Cyberfeminism Issues in Digital Platform

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Abstract

In this 21st century digital era, technology has massively developed and influenced the traditional feminist movement. Cyberfeminism creates a safe cyberspace for women to discuss various multicultural issues in the digital public sphere, especially in social media. This research uses a qualitative approach, including the virtual ethnography (netnography) method from @rahasiagadis on Instagram and collecting data through interviews with informants. This research shows that @rahasiagadis is a platform where every woman can discuss, express themselves, and speak out on sensitive topics about multicultural issues; also a platform where they can get information and learn more about women themselves.

Keywords: *Cyberfeminism; Multicultural Issues; Digital Public Sphere; Cyberspace; Computer-Mediated Communication*

Introduction

Self-disclosure–described as the process of opening up or disclosing to other individuals–is a process experienced by an individual in expressing or declaring a message or information that is descriptive, affective, and evaluative. The message and information are usually personal. According to (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009), the public does not generally know the content itself, and before someone decides to deliver that information, it should have been selectively sorted. This selective sorting helps individuals maintain a certain level of privacy and control over what they reveal to others.

Pushed by the advancement of the digital era currently, the increasing number of people shows the use of the internet in their daily lives. The internet is used to support work and education and can also be used to interact with others. There are survey data on the penetration and internet usage behavior recorded by APJII (*Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia*) in 2022, including 4099 female respondents out of 7568 respondents across Indonesia. The internet penetration level in females is 76.48%, with an internet contribution of 37.48%. It is slightly lower than men, with an internet penetration rate of 77.55% and an internet contribution of 39.21%.

Along with the digital transformation nowadays, this self-disclosure process is not only done in person but also has evolved. It can happen through internet uploads or what we can recognize as the digital public sphere. In this digital era, self-disclosure is widespread across internet-connected platforms, including social media. People can upload various information, such as expressing their emotions to various

forms of social media content, such as photos, videos, or texts that contain their statements or feelings about something.

At present, people usually feel more comfortable expressing themselves and venting their minds through the digital public sphere. The content of how they express it may be public, personal, or private. Despite this, someone will generally feel much more comfortable and confident expressing themselves to someone they already trust and are close to. However, due to the current phenomenon, people are not afraid to share their thoughts in the digital public sphere. They firmly believe that expressing their feelings through social media can effectively relieve or channel their emotions. On the other hand, there are also cases where individuals may find that pouring their minds into digital public spaces helps them out of depression, as stated by (Oktavianti, 2018).

Women, just like men, should be free to disclose themselves. Many problems come up in women's lives, too, so they need a space to talk and express their feelings. Women are often seen as a muted group because their access to various things, including freedom of speech and freedom to express their feelings, are restricted or even denied. Upholding the principles of gender equality and amplifying women's voices can contribute to a more just and inclusive social fabric.

Because of being muted, one movement emerged to fight for women's equality and rights. This movement is known as the feminist movement. The term 'feminism' appeared in the late 18th century, combining the French word 'femme' for 'woman' with '-ism' for 'political position'. Because many consider the feminist movement radical, many women who stand up for their rights generally have a negative connotation and thus avoid being called feminists. In fact, as shown by Wood *et al.* (Wood, 2007), the very definition of feminism opposes the growing oppression and domination in society. Embracing feminism not only challenges societal norms but also paves the way for more inclusive and progressive cultural shifts.

In the context of feminism, an emancipation process concerns the struggle for women's rights and justice. The word 'emancipation' itself means 'to liberate'. Women's emancipation emerged around the 19th century using various methods such as demonstrations and other movements. This ongoing pursuit of emancipation reflects the collective determination to dismantle gender-based barriers and achieve true equality.

Furthermore, feminism is divided into eight types, namely Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism: Libertarian and Cultural Perspectives, Marxist and Socialist Feminism, Psychoanalytic and Gender Feminism, Existentialist Feminism, Postmodern Feminism, Multicultural and Global Feminism, and Ecofeminism. In this research context, we will discuss multicultural and global feminism. Multicultural and global feminism discusses efforts to anticipate 'gender blind' by assuming that all genders (women) worldwide are the same. Although based on (Tong, 2004), what happens is that women with different skin colors, geography, culture, and politics, make women different. Recognizing the diversity within women's experiences challenges the notion of a universal "women's identity" and underscores the importance of intersectionality in feminist discourse.

In the digital era, the existence of the digital public sphere can open up great opportunities for women to speak up and express themselves. The presence of the digital public sphere can be a platform for women to talk and exchange their views on various sensitive issues. So, women need a community that can facilitate this. Not only as a forum for women to express themselves freely, but it can also play roles by participating in productive and respectful discussions. This digital empowerment has the potential to reshape societal narratives and redefine the role of women as active contributors to public discourse.

Several communities serve as a platform for women to express themselves. One of them is a platform called Rahasia Gadis. Rahasia Gadis is a platform for young women with a vision of becoming a community where women can be encouraged to express themselves. Rahasia Gadis started the Instagram

platform under the username @rahasiagadis. However, the community also has a 'Confession Room' feature on its website, www.rahasiagadis.com, where women can freely express their feelings anonymously (or not). Currently (May 2023), the Instagram platform @rahasiagadis already has 3.3 million followers and actively shares uploads in the form of women's outpourings and content that positively motivates women. These platforms showcase the potential of digital spaces to foster solidarity and empowerment among women across diverse backgrounds.

Rahasia Gadis can be said to be an example of the cyberfeminism movement. Cyberfeminism itself is a term that describes one part of feminism: feminism in the digital world. Cyberfeminism is a practical movement to defend women's rights and freedoms through new media interactions. As mentioned in (Alatas & Sutanto, 2019), new media provide a realm of broader and neutral cyberspace to empower women in tech culture. This intersection of feminism and technology not only challenges traditional power dynamics but also paves the way for innovative ways of advocating for gender equality.

To understand the role of cyberfeminism, this study explores how feminists deploy and utilize technology with the concept of self-disclosure in the digital public sphere as the spirit of the feminist movement. The results of this study are expected to help understand the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) for cyberfeminism, especially for multicultural issues, in the digital public sphere. This research sheds light on the transformative potential of technology in promoting diverse and inclusive feminist agendas on a global scale.

Cyberfeminism

Cyberfeminism means 'cybernetic feminism'. Cyberfeminism is a term that denotes a part of feminism: feminism in the digital world. Cyberfeminism has been coined as a starting point for feminism and a generic term for women working in tactical media and hacktivism, as specified in (Paasonen, 2011). Cyberfeminism is a practical movement in upholding and being concerned with women's rights and freedoms through new media interactions. New media provide a realm of broader and neutral cyberspace to empower women in tech culture, as mentioned earlier (Alatas & Sutanto, 2019). This fusion of feminism and digital technology marks a paradigm shift in how advocacy for gender equality can be pursued, adapting to the realities of the contemporary world.

Cyberspace allows women to utilize the web to share and connect data. In this manner, cyberspace is no longer seen as a manly or masculine space since women have finally embraced it. Thus, women are even considered as cyberspace's producers and consumers. To differentiate, cyberspace is a social capital that empowers women to embrace the cyber-communities and assist their prerequisites and wanders, according to (Puente, 2008). This democratization of cyberspace challenges traditional gender roles and enables women to assert their presence and contributions in digital realms.

Cyberfeminism integrates digital technology with the feminist movement to fight for women's rights in the digital world. With digital technology now available, the potential and opportunities to help women to help fight for their rights are even higher. Lestari *et al.* stated in (Lestari et al., 2020), women can do numerous exercises through computerized media by creating their communities and places to speak freely. Cyberfeminism can help revive the global feminist movement, opening new avenues for transnational feminism, as described in (Matos, 2017). By leveraging digital platforms and tools, cyberfeminism not only sustains but also strengthens the ongoing struggle for women on a global scale.

Computer-Mediated Communication

According to Littlejohn & Foss (2009), computer-mediated communication (CMC) can be any form of digital technology communication. Conversations are converted into a format managed by a computer system. These conversations and actions can be recorded and stored digitally, allowing a digital exchange of information. CMC discusses interactivity in various forms mediated via computers to communicate. The

most common format in CMC is mostly text format. CMC on various platforms on the internet provides user convenience, efficiency, and effectiveness, as mentioned earlier (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). The evolution of CMC has transformed the dynamics of communication, enabling diverse modes of interaction and connection in the digital landscape.

According to Nancy Baym (in Littlejohn & Foss), interactions are carried out using a computer as a mediator, unabling users from seeing, hearing, or feeling each other. Therefore, CMC users are making some special efforts to bridge social gaps from face-to-face or in-person communication. Baym identified five factors that influenced CMC:

- The external context in which CMC occurs (e.g., the language used and the city of the user)
- The temporal structure of a group
- Computer system infrastructure (speed, number of computers, anonymity, ease of use, user-friendliness)
- The purpose of using CMC (aligned with interests, uses, and gratifications)
- Characteristics of the group and its members (group size and members' education level)

Thus, CMC takes place in standard cyberspace, a metaphor describing the non-physical fields created by computer systems. The difference in movement in cyberspace is that it requires no physical movement other than pressing keys on the keyboard or moving the mouse. Based on (Sosiawan & Wibowo, 2018), since using cyberspace as a communication space, CMC has entered the era of inevitable communication behavior. The seamless integration of CMC into daily life signifies a paradigm shift in how human interaction is mediated and highlights the growing centrality of digital communication in modern society.

Digital Public Sphere

Habermas first introduced the concept of public space or public sphere. According to (Olifia & Gora, 2017), public space is where individuals (personal realms) gather and become public. Public space, according to Habermas, is defined as the space of economic communities and states, public places of discussion, opinion formation, and state control. However, along with the rapid development of the mass media, the existence of our public space or public sphere also began to develop. With the use of mass media, people can convey their ideas or aspirations and communicate their thoughts and desires in public forums. The evolution of public space highlights the dynamic interplay between traditional physical domains and the digitally mediated arenas of public discourse.

Social media is now used to communicate and disseminate information in the digital era influenced by the internet. Social media is clearly a digital public open space. This is because, undoubtedly, the use of social media itself has rules, ethics, norms, and principles of social communication that apply and are bound by the digital world. According to Salman (Salman, 2017), any message or information presented must be held accountable to the person who uploaded it since the digital public space allows what is generally hidden and unknown to become widely exposed and known to the general public. As stated in (Benkler, 2006), the internet allows anyone to talk or distribute information, and when everyone is talking, anyone will listen. The virtual nature of social media platforms introduces new dimensions to public discourse, blurring the boundaries between private and public expression.

Social media does not abandon the viewpoints of interpersonal communication. At times, connections formed on social media feel much more intimate than their real-world connections. These days individuals as of now have social media for an assortment of things due to the advancement of the social environment, the conveyance and gathering of messages, and boundless space and time, as referred in (Laksana & Fadhilah, 2021). The transformative potential of social media lies in its ability to redefine interpersonal relationships and provide a platform for diverse modes of expression, shaping the nature of communication in the contemporary digital age.

Methods

Virtual ethnography, also known as netnography, is a research method that uses digital technology to learn about online communities. It is a relatively new research method, so the researchers (virtual ethnographers or netnographers) can observe people's social interactions and behaviors online. With the development of digital technology and the internet, netnography has become an increasingly popular method for studying phenomena. This approach enables researchers to delve into the intricate dynamics of virtual social spaces and gain insights into the digital fabric of contemporary society.

The netnography research method involves observing and analyzing online communities virtually through their activities and interactions. It can include social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Netnographers can observe how the members of online communities interact with each other, expressing their opinions and forming social relationships in a digital environment. This form of observation provides a unique window into the evolving nature of human socialization and communication in the digital age.

Netnography uses computer-mediated communication (CMC) for its data sources and then interprets it ethnographically to denote a phenomenon that is happening. As specified in (Kozinets, 2010), the term netnography represents the netnographer's attempt to discuss the importance of CMC in the life of the digital cultural community. Like ethnographic research, netnographic research uses the same techniques to obtain data sources. It can be in the form of archival data collection (e.g., texts, images, and video), interviews, and many other techniques. This methodological hybridity underscores the interdisciplinary nature of netnography, blending digital and sociocultural insights.

This study obtains data from the digital public sphere through the Instagram social media platform @rahasiagadis, capturing content uploaded by the account and interactions or reactions on existing uploads. The reason for getting data from that platform is that @rahasiagadis has many followers and diverse backgrounds, so hopefully, it can provide information and perspectives from different angles.

The technique of collecting data is by interviewing three followers of @rahasiagadis. The interview was conducted through the Zoom Meeting on May 7, 2023, with the informants because they live in different regions in Indonesia. In this study, the informants who will share their perspectives were selected based on several criteria and qualifications. They should be followers of @rahasiagadis on Instagram, and they should be actively sharing their comments and opinions on posts uploaded by @rahasiagadis. By engaging with active and engaged followers, the study seeks to capture nuanced insights and reflections from those deeply involved in the online community.

Discussion

Based on the results of discussions and interviews conducted with the informants, the @rahasiagadis platform is considered a place where women get accurate and relevant knowledge about women themselves, as well as a forum where women get to gather issues that arise and make women feel secure and protected, also sharing, strengthening, and empowering each other. They hope that with the @rahasiagadis platform, women will have more cyberspace to express their rights more modernly. These findings underscore the transformative potential of digital platforms in fostering a sense of community, empowerment, and progressive discourse among women.

The results of this study will be broken down into three parts: the perceptions of @rahasiagadis' followers towards cyberfeminism, multicultural issues, and cyberfeminism in the digital public sphere.

Perceptions of @rahasiagadis' Followers towards Cyberfeminism

From the interview results, they believe that cyberfeminism in the 21ˢᵗ century is a new era for everyone, especially for women speaking out about feminism. This new era is taking place not only in

Indonesia but also throughout the world. However, even if it is a new and modern era, following the development of the times and technology, women do not give up their femininity because of that. They should not leave their feminine side as women. More and more women are under the notion that women should know their value and worth, while still maintaining the original concept of feminism itself. According to them, it is a way for various issues, including gender equality. This perspective highlights the evolving nature of feminism in the digital age, emphasizing the importance of embracing both progress and tradition in the pursuit of gender justice.

As a result of the interview, @rahasiagadis has contained various posts related to information and knowledge about women and feminism. It is just that the scope needs to be broadened because @rahasiagadis discusses urban women more, so women who do not live in big cities cannot relate to it. Contents uploaded by @rahasiagadis may also be classified as content that discusses feminism. This is because there are posts that demonstrate women's rights in a variety of issues on @rahasiagadis. This insight underscores the need for intersectional perspectives within cyberfeminism, ensuring that the digital discourse embraces the experiences and concerns of women from diverse backgrounds and contexts.

Women believe that the @rahasiagadis platform has become a 'safe space' for each of them, although each must have its requirements to define that 'safe space'. In addition, social media is a digital public sphere where all users can view their uploads and comments, so they cannot process the views and opinions of someone else. Nevertheless, even so, the @rahasiagadis platform has become an excellent place for women to tell their perspectives and find their voices to speak up and express themselves. This notion of a 'safe space' within the digital public sphere highlights the crucial role of platforms like @rahasiagadis in providing a nurturing environment for women to engage, connect, and assert their agency in online conversations.

Perceptions of @rahasiagadis' Followers towards Multicultural Issues

There are three multicultural issues raised in this discussion, which are sexual harassment, body shaming, and gender equality. Of the three issues, it turns out that many women are victims, including these three informants, which can cause trauma. Therefore, it is necessary to organize special education for women by utilizing the existing @rahasiagadis platform so that they can anticipate and avoid these issues in the future.

- Sexual Harassment
Based on the results of interviews with informants, they consider sexual harassment to be an act or treatment of the opposite sex that causes discomfort, either physically or verbally. Disgusting verbal treatment, such as 'catcalling', is also an unforgivable form of sexual harassment. This understanding highlights the urgent need to address not only overt forms of sexual harassment but also subtler behaviors that contribute to a hostile environment for women.

Figure 1. Post uploaded by @rahasiagadis on March 23, 2023, regarding 'catcalling'

Figure 1 is a content uploaded by @rahasiagadis that has garnered many engagements. The content itself includes an issue involving verbal sexual harassment or 'catcalling' at a train station. The woman who was the victim was wearing clothes that covered almost all of her skin, such as a long-sleeved jacket that covered the upper half of the body area, long pants or trousers that covered the lower half, and a mask that covered most of her face. This has made netizens extremely angry, especially the female followers of @rahasiagadis, who have also interacted and given opinions and views regarding the matter, shared their previous experiences about 'catcalling' in public spaces, and how they reacted. This incident sheds light on the pervasiveness of 'catcalling' and its impact on women's daily lives, as well as the potential of digital platforms to galvanize collective responses to such issues.

'Catcalling' incidents often occur in public places such as public transportation or on the street, regardless of the clothing victim's dress style. This is evidence of a constant and continuous negative culture. Regarding verbal sexual harassment or 'catcalling', women can educate the abusers by telling them that they feel uncomfortable with those treatments. There are still many abusers who think that this is just a joke or something trivial, so there is no need to exaggerate. In fact, they must keep in mind that women are powerful human beings, not the other way around. This call for education and awareness emphasizes the agency of women in challenging and changing societal norms, fostering a culture of respect and equality in all spheres of life.

- Body Shaming

According to the informants' understanding, body shaming has negative connotations by demeaning, humiliating, or making comments related to a person's physical defects in a way that makes the victim feel uncomfortable. In Indonesia alone, body shaming can be influenced by social media that provides information and labels related to beauty standards. Body shaming itself is an unethical act. The informants themselves often get criticized, or body shamed over their physique, such as their skinny bodies, slanted eyes, and acne-prone faces. Even this body shaming treatment leads them to bully. This cycle of body shaming and its impact on self-esteem underscores the need for a cultural shift towards body positivity and acceptance.

Figure 2. Post uploaded by @rahasiagadis on April 13, 2023, regarding 'skinny shaming'

Figure 2 is an Instagram post shared by @rahasiagadis that highlights the case of Ariana Grande, a prominent celebrity, who became a victim of bullying and body shaming due to her significant physical transformation. This content has gained sympathy from @rahasiagadis' followers. The content itself likely includes images or descriptions depicting the contrast between Ariana Grande's appearance after her physical changes, accompanied by a discussion of the hurtful comments and judgments she faced. This post serves as a poignant example of how even well-known individuals can experience body shaming,

illustrating the pervasive nature of such negativity and the importance of raising awareness about the damaging impacts of such behaviour.

Based on the interactions and discussions in the comments' column, it can be concluded that many women have been subjected to this body-shaming treatment. Body shame is often associated physically big people, but it turns out that skinny women also get treated the same way. They often hear words that might be painful. This shared experience resonates with the broader narrative of body image struggles, highlighting the importance of fostering empathy and understanding in discussions surrounding body shaming.

If someone has different features or body shapes than ours, or if someone decides to change their body drastically, we should appreciate and respect them because it is their body, and it is their choice. Other people might not know what someone has gone through in the past. Regardless of the pros and cons, try to be neutral first. It is better to keep quiet and not make comments that might cause pain and hurt to others. This call for empathy and sensitivity in interactions emphasizes the role of individual responsibility in promoting a culture of compassion and acceptance, both online and offline.

- Gender Equality
According to informants, gender equality means equal opportunities in public, educational, and social spaces, even when women and men have different physical forms. If women have the same qualifications and qualities as men, then women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. Women can also study and work as they please. It is important to dismantle systemic barriers and biases that hinder women's participation and advancement, promoting a society where individual potential is not limited by gender.

Some informants had experienced being treated unequally because of their gender as women. One of them was not treated equally at work because, as women, they are considered unsuitable for leadership due to being sensitive, emotional, and unstable. Meanwhile, in any job or organization, there must be a balance between women and men. The function of women in any job and organization can be to make decisions from two points of view, including using logic and women's feelings. These reflections on gender-based discrimination highlight the urgency of challenging stereotypes and promoting diverse leadership styles that value both rationality and emotional intelligence.
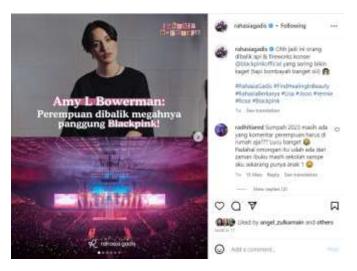

Figure 3. Post uploaded by @rahasiagadis on March 17, 2023, regarding gender equality at work

Figure 3 contains content that tells of a woman behind the magnificent stage of Blackpink (a girl group from South Korea that was performing a world tour concert). Amy L Bowerman, as a woman, is

working as the Creative Director. It proves women can have big dreams and a career following their passion. This can be used as an inspiration for women out there, especially in the creative industries, that women can create great works, and counters the statement that women 'should' stay at home taking care of the household. The narrative of Amy L Bowerman's success challenges traditional gender roles and exemplifies how women can excel in various fields, sending a powerful message of empowerment and aspiration to women aiming to break free from societal expectations.

The multicultural issues mentioned above need to be voiced because these issues are still considered taboo by society and need to be educated. While some parties may also feel uncomfortable, it should be pointed out that if this is not educated to the public, the multicultural issues will not stop. Society, especially the opposite sex (in this case: men), must be educated so that women can live comfortably without being overly vigilant. Women also need to be educated to protect and take care of themselves as a form of their responsibility. This collective education is essential for fostering a culture of respect, understanding, and empowerment, ensuring that all individuals can coexist harmoniously and contribute to a more inclusive society.

Perceptions of @rahasiagadis' Followers towards Cyberfeminism in the Digital Public Sphere

The internet and social media play a significant role in realizing feminism because, nowadays, information is massively obtained from the internet quickly. So, @rahasiagadis, which now has more than 3 million followers, should take advantage of this situation. @rahasiagadis can use their power in social media to deliver and spread massive messages, harnessing the digital reach to create awareness and drive meaningful discussions that contribute to societal change..

Even so, raising sensitive feminist issues in the digital public sphere is bound to have negative effects, one of which is that it can trigger someone's trauma. However, these issues must still be expressed and voiced with caution. To reduce the potential of negative impact, it is likely to upload content using the best words so that the audience can well receive the message. Ensuring a mindful and empathetic approach to discussing sensitive topics can foster a supportive and constructive environment for dialogues on feminism and its multifaceted dimensions.

Conclusion

Based on research results and discussion, it is concluded that all informants agree that @rahasiagadis's Instagram platform is a good platform to provide information and educate women, as well as a place where women can discuss, express themselves, and speak out on sensitive topics about multicultural issues. Eastern cultures that still consider this discussion taboo needs to be left behind. With the rapid development of technology in the current era, especially with the enormous amount of information flowing through the internet and digital public sphere, cyberspace is necessary for women to speak out in a good modern way. The transformative potential of digital platforms like @rahasiagadis fosters a more open and inclusive discourse, challenging cultural norms, and paving the way for a more empowered and equal future for women.

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