The author again asked the last informant, namely Rio. Rio is a 2016 student majoring in Agriculture who actively participates in teaching and learning activities and actively carries out activities on campus to just hang out with his friends.

To the author, Rio admitted that he had been both the perpetrator and the victim of catcalling activities. In the interview, Rio said: "Yes, I have catcalling with women and the women also give different responses. Some are happy and some are annoyed. But another experience regarding catcalling is that it is not only me (male) who does catcalling, but women have also done catcalling to me." Rio's answer above can be concluded that not only men are catcalling actors, but women can also be catcallers. When the author asked where the catcalling activity was carried out or received, Rio admitted that he did and got it around the cafeteria. The author also asked his opinion about what factors make someone a perpetrator or a victim of catcalling activities, to the author Rio said: "I think it's because of the woman's appearance, because I personally do catcalling to women judging from their physical appearance, that's how it looks." Based on Rio's answer above, according to him, what makes someone a perpetrator or a victim of catcalling is because of the physical form of the victim, thus making other people (catcalling perpetrators) tease him by doing catcalling actions. In the communication process, which can be a stimulus to stimulate the communicant, among others, is the message given by the communicator. The message conveyed to the communicant may be accepted or it may be rejected. Communication will only take place if there is attention from the communicant.

In the process of this catcalling action, the stimulus given by the communicator (catcalling actor) to the communicant (catcalling victim) is in the form of whistling sounds, calls and some even give a wink and finger heart. One of the informants, namely Bima, received catcalling actions such as calling and finger Heart, in an interview Bima said: "I was catcalling in the form of a "shhh-shhh" whistle, comments were also made like "Smiles are cute, bro", then I answered "thank you sweeter", that's it. I was also given a finger heart (showing finger heart) from a woman I didn't know." Unlike Bima, another informant, namely Solihah, received catcalls in the form of calls, winks and whistles. In the interview, Solihah said: "Usually I'm "shhh-shhh", then when I look at the perpetrator, he pretends not to call me. There are also those who flirt with me. Then I am the one who is most often teased with the sentence "Assalamu'alaikum beautiful", maybe because I wear hijab, but I don't like it because the tone is seductive". Based on the given stimulus, the communicant (victim of catcalling) will process and interpret the stimulus and then the communicant will respond, both positive and negative.

The two informants, Eva and Margaret, gave an angry response and went straight to the perpetrator. In her interview Margaret said: "I am a sensitive person and depends on my mood. So sometimes when I am teased, called out, I respond with sharp eyes to the catcalling perpetrator. Also what I've been scanning, I went to the person, I was angry and I said that I don't like to be seen like that. When I approached the perpetrator, he just laughed and said I was too much. That's when I got angry and left immediately". In this study, each informant gave a different response to the catcalling treatment that had been received. Some responded in an angry way and went straight to the perpetrator, some responded casually and some felt happy when they got the catcalling treatment. The angry reaction and coming to the perpetrator is done when the victim feels that the stimulus given is too excessive, such as commenting on the shape of the body and it is very disturbing to the victim. The next reaction is a normal reaction when the victim gets catcalling treatment. The victim can be normal to the stimulus he receives, because the victim considers that the catcalling treatment is normal or normal to do and does not consider it something serious and dangerous.

It's different with victims who feel happy when they get catcalling treatment. The reason the victim feels happy to get the catcalling treatment is because the victim feels that he is attractive and also feels more cared for; Each informant, both male and female, revealed that the reason they did catcalling was just for fun, wanting to entertain themselves, wanting to be noticed and wanting to get acquainted. So far, catcalling is considered a normal thing by students at the University of Medan Area; It is said that catcalling is a normal and common thing to do because based on the results of research conducted on six informants from various faculties at the University of Medan Area that students and students do not understand and know about the term catcalling; Ignorance of the term catcalling makes students feel indifferent and consider it a natural thing to do. The six informants also have the same opinion that the perpetrators of catcalling deserve to be punished if they have touched physically and the victim feels disapproved.

## 5.1. Numerical Results

Student experience about the catcalling phenomenon. From 7 informant in this study, the seven gave different answers, some of them had been victims of catcalling but also those who had been perpetrators of the catcalling phenomenon. There are those who argue that a person's physical appearance can cause catcalling behavior, but there are also those who argue that the habit of behaving casually and a lack of ethical understanding can make someone do this.

Student Forms, Reactions, and Perceptions of Catcalling. After asking the seven students about their experiences with catcalling activities, the author again digs deeper into what forms of catcalling they have received, how their reactions and perceptions were. An icon is a sign that resembles the shape of the original object, where one of the signs that includes an icon in the catcalling action is the finger heart. Index is a sign that means the result of a message. In this study, the index includes eye scanning and eye blinking. One of the informants is getting catcalling in the form of eye scanning. A symbol is a sign that is determined by a generally accepted rule or determined by a mutual agreement. The symbols used in this catcalling act are quite diverse, but the whistle symbol is the symbol most often received by all informants. In addition, other symbols of verbal sexual harassment are greetings (assalamu'alaikum), teasing words, sighs and body shape comments. All informants considered that whistling was a form of coquettishness and temptation to the appearance of each informant.

The factors behind the occurrence of catcalling activities in the campus environment. Catcalling itself usually often occurs in public places, such as on roads, public transportation and even in the campus environment. Each of the six informants thought that the campus environment was a neutral place but did not guarantee someone would not take catcalling actions. Based on the results of the author's interviews with the seven informants that the locations in the campus environment that are often the object of someone in carrying out catcalling actions are at bus stops and campus cafeteria area.

## 5.2. Graphical Results

Tabel 2. Observation Results Student's Perception of Catcalling Activities in The Campus Environment of Universitas Medan Area

No.	Observed Symptoms	Observation Results		
		Yes	Sometimes	No
1.	<b>Nonverbal Communications</b>			
	a. Face /Expression	7	-	-
	b. Eye Contact	7	-	-
	c. Gesture	-	-	-
2.	<b>Verbal Communications</b>			
	a. Voice Tunes	4	3	-
	b. Tempo	4	3	-
	c. Articulation	2	5	-
3.	<b>How Informants Communicate</b>			
	a. Send Messages Repetedly	7	-	-
	b. Using Formal Language	5	2	-
	c. Using Nonformal Language	7	-	-

Each informant, both male and female, revealed that the reason they did catcalling was just for fun, wanting to entertain themselves, wanting to be noticed and wanting to get acquainted. So far, catcalling is considered a normal thing by students at the University of Medan Area. It is said that catcalling is a normal and common thing to do because based on the results of research conducted on six informants from various faculties at the University of Medan Area that students and students do not understand and know about the term catcalling. Ignorance of the term catcalling makes students feel indifferent and consider it a natural thing to do. The six informants also had the same opinion that the perpetrators of catcalling deserved to be punished.

## 6. Conclusion

The perception of students and students of the Medan Area University on catcalling activities that occur in the campus environment. Catcalling that occurs in the Medan Area University campus environment based on the results of this study is not only carried out by men, but women can also be the perpetrators of this catcalling act. In the process of

the catcalling action, the stimulus given by the communicator (catcalling actor) to the communicant (catcalling victim) is in the form of whistling sounds, calls and some even give a wink and finger heart. Each informant gave a different response to the catcalling treatment that had been received. Some responded in an angry way and went straight to the perpetrator, some responded casually and some felt happy when they got the catcalling treatment. In this study, the authors found several signs used in carrying out catcalling actions, namely icons (finger heart), index (eye scanning, winking) and symbols (whistles). Each informant interprets the signs they receive differently. There are those who think that the sign is intended because of an attachment to body shape, there are those who interpret the sign as an invitation to sexuality and there are also those who consider the sign as a form of coquetry and temptation to one's appearance. The factors behind the occurrence of catcalling activities in the Medan Area University campus. The results of this study indicate that the motive or background of the catcalling activity that often occurs in the Medan Area University campus is purely for fun. If viewed from the perspective of the perpetrators, the reason they did the catcalling action was for fun, wanting to entertain themselves, wanting to be noticed and wanting to get acquainted. However, when viewed from the side of the victim, the victim feels that his appearance is what triggers someone to do catcalling. In this study, students at the University of Medan Area also considered that catcalling was something that was commonplace to do. Many of these students and college students do not know the term catcalling as verbal sexual harassment so they feel they don't care and consider it a normal thing to do.

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