

Social Media Ethics on Instagram as a Virtual Public Space for Teenagers



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ABSTRACT: The understanding of ethics in interaction with social media is different for each individual. Some people consider social media as a public space that must maintain boundaries of behavior and others consider social media as a medium of expression to show self-identity. Problems that arise in the use of social media include the fusion of private space with the public space of its users, especially on Instagram social media. This research uses a virtual ethnography strategy with a qualitative research approach. The type of research used is descriptive qualitative with the population of this research is teenagers who are active Instagram users. The first finding is the ethics of drawing boundaries between public and private space on Instagram. How Instagram social media blurs the boundaries between public and private matters. This research also reveals the ethics and interactions that occur in the social media space of Instagram.

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of information technology has consciously opened the space of human life wider and more borderless. This technological advancement has transformed cyberspace consisting of various magnetic waves and radio waves, as well as material properties that have not been discovered by humans, as a new life space that is very prospective for human activities that have high efficiency values (Bungin, 2009). Technology is a human creation, so virtual society uses all the methods of real life as a model developed in virtual life.

Since the emergence of the internet, people are more easily connected to interact with each other. Based on data from (Wearesocial.com, 2023), the number of internet users has grown by 3.7 percent over the past year, reaching 5.30 billion in October 2023. This equates to 65.7 percent of the world's population, although delays in reporting mean that actual internet penetration is likely to be higher than these figures suggest. In Indonesia alone, internet users were recorded at 204.7 million users in the same year (Datareportal.com, 2023).

The widespread use of the internet has alerted people to the importance of maintaining rules and norms. The internet has become one part of the new life, therefore people must know the ethics in the virtual world to maintain the overall order of life. Virtual society has a system of institutions and social controls that are built together as a self-protection system. The form of community access activities in cyberspace must be regulated and controlled so that its presence does not disrupt or damage the existing network. Some of the institutions and social controls that are prevalent in virtual communities take the form of logins, passwords or PIN numbers used to access a particular page.

The presence of social media adds to the changes in the fabric of society. Social media is an online media that supports social interaction (Triyanto, 2019). Social media is a mainstay in disseminating information and becoming a medium of learning for the community (Prawati, 2020). The existence of social media has an impact on communication and information dissemination occurs so quickly, so that people can access it easily anywhere and anytime, now they can work and think as a digital society.

There are various kinds of social media ranging from social networks (Whatsapp, Instagram, Facebook, Linked-In, and Line), content sharing sites (YouTube), Wikipedia, blogs and microblogging (Twitter). Instagram was chosen as the focus of this research because it is one of the most popular social media among teenagers. Instagram is a social media platform used to share content in the form of photos and videos accompanied by explanatory captions. Through Instagram social media, people, especially teenagers, do not hesitate to upload all kinds of activities, complaints, personal photos and short videos to be conveyed to the wider community through Instagram social media accounts in shaping their self-identity (Sakti & Yulianto, 2013).

Problems that arise in the use of social media include the fusion of private space with the public space of its users (Anwar, 2017). This has resulted in teenagers and social media users not hesitating to spread all personal activities so that they can be known to the public.

This research was conducted to find out the understanding of teenagers in interacting in virtual public spaces. Instagram is a public space where everyone can find out about other people's activities through their respective account uploads. Interactions that

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occur on Instagram are the same as interactions in virtual public spaces where everyone must understand the ethics of using them, including teenagers who are at the age of forming an identity for self-existence. They must understand the boundaries between privacy and public space, as well as good communication ethics in public spaces. The concept of private and public space is created by everyone to maintain mutual safety and comfort.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research related to virtual interactions on social media has previously been conducted by Indrianti Azhar (2018) and Febriyanti & Tutiasri (2018) where both focus on using Facebook social media to find out how to interact and how to communicate, get news, information, and socialize. Furthermore, research on social media ethics has been conducted by Benito Kodiyat (2018) and Yuhdi Fahrimal (2018) where they found that the existence of rules and norms on social media is a form of legal system in Indonesia and ethics in interacting on social media. This research is also reinforced by the results of research from Drozdova (2020) that the boundaries of public space and private space in using social media need to be known with an understanding of the ethics of using social media itself.

The work of society produces technology and material culture which is needed by humans to master the surrounding nature, so that the strength and results can be devoted to human needs (Maros & Juniar, 2022). The birth of the internet is a new culture that exists in human life as a form of technological development (Bell, 2001). The internet affects the social interaction style of today's society. Products of pervasive technology with unlimited access to information such as social media access, online shopping, digital payments, online education, and work from home. These activities are inseparable from social interactions generated from the internet (Agustiawan et al., 2023).

Social media is a part of new media, whose functions are not much different from new media, namely interacting, exchanging information, and publishing daily activities. Through social media, many teenagers use it as a means of interacting with friends, sharing school materials, playing games, and or just filling spare time (Sekarayu & Santoso, 2022), thus creating a space called virtual public space. Virtual public space allows individuals to join it freely and openly. The concept of virtual public space is the second public space concept after real-world public space is available through modern social media (Panagiotopoulos, 2022). Virtual public space is used as self-actualization and a form of virtual simulation of the real world that allows free and open exchange of information including public opinion. Virtual public space provides an opportunity for individuals to interact with other parties even beyond their geographical boundaries. Various comments, opinions and attitudes on issues can be found in social media. In it, hard to soft attitudes and opinions can be expressed, as well as various reactions such as sarcastic and humorous ones when responding to them (Ishaq & Mahanani, 2018).

Social media and the internet have raised issues of conflicting ethical and moral values (Belsey & Chadwick, 2002). Ethics on social media are put aside because of the freedom that social media facilitates as a space to interact and communicate. With social media, users can easily find or add friends, inform something, express feelings or ideas, express feelings or emotions into words, pictures, or photos, and even forward news (Wood, 2013). This freedom of space to share often leads to speech that offends, hurts indirectly, bullying, both to speech partners and parties outside the speech partners. This is what is said today to have occurred an ethical crisis (Hapsari Wijayanti, Sihotang, Emmily Dirgantara, & Maytriyanti, 2022).

The utilization of social media such as Instagram also has negative and positive impacts. The negative aspects can be seen from the neglect of ethics in the use of Instagram media and the lack of control from the authorities making Instagram used by some irresponsible people. A small example is faking someone's identity, usually public figures, and organizations. Other examples of users helping to spread hoaxes, users using disrespectful words, cursing, blaspheming, slandering and so on. The motives can vary, from just idle, playful, nosy, to even deliberately killing the good image of others who are falsified and misused by name (Langit et al., 2021). On the positive side, Instagram is a social network that is used as a place to disseminate and share information, interact with many people, and get to know more closely with fellow Instagram users through uploaded photos, videos.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative research methods based on reality in the field supported by information based on the experience and knowledge of informants (Sutton & Austin, 2015). In the context of this research is in using Instagram. The type of research used is descriptive. Descriptive qualitative research is used to describe a phenomenon that has been studied and to describe the phenomenon on social media related to understanding ethics in the culture of interaction in virtual public spaces (Matondang & Zariyati, 2023). This research focuses on teenagers' activities on Instagram. Descriptive research is based on the results of interviews with informants, namely students of the Faculty of Social Science & Political Science (FISIP), Sebelas Maret University.

This research uses a virtual ethnography strategy as a research method to understand society and culture formed from human interaction through the internet network (Nasrullah, 2018). Cristine Hine (2000) stated that virtual ethnography is a methodology for conducting internet research and exploring entities (users) while using the internet. Virtual ethnography is defined as an activity of researchers to understand how people interact and work together through phenomena observed in daily activities.

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The population in this study are active Instagram users. Who have criteria in accordance with the requirements as sources to be sampled, the criteria are as follows:

- a. Students of FISIP, Sebelas Maret University.
- b. Aged 18-24 years old
- c. Active and have an Instagram account

The sampling technique uses purposive sampling technique with the focus of data in accordance with these criteria that are able to describe the research objectives.

RESULTS

This study found ethics that need to be considered in using social media, especially Instagram as a virtual public space. The ethics that must be considered in using Instagram are understanding the boundaries of public space and private space, verifying news before trusting, and commenting politely, not offending and not participating in spreading hoaxes. This research also summarizes some ethics that need to be considered and should not be done by the community in using Instagram social media.

Limits Between Public Space and Private Space

The first finding is the ethics of drawing boundaries between public and private spaces. Instagram is a virtual public space that is applicable so that everyone can engage in discussion and interaction in it. The social system on Instagram is shown by the following or followers of other user accounts. Communication formed between fellow Instagram users can be in the form of giving likes or comments on an uploaded post, besides the direct message feature on Instagram can also be done to send direct messages that are more private.

The presence of social media makes the boundaries of public space more fluid. The meaning of private space and public space is contradictory, almost everyone has a different understanding. Public space itself appears as a specific domain - public versus private (Habermas, 1991). Instagram features comments, statuses and posts that are useful as a virtual public space, which is a place for users to convey ideas, publish their opinions, inform an existing reality.

Accessing the internet as a public domain is a relatively new phenomenon, it definitely requires a similar set of civil rules, intuitive or formal, that govern its vast and information-based activities (Camp & Chien, 2000). Although Instagram is a public space that can freely share moments, information, and experiences with the audience, it is necessary to pay attention to the boundaries that are private for oneself and others.

Meetings conducted through Instagram can be done effectively and efficiently, unlike traditional public spaces that utilize public places to gather. However, with Instagram as a public space, people often blur the boundaries between public and private matters. In the end, this blurring of boundaries creates problems in social life. It is important to understand the boundaries of public and private space to maintain the security of one's own data, because there are many digital crimes by stealing data obtained from social media posts.

The Ethics of Giving Opinions on Instagram

Opinion on social media is a virtual freedom of speech. Instagram as a public space is a place to express themselves through their ideas freely, including disseminating information. Therefore, this freedom must be followed by finding the correct and reliable source of information, before disseminating it. As a public space, opinions or opinions conveyed through Instagram are likely to be at odds with other users.

Having an opinion is allowed for anyone by paying attention to appropriate ethics and norms. Therefore, the sentences used should not offend each other and should not spread hoaxes to maintain public order. Using social media requires understanding the ethics of its use. Every interaction and action performed with digital technology can be recorded and stored as digital trace data. Understanding the ethics of social media as a virtual public space is not given through formal education but it can be learned through literature that is also available on the internet itself.

In delivering comments and opinions on Instagram contains social interaction. The process of interaction and communication between individuals can influence and adjust each other through mutually compatible actions. Social relationships created by each individual form social norms that limit community behavior. In using social media, of course, paying attention to ethics is not much different from the values held from real life. Basically, the ethics applied in the virtual world is a reflection of social reality.

Instagram has symbols to understand social media ethics, symbols are used to indicate whether a post is appropriate or not to be accepted by users. Interactions on Instagram that show ethical users are appropriate posts that will appear on the account and home page, while if the post is not appropriate or violates media rules, it will be blocked by Instagram. This shows that the role of the media in selecting a user post is appropriate not to violate the personal and social rights of the community.

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CONCLUSION

This research has described the form of understanding of social media ethics among adolescents in the virtual public space of Instagram. There are several ethics that have been applied in using Instagram, namely understanding the boundaries of public and private, how to express opinions and comments on social media. Teenagers are a group that dominates social media users. The ethics that teenagers understand in playing social media by applying the boundaries between public and private spaces for themselves. The ethics of expressing opinions and commenting are characterized by paying attention to the use of good and polite language, ensuring valid news sources, not offending others, not spreading hoaxes, hate speech, and harming other parties.

This research suggests that teenagers are able to understand the ethics of social media as a virtual public space. Although Instagram is a public space, users must understand the boundaries between public and private rights. In using social media as communication between individuals, they must maintain politeness and maintain public order. People must properly understand the ethics in social media that are not much different from the norms in the real world. Basically, the virtual world is a reflection of a more modern real world.

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