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Social Media, Awkarin Phenomenon and the Freedom of Expression Among Teenaged Girls

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Abstract: **1** Instagram has been so popular nowadays after Facebook and resulted many new celebrities who are called as “Selebgram” or celebrity Instagram. These celebrities have given so much influence to the followers and become new idols and role models especially for young people or teenagers. Awkarin is a selebgram who has more than two million followers with so many controversies. This research was conducted in Malang, East Java from Juli- September 2017 and used descriptive qualitative method. The data gathering techniques were interview and documentation. Meanwhile, the sampling technique was a purposive sampling. The result showed that most teenaged girls used social media as reference to identify themselves. The acceptance of their peers to get their identity has become an important thing and with the easy access to social media it has created a new way of finding identity and expressing themselves. Unfortunately, they have a role model crisis with the influence of their idols and family. Family has a big role to prevent teenagers from the negative influences of social media and internet. So, increasing and strengthening family communication have become urgent to be conducted. Parents must also be familiar with internet technology to be able to control and monitor their children.

1 INTRODUCTION

Today, social media has influenced and changed the way we interact each other. Everybody is in social media such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. With the development of the internet technology and the emerge of various social media we have become human with the need to always communicate. We are living in the era of internet expansion in almost all aspect in our lives.

The popularity of social media is due to its ability to connect everybody. We are now living in the era where everything grows and moves very quickly into something we have never imagined before. We never really settle, we always move from one place to another, from one thought to another using different ways. We have changed into “nomads who are always in touch” (Benekdikt, 2007, p. 25) because of the internet.

Social media is a new space for people to express themselves. In Indonesia Facebook has become the most popular social media and then followed by Instagram. Social media has enabled people to be whatever they want to be. It is not only necessarily connecting people but forming a virtual reality. Users

will compete to show the best of them, express their thoughts and feeling through posting, photos and video. We can see now a new profession as Youtuber and Vlogger become popular and as a new way to make money, big money.

In Instagram, there are many famous figures known as *Selebgram* or Celebrity Instagram, gain fame and money easily. Karin Novilda or famous known as Awkarin, is one of *selebgram* who is in these last few years has become a topic of discussion because of all her controversies. Awkarin has 2.4 million followers in Instagram only by performing herself as a free and rebellious girl. Just like other teenaged girl she likes sharing photos, videos and feeling about things but what make her controversial is her life style as a young girl.

She posts vulgar photos, tattoo, her boyfriend, alcohol, hedonic lifestyle and night life. The way she performs herself probably something usual in western countries but in Indonesia it becomes controversial. In one side Awkarin tries to express herself by being herself but in another side it is not acceptable by Indonesian community and norms. And unfortunately, she is followed and liked by many

young people. She has become a new idol for young people.

Awkarin is only a representation from many more *Selebgrams* in Instagram. Another controversial figure is Anya Geraldine and probably still many more. This generation is called as Swag generation which is getting popular today. Swag actually has a more negative meaning, but Justin Bieber through his songs has promoted it into something more positive as a person who has a big self-confident and dares to be himself (Lathiva, Melati, 2016). The Awkarin phenomenon should be considered as serious matter because she is followed by many young people and become new idols. If they perform on television, we can guarantee that they will be censored but not in social media. Young people can just watch them and probably just imitate them as new idols.

Teenagers with all their characteristics have become a big market and target for product provider or seller and they know how to use these *selebgram* to influence them. The big curiosity and the needs of acceptance from their peer groups have made teenagers vulnerable to the negative influence of social media. In one side, social media has offered as a new space of freedom of expression and democracy since it offers us the possibility to communicate with other people and expressing ideas. Facebook or Instagram for instance, has enabled us to explore technology, share ideas, experience with groups or friend in real world or cyber world (boyd & Ellison cited in Beer, 2008).

But in another side, social media also reflects the invasion of privacy and commercialization of personal information. People cannot differentiate between private space and public space. They cannot control what has been said or shared and what is the impact from what they shared. Most young people will be more expressive in social media rather than in real world. They can have offline and online identity at the same time and perform something totally different from their real personality. Young people today have an identity and role model crisis.

This paper tried to explore Awkarin phenomenon, to find out the teen-aged ¹l's point of view on how they express themselves with the influence of their idols and family role. As young people, the acceptance of their peers to get their identity has become an important thing and with the easy access to social media it has created a new way of finding identity and expressing themselves. We choose teen-aged girls because girls are more active in social media rather than boys (Sripoku, 2016) and most of Awkarin followers are girls.

² METHOD

This research was conducted in Malang, East Java from Juli- September 2017. This research used descriptive qualitative method to describe the detailed condition or process and also interrelated findings on the subject of research (Sutopo, 2006).

The data gathering techniques were interview and documentation. Meanwhile, the sampling technique was a purposive sampling. Purposive sampling tends to choose the right informants who know the problems and can be trusted as reliable sources (Sutopo, 2006).

There were ten high school girls who ²re Instagram users as informants for this research. The analysis used interactive model from Miles & Huberman (1992). This analysis has three analysis components namely: data reduction, data display and verification or conclusion withdrawal.

3 RESULT

3.1 Teen-Aged Girl and the Access to Social Media

Just as another conventional space, social media has transformed into a new public sphere where people can interact, meet, chat and share things just as we go to malls, parks and other public space. In Indonesia, the number of internet users have increased tremendously and reached 88 million users (internetworldstats, 2016) and most of them are social media users. Facebook and Instagram are the big ⁵st two of popular social media and their popularity has changed the way people interact and communicate each other. Instagram for instance has changed the way people capture the reality through pictures. Instagram allows people to share pictures and videos and its features enable them to give a personal touch to each picture. The term "*Instagramable*" which refers to every picture worth seeing in Instagram has trigger people to make the best picture at the best moment and place. In one side it is a good thing that can increase the interest of people to photography but in other side it makes people do some crazy things to gain like and follower such as taking pictures (selfie or wefie) from dangerous places which can caused death.

Getting many likes and followers has become a goal in most social media including Instagram. The more follower someone gets the more popular someone will be. Normally to get many followers someone must present the best pictures which can

attract people's attention. Adding hashtag to the picture can also help to increase the popularity of the post. If an account has many followers, then it can earn money from product endorsement.

From this research, it is found that the intensity to social media by the informants is considered as high ranging from 3 to 12 hours per day. They would access social media anytime they have opportunity. The high exposure to social media in the long duration of time makes the girls have more opportunity to live their virtual life longer than their real life. Another fact also showed that the informants have more online friends than the offline friends.

It means they are possibly to interact or communicate with someone they have never known or met before. Since there was no strict limitation from their family, the informants decided themselves when to stop or when they thought it was too much. Most informants felt more freedom to express themselves in social media. Even though they did not put fake identity or pictures but they could post their real feeling of fake feelings just to get attention or for fun.

3.2 Awkarin Phenomenon and Selebgram in Social Media

Karin Novilda or famous known as Awkarin is a *selebgram* in Instagram with 2.4 million followers. She is a young girl who decided to be famous through her controversial postings. She is from a wealthy family but living separately from her family. Her family lives in Riau and she lives in Jakarta (Tribun Timur, 2017). She also decided not continuing her study to university and preferred focusing on her career as a *Selebgram*.

With 2.4 million followers she knows that she can get a lot of benefits such as fame and a lot of money. She endorses some products in her postings and she also takes photo model jobs but unfortunately she also exposes her personal life as a free young girl. She shows some pictures about her taste of fashion, smoking, drinking alcohol, clubbing and making video when she felt desperate about her boyfriend.

She deliberately designed her posting with certain concept to attract more followers and at the end of the day she can put high price for promotion or endorsement. She can earn up to IDR 70 million per month from that (Tempo, 2016). It is a fantastic amount of money for a twenty years old girl just by posting her pictures or video. The biggest motivation for Awkarin to do this is money (Tempo, 2016) so, she knows how to sell herself and keep updating her account.

Unfortunately, Awkarin is not the only famous *selebgram* in Instagram with controversies, there are more young *selebgrams*. Some names similar to Awkarin are Anya Geraldine, Aldirachena, Rachel Vennya, Winny Putri Lubis and many more who expose their beauty, sexy bodies, glamorous lifestyle and intimacy with their boyfriends.

From the informants of this research, most of them follow at least a *selebgram* in Instagram with various motivation. Mostly because the figure is inspiring and they want to imitate them. As teen-aged girls, the informants like doing things just like teenagers do, making friends online and offline, showing themselves in a way to get other's attention and having idols. This is a common phenomenon with the help of internet technology. It is a must for young people to have social media and be active users just to be accepted by their peers.

Most of the informants know about Awkarin but only few of them follow her. They know about her controversies but not interested to follow her because they thought Awkarin was not a proper idol. But for those who follow her, thought that Awkarin was an honest person and not trying to pretend to be someone else just to be accepted.

However, when they were asked the perfect figure in social media, most of them could not answer it. They said there was no perfect person so they could not mention one. They only liked several *selebgrams* who they consider inspiring based on their preference such as *hijabers* (women who wear head scarf/hijab), hobby, their achievements, so they could learn from them.

3.3 Freedom of Expression in Social Media

Most of the informants agreed that freedom of expression is part of human right and it was important for them to be able to express their feelings. They also considered that it was acceptable for girls to be more expressive and exist in social media rather than boys.

As teenagers they needed more space to express themselves and explored their interest. Instagram enabled them to express themselves through photos, captions and videos. And since they had more than one social media they had more option to do with each of them. Instagram become more popular among young people because it focuses on photo without long text.

The simplicity of Instagram and the ability to edit and beautify photos attract more young people. Facebook is considered as for old people while Instagram and Snapchat are for young people

(Bohang, 2016). In Instagram and Snapchat, they do not discuss about politics and that what matters for them.

Most informants considered themselves were more expressive in social media because most of their parents were not in social media so they had less monitoring. But most of them presented their real identity and photos and hid some personal information such as school or home.

One informant said that she sometimes deliberately made a fake post just to gain attention, such as *galau* or dilemma status which was actually not true. She considered it just for fun to get comments, likes or shares. Some of them also used *Alay* language that becomes popular nowadays. *Alay* is considered as slang language among teenagers as a new identity for them so they can catch up with their friends.

Overall, the way the informants expressed themselves in social media was considered as normal just like other teenagers. The way they shared status, photos and gave comments were still in proper way such as not posting something vulgar, harsh words etc. But they could find some bad postings in social media easily because they had more online friends than offline ones so they barely know them all. Mixed people joined in their account and they would not be able to stop them.

4 DISCUSSION AND TECHNOLOGY

4.1 Role Model Crisis

As described previously about several *selebgrams* in Instagram and the way they expressed themselves and gained millions of followers, we can say that teenagers today are living in a role model crisis. Living in digital era like today, teenagers are exposed to the flood of information from conventional media and online media.

The abundance information makes people especially teenagers cannot differentiate which one is needed and which one is only spam. The circulation of information in social media also contributes to the trend of a topic which is being discussed by people. The trending topic is not always necessarily important for teenagers but since it is being discussed they consider it as important.

Beside the information, the public figures in conventional media and social media also do not represent the real figures. We can see some young idols on television only focus on look or performance and wealth. Media has commercialized the existence

of these idols to get more young fans and gain more profit.

Unfortunately, it also happens in social media, maybe even worse since the space is almost limitless in social media. Everything in media and social media is artificial, made up, set up and over exposed. People can be anyone they want to be and teenagers are vulnerable to this because teenagers are still developing their ability to digest reality and use their logical thinking (Fauzi, 1999).

Media is the representation of society and society is the reflection of media. Freedom of expression is part of human rights and it has been regulated through some regulation in Indonesia. It accommodates people to access information, express their ideas, share information and make content but it also accompanied by several responsibilities. As we can see in cyberspace, censorship is not always applied.

We can see many improper photos or videos become viral in social media. In this case, how Awkarin and other *selebgrams* express themselves freely and limitless need to be a concern. With millions of followers, controversial postings are being liked by many other young people. Can they be called as role models who represent teenagers today? Teenaged girls will experience many problems with self-confidence related to body image. It is about 40-70% girls feel unsatisfied with some parts of their bodies (Smolak & Thompson, 2009) and it is caused by emotion distress, performance oriented, depression and low self-esteem (Bearman, Martinez, Stice, 2006).

It can be concluded that from psychology point of view, teenaged girls face many problems regarding to self-esteem and body image and it is added by their idols who over exposed their sexy bodies and lifestyles. It is a contradiction for teen-aged girls in finding their identity. How they have to deal within themselves and to look up to their idols. It is an unrealistic standard for teen-aged girls and it caused more insecurity and influence the way they respect themselves. There are many cases in social media such as raping, harassments, bullying and pornography because teenagers did not aware the consequences of making online friends.

If we barely find good role models in media, then what can our teenagers looking up to? Can our teenagers filter the information or influence in social media when the exposure of social media is high? With the access to social media up to 12 hours a day and they were exposed to un-realistic standards, teenagers are facing a dilemma in defining their identities because they live their lives online and offline at the same time.

4.2 Girls and Pop Culture

Based on a survey from kids.kaspersky.com (infokomputer.grid.id, 2016) the way boys and girls accessing internet are different. Boys like using computer to access the internet and girls prefer smartphone. It is why boys tend to be addicted to online games rather than girls. But girls like to interact in social media and messenger rather than boys. So, it can be said that girls are easily to be influenced by social media, especially with the psychological condition of girls who have body image crisis.

They become a target to advertisement, sexual harassments and pornography. Commercialization of girls in social media has become a serious issue. Girls become the object of exploitation. Fame and wealth have become part of many youngsters today. It strengthens the image girls as object of media exploitation.

Awkarin phenomenon can be explained from postmodern point of view as emphasizing on look or performance rather than the substance (Harvey cited in Strinati, 2010). It can be said that we consume more on image or symbol itself and not the advantage or deeper values which might symbolized. As consequences, artistic value, integrity, intellectual, seriousness, authenticity, realism and strong narrative tend to be neglected. So, living in a popular culture like today means living in consumptive culture which is supported by new information technology. Media and consumption have shifted social bonding from moral concern into capitalism ideology (Strinati, 2010).

4.3 Communication the Family

Family plays an important role in preventing the bad influence of social media. From the research, we found that most parents are not familiar with internet technology and they do not monitor their children's activities in social media. Indeed, there is a digital divide between parents and children.

Young generation today is living in digital era where internet technology has been part of daily lives whereas parents were grown up in conventional technology era. These differences make parents are not easily to change into digital natives. However, education starts from family so parents are the first filter to help teenagers protecting themselves from bad influence of internet.

An open and equal communication is the best way to communicate with teenagers. With the easy access to information in the internet, parents cannot be over

protecting their teenagers, but what they can do is becoming friends and discuss what is good and bad without dictating them. Teenagers are in the stage of high curiosity, so giving too many limitations will make them wrong in expressing themselves and they can be rebellious.

Rousseau (cited in Fauzi, 1999) argues that teenagers aged 15-20 is in a stage of character and religion educations, so parents and teachers must pay attention to the values they teach the teenagers. In this stage teenagers are trying to find values that they hold on to, test them with their real world, asses them and change them if they do not fit. This process will be continuing until teenagers feel comfortable with those values (Fauzi, 1999). That is why this stage is called as searching for identity stage.

5 CONCLUSION

Social media has become everybody's part of life. It is already there, used and it gives so many impact to our lives. Awkarin phenomenon is not the only phenomenon in social media but it has given big influences to our teenagers.

Awkarin has misused the way she expresses herself and creating image as bad girl in social media merely to gain fame and money. Unfortunately, many young girl followers adore her. Teenaged girls are more vulnerable to the influence of these *selebrgrams* in Instagram because they are in an identity and body image crisis, so a wrong idol will lead them to a wrong self-esteem.

Parents have a big role in creating a good role model for their children. So parents need to be also literate to social media and know how to build a good communication with their children. In the end, it is hoped that this research will contribute to media literacy in Indonesia and inspire parents and teachers to be more aware of the influence of social media.

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