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Role of Virtual Communities in Improving the Quality of Blogs and Bloggers' Presence

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Abstract

The existence of blogger as a writer would be better with its membership in a virtual community because many more people can access his writing. This paper looks at the role of virtual communities in the existence of bloggers and how far bloggers can improve their presence through their writing. It will also show the communication patterns used to create an environment to bring out better creativity from the bloggers. This study involves a content analysis of the postings at emak2blogger.com website, and interviews with bloggers from Kumpulan Emak Blogger (KEB). The results show that of the quality of blogging and the blog traffic had increased through their web links to KEB. Communication contained in community KEB is group communication, the one in which a few people interacted in the same destination (on the blog) and information dissemination occurred with simultaneous distribution patterns. Other members of KEB also communicated intensively through interpersonal communication.

Keywords: blogger, group communication, virtual communities, virtual community

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1. Introduction

This is a case study of emak2blogger.com, which was established in January 2012. This website also comes with access to the social media Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, and includes a variety of contents such as lifestyle, parenting, food, and others. In addition, this website is a blogger community the members of which are all female bloggers. This study aims to determine the role of the virtual community, the presence of women bloggers and the extent to which the female bloggers can improve their online presence (or 'existence') through their writings. The research problems are:

1. What is the role of virtual communities in promoting women bloggers?

2. How far can female bloggers improve their online presence through their writing?

1.1. Theoretical Review

1.1.1. Communication Patterns

Group communication, according to Johnson and Johnson in Derry [2], can be understood better as a pattern of interaction rather than as a series of special skills. The definition of a group is a group of people who have a common goal, interacting with each other to achieve a common goal (their interdependence), getting to know each other, and seeing them as part of a group ([4]: 82). Group communication is a face-to-face interaction between three or more people, for the purposes of information sharing, keeping yourself, and problem solving, in which the members can remember the appropriate personal characteristics of other members.

Group communication is also experiencing growth along with the development of communication technologies; the role of communication technology to overcome the difference in distances is not achieved simply by speaking in a normal range. McLuhan said that the changes occurring in a variety of communication methods will create the whereabouts of a man himself. The use of such technology and media communication has become a staple of the communicators today, because essentially everyone's interest is in establishing a harmonious relationship with others using relevant media [5].

Communication style is defined as the shape or pattern of relationship between two or more people in the process of sending and receiving in a proper way so that the message in question can be understood ([3]: 1). Guetzkow in Pace & Faules ([6]: 171) states that the information flow can occur in three ways: (1) Spread Message Simultaneously. The requirement to deliver messages to several people at the same time gives the communication a role. The selection of dissemination techniques on timely basis (arriving simultaneously) requires certain considerations regarding the dissemination method slightly different from the usual one. One of the main considerations is how the message can be distributed at the same time. (2) Spread Message Sequentially.

Haney in Pace & Faules ([6]: 172) argues that "the delivery of the message sequence is a primary form of communication, which is bound to happen". The dissemination of information sequentially includes the expansion of dyadic forms of dissemination. So the message was transmitted from A to B to C to D to E in a series of transactions. (3) Combined Spread Message Simultaneously and Sequentially. In this information flow form, the message is delivered using a combined simultaneously and sequentially message dissemination. Due to the combined nature of the communication flow, it cannot be determined which will happen first. At first, it could be a message or information conveyed simultaneously and then followed by the sequentially message or

information delivery. Instead, message or information can also be submitted sequentially first, and then proceed simultaneously.

Interpersonal communication is the face to face (dyadic communication) taking place between two people, according to the Suranto Trenholm and Jansen ([8]: 3). The characteristics of such communication are: (a) spontaneous and informal; (b) each receive feedback to the fullest; (c) participants argued flexible role. Interpersonal communication is the communication between people face to face, allowing each participant capturing reactions of others directly, both verbal and nonverbal ([4]: 81). According to the Suranto DeVito ([8]: 4), interpersonal communication is the delivery of messages by a single person and message receiving by another person or a small group of people, with a variety of effects and with the opportunity of providing immediate feedback.

1.1.2. Virtual Communities and Blogger

The virtual community is a group of Internet users establishing a network of personal relationships [9]. Blog is short form of web log, a web application in the form of writings (published as a post) on a web page. These writings are often published in reverse order (the latest content comes first before the older ones), despite unnecessarily so. Such web sites can usually be accessed by all Internet users according to the topic and purpose of the user's blog. Blogger is a term for people writing on the blog.

Existence, according to the Indonesian big dictionary, is existence, the presence of which contains survival elements. Meanwhile, according to Abidin ([1]: 16) "Existence is a dynamic process, to be, or invent. This corresponds to origin of the word existence, exsistere, meaning out of, surpassed or overcome. So existence is not rigid and stalled, but supple and pliable or developing or otherwise experiencing setbacks, depending on the ability to actualize its potentials".

2. Method

This study used a qualitative research approach to the nature of descriptive research. The data used was a visual data contained in the website emak2blogger.com taken during September 2016. The analysis methods used were content analysis and interview. In analyzing this website, the author used descriptive analysis to describe how participants or members joined Kumpulan Emak Blogger (KEB) to communicate and to interact in their capacity as a female bloggers. The author also interviewed two bloggers from KEB to determine the direct benefits of the virtual community existence in improving the capability and their existence as a blogger

3. Findings and Discussion

Website emak2blogger.com carries the tagline 'Inspiring women, we are here to share'. KEB was established on 18 January 2012, spearheaded by Mira Sahid and her two companions. The objective of this community is to be a means of sharing inspiration, information, motivation, and work through their respective blogs. The requirements to be a member of this community are: (1) women (2) having a personal blog (3) having at least five pieces of writing in a blog that is updated in the last five months before applying for joining KEB (4) having a personal account FaceBook, and account FaceBook of KEB is cannot used for commercial purpose (5) filling in the form (6) waiting for confirmation from the administrator (7) complying with the applicable rules (8) thereafter a member could put the KEB logo in a personal blog and put a link to the KEB (emak2blogger.com) website.

Considering the requirements to be a member of the virtual community of KEB, not everyone can be its member, unlike other virtual communities having a lot of conveniences for those who want to join. KEB community was selected in this study due to, among others, the community deserves to be studied scientifically because its members are those having writing ability and having the output of these capabilities, that is writing through media, hereinafter referred blogger. Viewed in more detail, the figures of KEB community members not only play or work as a blogger but also have other professions, such as freelance writer, master of ceremonies, housewives, trainers, and so on.

To be able to write on the website emak2blogger, an individual should be the member of KEB community first. For non-regular contributors, the members just send their writing, while a regular contributor, the member must send at least three posts at the beginning, and then at least for a month submit writings to the website emak2blogger.com, and all of his writings should be the original work. Because of the different professional background and experience of the bloggers, the writings on the website KEB also varying, including parenting, lifestyle, events, and reviews. Many interesting articles can be an inspiration, information, and motivation, especially for women, as members of this community are women.

Examples of interesting blogs are, 'Learning to Be Imperfect', the text contents of which tells about how a parent or a mother tries to provide education about discipline to his son, but the results is that the children cannot be disciplined for conducting activities according to schedule, putting something in place. So, finally as the time progresses, the mother can accept that their children are not perfect as expected. Other writings may include the tips to do when the spirit of writing to be down, the knowledge about information technology and many other interesting articles. Each article in KEB website has links to the personal blog of their respective authors. This

shows that the members of the community KEB upload writings into their personal blog, so it is possible to be more accessible to readers.

Access to the blogger and their work is not limited to through emak2blogger.com website only but the community also has a Facebook account. Through FaceBook all the writings on emak2blogger.com website can also be accessed by the link; the members can also update their personal blog post via Facebook. In addition to Facebook, personal blog can also be accessed through Instagram, Twitter accounts, and YouTube of bloggers. In addition, KEB community has an account in the WhatsApp, Twitter, and Telegram as well. Communications is made through both online and offline activities, where a fellow community members are able to meet in person. KEB has a partner community as a sponsor of the activities carried out by the KEB Community. Activities undertaken include a seminar about healthy internet, blogging contest, workshops trial hotspots, and more. KEB Community also often receives invitations offline activities, attended the launch of the company's products, as well as cooperation with companies.

3.1. Interview Result

Two informants were selected from the members of KEB virtual community. The first one is KEB official, to obtain information whether or not the conditions contained in the current KEB community is in accordance with the objective of community establishment. The second informant has been a member of KEB for two years, to explain how KEB virtual community affects the ability and existence of a blogger.

The first informant named Indah Juliani is also one of the founders and advisors of KEB, working as a fulltime writer and blogger. She has written 10 children's books, and 11 anthology books. She perceived some benefits of being a member of KEB: having many friends, networking, and information especially about the world of blogging, women world, lifestyle and parenting. As a blogger, Indah is proud of being a woman blogger, like what one of the founders say, 'Of course I feel exist as part of KEB'. The main interaction among members is through the Kumpulan Emak Blogger (KEB) Facebook group, as well as using WhatsApp group and telegrams.

Indah, as one of the founders, hopes that KEB can inspire all female bloggers Indonesia in the future. It can be a pleasant home for Indonesian female bloggers. She said "...there many advantages of joining KEB .... I can add friends, expand networking, and add information. The information is broad as well, for example ... around the blogging world, women world, lifestyle, also parenting ... ". As a blogger, the subject is proud of being one of active female bloggers; moreover, the subject is one of the founders. She continued "... certainly exist, then I would be the founder .... Each month I would have to write and read people ... any time I write, I feel increasing my knowledge, and the more frequently I write, the more flexible is my writing automatically..."

The second informant named Ade Delina Putri is the member of KEB who is also a blogger and reviewer. Ade stated that her perceived benefits of participating in the KEB are adding social networking bloggers, increasing blog traffic because by means of sharing anything in the KEB group, more people will visit the blog, and adding a lot of information such as job for the blogger, or other events to be held. And joining KEB community makes Ade more established as a blogger especially since she joined the KEB Collaborative Blogging program, and she and her blog become more famous. Communication runs well between KEB members. Even through Collaborative program, Ade can affiliate with WhatsApp group that can be used as a means of sharing knowledge about blogs and blogging.

KEB, according to Ade, is already quite glorious, but of course there should be an improvement. Ade gave a little input so that there is schedule to learn about blogging, because many female bloggers do not understand blogging, while they actually want to occupy their blog seriously. She said "... After joining KEB I feel to be existing because many people have read my text ... I become more existing since joining the Collaborative Blogging program... so more readers know me and read my blog ...". She also said "... We do have a whatsapp group, so I think we could share blogging science, stories ... could ask anything ..."

3.2. Discussion

The content analysis of emak2blogger.com website showed many overlapping articles in the terms of topics or menus because the administrator of website likely consider that they contain multiple topics. In the future, the articles should be included into the topics more appropriately, so that the readers will not find similar articles on different topics or menu. Also, according to one informant, there should be a schedule of activities to be carried out in the KEB community, so that members can better prepare themselves particularly for the activities that can improve blogger productivity.

Based on the results of the interview represented by two informants, it can be found that communication and activities happen in KEB community through the website emak2blogger.com and offline activities prove to increase the ability of members as the blogger. KEB virtual community is somewhat different from other virtual communities. Most members are adult women with the background as a blogger, so they use online media better to communicate with the community, and it is difficult to find a negative side in their interaction and activities.

4. Conclusion

Kumpulan Emak Blogger (KEB) virtual community is a community of female bloggers, who not only communicate and interact online or virtually, but also do so offline or in person between members. And joining KEB, its members who are mostly blogger have improved their online presence, hence their existence as a blogger. The KEB community receives many invitations from seminars, product launching in an enterprise, as well as other workshop activities. KEB members who are female bloggers can further enhance their presence, because by joining the KEB their ability and knowledge of writing in blogs have increased with higher reader access leading to an increase blog traffic because of their link to KEB web.

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