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Empowering Indonesian women through building digital media literacy

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ABSTRACT

There is still a gender digital divide in Indonesia. Indonesian women need digital media literacy skills to effectively use the Internet and to raise their quality of life. Empowering literacy abilities includes the skills of using digital media to access, search, analyze, reflect, share, and create. In this qualitative research study, founders, leaders, and participants from IWITA (Indonesian Women Information Technology Awareness) and FemaleDev (Female Developer) were interviewed because these organizations focus on developing digital literacy for women. The findings indicated that digital media literacy remains low because of inadequate education, lack of opportunities and the patriarchal system in Indonesia.

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Introduction

There has been a massive growth in Internet use in Indonesia over the past decade. Indonesia's Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kementerian Komunikasi dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia or Kominfo) reported that there were 82 million Internet users in 2014, and Indonesia has the eighth highest number of Internet users in the world (Kominfo, 2014). Of these 56 percent are men and 44 percent are women (Comscore, 2013) and Internet penetration is 29 percent of the total population (Jakarta Post, 2015). However, there remains a gender gap in Indonesian Internet users with many Indonesian women still not knowing how to effectively use digital media or the Internet.

Research by Intel indicated that the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will increase by USD 13–18

million if the number of women using the Internet increased 600 million (Intel & Dalberg, 2011, p. 12). However, research from the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) on financial and digital inclusion, reported that 2.2 billion women (52%) are still offline. Therefore, if women had digital equality in this Internet expansion era it would impact significantly on gender work equality (McKinsey Global Institute, 2015, p. 12). This information demonstrates how important the Internet and women are in supporting economic development.

The digital divide is the concept of inequality regarding using digital media between a group or power that can or cannot access and use digital media (Hilbert, 2011, p. 4; Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2007, p. 130). One factor of the unequal use of computers or digital media in the world is the gender gap (gender digital divide), through which women only have limited access to digital media and fewer opportunities to join in Information Communication Technology (ICT) communities compared to men (Alliance For Women in Media Foundation, 2011, p. 1; Thurlow et al., 2007, p. 130). This is supported by several stereotypes holding that women are technophobic, lack interest,

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and lack technological capabilities. However, the reason women use less digital media is because women have less employment, education, and income, which lead to less digital media access and use ([Alliance For Women in Media Foundation, 2011](#), p. 1).

In the final declarations of the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (2003–2005), heads of countries recognized that the digital gender divide exists and they declared a commitment to women's empowerment and gender equality to solve this divide ([WSIS, 2005](#)). Moreover, there is a great need to improve digital media literacy for women and to develop the capacities of girls and women to contribute in society, especially in ICT-related fields ([WSIS, 2003](#)). Digital media literacy is very important because it has the ability to assist people to reach digital competency, to critically and confidently use ICT, and to learn and communicate.

[Farida, Sulistiowati, and Hermana \(2011\)](#) cited Indonesia's Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection who stated that the field of ICT is still dominated by men (subjects) while women are often just objects. It is necessary to improve women's digital media literacy, so they can support the potential of the nation ([Farida et al., 2011](#), pp. 78–79). Women have been excluded from governance for many centuries; the lack of access to ICT could reinforce that marginalization if women do not master the technology and begin speaking about the future of ICT and their place in it ([Goulding & Spacey, 2002](#), p. 9).

Women's empowerment actions in ICT have been emerging in Indonesia over the past few years through social or community organizations. First, there is the Indonesian Women Information Technology Awareness organization (IWITA) that aims to help Indonesian women to become technologically literate. Second, FemaleDev (Female Development) targets the college students of various universities in Indonesia through forming an environment of women that understand technology, invent creative ideas, and create useful programs or applications for society. This paper explores the role, opportunities, and challenges to implement and promote digital media literacy for Indonesian women.

Literature Review

Gender Digital Divide

The digital divide—the gap between the “haves” and “have-nots” to ICT access—is created not only by unequal access to technology but also through the lack of real engagement and use of the technology, and concerns about that use ([Selwyn, 2014](#), p. 356). [Norris \(2001\)](#) described the digital divide as every inequality within the digital community, including access between men and women, rich and poor, and also developed and developing nations ([Norris, 2001](#), p. 15). There are two forms of digital divide—access and the ability divide, and the inequality of ability to use ICT among those who already have access ([Dewan & Riggins, 2005](#), p. 300).

In the Indonesian context, unequal participation has resulted to a degree from unequal access to information. However, education and literacy levels have even more

strongly influenced the capacity to engage with Internet usage ([Hill & Sen, 2005](#), p. 14). [Renggana \(2008\)](#) found that the Internet can empower Indonesian women through opportunities, for example working and creating online shopping at home. Unfortunately, the development of ICT has not occurred automatically with the opportunity of women's usage of the Internet. The lack of digital media literacy can create a broader digital divide ([Renggana, 2008](#), p. 2).

[Wakhidah \(2012\)](#) noted that the history of technological development spans from ancient times to the present. However, recently, technology is always associated with males, although technology is very useful and helpful for both males and females living in the era of globalization. Indonesian women are usually in a position as users rather than creators on the Internet ([Wakhidah, 2012](#)). Women's access to technology is still limited because of the need to raise the low education level of Indonesian women. This review also found that gender equality in technology is hard to be accomplish because a gender mainstreaming policy has still not been properly implemented ([Wakhidah, 2012](#)) which is in line with [Hilbert \(2011\)](#), who stated there is a necessity to create policies and projects that truly allow girls and women to become equal members of an information society ([Hilbert, 2011](#), p. 22).

Women's Empowerment

There are themes from the literature of digital media and women's empowerment, including digital media use, rural women's access to services and enterprises, e-governance, and data ([Cummings & O'Neil, 2015](#), pp. 5–6). [Widyastuti \(2014\)](#) citing Herawati stated three vital aspects for empowerment. First, meaningful access relates to access digital information and each individual's ability to use technology to enhance social living. Second, motivation does not relate to the ability to use technology but also to what is done with the use of this technology. Third, empowerment involves the social capacity of individuals to actively and confidently use digital media ([Widyastuti, 2014](#)).

[Nugroho](#) stated that women's empowerment has several aims: enhancing women's abilities and leaderships to actively participate, to bargain positions, to organize small or medium-size or large enterprises, to open employment opportunities, and to change the roles and functions of women's organizations at local levels as the media can support women to become active participants in their living local programs ([Nugroho, 2008](#), pp. 163–164). ICT can bring major improvements to the economic, political, and social empowerment of women, and the promotion of gender equality ([Primo, 2013](#), p. 27).

Digital Media Literacy

Media literacy is not only the simple development of interpretive skills, but also involves a series of digital production skills that include “the ability to create, to be critical and to contribute as well as to consume” the digital content ([Flew, 2014](#), p. 86). Moreover, new media or digital media literacy is social and cultural skills that are

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