ICT and Social Relationship Engagement: Women's Online Communities in Indonesia

4 authors, including:

Yudi Basuki
Universitas Diponegoro
26 PUBLICATIONS   **130** CITATIONS

Roos Akbar
Bandung Institute of Technology
23 PUBLICATIONS   **73** CITATIONS

Pradono Pradono
Bandung Institute of Technology
46 PUBLICATIONS   **222** CITATIONS

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

Strengthen national climate policy implementation: Comparative empirical learning & creating linkage to climate finance (SNAPFI) View project

Departemen Urban and Regional Planning View project

5th Arte Polis International Conference and Workshop – "Reflections on Creativity: Public Engagement and The Making of Place", Arte-Polis 5, 8-9 August 2014, Bandung, Indonesia

ICT and Social Relationship Engagement: Women's Online Communities in Indonesia

Yudi Basuki[a]*, Roos Akbar[a], Pradono[a], Miming Miharja[a]

School of Architecture, Planning and Policy Development, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia

Abstract

The article explains the community activity, forming community process and how fulfilment of women's online communities needs to prove whether physical meeting is still required. The development of ICT has resulted in changes in the definition of society to be network society. Within the network society, the communities' social relationship pattern has changed from hierarchical to more flexible structure. Such convenience has also facilitated the women in actualizing themselves through women's online communities. It was initially believed that most matters can be done without having to meet in person. Descriptive analysis is used to explain the characteristic of women's online communities with sample framework from two women's communities: Women Blogger Community and Women Pregnant Community. The result shows that the phenomenon of women's online communities is a flexible and non-hierarchical social relationship engagement. This engagement of relationship needs virtual and real space in its community's activities.

Keywords: women's online communities; social relationship engagement; virtual and real space;

1. Introduction

Nowadays, urban activities around the world increase rapidly, along with the development of information and communication technology, which then set up the informational city (Castells, 1989). This development led to a new paradigm in urban infrastructure planning and the facility for the flow of information. Information infrastructure has become an absolute necessity in the development of cities and regions since a decade ago (Graham, 2001). City

---

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +6281326283162
  E-mail address: yudibasuki@yahoo.com

planners were encouraged to anticipate the raise of information needs that impacted to the system activity and structure of the city (Audirac, 2005).

The development of information and communication technology has affected the social life and led to the network society (Gustavo, 2006). In the network society, the pattern of social relations experienced structural changes where geographical proximity is no longer the condition and relationships are more flexible. The changes in are not only in real space/ room but also in virtual space as a variety of new social groups can be created (Gamal , 2010; François , 2009; Hampton , 2007). This phenomenon occurs not only in developed countries but also in developing countries. However, the changes are different in every country depending on the availability of information and communication technologies.
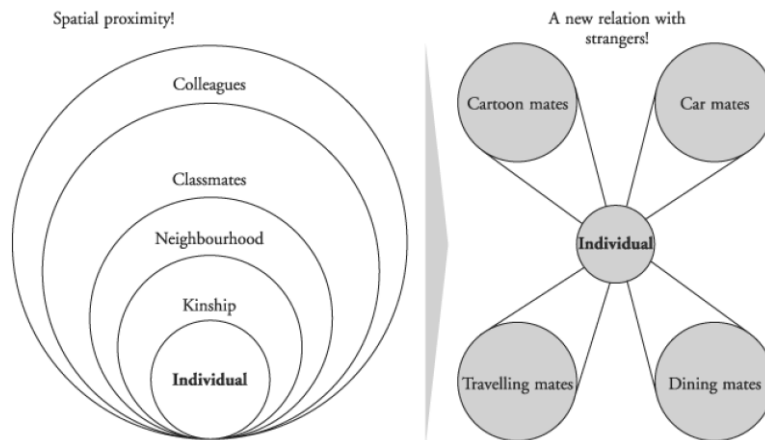

Fig. 1. Changing Forms of Social Relations. Source: Francois, 2009.

Initially, the information and communication technology is supposed to reduce or eliminate the distance of human movement (Cairncross, 1997). Some activities using information technology, such as teleconferencing and tele-education, has reduced the movement of people. But for the city development, information technology has changed the concept of physical space into a virtual space (Francois, 2009). Space and time become a relative flow. (Castells, 2010). The access to virtual networks allows people to connect in a variety of activities at any time and place. (Ohmori, 2006; Golob, 2001). The easy application on internet allows people to initiate online communities, based on people's interest, in small to large groups. Its existence can last for a long time or a short time. Activities of members of online communities are varied, but mostly are exchange of information and knowledge based on their interests.

The formation of an online community is the representation of human self-actualization porcess after the primary and secondary needs has been met (Maslow in Williams, 1995). The online community covers a diverse member and interest, from old to new friends, from hobbies to fans, and specific activities triggered by donations for disaster. Hummel &Lechner (2002) classifies the online communities into five categories, namely 1) gaming communities, 2) communities of interest, 3) consumer to consumer communities (C2C), 5) business to business communities (B2B). The women are also facilitated in actualizing herself by the internet through the online community of women. The uniqueness of women's nature has been utilized to create a community in that their interest and equity in society can be underlined. The United Nations has pioneered programs for gender equality by which the access of women to internet increases. (UN, 2005). The information and communication technology has enabled women to demonstrate their existence and gender equality.

The use of information and communication technology and internet users in Indonesia has increased rapidly. User of Facebook in Indonesia was ranked third place in the world, after the United States and Britain. The number of Facebook users is more than 26 million people. Besides for social activities, Facebook is also used to promote online shopping. (Social Media World Forum Asia, 2010). Although this number is relatively small compared to the

total population of Indonesia, the trend of internet uses in urban areas is increasing.

2. Aim

This article is to explain the influence of information and communication technology on social relations in society where the distance is no longer an obstacle to initiating a social bond among women. It will prove that information and communication technology has increased the participation of women in creating social bonds, yet, has not eliminated the face to face interaction. The questions to be answered by this article are 1) how social engagement in women online community are being initiated, 2) what kind of place is created from the activities of women online community.

3. Research Method

The method used for the research is a survey for comparative analysis in two women online communities: women blogger community and pregnant community. Samples taken are 79 people for women blogger community and 61 people for pregnant community. Data from the two communities are compared, and a descriptive analysis of them will explain the characteristics of the community. The analysis includes type of works, location of residence, the use of internet, and the intensity of activity in the online community. The analysis is also intended to illustrate the degree of satisfaction provided by the online community on its member's need and the importance of face to face interaction among members. In the end, the two communities will be compared for their spatial requirements.

4. Discussion / Analysis

To answer the research questions, the discussion is focused on the characteristics of each online community by recognizing the activities, number of members, geographical location of members, satisfaction of members, and needs of face to face interaction. Geographical location of the members is investigated to identify whether social relationship among members is limited or independent from any physical boundaries.

Komunitas Emak Blogger (KEB), is an Indonesian women blogger community that consists hundreds of member residing in Indonesia and abroad. It was founded by Mira Sahid on January 18, 2012. The activities undertaken in the community include the sharing of inspiration, information, motivation and working issues. Members of the community frequently meet offline (face to face interaction). The members are women between 19 and 45 years old with a variety of professional background. Some of them are housewives (53%), private sector employees (29%), self-employed (6%), school/ college students (9%), and the rest is not working (3%). Komunitas Ibu Hamil is a blogger community that discusses pregnancy and parenting. This community was founded in 2011, and 196 out of 849 members are active (data of March 2013). The activities undertaken in the community include discussion and seminar on pregnancy and parenting, and sales of product. The members are women between 19 and 35 years old with a variety of profession ranging from housewives (66%), private sector employees (32%), and not working women (4 %).

The establishment of both women online communities got along with the advent of internet community. The blog was initiated by individuals and small groups, and evolved by the growing number of people accessing to this community portal. The members are from various cities in Indonesia. Most of them are from metropolitan cities such as Jakarta (35 %), Bandung (18 %), Semarang (8 %), Yogyakarta (12 %), Surabaya (18 %), Medan (2 %) and Makassar (2 %). A small number of members are from smaller cities such as Ciamis (2 %), Kuningan (2 %), Lampung (2 %), Tulung Agung (1 %), Balikpapan (1 %), Tarakan (1 %), Jambi (1 %), Padang (1 %) and Nabire (1 %). This indicates that social relationship is not affected by the distance and geographical location, as it was discussed in Hampton (2007). Social relationships in the virtual community are based on common interests and needs of its members, so that the relations are flexible and not hierarchical (Francois, 2009). Similar condition is found in the establishment of women online community in Indonesia.

Both online communities perform active interactions among its members. 72 % of the women blogger community and 84 % of the pregnant community access the website every day and carry out the session of question and answer. The website is also utilized for dissemination of information and promotion of products related to

pregnancy. Women are willing to subscribe as a member of women community because of the information that are specific to women issues. Most of the discussion in the women blogger community is around daily activities of its member. In the pregnant community, topics being discussed are about pregnancy, medical consultation and parenting issues. Not all issues are discussed thoroughly, in that the needs of a majority member are not completely fulfilled through the virtual community. This can be seen in Table 1. For the reason to fulfil the needs, members of the community subsequently organize face to face interactions. Table 2 shows the need of the face to face interactions among members. The numbers in Table 2 indicate that online community is not sufficient for the women to cope with their needs.

Table 1.Women Online Community's Level of Fulfilment

Fulfillment needs	Women Blogger Community	Pregnant Community
Fulfilled	8%	11%
Almost fulfilled	78%	76%
A little fulfilled	12%	10%
Not Fulfilled	2%	3%

Table 2.The Importance of Face to Face Interaction

Level	Women Blogger Community	Pregnant Community
Need strongly	72%	66%
Need	25%	27%
No need	3%	7%

Table 2 shows that the information and communication technology does not reduce the needs of the face to face interaction in Indonesian women communities. This condition does not correspond to the condition mentioned in Cairncross (1997). Women are pleased to communicate online with other women, yet, they still need to see the face to face. Information is not the only concern of women. Social relations and human interaction are still the motivations of joining a community. The intention to meet face to face usually is initiated by one or more members. The invitation to meet is then posted to the online community and, as many members respond to it, a program for face to face interaction is organized. A theme and place of meeting will be discussed online, and members live in the same district will gather in a public place in the nearby.

Cattan (2007) and Zandvliet (2005) have indicated that the meeting place is highly dependent on the preferences of the community. It can be a highly representative place such as a conference hall, hotel, and restaurant, or in a more informal ambience such as someone's home, small shop, cafe, and garden. When Cattan (2007) and Zandvliet (2005) identified that the meeting can take place in local, regional or inter-state area; in the context of Indonesian women, face to face meeting takes place in town and varied as shown in Figure 2.
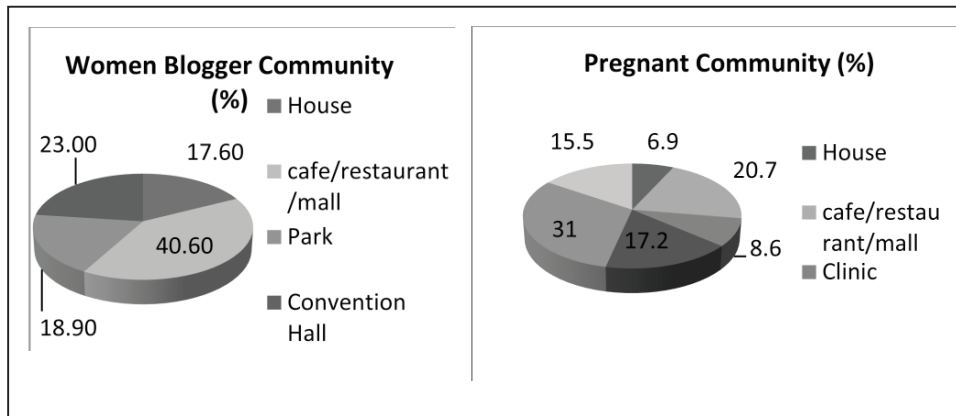
Fig. 2. The Place for face to face meeting.

5. Result

The women online community has attracted many women with similar interests and needs to gather in a virtual community for gaining better and effective information. The community has imposed the use of internet on the daily basis, by which increase the demand for internet access among women. The community is quite diverse in regards to age, professions and location of residence. Social relations are quite open, flexible and egalitarian. The women in Indonesia need a physical space as well as a virtual space. The virtual space is needed to gain information and to chat, whereas the physical space is for face to face meeting. The fulfilment of the virtual space depends on the availability of the internet access and the quality of telecommunication infrastructure. There are similarities and differences in the demand for physical space between the women blogger community and the pregnant community. Both communities use private house, café, restaurant, mall, park, and conference hall as a meeting place. The pregnant community uses related space to their pregnancy as the gathering place, such as the clinic and pregnancy gym. The physical space is required because not all aspects of women's life can be discussed virtually.
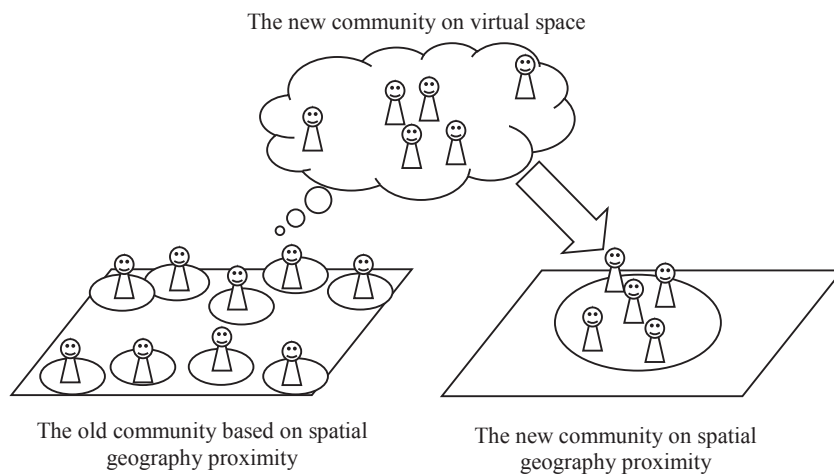

Fig. 3. Social engagement and spatial change of Women Online Community.

From the analysis of two women online communities, it is proven that social relations among women have undergone structural changes. Geographical proximity is no longer a determinant for the social relationship. A new community of women is established by the virtual space and the space has led to social engagement among members for a certain issues. Subsequently, the engagement produces the need of a physical space that enables members of the community to have face-to face interactions. The change of social relations among women is shown in Figure 4.
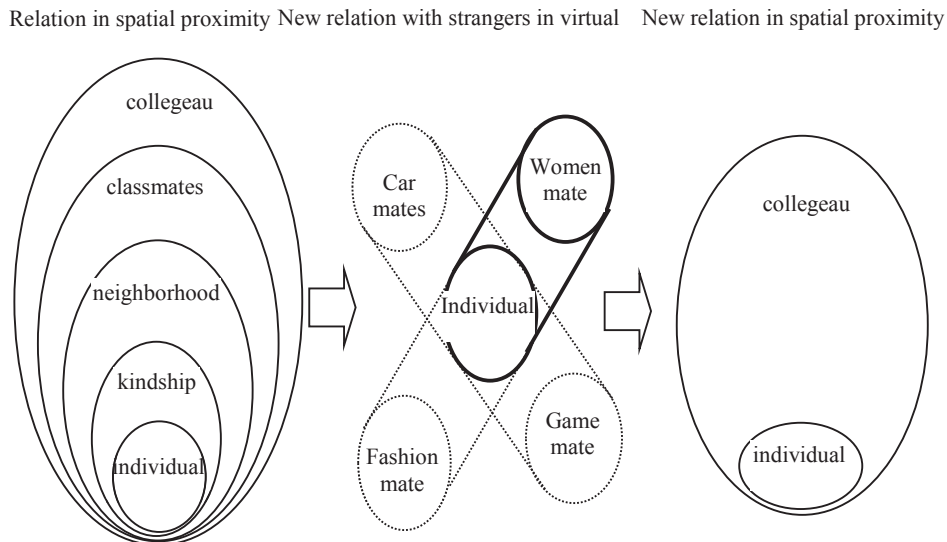
Relation in spatial proximity   New relation with strangers in virtual   New relation in spatial proximity

Fig. 4. Changing The Form of Social Relations in Women Online Community. Source: Modified model of Francois, 2009.

Conclusion

The Internet has facilitated the formation of new social relationships among women. The women are engaged to an online community due to common interests. Their engagement to the community is highly flexible and unconstrained by geographical proximity. The individual member is a stranger one to another, comes from various background and lives in several places all over Indonesia. Although the women communicate regularly online, they still require face-to-face interactions in a physical space to fulfil their needs to be with other women. Women, in fact, need both physical and virtual space to communicate with others. The blog becomes the virtual space that accommodates women' activities and interests, whereas public place such as parks, malls, cafes, conference hall stand for the physical place that fulfil physical interactions.

References

Audirac, I. (2005). Information Technology and Urban Form: Challlenges to smart growth international. *Regional Science Review, 28, 2,* 119–145.

Caincoss, F. (1997). *The Death of Distance : How the Communications Revolution Will Change Our Lives*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Cattan, N. (2007). Student Mobility, Gender and Polycentrism in Europe. In Cattan, N. (Eds.), *Cities and networks in Europe. A critical approach of polycentrism.* Surrey: John Libbey Eurotext.

Castells, M. (2010). *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Volume I: The Rise of The Network Society* (2nd edition). UK: A John Wiley & Son. Ltd, Publication.

Castells, M. (2009). *Communication Power*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Castells, M., & Cardoso, G. (2005). *The Network Society: From knowledge to policy*. Washington DC: Johns Hopkins Center for Transatlantic Relations.

Castells, M. (1989). *The Informational City : Information Technology, Economic Restructuring, and Urban-Regional Process*. Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell.

Choo, S. (2004). Aggregate Relationships between Telecommunications and Travel : Structural Equation Modeling of Time Series Data, Dissertation of Doctor, University of California Davis.

Francois, D., & Shang, D. (2009). *Becoming mobile in contemporary urban China: How increasing ICT usage is reformulating the spatial dimension of sociability.* International Development Research Centre.

Gamal, H. E. (2010). Network society: A social evolution powered by youth. *Global Media Journal Arabian Edition Fall/Winter, 1 (1),* 16-26.

Golob, T. (2001). *Travel Behavior.Com: activity approaches to modeling the effects of information technology on personal travel behaviour.* Institute Transportation Studies, Universities of California.

Graham, S. (2001). Information technologies and reconfigurations of urban space . *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 25*.

Gustavo, C. (2006). The Media in the Network Society: Browsing, News, Filters and Citizenship, Lisboa, Portugal: CIES – Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology.

Hajer, M., & Zonneveld, W. (2000). Spatial Planning in the Network Society—Rethinking the Principles of Planning in the Netherlands. *European Planning Studies, 8 (3)*.

Hampton, K. N. (2007). Neighborhoods in the Network Society: The e-Neighbors Study. *Journal Information Communication & Society*, *10*, 5.

Hummel, J. & Lechner, U. (2002). Social Profiles of Virtual Communities*, Proceedings of the 35th Hawaii International Conference on Systems Sciences. Hawaii, USA.*

Ohmori, N. (2006). Connected anytime: telecommunications and activity-travel behavior from Asian perspectives, *11th International Conference on Travel Behaviour* Research. Kyoto, Japan.

Williams, R. N., & Slife, B.D. (1995). *What's behind the research: Discovering hidden assumptions in the behavioral sciences*. USA: Sage Publications Inc.

Zandvliet, R., & Dijst, M. (2006). Short-term Dynamics in the Use of Places: A Space–Time Typology of Visitor Populations in the Netherlands. *Urban Studies, 43, (7),* 1159–1176.