

## Digital Gender Gap for Housewives

### Digital Gender Gap bagi Ibu Rumah Tangga

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#### Abstract

*The development of communication technology through the internet brings a digital gap for women, especially for housewives who tend to be associated with domestic work. This study examines the use of internet and web newspaper (suaramerdeka.com) access by housewives. This study breaks the patriarchal ideology and the digital gap in family communication in the terms of access to information via internet. The theory used in this study is Gender Structure and Liberal Feminist Theories. This study is a descriptive qualitative research with critical phenomenology design. The results of study suggest that housewives are still excluded from access to information via internet due to unequal power in the use of communication technology in families. This happens because of the pattern of family communication that embraces patriarchy culture believing that housewives only need to take care of domestic issues and do not require internet access.*

**Keywords:** Digital Gap, Housewives, Domestification of Women.

#### Abstrak

*Perkembangan Teknologi Komunikasi melalui internet membawa kesenjangan digital bagi perempuan, terutama bagi ibu rumah tangga yang cenderung dikaitkan dengan pekerjaan domestik. Penelitian ini meneliti penggunaan internet dan akses surat kabar web (suaramerdeka.com) oleh ibu rumah tangga. Penelitian ini membongkar ideologi patriarkhi dan kesenjangan digital dalam komunikasi keluarga dalam hal akses informasi melalui internet. Teori yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah Strukturasi Gender dan Teori Feminis Liberal. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dekriptif dengan desain fenomenologi kritis. Hasil penelitian menyatakan bahwa ibu rumah tangga masih tersisih dari akses informasi melalui internet karena adanya kekuasaan yang tidak setara pada penggunaan teknologi komunikasi dalam keluarga. Hal tersebut terjadi dikarenakan pola komunikasi keluarga yang menganut budaya patriarkhi yang menyakini bahwa ibu rumah tangga hanya perlu mengurus persoalan domestik dan tidak memerlukan akses internet.*

**Kata Kunci:** Kesenjangan Digital, Ibu Rumah Tangga, Domestifikasi Perempuan.

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#### Introduction

The technological revolution in the field of rapid information and communication has provided great opportunity for new media to disseminate information to everyone without any limits. The development occurs along with the increasing ease of internet access. Internet has become a necessity for people of digital age.

The number of internet users continues to increase every year along with the expansion of the internet reaches in every region in Indonesia. The increasing population of the society also increases the number of internet users every time. Based

on data from the Association of Indonesian Internet Service Providers/Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia (APJII) in 2017, it shows that up to now from the total population of the community in Indonesia has the composition of internet users that reaches 38 percent. Of the total, about 70 percent are internet users via smart phones, while the rest through broadband. Looking at the percentage of internet users, it is predicted in the future the number will continue to increase.

APJII mentions that internet users are dominated in Java Island with a figure of 86,3 million or 65% of the total users of 132,7 million people because of the infrastructure that is already well established in Java compared to other islands. While in Central Java, APJII Central Java data in 2017 shows the needs of internet services by companies in Semarang city continues to increase. The increase is considered to be the impact of the increasing number of companies moving to Semarang city and surrounding areas.

However, the rapid technological developments and the proliferation of smart phones in Indonesia are not enough to encourage women to access the internet and to empower women to use technology to access information and to make their life easier.

The digital gap between women and men is still high in Indonesia. The way of utilizing the potential of ICT (Information Communication Technology) maximally is still very long for girls and women of low-income residents in the city. In Indonesia, there is neither ICT policy, nor the national broadband plan, specifically mentioning gender or the promotion of women access to the internet and ICT.

Data from ICT Watch 2017 states that the lack of access and use of ICT in women can be seen from research findings stating that less than 30 percent of female Internet users use the internet to seek information.

The importance of equal access to information for every Indonesian citizen is contained in article 28F of 1945 Constitution (UUD 1945) which states, "*Setiap orang berhak untuk berkomunikasi dan memperoleh informasi untuk mengembangkan pribadi dan lingkungan sosialnya, serta berhak untuk mencari, memperoleh, memiliki, menyimpan, mengolah, dan menyampaikan informasi dengan menggunakan segala jenis saluran yang tersedia (Every person should have the right to communicate and to obtain information to develop his/her personal and social environment, and should have the right to seek, obtain, possess, store, process and convey information by using all available channels).*"

Article 14 of Act Number 39 Year 1999 on Human Rights (UU No. 39 Tahun 1999, Hak Asasi Manusia) states, "*Setiap orang berhak untuk berkomunikasi dan memperoleh informasi yang diperlukan untuk mengembangkan pribadi dan lingkungan sosialnya. Setiap orang juga berhak untuk mencari, memperoleh, memiliki, menyimpan, mengolah, dan menyampaikan informasi dengan menggunakan segala jenis sarana yang tersedia (Every person should have the right to communicate and to obtain information necessary to develop his/her personal and social environment. Every person also has the right to seek, obtain, possess, store, process, and convey information by using all available means).*"

In terms of access to internet information, it is still not balanced between men and women in the community and fellow family members. For example, in terms of access to one of the mass media products that is broadcasted via Internet in the form of online newspapers.

The characteristics of online newspapers as a medium of information are different from television that can be accessed by almost all people in Indonesia because almost

all have television. Television footage is still major source of information and entertainment, especially the "light" show programs sold in the market, the show generally has high rating (Anna Puji Lestari, 2017: 56). Unlike the case of online newspaper that is not necessarily accessible by anyone because the facilities such as smartphones and computers that are not necessarily owned by all the people of Indonesia. This is a significant obstacle to the equality of women's information rights fulfillment.

In term of internet-based information provider, the largest newspaper company in Central Java, Suara Merdeka, which has web address at suaramerdeka.com, contributes to the availability of internet-based information for the community. A number of important economic, politic, health, and entertainment information are available at suaramerdeka.com. Some of the information are also important to be accessed by housewives. However, not all women or housewives have the equal access and opportunity in term of obtaining information over the internet. Therefore, this study aims to answer it.

This study examines the use of internet and web newspaper accessed by housewives. The objectives of this study are: (1) to describe the digital gap for women (housewives) who have domestic burden in the family; (2) to describe the accessibility of suaramerdeka.com as internet news provider for housewives. The questions to be answered in this study are: How are the accessibility and practice of internet consumption to housewives? How suaramerdeka.com through its web design accommodates internet access for housewives?

Women's limited access to information through the internet needs to be examined from feminist perspective. Feminists who concern about educational and equality of information access for women issues are liberal feminists.

The goal of Liberal Feminists is the establishment of society of mutual respect and always have the freedom to develop potential. In pursuit of it, liberal feminists through long history of struggle and has not fully achieved until now.

The Liberal Feminist struggle was started from the 18th Century. The struggle focused on the struggle for women to have the same access to education as men. In the contemporary times, the Liberal Feminist struggle focuses on the struggle for women to have the same education access on ICT as men.

The explanation about the exclusion of women from ICT to this day derives from the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (in Tong, 2008: 18-25). Jean-Jacques Rousseau states that rational education is only for boys, not for girls. Education for men is created to achieve maximum effort to achieve goals and justice. While education for women should teach patience and obedience.

According to Rousseau, subjects suitable for men are lessons on humanities, natural sciences and social sciences. While subjects that are suitable for women are art, music, fiction, and poetry. Such thought makes it difficult for women to gain access and they are excluded from ICT until now.

Then, one of the Liberal Feminist figures of the time, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1799) opposed Rousseau's thought stating that men were rational and women were emotional.

Wollstonecraft (in Tong, 2008: 18-20) states that women have the rights to be given the same subjects as men to develop the women's capacity as rational and moral beings. Wollstonecraft wants women to have rational decisions about their lives.

Therefore, according to Wollstonecraft, if a woman decides to become a housewife, she must have strong thoughts and not be slaved by her husband or by her children.

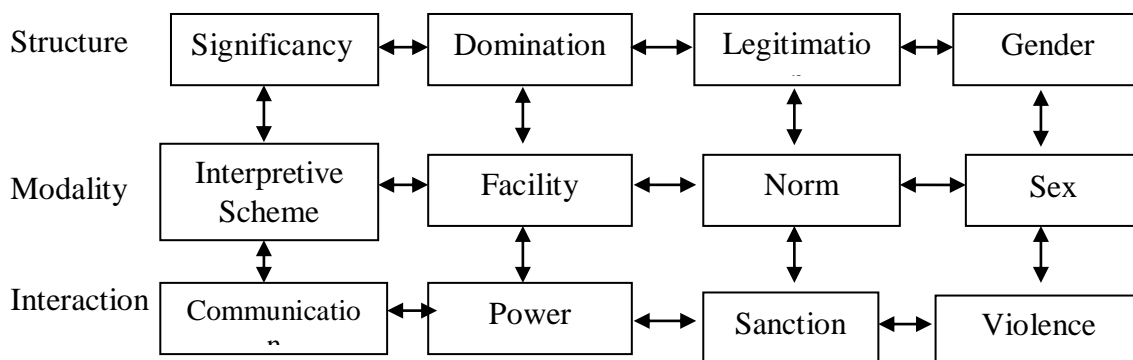
The Liberal Feminist struggle from 18th century up to now wants women and men to have the same access to education including education and knowledge in the mastery of information technology.

The development of communication technology through the internet causes women who do not have access to be marginalized and isolated from the discourse of information, this is also experienced by housewives.

The differences between men and women in accessing internet-based information have resulted in women having less information than men about local, national and international issues. As the result, when women get less information about politics, economic, education, social and technology, they will surrender power to more informed segment of community, i.e men.

Gender Structuration Theory provides theoretical explanation of why it still occurs up to now. Gender Structuration Theory was proposed by Sunarto. Gender Structuration Theory explains the unequal distribution of power between men and women which impacts on the limitations of women's access in everything, including information technology.

Modality of Gender Structure (Sunarto, 2007: 138)



In the structure or pattern of rules associated with gender, this knowledge and power are dominated by men. This occurs as consequence of asymmetric relations as naturalized by patriarchy. The consequence of the mastery makes the result of the interaction more in the form of reproduction of repressive social system for the interests of women.

The patriarchal social system and capitalism can arise due to the ability of men who become the owners of capital to take social action by maximizing the modalities they have in social interaction with women as laborers (2007: 140-141). The maximization of the structuration modality in the interaction has led to male domination on women.

The domination of men over women is not just in terms of institutionalized structures such as family institutions. The domination over women also occurs through the language structures preserved through folklore such as *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih*. The domination of language in folklore makes the dichotomy between good women and bad women. The passive, forgiving, non-aggressive, and accepting whatever happens to them (*nrimo*) women are good women. While active, ambitious, and aggressive women are bad women (Setiawan, Fanani, Julianto, 2013: 12). The

dichotomy continues to the present time so that many women who become housewives feel compelled to resign in the domination of the family structure.

The domination of men over women in the family structure forces women to do domestic work (can be equaled to labor) and restricts women to access information and to master resources in the possession of information technology.

If it is elaborated, the Liberal Feminist approach enters into Gender Structuration Theory to explain the phenomenon of the housewives marginalization in terms of access to information by: (1) the concept of a social system that perpetuates asymmetric gender relationship influenced by patriarchy; (2) the concept of actor in the family. The concept distinguishes the role of male actor (head of household) and women (housewives); (3) the concept of interaction by showing the location of interaction in the domestic domain in the form of repressive measures from men as head of household to women as housewives; and (4) the concept of resources through power related to the ownership of authoritative and authoritative facilities that discriminate housewives from the ownership of resources in the form of communication technologies and access to internet-based information.

### Methodology

The type of this research is descriptive with qualitative approach in critical paradigm with phenomenology research design. The secondary data in this study were obtained through in-depth interviews with informants. The informant is a 45-year-old housewife who does domestic work at home every day. In-depth interviews were conducted to determine the conscious experience of an individual who experiences limited access to information over the internet. The secondary data were obtained from interviewees, previous research results, documentation and other relevant sources.

In relation to internet-based mass media accessibility as source of information for the community, research is also conducted at [suaramerdeka.com](http://suaramerdeka.com). The primary research subjects are Editor at [suaramerdeka.com](http://suaramerdeka.com) and IT personnel of [suaramerdeka.com](http://suaramerdeka.com). Primary data were the results of in-depth interviews with research interviewees. Secondary data were in the form of other relevant data in research obtained through literary study and interview.

This study uses critical paradigm. The assumption underlying this paradigm is that gender inequality is the thing struggled by this paradigm. This tradition questions the unequal power relationship in the communication process. According to Littlejohn and Foss, the essence of the critical tradition are *first*, seeking *taken for granted system*, the power structure, the belief or ideology that dominate society. *Secondly*, the critical tradition reveals the social conditions and the oppressive arrangements of power for the realization of emancipation so that society is free from oppression. *Third*, critical theories combine theory and action (2008: 46).

The purposes of critical sciences with its emancipatory interests are to help people to achieve autonomy and maturity toward the achievement of free domination consensus (Habermas in Hardiman, 2009: 17).

An important concept in the critical tradition is the view that ruling ideology dominates society. There needs to be equalization so that the distribution of power in terms of access to information can be balance.

Phenomenology design in this research is critical phenomenology. Critical phenomenology seeks to understand an individual's conscious experience about the discrimination on the use and the acquisition of internet-based information for women.

The phenomenological approach focuses on one's conscious experience. Theories in the phenomenological tradition assume that someone actively interprets his experiences and understands the world with his personal experiences (Littlejohn and Foss, 2008: 38).

Critical phenomenology shows how phenomenology and the social sciences, in order to give a complete account of human reality, must recognize the distance reflection creates between thought and practical existence to reach the ontological, social, and political meaning of both kinds of experiences.

According to Bourdieu (1991), phenomenology can become explicitly political if it is critical and aware of its political effects. And to do so it must go toward bodies, social structures and the state; it must also enter into a serious relationship with the social sciences.

To flesh out the beginnings of a critical phenomenology, we can turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2001), whose treat of the same problems and especially of the social character of thinking anticipated a great part of Bourdieu's criticisms and completes his analyses of the embodied character of thought and of social and political life.

In other words, phenomenology can radicalize itself in order to push democracy ever further by giving each and everyone the possibility of bringing into question our forced to an order that disadvantages us.

The data analysis in this study uses transcendental phenomenological analysis prosedur including the activities of (1) epoch process, (2) transcendental phenomenological reduction, (3) imagination variation, dan (4) meaning dan essence synthesis through the analysis of textural description mixture and structural description mixture (Husserl dalam Moustakas, 1994: 85-100).

The stage of phenomenological reduction is to describe someone's (informant's/ interviewee's) textual languages, not only as external object, but also the consciousness of internal attitude performed. The stage of imagination variation is to seek the meaning opportunity through imagination in reference framework, put opposing and inversion attitude, and approach the phenomena from different perspectives. The next stage, the last process, is the meaning and essence synthesis through the analysis of textural description mixture and structural description mixture. This stage guides to straighten the essence of knowledge (Husserl dalam Moustakas, 1994: 100).

## **Result and Discussion**

The results of this study are divided into two themes in which both are a unity. The first theme describes and discusses about unequal power distribution in family structure related to internet-based information access. The second theme describes and discusses suaramerdeka.com accesibility as web-based information provider company for the users.

### **Unequal Power Distribution: the Obstacles of Web-Based Information Access for Housewives**

The housewife used as informant (45 years) in this study states that she, as a housewife, has lack access to get information via internet. The informant states, her husband doesn't want to buy her a smartphone because he worries that the household works will be neglected if she plays smartphone. Her husband only buys smartphone for their son who is still in college. The informant states, she actually wants to have smartphone in order to own WA account and be able to order online transportation service independently. All the time, she orders online transportation with the help of her

son or husband and the informant feels uncomfortable because she can't be independent. Moreover, the informant also want to obtain important information from internet that can't be obtained from television.

This time, to get information, the informant relies on television. She can't read online news because she doesn't have the tool (smartphone) and she is not allowed by her husband to surf in internet. The phenomena are the realization of digital gap in family structure. This is an obstacle for women to obtain information via internet.

The obstacles for women to perform communication access via internet must be studied from feminist perspectives. The feminist perspectives can see social and cultural factors which also affects in the context of technology adoption for women. Cultural and social factors, for instance, related to how women are positioned in a community.

The legitimacy of the patriarchal culture has in fact put women at very disadvantaged position in life including in the access to internet-based information. Women get unequal position in terms of digital technology. Liberal Feminists oppose such views. The goal of Liberal Feminists is the creation of society of mutual respect and always having the freedom to develop for something better.

Liberal Feminists voice the same education for women and men. Wollstonecraft, the Liberal Feminist figure, opposes Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idea who states that rational education (such as technology) is reserved for boys as rational creatures, not for girls. This then makes men extreme creature, narcissistic, hypersensitive, and want to be spoiled excessively (in Tong, 2008).

Liberal Feminists in the contemporary era argue that the low participation of women in science and technology can be solved by providing equal access to the same education for women.

Women have cultural and structural barriers in accessing technology. Stereotypes in educational institutions bear labels in majors considered masculine and feminine. The social construction of the feminine character in culture leads to the low women's participation in science, laboratory, and technology (Wajcman, 2007).

Women's cultural and structural barriers to access technology can be explained theoretically through Gender Structuration Theory. Gender Structuration Theory (Sunarto, 2009) explains that in a structure (in this study is the family structure) the resources and rules are created and devoted to the interests of men so that marginalizes women. The informant who is a housewife and does not work feels marginalized because she can not access information via internet and is not allowed to own smartphone.

Thus, it can be argued that the use of communication technology in the family illustrates the unequal power between female and male family members.

In line with this, Kennedy (2006) argues that this difference in pattern is closely related to the distribution of unequal power in the family: between husband and wife, between girl and boy. The implication is that this domestication technology integrates with the division of gender roles in the family (Ahrens, 2013). The domination of patriarchy in the family structure makes the technology permitted to be mastered by women only related to its affirmation of the domestic role, for example, rice cooker, dish washer, microwave, mixer.

In terms of information seeking practices via the internet by housewives (informants) can be said still experiences obstacles. The main obstacle is the digital gap of providing facilities for housewives. The provision of communication means (smartphone) in the family is preferred for men. This is due to patriarchal thinking in the

pattern of family relationships that assume women take care of domestic duties so that men have more rights to master communication technology than women.

Suaramerdeka.com is Provided for All Readers

The result of study on suaramerdeka.com accessibility states that suaramerdeka.com has simple web display design that can be accessed by anyone, including housewives. All readers can access news on suaramerdeka.com provided they have facilities and connected to internet.

Based on interview with IT personnel of suaramerdeka.com on October 25, 2017, the researchers obtained information that suaramerdeka.com was established in 1996. At first, suaramerdeka.com only featured news from Suara Merdeka print edition. Started in 2000, suaramerdeka.com performed innovation by presenting updated and up-to-date news beyond the print edition news.

Suaramerdeka.com has constantly changed the look of web design for easy access for the readers. The latest design was changed in September 2017 to be simpler to facilitate access for the readers.

The editor of suaramerdeka.com in an interview dated October 21, 2017 stated that suaramerdeka.com exist because it adjusted to the development of the digital era. He stated, now print newspapers must have online version in order to survive amid the global competition of the mass media industry. He stated, suaramerdeka.com can update news every 5 minutes. According to him, that's the advantage of suaramerdeka.com compared to print newspapers. In addition, suaramerdeka.com is excel in terms of interactivity with its readers. Readers can give comment on the news they read.

## Conclusion

The development of online mass media provides digital gender gap for women who do not have the means and infrastructure to access it. Internet access barriers for women (housewives) indicate that internet access for women needs to be the priority in the development of digital revolution in the future.

Based on the findings of this study, it is expected that all parties are eager to grow the digital gender awareness in the communication structure of the family so that the distribution of communication and information technology via internet can be equivalent. If the housewives are given equal opportunity in accessing information via internet, it is certain that they will get important information about their rights, such as health, reproduction, and law rights.

According to the result of this study, the access and mastery of women to communication tools to surf in internet is the main factor that determines the level of internet usage for housewives.

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