

Online Social Support Communication of Breastfeeding Mothers on Facebook Group

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ABSTRACT

Improving maternal and child health is one of the Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved. Breastfeeding is a natural and sustainable strategy to achieving that goal. One factor proven to have a positive effect on breastfeeding behaviour is the optimization of social support. In the age of social media, social support has extended not only from the mother's surroundings but online through social media. This study aimed to analyse the structure and communication behaviour of social support obtained in Facebook group on breastfeeding. Qualitative methodology using netnography was used. Results show that the communication structure in the Facebook group is open with a radial pattern that is beneficial in breastfeeding communication because radial patterns are considered more effective in the diffusion of innovation and new ideas. Admins play a key role in the Facebook group communication network; they acted as cosmopolites, opinion leaders, and gatekeepers. In conclusion, Facebook group in an interactive and effective media for online social support communication of breastfeeding mothers. Interventions on breastfeeding should consider the use of social media as they can mediate the breastfeeding support not adequately provided offline.

Keywords: *online communication, breastfeeding mothers, Facebook group*

1. INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding is known to have a positive impact on maternal and child health. Breastfeeding is considered a natural practical and sustainable strategy to maternal and child health, which contributes to health, social and economic development. But in reality, breastfeeding rate in Indonesia is still not optimal because the national coverage is still below the national and global targets set by the government and the World Health Organization which targets 50% exclusive breastfeeding rate.

Many factors influence the breastfeeding behaviour in nursing mothers. Sociodemographic and biophysical factors are permanent factors that are difficult to change, but psychosocial factors such as social support, intention, knowledge and self-efficacy can still be changed by interventions using health communication strategies. One potential health communication strategy to be harnessed in breastfeeding communication is by utilizing information and communication technology such as social media. This is due to the broad reach of social media and its nature that is readily available at any time. This present study was aimed to analyse the communication structure and communication behaviour of social support on a Facebook group about breastfeeding.

2. METHOD

Research was done on Facebook group of a prominent breastfeeding society in Indonesia (Organization A) in June 2017 to August 2018. Qualitative methodology using netnography was used. In netnography, data collected were analyzed inductively to process and perfect and produce the essence of raw data [1], [2]. Netnography is different from content analysis because in netnography, the researcher must enter the cultural arena by immersing into the community and become part of the community [3]. One author has become a member of the Facebook group years prior the research hence familiar with the research subject and has immersed herself through natural interactions in the group. Other than recording conversations on sampling days, in accessing personal Facebook accounts on non-sampling days, the researcher still interacts and access the group Facebook content and making notes or recording important events or communication for this research, analogous to making field notes in conventional ethnography [1]. Data in the form of text from Facebook consisting of 81 posts, 1279 comments, 1205 replies from 528 actors were collected randomly on sampling days to be analysed. Communication structure and communication patterns are part of cultural issues that can be analysed in a netnographic study [3]. These can be answered using communication network analysis. Thus, the data obtained was analysed using qualitative communication network analysis by discussing communication networks themes

that emerge in the text related to communication structure, communication behaviour and actor roles.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Communication Structure

The communication structure is the arrangement of different elements that can be identified through patterns of communication flow in a system [4]. In this case what is described is the interactions of actors in the community which is the Facebook group. Communication flow pattern in the group is shown in Figure. This depicts examples of communication flow pattern that shows the possibilities of interaction that have been identified in the Facebook group studied. Generally, the interaction pattern is radial personal network. A radial personal network is a network pattern where individuals interact with dyadic couples that do not interact with one another [5].

Thread A is the first form identified when a member (Member 1) initiates communication by writing a post, in almost all cases there is always an Admin who answers, it is mostly the Admin who first comments on the member's post (Admin 1). Then another member (Member 2) responds the post. This is the most common possibility that has been identified.

Another form of communication is in Thread B where a member (Member 3) initiates communication by making a post targeting the Admins (Admin 2) and other members where other members may respond (Member 4). The result of that interaction is read by another member (Member 5) who then asks a new question (on the same topic or out of the topic) inside the thread of Member 3.

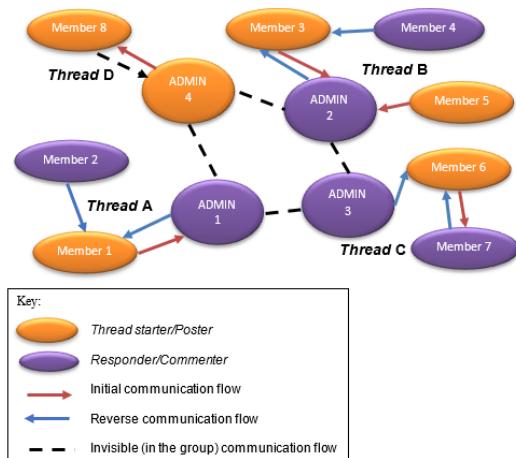


Figure 1 Communication flow patterns in Facebook group

The next form of communication depicted by Thread C is where a member (Member 6) creates a post targeting other members ("Is there any working mothers here...") and commented by the Admin first before answered by other

members (Member 7). In some cases, other members do not answer since it has been clearly communicated by the Admin the information or support needed by the poster.

Thread D is the last form of communication where Admin (Admin 4) may use her prerogative rights to not approve a member's (Member 8) post but directly explains the situation or provide solution then clarifies why the post is not approved.

The Facebook group has radial personal network pattern because the members are not familiar with each other. Even though a member's Facebook friends may also be a member of the Facebook group, they are likely to interact specifically inside the group. For example, 21 members of the Facebook group is personally Facebook friends with one of the authors ("mutual friends") but has never interacted with them inside the group.

Hence, there were no identified cliques in this Facebook group since the network is open. Even if there are cliques, it may be the Admins who coordinate with each other to moderate the group (shown by the dashed lines on Figure). But this was not shown explicitly since interactions between Admins only were not found. In the group Wall, only interactions between Admin-Member or Member-Member that is shown.

This radial personal network pattern is beneficial in breastfeeding communication. Even though effective communication happens between communicators with homophilic relationships—that is having something in common such as values, beliefs, education, social status etc—but in the context of diffusion of innovations or new ideas what is needed is heterophilic relationships. In other words, communication for behaviour change is more effective between members whose characteristics are not the same with one another [5]. This is called Strength of Weak Ties where new ideas are communicated to many people at once through greater social distance, when run through heterophilic relationships such as in radial personal network rather than homophilic relationships as found in interlocking personal network [5], [6]. Large social networks tend to have weak ties where the individuals inside it will seek support in these weak ties rather than the strong ties that they have [7]. The value of the nodes or sources also play a factor in the diffusion of new ideas; the higher the value of the sources, the more optimal the diffusion becomes [8]. The communication network of the Facebook group is large with weak ties since individuals are from different backgrounds, and a lot of information sources came from high value nodes such as Admins, thus optimizing the network for the diffusion of better breastfeeding practices.

3.2. Communication Behavior of Group Members

In the sociotechnological approach, relationships between social and technological systems depend on the communication process observed through communication behavior [9]. Communication behavior is a respondent's action in seeking and conveying information through the channels that exist in the community's communication networks [10]. Communication behavior in a Facebook

group can be analysed at the media object level to see user activities and interactions, comprising of: 1) communication model of users in social media; 2) text that become the agreement in the virtual community and used to communicate with each other; 3) what forms that can be used in communication, whether it is text, visual, audiovisual and so forth; 4) what are the communication habits of entities in social media; 5) do entities have a routine to access social media; 6) values used in online communication; 7) boundaries set by entities for access by other entities [3].

In this Facebook group, the intruder communication model is open and interactive. If following the rules, anyone who is a member may post or comment in the group. Text that become the agreement for communicating in the virtual community is legible and polite Bahasa Indonesia. This Facebook group has a comprehensive guideline on writing to minimize the risk of miscommunication, since computer-mediated textual communication is prone to distortion due to the lack of nonverbal cues to accent the message:

WRITING GUIDELINES

1. *Writing posts and comments please use general Bahasa Indonesia. Do not use words that many people do not understand.*
2. *It is not permitted to use informal or colloquial language...*
3. *Do not use SMS language with unconventional abbreviations Use abbreviations in general Bahasa Indonesia ...*
4. *Turn off auto text function of your phones since others may not be able to view it.*
5. *Using internet and social media lingo is permitted as long as it is conventional*
6. *Please ask a question about a topic in thread/post similar to your topic. If the question is different, do create a new thread/post.*

Multiple forms of communication were used in the group, but basically the main form of communication is text. If there is visual, audio-visual or long text, then Admins will keep them in Group Documents. In this case, Admins or knowledgeable members will guide members who need the document by giving the link to the document or tagging the members in the document comments field.

Boundaries set in access is the action of group moderation process by Admins. Boundaries may be public that is explicitly communicating group rules so all members understand the rules, regulations and values that can be communicated in the group. There are also specific boundaries, when Admins filter all posts that come in and moderate comments and replies already existing in the group.

3.3. Roles of Actors in the Communication Network of Facebook group

In communication networks, each actor has a special role attributed to him. Some of these roles include: 1) Liaison, people who connect two or more cliques in the system but are not part of the cliques, 2) Bridge, members in cliques that connect two or more cliques that they follow in the

system, 3) Isolate, individuals in the system that do not have a network relationship with others, 4) Gatekeeper, individuals who filter the information that comes in before being communicated to group members, 5) Cosmopolite, people in groups that connect groups with the surrounding environment (outsiders), 6) Opinion Leader, those whose views are respected more than others in the group [5], [11]. In the A Facebook group communication network, Admin acts as a cosmopolite, opinion leader, and gatekeeper in the communication process. This is because the communication in the A Facebook group is moderated by the Admin. Admin plays a big role in this community, they are always present and do their job of selecting information and providing correct information. In diffusion of innovations theory, the existence of opinion leaders and gatekeepers is proven to accelerate the spread of new ideas [12]. Admins are categorized as cosmopolites because they connect members with outside parties. In this case, the context is when members need further information or consultation offline, the Admin can provide information on the nearest organization representative, so members can directly contact the organization to consult with professional lactation counsellor:

*CC: Good evening. Please inform the contact number for lactation counsellor in BSD. Thank you *smile emoticon**

Admin: Please contact the secretariat tomorrow because we are nearly closed now. We will refer you to a counsellor in BSD area or to a lactation physician/clinic if....

Breastfeeding is a very practical activity; breastfeeding techniques require direct demonstration and in certain cases it requires direct observation of the mother and baby as well as direct demonstration by professional lactation counsellor to avoid mistakes in the practice of breastfeeding [13].

In communication networks, opinion leaders are whose voice can influence group attitudes or behaviour [5]. Admin is an actor in a communication network that is classified as opinion leaders because their opinions are heard and trusted by members. According to Valente and Davis [12], there are 5 ways in which opinion leaders are determined in a community: 1. Individuals nominate themselves to be opinion leaders; 2. The organization / program / project staff elect opinion leaders; 3. Community members recruit participants; not an opinion leader, who then recruits other new participants; 4. Some selected individuals in the community nominate other individuals to become opinion leaders; 5. All community members are invited to nominate opinion leaders.

In the A Facebook group, the second method used is A itself as the organization that determines who acts as an Admin. Admin is considered as a trusted person and a place to find information, seen in some member posts that ask for information not to ask the group but directly greet Admin with the intention of getting information from Admin.

Information from the admin is considered trustworthy because even though they play the same role as breastfeeding mothers or those who have breastfed, who voluntarily become part of the organization to be active in the Facebook group. Most administrators are professionals who are competent to answer problems around breastfeeding or infant and child feeding; they are doctors,

nurses, or other health workers and certified breastfeeding counsellors.

In communicating, Admin always strives to provide clear, decisive information, but still polite to be accepted by its members. For example, by continuing to use everyday language but that is easy to understand, and using emoticons to be more familiar with their members.

It is also not uncommon for members who feel they have received support from this Facebook group to breastfeed, directly expressing their gratitude to the organization:

ERM: 6 months went so fast. My deepest thank you to A. I hope all breastfeeding warriors get abundant blessings. Amen.

In every interaction (posts/comments/replies) the Admin is almost always there to answer members' questions. In addition to answering questions, in some cases the Admin can initiate a conversation or discussion by starting a post. A total of 9 posts were written by the Admin. Admin writes posts in cases of: 1) providing information related to Organization A offline activities such as training, workshops and other events; 2) conveying long information, often accompanied by links to group documents; 3) respond to questions from members whose posts have not been passed (discussed further in the next section).

Admin of the A Facebook group acts as gatekeepers, which in the context of a communication network is defined as an individual filtering incoming information before being communicated to group members [11]. The gatekeeping process is important to ensure that the communication and information exchanged is as transparent as possible. This mitigation step is a consequence of the fact that information obtained on social media cannot be accounted for by its credibility, because the user-generated content feature of social media means that anyone can post anything on social media [14]–[16]. In this study, four ways were identified on how Admins moderate the group for this purpose: 1) filtering all incoming posts, 2) deleting messages, 3) turning off commenting features for posts that need professional advice or causing controversy, and 4) by providing credible information to respond or neutralize responses containing non-credible information that keeps popping up. Admin actions in carrying out this gatekeeping process can be done with or without notification to members who have deleted their posts or comments.

In addition to rectifying by providing credible information, the Admin is also tasked with maintaining the communication climate in the group by providing information related to rules or regulations in the group:

*Admin: Hello mom, please fix your writing (to be readable) *emoticon**

Appointment of Admins in the AIMI Facebook group is different from other online communities. Online communities, both in the form of Facebook groups and web-based communities, usually choose Admin by appointing ordinary members through various mechanisms. But the Admins in the AIMI Facebook group is part of the organization, not an ordinary member who was appointed as Admin. Even then, being an AIMI administrator is voluntary work that is not paid, and the Admin profile is the same as the profile of other mothers who are regular

members: mothers who are breastfeeding their children and are active between their duties as a mother. So they may close the Wall when Admins cannot handle the group for various reasons. This Admin action may look authoritarian and overly controlling, there are some members who object to the implementation of the open-close system of this group wall. On the other hand, there is also a lot of support flowing in the comments column in the form of nurturant support such as praying, expressing gratitude, and encouragement. The nurturant support exchanged show empathy. But it also shows the weakness of the group in managing the communication. If a good and sustainable system is available, there is no need for group open-close treatment. In addition, Admin's disclosure can also be interpreted negatively by members. By providing information that the Admin is a volunteer who is not paid and even pays for her own needs to perform her duties as an Admin, can create a negative impression. But seeing the various comments coming in about this group's open and close posts, it doesn't seem to be that much of a problem because the members are very supportive of Admins. Other roles are attributed to ordinary group members. For example, bridges are those who provide network support by giving link or tagging others in posts that they think can help the member in need. In the following post about expressed breastmilk management, WD tagged her friends NFZ and BP. AL did the same but the friend she tagged is a non-member, hence the link is in grey. If a non-member is tagged, they will not be able to view the information as they cannot access the group. Liaisons were not found in the Facebook group because to post, someone must be a member of the group, so all who communicate in the group are members or part of the network. The absence of cliques also makes liaison to be unidentified in this group.



Figure 2 Liaison

Whereas isolates are passive members of the group that never post. In online community studies, members like this are called "lurkers" [17]. Lurkers in Facebook groups can be divided into 2, namely 1) passive lurker, which only sees posts and does not take any action in the group, and 2) active lurker, who does not provide verbal comments or in the form of text (in the form of posts, comments or replies) but clicking on a reaction to show support. Even though they do not carry out activities, members can still benefit from the Facebook group, especially in getting support in facilitating actions [18]. However, the level of support obtained will not be as large as those who actively communicate in groups, especially in obtaining support for caring [19].

4. CONCLUSION

Social support communication online through Facebook can be described by its communication structure and communication behaviour. The structure of communication proves that it is beneficial for improving breastfeeding behaviour of its members, whereas the communication behaviour show an open and interactive but guided communication. Facebook group then can be an effective media for social support communication of breastfeeding mothers, as they can mediate the breastfeeding support not adequately provided offline. Further research should delve more into the communication networks of the group by conducting further large-scale analysis to corroborate these qualitative preliminary findings.

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