'I Become More Confident': Mother Use of Online Platform for Parenting Information

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Abstract. There are an increasing trends that mothers today are turn to Internet to search information about parenting. While in the past, new parents would turn to their own mother or closest family to consult about issues related to how to raise children. Thus the research explores how parents in Indonesia use online platforms to find about parenting related topics. Examine the motivations to search on online platform, how they use the platform and also how the interaction between members on the online community. To explore these mothers' experiences, a qualitative method is employed. It includes open-ended questionnaires and telephone interview. To enrich the data, observation was done to the online platforms mentioned on the interview. The information were collected, organized, categorized and analyzed based on the emerging themes. The study reveals that parents use Internet platform to find more empirical and reliable information related to parenting. They also try to find support from peers and develop relationship among online community member. The topics emerge on the discussion between parents varies from children tantrum to light topic as such discount from nearest shop. The platform used by mothers to find the information is varies. This online information and online discussion has empower the mother as parent, it increase awareness of the importance of parenting knowledge, increasing confidence related to their parenting journey and help mother to make better decision making.

Keywords: Internet, parenting, online, mother

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of Information and Communication Technology, particularly online communication has affect human life. It also influences the way people interact with each other and how people look for useful information to their self and family. Recent studies have shown that women, especially women with young children, spent a large amount of time online. (Zaslow, 2012; Pedersen and Smithson, 2010). This phenomenon also confirmed by Plantin and Daneback, 2009; Powel, Inglis, Ronnie and Large, 2011; and Dotty, Dworkin, and Connell, 2012) that parents consume much information through Internet related to parenting.

The Internet provides a large amount of information related to health and parenting that aimed for parents. This information is offered in many platforms. Furthermore, Plantin and Daneback, 2009, on their study stated that in recent years, parenting sites has significantly rise in number, they offer information from children growth and development, breastfeeding, children health, where to buy cheapest nappies, baby food to baby rash.

There are a large number of researches about parenthood, parenting and Internet in North American countries (Plantin and Daneback, 2009), however it is difficult to find research in the same field in Asian countries especially Indonesia and from Indonesian parents. As stated by Riany, Meredith and Cuskelly (2016) and Sumargi, Sofronoff & Morawska (2013) that research focusing on parenting in the Indonesian context is limited. Even though Indonesia is the fourth most populated country in the world (Sumargi, Sofronoff & Morawska, 2013; Internet world stat, 2016) with approximately 64 Millions families (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2016) and one of the country which have highest number of Internet users (Internet World Stats, 2016), the research on such topics is limited.

Thus, this paper will elaborate the way in which parents in some cities in Indonesia use the Internet to find information about parenting and why they administered this way of searching the information.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Indonesia is a collectivist society, where family and the inner circle, heavily influences people's life and decision-making (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2010). Thus, in term of child rearing (Sumargi et all, 2013) new parents in Indonesia gain advices about parenting from family and closes relation. The parenting practices are also influenced by traditional and religious norms (Riany et all, 2016). Since usually most Indonesian lives close to each other so they could share knowledge, expertise and advice.

Zaslow (2012) argues that mothers are believed to have instinctive knowledge on how to handle their children, when the baby need to be calm down, to be pick up or to be fed. When they feel their instinct was not enough to solve the problem, they usually would come to their own mother, neighbor, friends or relative to ask for help, or ask for their relative's experiences. These mothers believe that the knowledge made them parenting expert. Thus Zaslow argues knowledge about children is based on practice, personal experience and sense of maternal empathy (2012).

Meanwhile, scholars argue that there are socio cultural shift in this post-modern era, which is shown by the decline of family size, urbanization, and the movement of kin to different place (Castell, 2010; Zaslow, 2012). These changes made women are no longer able to see the closest role model to raise children healthily (Zaslow, 2012).

This changing society is also happen in Indonesia. Mobilization of men and women occurs because of the employment, education, migration or any other reason, thus many Indonesian todays live in different place with their parents and family. In the other hand, working women with young children, particularly

infants and toddlers can find themselves isolated from their parents and relatives. This made them unable to access valuable information to solve childbearing problems (Hall & Irvine, 2009). The abundance amount of information on the Internet enable working mothers with young children to seek information and share their experiences (Hall & Irvine, 2009).

Rothbaum in Pedersen and Smithson study (2010, p.89) stated that nowadays the "society is becoming increasingly mobile" where relatives and friends may not be readily available to give advice. Thus, there is a proliferation of parenting websites, which is managed by the expert. The sites enable the parents to talk to each other where they can offer advice or support (Pedersen and Smithson, 2010).

Driving Factors to Seek Parenting Information Online

Hall and Irvine (2009) on their qualitative descriptive study, investigate mothers of young children used a community based electronic communication. There were 40 Canadian mothers, age from 26 to 45 as sample of the research. The mothers were pregnant or have children age ranged from newborns to 11 months. The participants were highly educated and above the socioeconomic of the average. The driving factor to use the community online was to develop community connection, to share information and to facilitate learning. Other motives are to ask for support and also provide emotional support. Besides that, parents were going online to consult about their child development and to confirm about their parenting experiences. The study also found that the women on this online community have form online relationship with other mother all over the world. However the study also found that there are many tension in the community among mothers of different cultural group, which has different cultural approaches to parenting. This tension leads to competition about which parenting approach is the best.

Different with Hall and Irvine (2009), Shpakovskaya (2015), found out that mothers in Russia, especially from middle and above social class, they participating in online class as they felt that the available free parenting class from government was not enough to fulfill their need of information. Thus they are willing to participate in paid parenting class to find out more specific information. Furthermore, Shpakovskaya argue that these mother actively discuss and negotiating their understanding about being mother and parenting itself. Often, this process held online. In addition, Shpakovskaya (2015) found that motherhood in Russia is now become lifestyle and middle class practice.

Parents Activities on online Platform

Pedersen and Smithson (2013) investigate the nature of online activities, how mother interact in online community and the segregation between online and "real life". It reveals that besides looking for information, the mother also looking for entertainment, as write on (Investigate Hers, 2014), that mother usually need some entertainment on internet after doing parenting activities. The research conducted by Pedersen and Smithson (2013) also discussed about hierarchy

among members on an online community parenting websites in UK, Mumsnet. The websites is a large parenting online community in UK that The Observer said it is a "virtual shoulder to lean on" (Pedersen and Smithson, 2013). The discussion board attracts 20,000 posts every day.

The research questioned about membership and the activities in online community, the analysis reveals how individual of an online community post to website. How they construct and maintain membership, developing friendship, create hierarchies of acceptability and regulate what kinds of posts are considered appropriate. It also investigates how members construct power hierarchy, identity of membership and how poster responds to other post (Pedersen and Smithson, 2013).

There were four level of member hierarchy found on Mumsnet that was established and acknowledged by the members itself. Those are "*members*", "*newbie*", "*expert*" and "*lurker*". On this online community, member gave acknowledgement to other member as an "expert". This expertise acknowledged based on their active posts and how they respond to questions on the group. Different from other parenting websites, Mumsnet have no official experts, and the advice is based on from personal experience (Pedersen and Smithson, 2013).

Turning to the activities of mothers, Plantin and Daneback (2009) find that they find health-related topics and parenting information primarily through the search engine (2009). Others find from blogs, interactive websites and mailing list. The study reveals that topics discussed on the parenthood-related websites are vary from pregnancy, bleeding and other post-partum complications, stress and anxiety of first –time parents, advice on the upbringing of children, children behavior, parental conflict, sleeping problems, toothache to the cheapest nappies. Mostly parents have positive feeling for the information on Internet. However, many studies report that the online information provided for parents could be misleading and inaccurate (Pedersen and Smithson, 2010; Powell, et al., 2011).

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative method to reveal the experiences of research participants on their behavior towards online information. Hendrarso on Suyanto and Sutinah (2008) stated that qualitative research try to understand the social reality of people from the perspectives of the people itself. On this type of research, the object of research can be small in numbers. Researcher gained primary data through interview, both via telephone conversations, chat applications and direct communication with the participants. The informant selected based on several criteria, they should be parents with children age 0 to 18, reside in Indonesia, and actively use internet platform to seek parenting information.

To explore the Internet platform mentioned by the informants, observation was also done to look at those platforms. Secondary data were obtained from literature review of the related articles. After the data collected, it was organized and categorized based on frequents topics that emerge on the data. Finally it was

analyzed based on thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Interview sample and demographic characteristic*

To explore how mothers look for parenting information online and why they seek parenting information online, Six (6) female participants aged 27 to 35 years were recruited by a purposive sampling. The sample comprises mothers with children ranging from 9 months to 8 years. All the participants were female. Although the interview was offered also to male potential respondents, there were no male who indicate their willingness to participate in this interview at the time. They were interviewed either by telephone, instant messaging application and direct face-to-face interview.

All the respondents on this study are educated mothers as they have bachelor or master degree. Two of them are housewives who quitted their job to raise the children as the main reason. The other four respondents were having various professions. Most of them live in big cities (Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Palembang) and the other live in small towns, however all of the mothers have access to the Internet, both through personal computer and Wi-Fi connection and through mobile phone.

B. *Thematic Analysis of the Interview Data*

Themes on this research were identified under the following headings and framed by the questions from the interview guide: the motivations for seeking parenting information online, topics of online information searched by mother; reliability and trust of the information on internet; mother interaction on online community and how does the information affects mothers?

1. Motivations to seek information online

a. Look for more theoretical and experience based information

Most of the participant indicated that they were looking for parenting information online because they needed latest information about parenting. As indicated by Dena: "*because there are lot of theoretical development that I need to know, such as the vaccine, diseases, menus for babies, methods for raising children.*"

Other participant stated that when she went online, the discussion on the sites usually participated by a lot of people and she could learn from others, about their experiences, knowledge and theory the people know based on their expertise. She compare that when she discussed the problem with her mom, she feel that her mom is possibly gained knowledge only from one point of view.

Three of the 6 respondents live near their parents and family. However they felt that they need more theoretical and evidence based knowledge about parenting. They also indicated the gap of knowledge between the generation of their mother and their own generation.

This inline with the research of Roman on (Plantin and Daneback, 2009: p.3) that today's parent are no longer satisfied "with simple description of parenthood". They demand knowledge that based on true experience from other

parents who had similar situation with them.

Women would likely to have instinct and sense of maternal once they become a mother (Zaslow, 2012), they use their own knowledge to cope with daily problem or they will turn to their own mother or friends for something they don't know yet. However, participant on the research indicate that they have an increasing risk awareness of rearing children after actively participate in parenting group. As stated by Eka, that she were eager to find lot of useful information about how to bring up the children because she is worries with the world that getting weirder, if she don't have enough knowledge she just afraid that she would teach her children in a wrong way. In line with Eka, Dena said that:

"Nowadays, parenting is not only how to make a child to be polite but also how to protect them from negative impact of the environment, include media."

b. Need for confirmation for what have been done.

Dena and Lea indicated the other motives they have to go online that sometimes they need confirmation of what have they done related to parenting. They need to reassure that they are on the right track and they were not doing wrong. When parents make decision, sometime they become doubt for what decision should they make. This confusion could happen because there are different parenting practices between the parents and previous generations parents and others parents on their surrounding environments. If this happen, the participants usually would ask to the online friends whether the decision they took were right. As experienced by Lea, when she felt intimidated by her neighbors because giving baby food with no added sugar and salt. Her neighbors gave nosy comment that the baby certainly would not eat the food because it was tasteless.

Sometimes the informants posting question to the parenting group to find out about some information, or they only look for justification for the decision they have made. If they found out that they were wrong, they usually tend to be more acceptable for the criticism because the comment was delivered in a careful manner and based on scientific evidence.

c. Finding for companion and support

Besides finding for some information, mothers tend to find some emotional support from their friends on online community. Also they try to find companion for their parental journey. Liana, mother of two years old boy who have a Long Distance Marriage (LDM), stated that:

"I am on LDM, I have no husband beside me who can always listen my thought, I have no one to complaint, once I have them (WA group) in my life..oohh… I feel that I have friends who can understand me, moreover they have the same experiences with me".

The statement show that, participants of the study join the whats app group to find companionship, they also tend to develop close relationship. This finding was inline with Zaslow study on 2012, she found that ICT have enable interpersonal connection that goes beyond space and time. The member interaction on the group has connected each other and develops emotional relationship between them. Similarly, Madge and O'Connor's study reported that

the social support from other mother help to reduce negative feeling and isolation along maternity leave period (2006). Thus, emotional and informational supports are important resources to find on community online (Cutrona and Russel on Doty et al 2012)

2. Online media where mothers find parenting information

There are a lot of information source on Internet providing detailed information about parenting where people can access through various websites or other platform. Many studies investigates how mothers find parenting information on an online community such as mailing list, discussion forum on websites and blog. On this research there are four platforms that used by informants to access parenting information:

TABLE I: ONLINE PLATFORMS USED BY MOTHERS

Platforms	Tittle	Note
Websites	• The Urban Mama • Mommies Daily • Islamic Parenting Community	Managed by official experts who have professional skills and experiences on parenting or health
Facebook Page	• The Urban Mama • Islamic Parenting Community • Parenting with Elly Risman Family • Ayah Edy Parenting • ParentThink • Kiki Barkiah • Sharing ASI-MPASI	
WhatsApp Group	• OSA Group • PAMA Pumping Club • IPC • ReAL Group	Managed by member of group (non official experts
Other Platforms	Personal Blogs Search Engine	

Besides those platforms, all the respondents usually use search engine and find information based on particular matters by keywords, as Eka said that search engine such as Google, is more time efficient because she could pick several articles at a time. This is inline with Suarez, Rodrigo and Muneton (2016) that young parents preferred to use search engine like Google, followed by websites, friends, colleague, and publication. While Ani would ask her mother and her sister first then she would try to find more comprehend information online. She added:

> *"Offline discussion is more comfortable but the knowledge is limited. When we have online discussion, a lot of people could join*

the discussion, they have their own knowledge and experiences to be shared, but when I discuss with mom or my sister, the knowledge is limited only to what they have known."

Dena added that mostly she gained information through Facebook timeline, since there was lot of articles shared by her Facebook friends. She confirmed that usually she looking for parenting information on Internet but for information related to health, she prefers to discuss with her mother, this was also confirm by Ani and Lea.

3. Topic of information searched by mothers

Internet offers a wide range of information, the parents on this research are going online to search many information related to their role as a parent. The information mentioned by participants range from children growth, children eating habit, coping with tantrums, cosmetic, and place to go, babies daily menus, child misbehavior, sleeping habit, foods, and baby food, the cheapest nappies, mother stress management, parents children relationship and other topic related with parenting.

The participants tend to use different platform to find particular information, for example, a participant stated that she preferred to access whats app group to find emotional support and to find general information or day to day conversation, when she need more specific information she prefer to browse on search engine, as usually it linked to many reliable resources. Furthermore, higher educated participants tend to find more various topics through different platform. This finding is also inline with the study of Suarez et all, (2016).

4. Reliability and trust of information on Internet

Dena, Lea and Ani agree that there is a possibility of unreliable information on the Internet. They stated that they always try to check the reliability of the information. However, Dena said that she never crosschecked the information that she received from Whats App group:

" I never clarified the info because I'm sure that it is valid, I know my friend they are smart enough to pick what information to share. But I usually check the information from article on Facebook with my husband or my brother or friend who is qualified to answer".

While Ani said that:

"Web sites seem to be most qualified because it handled by professional, blog I think is moderate, I just want to know other people experiences, for Facebook, I always confirm to the closest if I find information that seem weird"

Lea in other side trust articles more, because she said that articles from magazine and journal usually was a result of a study that written by an academic or expert. This is show that the participants have moderate awareness of the reliability of the information. (Bernhardt & Felter, 2004) stated that information on Internet could be misleading and not reliable. Thus, to asses the trustworthiness of the information, participants clarify with family or friends who considered have

knowledge on the field, compare the information with other similar resources, and consider the expertise of the author and the publisher.

5. Mother interaction on an online community

Almost all mother on this study admitted that they joined a web based online community however they prefer to be a silent reader or to be a "lurker" as on (Pedersen and Smithson, 2013). A member of an online community who were only read the thread without post any comment. Dena said, "*I've been a silent reader. I don't know them (other member), I just don't want to interact with people that I don't know. While on WA group, I've known them, I know who and how they are, so I'd rather to discuss on WA group*"

This also admitted by Eka who joined mailing list group "I got enough info from reading the thread, have the question raised by other. Or when I want to comment on something, others must already comment on it".

Liana, one of respondent who were active in The Urban Mama discussion forum, she is also contributor for the website, also said that she use WA group more than website:

> "*The WA group is very active, and very supportive. For example, when I was pregnant and joined with WA support group, we often awake at night, we just feel tired and so on, complaining of many things, craving for something, because we have the same experiences, we talk and support each other. The discussion can just pop up at any time*"

Furthermore, Liana stated that the interaction between her and her group was beyond her expectation; it becomes stronger and develops closeness:

> "*Sometimes when we got our child sick, the member of the group who live near to that member just come to pay a visit, I think, well… that nice. We are just virtual friends, but now they become my new family. I am crying writing these, because yes they are now my new family*"

There are similarities among these mothers, they do not want to involved in discussion with other mother that they don't know, they prefer to involved in deeper discussion through more personal platform such as WhatsApp instant messenger. As they usually already know all the member of the group personally. Madge and O'Connor (2006) also mentioned that Internet provides non-judgmental support and advice. However face-to-face communication and family support does not replace the support from Internet forum (Plantin and Daneback, 2009)

The interaction between members on Whats app group tends to become deeper as they sharing information and support each other. This interaction builds into deeper relationship as they not only discuss on online platform but also they decided to meet offline.

6. How does the information affect mothers?

Participants admitted that the use of Internet to search information related

to child rearing have positive impact on their life. As Dena stated that:

> *"I become more confident with what I am doing…compare to my friend.. who seem don't now anything. I feel sorry to her. When I got problem related with my child, I would searching on the Internet, when I know that each children development are different, so I just calm down and feel safe. My child is just fine and that's normal."*

Eka also confirms that parenting information she from the internet and online group has raise her confidence,

> *"I could manage my anger, previously when my child get trouble I got confused, but when I find the information that what happened with my child is normal, I just cool down and not burst into anger. Now I understand that our duty is to teach them not to shout to them"*

Other things impacted to the participants that they have less stress related to raising children, because they have more awareness and knowledge of what happened to their children. They also stated that there is increasing ability to support the children to be creative, independent and confidence,

> *"It affects my life much. I feel how this group grows, from only 4 members, now become 33. We know each other, even their husband, their first child and their mom. We some time have offline discussion. Usually mom of the member would cook for us. Since my husband live in different country, not everyday I can hear my husband voice. I can't speak with my husband about all my tiredness and stuff of being a mom. Once I have them in my life I feel that I have friend that understand me and they have same experiences, I love them so much."*

Participants reveal that this online information and support has impacted their life positively. They feel that they have more knowledge and awareness that make them feel secure and not easy to get emotional for being a mother. This is also rising more confident on how to raise the children on their own way based on the knowledge they gain. However, O'Connor and Madge (2004) argue that even though parents obtain support from their online community, this kind of support could not replace the offline support from parents surrounding system; it is only complement the offline support.

Discussion

The result of the research shows that there were transformations of nuclear family in Indonesia. As other Asian countries, previously family lives closely to each other in one environment. However, employment and education has changed the way Indonesian family lives. Young couples migrate to other part of the city or country for employment or education. This change was impacted the way they communicate. As new parents, they usually consult with their own mothers for things related to child rearing. As they separated with their parents, this new

parents try to look for information that they need through online platform.

They turn to online platform to fulfill the need of quality information about their children. These online platforms were their first preference for information related to their children as they stated that the online platform would gave them more theoretical based knowledge. This point that there was knowledge gap between generation and the need of later generation to have more experience based knowledge. From many Internet platforms available, search engine such as Google used to find particular topic, websites, web based online community and most of the participants prefer more personal group of online community such as Whats App.

Interestingly, participants turn to online community not only for information, but also they try to get some entertainment and emotional support from peers that have same condition with them, also these mothers need to reassure that they have made the right decision related to parenting and that their children development were on the right track. Furthermore, some of the participants show that they developed strong emotional relationship among the members of parent online community.

Mothers in this study search various topics related to parenting and information related to their journey as parents. Some of the participants showed that they realizing the risk of inaccurate information. Thus to assess they use different strategy to assess the reliability of information such as clarifying with family and friends who have knowledge related to the information and comparing with other articles

This study shows that online platform has become an important resource for mothers to help them on their parenting journey. Internet has changes the way mothers find advices and support related to parenting. They finding information and discussing information online. Thus even though these mothers' lives far from their family, they still can access useful advice and support.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that mothers today are actively search-parenting information online. They use various platforms to access the information. However this study show that mothers have different level of awareness on the information reliability. Some mothers have high trustworthiness to the information online without checking whether the information accurate or not. While the others apply some strategies to check the reliability of information. What platform to use, what information to see, whose write the information and whether the information has the degree of similarity with other information. Besides parenting information, these mothers are also trying to find companion and support trough-developing relationship with online peers. This online information and support has impacted these mother's life, they admitted that they have increasing knowledge, increasing awareness of good parenting practice and increasing confidence. This concludes that Internet is an important source of information and support. Thus, this study suggest that the relating stakeholder to

parenting could provide quality information and provide digital media training skills for mother

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