Digital Body Positivity Activism Role of Influencers on Instagram to Spread Body Positivity Discourse

Ayu Candra Puspita Anzani
Universitas Indonesia
ayu.candra91@ui.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the practice of digital body positivity activism on Instagram social media. Instagram social media plays a role in creating a much more democratic space and creating more neutral users. However, in reality, Instagram is one of the mediums where the ideal body and beauty myths continue to be intensified. The presence of body positivity seeks to challenge the beauty myths displayed in various media. The analysis was conducted with several content samples with the hashtags #bodypositive and body positivity. Previous studies have analyzed more positive body image campaigns on social media (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) and how other social media users respond to the discourse of body positivity being spread. The results of this study, where body positivity activists and influencers spread body positivity, also take a significant role in spreading body positivity discourse.

I. Introduction

Entering the 20th century, social media is more widely used by the community, especially the millennial generation, than old media such as television, radio, magazines, and the like. One of the most widely used social media by Indonesian people and even the world is Instagram. Instagram is a *platform* because its goals are focused and self-presentation-oriented (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Instagram culture has placed a value on a person's appearance, which in turn imposes the importance of how a person looks ideal in the eyes of other users (Barbato & Tiggemann, 2018). That is what makes Instagram users able to create their content actively and passively consume content posted by others.

Because Instagram is focused on self-orientation and visual appearance, Instagram users choose photos selectively before sharing them on social media. Each content that wants to be shared is strongly influenced by the norms and standards set by popular culture (Bryant, 2018). In many cultures around the world, thin is the ideal body type for women, while fat is always placed with a negative connotation. Then popular culture itself is very closely related to placing women's bodies with such standards and perpetuated in all media lines such as films, advertisements, fashion, and social media (Bozsik, 2018).

Popular media treats women's bodies like commodities, where age, body, and appearance are something that women must always think about. The problem is that the media displays the ideal body and how the representation in this media has spread in various discriminatory forms of this "other" non-ideal body. Digital culture is full of macro images of thin women, and those images often contain motivational text overlaid on top of women.

Social media is an example of a relatively recent development of information technology (Marbun *et al*, 2020). With time, social media Instagram has changed and is here to provide a place for the battle of discourse and identity. One of the battles that occurred was the emergence of activists on Instagram who campaigned for the issue of *body positivity*. Activism *Body positivity* itself not only opposes the ideal body and beauty myths but also invites its supporters to learn to love their bodies.

The issue of body politics has been rooted in the second wave of feminism in the 1960s. Although this issue has emerged since the 1960s, *Body Positivity* has only gained momentum since the advent of social media (Rahmawati, 2019: 81). Millions of activists worldwide have used social media to express their opposition to any control over women's bodies which in the 2000s was known as the "*Body Positivity Movement*" (Darwin & Miller, 2020).

The presence of digital body positivity activism on Instagram seeks to oppose the construction of ideal body standards and beauty while preventing self-comparison based on appearance and appreciating all body shapes, sizes, and appearances (Cwynar-Horta, 2016; Sastre, 2014). the content *Body positivity* shared on Instagram usually includes various photos and videos, but often the photos focus on women wearing swimwear or wearing clothes that are trending. Moreover, interestingly, some of the shared photos showed their happy expressions showing an uneven stomach (Cohen, Irwin, Newton-John, & Slater, 2019). Images are often accompanied by captions*that*reinforce the content (for example, "love your body," "all bodies are beautiful").

II. Research Method

The method used in this research is virtual ethnography. Christine Hine (2000, 2015) defines virtual ethnography as a method used to research activities on the internet and explore entities (*users*) when using the internet. The selection of literature studies for in-depth analysis of the subject has become the basis for the author to conduct research with a qualitative approach and supported by digital studies to analyze more deeply and produce an empirical review of cases of *body positivity* in Indonesia. The researcher determines the analysis of the *body positivity* because this media allows writers to explain discourse to outsiders and convey their criticisms of the movement. After an initial exploration of the *hashtag #bodypositivity* on Instagram, the researcher concluded that conversations in the digital space do not highlight the framework of the movement but rather the individual's personal experience with beauty culture.

Subjects and research units are actors who are actively involved in spreading the issue of *body positivity* online on Instagram. Data collection was carried out using two techniques, namely in-depth interviews and taking several content samples from social media, Instagram, with the *hashtags #bodypositivity* and *#bodypositive*. In-depth interviews were conducted by researchers from June 13, 2021, to August 3, 2021, online. Meanwhile, the data taken from Instagram is a sample of data posted from June 1, 2021, to September 30, 2021.

Researchers carry out data reduction and presentation in primary data processing or interview data. Data reduction is a data processing process by reducing interview findings and narrowing them down to be more specific. At the same time, researchers have collected secondary data in the form of content. Researchers then looked into each *#bodypositivity* and *#bodypositive hashtags* included in the captions of their text. This includes digging into comments on hashtagged photos that provide data on cross-post activity. The number of likes is taken into account to understand the level of interest other

users have in the content being shared and how well the post is received. This process is repeated until saturation occurs so that generalizations about the overall field data can be made accurately.

III. Results and Discussion

Discourse disseminated in a digital campaign is usually content produced by social media users, then shared and consumed by other social media users. Content on social media is an essential part of communication that plays a significant role in interacting and delivering information on social media. Various types of content exist on social media, such as text, images, audio, infographics, articles, and videos. Activists' *body positivity* because the content they create must gain interest from other users; besides that, the target audience also understands the content of the content being shared. Discourse spread by actors who take part in spreading the issue of *body positivity* is usually added with *the hashtag #bodypositivity #bodypositive #lovemybody #lovemyself #selfacceptance #bodyacceptance #bodyneutrality #stopbodyshaming.* Moreover, several images that show belly folds are added with text that conveys *body positivity.*

Researchers have attempted to identify social media content capable of supporting body image and the rationale for manipulating certain aspects of images and social media content. Analysis of content with the hashtag *#bodypositivity* on Instagram shows that most of the posts do not match the ideal of the beauty displayed by the mass media. Body positivity posts often feature body features such as cellulite, tummy tuck, and stretch marks. These perceived imperfections are celebrated and embraced as beauty. In the context of *body positivity* on Instagram, almost all posts contain persuasion in promoting body appreciation in influencer posts. In addition, a search for posts with the hashtag *#bodypositive* found 17,108,414 posts (Instagram, October 2021) which means more than the *hashtag #bodypositivity*, although both have similar definitions.

Although many female users and bodies outside the ideal-thin share their posts and provide *the hashtag #bodypositive.* However, nowadays, posts are much more diverse, not only women who share their posts but also men. Even women with ideal body types also participate in the *body positivity campaign.* However, this has sparked criticism from several parties because it was initially suggested that *body positivity* is not adapted to the ideal woman's body – thin and attractive. Activists *of Body positivity* argue that posts showing thin people can also have fat belly folds because they position fat are intrinsically evil. Logically, while the description of *body positivity* in pictures of thin women may promote body appreciation, they do not intend to oppose the ideal of thinness as a *body positivity* that they want to do.

In addition to personal accounts that share *body positivity* on Instagram, several accounts bearing the name of online communities also campaign for *body positivity*. Such as @bbcbodypositive, @bodypositivemovement, @bodyimagepositive, and @bodypositivityadvocacy accounts. Body positivity posts on Instagram have encouraged body appreciation and body care concepts and feature more prominent women engaged in physical activities such as yoga (e.g., @nolatrees and @mynameisjessamyn) and surfing. Similarly, an analysis of the content of Instagram images with the hashtag #curvyyoga found that these images convey messages that convey a holistic approach to health, actively portray health and wellness of all sizes, and take pride in one's body shape, consistent with the promotion of Health at Every. Size (HAES).

Body positivity advocates argue that such social media content is likely to create a more inclusive and empowering environment for everyone to participate in similar activities regardless of their body shape or size. When sharing photos on Instagram, influencers usually use captions to interact with their followers and share their opinions and feelings about specific topics. In response to concerns that what they post could hurt women's body image, some female influencers have started using captions that explicitly address their bodies in the images. One form of this is to show or accentuate unrealistic traits in photos on Instagram, to tell other social media users not to compare themselves to unrealistic images. For example, one influencer in Indonesia started posting disclaimer captions on Instagram: "social media is not real," and "I took more than 100 photos in similar poses trying to make my stomach look good and barely ate that day."

Alternatively, on the other hand, an influencer shares body positivity by encouraging his fans to love and respect their bodies. Often celebrities also include hashtags in their captions, such as *#bodypositivity #bodypositive, #bopo, #lovemybody #lovemyself #selfacceptance #bodyacceptance #bodyneutrality* to try to strengthen their attitude of acceptance. This action can be seen as part of a broader online 'body positivity movement that seeks to challenge narrow beauty ideals and discourage appearance-based comparisons, and actively promote body acceptance and appreciation of all forms.

In a recent content analysis of 640 Instagram posts drawn from a famous sample of the hashtags #bodypositivity and #bodypositive, the authors found that such posts typically include images of various body sizes and looks otherwise underrepresented. For example, the majority (90%) of bodies depicted in popular body positivity posts range from average weight to obese, and just under half (10%), display attributes that deviate from societal beauty ideals, such as displaying cellulite tummy tuck and stretches. Mark. Such images are accompanied by captions that promote appreciation of the body and seeing beauty in various appearances. Body positivity advocates aim to show that all bodies deserve respect and promote a more positive relationship between one's body and oneself through posts like these.

Research shows that body positivity campaigns are associated with greater psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing (Swami, Weis, Barron, & Furnham, 2018), health-promoting behaviors such as intuitive eating and physical activity (Andrew, Tiggemann, & Clark, 2016a, 2016b), and protective against ideal-thin media exposure (Andrew, Tiggemann, & Clark, 2015; Halliwell, 2013). The core features of positive body image include respecting the uniqueness of one's body, accepting all aspects of the body even if it does not conform to the idealized body image by the media, broadly defining beauty, mental positivity, and filtering information in a way that protects the body (Tylka & Wood Barcalow, 2003). 2015). It is essential to find that the content followed on leading body positivity accounts is mainly consistent with the central theoretical tenets of positive body image (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). The authors, therefore, conclude that engaging with body positivity content on Instagram can be associated with mental health, a healthy lifestyle, and of course, reducing the body's comparison with other women's bodies in the media.

IV. Conclusion

One of the most widely used social media by the people of Indonesia and even the world is Instagram. Instagram is a *platform* because its goals are focused and self-presentation oriented. Instagram culture has placed a value on a person's appearance, which in turn imposes the importance of how a person looks ideal in the eyes of other users. Digital culture is full of macro images of thin women, and those images often contain motivational text overlaid on top of women. With time, social media Instagram has changed and is here to provide a place for the battle of discourse and identity. One of the battles that occurred was the emergence of activists on Instagram who campaigned for the issue of *body positivity.* Activism *Body positivity* itself not only opposes the ideal body and beauty myths but also invites its supporters to learn to love their bodies.

Support is not only obtained from ordinary social media users, but influencers from international to national levels in Indonesia also contribute to campaigning for the discourse of body positivity. The findings from this study show that the issue of body positivity has a large and significant impact on social media users. Social media users who actively follow influencer accounts who share body positivity posts get greater psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing than other social media users who follow world-class model accounts. Because by looking at pictures of body positivity, social media users reduce the level of social comparison between their bodies and the bodies of other women with the ideal-thin type. This proves that the body positivity campaign on Instagram social media positively impacts other social media users.

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