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Instagram As the "Identity Workshop" for Female Travelers

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Abstract

Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms used by societies, with one of the key groups being female travelers. Nowadays, Instagram does not only become a social space, but it is also a space of identity construction, or an "identity workshop". Traveling is one activity which is often found on women's Instagram accounts. It is an activity chosen by women to show their personal authority. The purpose of this paper is to understand how female travelers use Instagram as their "identity workshop". This research analyzes the Instagram account of a female traveler, Claudia Kaunang's (@claudiakaunang) by applying virtual ethnography methods. Alongside this, the research uses Angela McRobbies's postfeminist theory which focuses on 'empowerment' and 'choice'. The research findings confirm that a female traveler constructs herself to be what she wants through Instagram.

Keywords: Instagram, identity workshop, postfeminist, female traveler.

1. Introduction

Instagram, as one of the popular social media platform, delivers content in the form of images. Since its emergence in October 2010, Instagram has attracted millions of people around the world to join. It has even overtaken the number of Twitter users which used to precede Instagram's figures. Lee, Lee, Moon & Sung (in Sung, Lee, et al: 2016) stated that "[t]he popularity of Instagram, with its more than 300 million active monthly users, has overthrown the text based Twitter, which serves 284 million users. It shows that pictures speak louder than words".

Based on the results of data released by We Are Social and Hootsuite (Indonesia Digital Landscape 2018, accessed 2 February 2018 from https://www.slideshare.net/rumahide/indonesia-digital-landscape-2018) in Figure 1, it can be seen that nowadays Instagram is the third most popular social networking media in Indonesia.

It is interesting to learn that the biggest group of Instagram users in Indonesia are women. This was conveyed by Hansal Savla, Senior Director of Taylor Nelson Sofres
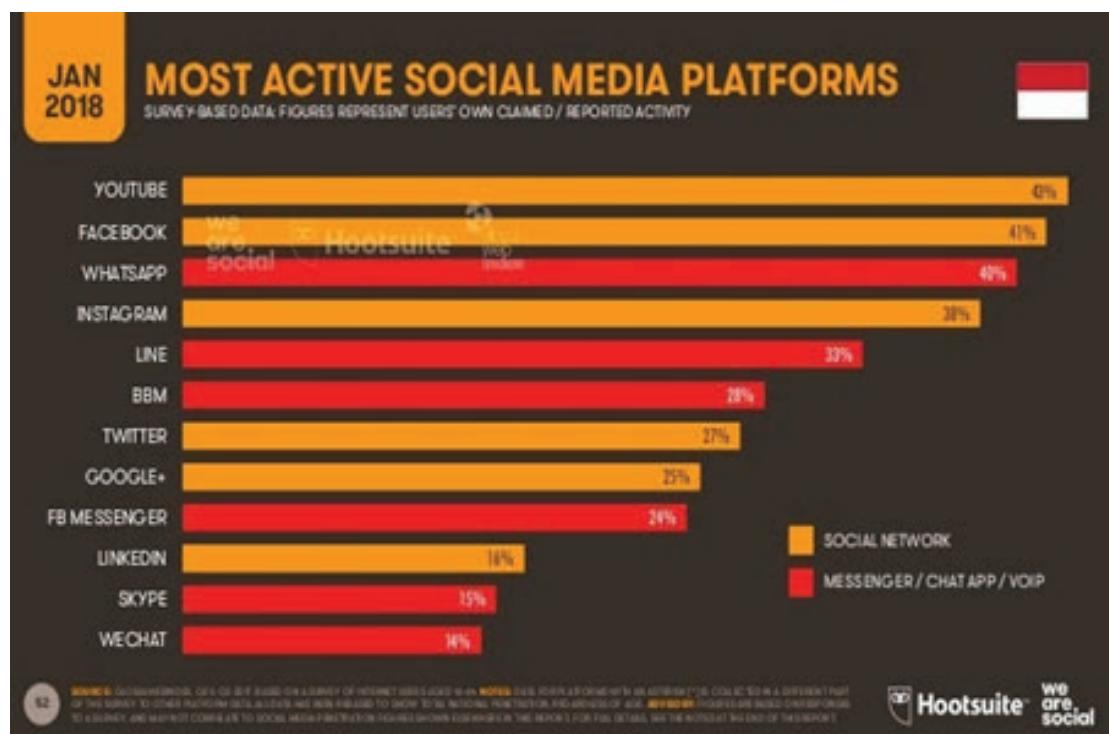
Figure 1: The most active social media is used in Indonesia (https://www.slideshare.net/rumahide/indonesia-digital-landscape-2018/)

(TNS) Indonesia (Jeko, 2016), who explained that based on a survey conducted, around 63% of women tended to actively use Instagram every day. Meanwhile the percentage of male users is only 37%. In addition, Salva also explained that the majority of Instagram users are well educated women.

Women use Instagram on various occasions, which can be observed throughthe various moments that are shared and uploaded by them onto their Instagram accounts. One of the most popular uploaded activities on Instagram is traveling. During their traveling and related activities, women (female travelers) upload photos and videos as a way to state their identities to their followers and other Instagram's users. Thus, Instagram as a social media is not only used for communicating and uploading images, but is also considered as one of the tools for self-actualization purposes. This is consistent with Yang & Li (Sung, Lee, et al: 2016) who explained how a "recent study found that individuals fulfill their social needs through posting their pictures on Social Networking Sites (SNSs) because they expect to get responses from other users and have a chat with them".

Female travelers upload their photos and videos to Instagram so that others can see their activities and also places they have visited/traveled. Sometimes the photos provide inspiration for others who see the accounts to visit the same place. For female travelers, especially those who live in big cities with various demands and high mobility, they

generally feel bored with their everyday social life. Working and engaging in activities with high pressure and demands in urban life raises their awareness of the need for quality free time. Among various choices of activities to fill leisure time, one of them is traveling. Traveling activities become a form of diversion or escape for women who live in urban areas to channel their boredom in facing high social mobility. While traveling, Indonesian female travelers also upload their photos via Instagram to show their 'self'. The aim of uploading these photos is to express that they have the freedom to determine what ways they enjoy their lives and that they are able to do various activities that are constructed as male activities, such as climbing mountains and diving in the sea.

Traveling activities come in various forms, for example shopping, nature tourism, historical tourism, and culinary tours. Traveling now has become a hobby and a primary need for many urban communities including women. In the past, traveling activities were carried out by women in the area of shopping or visiting places which were common destinations for the society. Women on these trips used to go with their family members or in groups; however, nowadays female traveling activities have shifted into more challenging activities that are usually done by male travelers. There are many female travelers who have started solo traveling (becoming solo travelers) without having a tour guide or joining a tour travel service.

In order to construct themselves as empowered and free women, many upload their traveling photos to their Instagram accounts. Therefore, it is interesting to find out how female travelers have used Instagram for their "identity workshop" since Instagram previously was only seen as a medium for communication and not as a space for identity formation.

1.1. Literature review

Studies on Instagram as an "identity workshop" for female travelers is an area yet to be fully explored, however there have been several studies related to the topic of female travelers and Instagram. So far, research related to female travelers has often been associated with women's freedom outside the domestic sphere. However, Lattimore and Wilson (2017, 8) in their article "Introduction: Women and Travel, Past and Present" argue that the purpose of women to travel is not only to get out of the domestic realm, but also to feel freedom, self-empowered and to give credit to themselves. While Linda Myers (2017, 167) in her study entitled "Independent Women Travelers, Experiences and Identity Development through Multi-Sensual Experiences in New Zealand" suggests

that traveling activities become a space for women to rethink, learn and find their true self.

Another study about the motivation of women to travel with the title, "Why Do Women Travel Solo For Purposes Of Leisure?", was conducted by Ching and Jogaratnam (2006, 59-70) who explained that getting experience is the biggest motivation for female travelers, and this need for experience underlines many female travelers' objectives for traveling. The risks involved in solo traveling then, are not their primary concern. It is more important for them to get the experience and leisure, so sacrifice their safety.

In addition, research conducted on motives of Instagram usage has been carried out by Pavica Sheldon and Katherine Bryant (2016, 89-97) with the title "Instagram: Motives for Its Use and Relationship to Narcissism and Contextual Age". This research noticed Instagram as the fastest growing global social networking site. This study examined the motives for its users, and its relation to context such as age and the narcissism of its users. The survey was conducted on 239 students. It revealed that the main reason for using Instagram is to gain information about others, make documentation, follow trends, and make content creatively. However, another finding from the study showed that the frequent posting of social activities (such as traveling, going to sports event, visiting friends, etc.) on Instagram for documentation actually exhibits narcissism, or is used to show that the person posting follows trends and looks "cool".

1.2. Theoretical framework

1.2.1. Postfeminist

Women's empowerment and freedom to make choices, especially in the area of female traveling, are major topics within postfeminist thinking. This postfeminist thinking develops the concept of "New Women" which is exploited by the media and the cultural industry by raising the images of women who are free and independent but in accordance with the media agenda and the cultural industry. This is in line with Angela McRobbie's (2009, 1) argument that stated:

> "Words such as 'empowerment' and 'choice', these elements are then transformed into a much more individualistic discourse, and they are placed in this new picture, especially in the media and popular culture, and also by state institutions, in replace of feminism. New ideas and 'modern' looks about women, especially young women are then disseminated more aggressively with the aim of ensuring that the New Women's movement will not reappear.

'Feminism' is instrumented, it is proposed and claimed by Western governments, as a sign to the whole world that it is an important part of what freedom means today".

The above postfeminist idea provides new insights for women to understand feminist thinking which does not only emphasize equality but also gives women the choice to select what they want in their lives. As stated by McRobbie (2009: 20-21) in the context of postfeminism, women, especially young women, struggle to live a life that has been marginalized by feminist thought. In postfeminism, the main objective of the women's struggle is not about financial freedom and independent life without men. The theory supports the idea that women can enjoy all the 'traditional feminine pleasures' without any pressure or guilty feelings, for instance, women begin a relationship with men and starting a family, because in the former feminist thinking, beginning a relationship with men only weakens the existence of women themselves. In addition, wearing clothes and dressing up 'girlish' are also interpreted as a symbol of women's weakness. Within postfeminist thought, women are asked to be aware of the choices that they could take and their own authority to make these choices, especially when they have good financial conditions. This can build their confidence. As a result, those women can show themselves to be empowered and free.

Female travelers who use Instagram to construct themselves realize that they have personal freedom even though they cannot be separated from the role of the media and the culture industry. On the one hand, female travelers want to portray an image of independence and freedom to their followers, yet on the other, many want to show their identity as women continuing to use the attributes constructed for them by the culture industry.

In reference to McRobbie's thoughts on the "New Women", female travelers show themselves as being free but still embracing their feminine identity by displaying 'feminine' attributes or dressing "girlish" outfits. One example of this is female travelers who climb mountains but wear pink shoes and bags, a color closely associated with femininity. Women's desire to show their feminine side is "packaged" in such a way by the media and cultural industries. They facilitate female travelers by presenting a variety of needs that are tailored to female travelers, so that female travelers have a close connection with the media and cultural industries.

1.2.2. Identity workshop

According to Shapiro (2015: 124), identity workshops are a "space, in real world (offline) or in virtual world (online), which encourages the development of a new identity or changes identity by encouraging exploration, play and adoption of identity". The use of Instagram as a "play" room or "identity workshop" in a virtual space becomes interesting to study and relates to the "identity workshop" in the offline space or the daily lives of female travelers. Shapiro (2015:123) writes that the construction process of self or self-identity in everyday life is called 'identity work'. She defined identity work as th activities individuals engage in to create, present and sustain personal identities. Furthermore, she argued identity work does not make false self-identity, but makes us as social beings who are able to adapt to the surrounding environment and always develop themselves.

1.3. Methodology

Based on the above mentioned previous research findings, it is crucial to add another point of view that considers Instagram as a place of "identity workshops" for female travelers, particularly using virtual ethnographic research methods. Virtual ethnographic research expands on Multi-Sited Ethnography which detaches itself from domestic dichotomy, and switches from local to global. According to Miller (2000: 5), in virtual ethnography we are not only dealing with computers and humans, but also with social order in society. However, Hine (2000:65) mentions that in doing a virtual ethnography, a direct meeting is not important, and the research can be carried out anytime as there is no time restriction to do it.

In this research, I will employ virtual ethnography methods in order to analyze photos and captions taken from @claudiakaunang's Instagram account that were uploaded between 2016 to 2018 as the primary data. In addition, for the secondary data purposes I have also included data based on interview with Kaunang as the owner of the @claudiakaunang Instagram's account.

2. Results and Discussion

In its development, the trend of women traveling and uploading photos on social media has also become a trend for female travelers in Indonesia. The name of Claudia Kaunang and her Instagram account @claudiakaunang, is familiar for Instagram users and those who enjoy traveling. She is known as a female traveler who has written 16 books on

traveling activities. She has a lot of followers on Instagram. Throughout her traveling activities, Kaunang uses Instagram as one platform of social media to show her self-actualization.

Kaunang is one of the Indonesian female travelers who provides inspiration for women in Indonesia, especially in terms of determining life choices and living life as one desires. Thus, her activity is in line with postfeminist thinking that emerged as a new concept in women studies. Kaunang's vision does not only discuss equality and how to be equal with men, but also to discuss how women are free to determine what they want and how they live their lives.

From the various social media platforms, Kaunang uses Instagram as her primary medium to explore and portray her identity. As shown in Figure 2, on this date Kaunang's Instagram account had 42,200 followers and she had posted 1185 images focusing on traveling activities and moments.
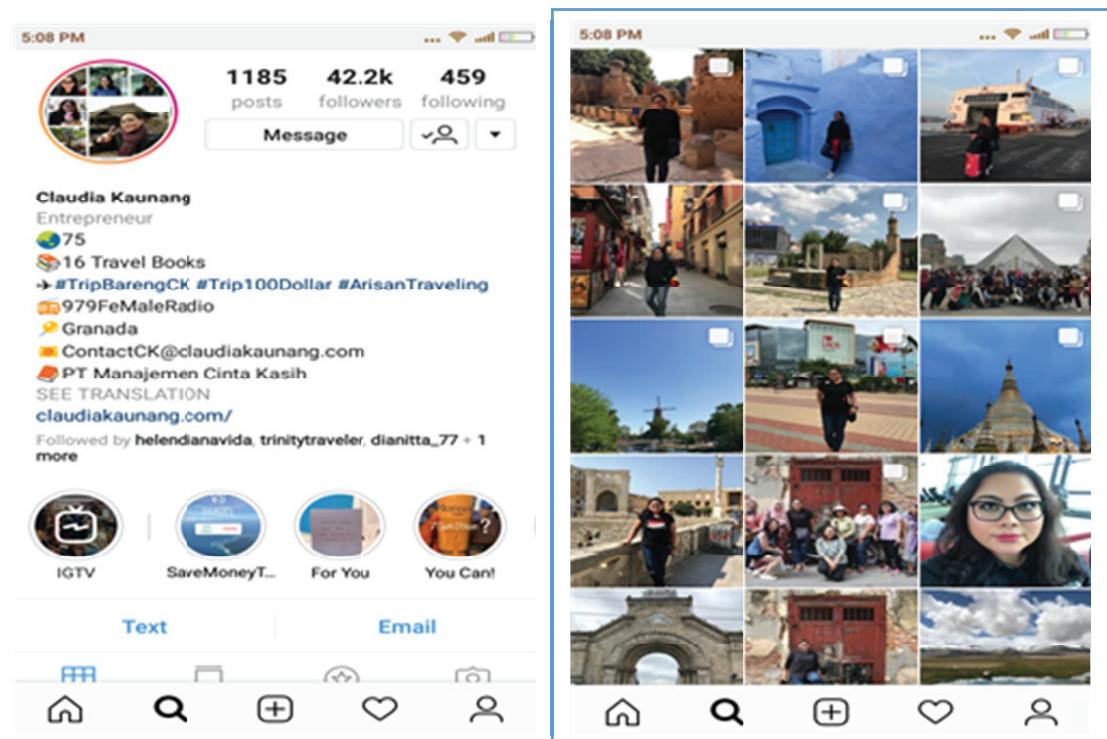

Figure 2: Front page Instagram account of Kaunang (Source Instagram account @claudiakaunang)

Based on McRobbie's concept of postfeminism, I analyzed Kaunang's Instagram account and her information during my interview with her. I made the following observations:

A. Women Empowerment

Through her Instagram account, Kaunang explores herself and portrays that she is free, independent and loves traveling. From the various posted photos and captions, we could see how she constructs herself through Instagram according to her wishes, more over through some of her posts she also invites others, especially women, to follow her as a woman who is free, independent and loves traveling.

Through her Instagram account, it can be seen that Kaunang does not only perform traveling activities for herself, but also holds open trip activities for anyone who wants to travel like her. From the open trip activities and the photos posted via the @claudiakaunang Instagram account, Kaunang confirms her identity as a free and independent woman. Furthermore, Kaunang also constructs herself as a travel guide who can invite many people to visit various places in the world at affordable costs.

Through her Instagram account, Kaunang also constructs herself as a woman who is able to achieve the ideals that Kartini fought for. This can be seen in Figures 3 and 4. Kaunang emphasizes that every woman can go anywhere she wants. A woman should not hesitate to achieve her dreams.

Education and employment are important considerations in postfeminism. According to McRobbie (2009, 72-88), women who have a good education, job and are financially secure are considered women who are capable to determine their lives. Kaunang implements McRobbie's concept by carrying out traveling activities. She emphasizes the importance of good money management for female travelers; as indicated through her Instagram account, Kaunang often reminds heself that if she wants to continue traveling, the female traveler must save and determine the purpose of traveling according to the funds they have. This shows that women's freedom in determining their choice of life, especially for traveling, must be supported by freedom and independence in financial matters (economic freedom).

Postfeminist discourse raises the concept of the "New Women" which emphasizes several points surrounding the empowerment of women, including financial matters and freedom in determining life related to education, sexuality, fashion, and even the choices of life. However, postfeminist discourse also acknowledges how media power and capitalism play an important role in influencing the life choices taken by women.

Figure 3: Kaunang in Iceland (Source Instagram account @claudiakaunang)

Women Choices

Although women have freedom and independence in their live,s both in financial terms and in other matters, they still miss the presence of men and other things which are constructed and related to women's choice, such as the color pink, cooking, raising children, and taking care of the house-work. As stated by McRobbie (2009: 21), "There is a strong feeling that young women who want to regain their femininity, without stating exactly why it was taken from them. These young women want to go back to being girls and enjoy all kinds of traditional feminine pleasures... it seems feminism, taking their most precious pleasures, such as romance, gossip, and obsession with getting a husband". In Figure 5, it can be seen that Kaunang wants to emphasize this through photos and captions observing that women who do traveling are generally single. The reason for being single has nothing to do with refusing marriage, but it is due to the difficulty to determine which man, is suitable for her. Kaunang opens herself to the

Figure 4: Kaunang in Sevile, Spain (Source Instagram account @claudiakaunang)

presence of men and she shows that she is able to choose the man she wants to be close to.

3. Conclusion

Instagram as a form of digital social media has expended its function, not only for communication and posting image, but also as a space for self construction. For female travelers, Instagram becomes one of the most popular social media platforms that they use to upload their journeys and also a space ("identity workshop") that encourages self-development and transformation of the identity for its users. Through Kaunang's photos and captions on Instagram, she explores and constructs herself as a free woman who is able to enjoy life and travel wherever she wants.

Figure 5: Kaunang's post about single women (Source Instagram account @claudiakaunang)

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