# The Role of Youth in Raising Gender Awareness on Social Media

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**Abstract.** The raising of gender awareness is everybody's responsibility to do. Raising gender awareness means increasing knowledge and understanding about gender sensitivity issues. In this case, youth as agents of change already variously do the same things by using social media. Social media is the most accessible platform to raise communication-based gender sensitivity by a single-handed person. This research used a qualitative approach and phenomenology method. Data were collected from youth as university students through forum group discussion and in-depth interviews. This research presents and elaborates values, beliefs, and activities about how youth independently use social media to educate people and do a campaign about gender awareness while sharing, spreading, producing, and reproducing the information repetitively.

**Keywords:** agent of change, gender awareness, gender sensitivity, social media, youth

## 1 Introduction

Gender inequality is a behavior that causes a person to be discriminated against for reasons of gender. The term gender inequality refers to the difference between women and men, especially interpreted as a problem of inequality between the situation and position of women and men in society, such as inequality in education, sexual violence, malnutrition, reproductive health information, child marriage, child labor, HIV/AIDS, and gender-based violence. In addition, this can happen when the behavior of one party harms the other because of gender factors (Luthfiyah, 2020).

According to Ellen Kusuma, Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network's Online Security Division, cases of online gender-based violence (KBGO) against women also tripled during the Covid-19 pandemic (Stephani, 2020). Komnas Perempuan's 2020 Annual Record states that within 12 years, violence against women has increased by 72%, which is an 8-fold increase (komnasperempuan.go.id, 2020) because there is an increase in the courage of victims to report as evidence of various forms of violence that have begun to be revealed. The data above shows that gender inequality is increasingly touching the virtual world.

Media is a means of communication in society. The function of the media is as a source of information, correlation, continuity, entertainment, and mobilization. Littlejohn (2002) says that the media is a powerful tool for spreading the dominant ideology. The media are perceived as having the potential to raise public awareness about class, power, and domination issues, such as gender. The concept of gender is an inherent trait of both men and women socially and culturally constructed.

Brannon (2011) asserts that the concept of gender describes the traits and behaviors that are considered by culture to be appropriate for women and men. Gaunlett (2002) states that the media spreads a clear division between male and female appearances as choices, making gender categories even more apparent. The media also shape an understanding of how masculinity and femininity should be.

Media insinuates people's consciousness of how we are seeing men and women (Wood, 2013). Daily, the gender binary makes males and females; men and women must obey social and cultural norms in our society. Sex becomes basic to categorize gender traits as feminine and masculine (Bem, 1977). A woman must have feminine traits, and a man must have masculine traits according to society's social and cultural system. The functionalist perspective on gender roles with its views on expressive women and instrumental men is based on the work of Parsons and Bales in traditional society (Wienclaw, 2011).

According to Hall (1997), the work of the media is to defend the dominant ideology (the ruling class). The dominant ideology perpetuates unrealistic women representation, gender stereotyping as a cultural standard, and traditional roles and normalizing violence against women (Wood, 2013). Hall (1997) defines ideology as images, concepts, and premises that provide a framework for representing, interpreting, understanding, and thinking about something that 'make sense' to various social aspects. Furthermore, Giddens said a person's experience is to some extent mediated through words and images from the dominant medium in our lives (Gauntlett, 2002). Media, for this context, focuses on social media and plays a vital role in society as information providers about cultural, social, political, and economic perspectives.

Gender awareness is shaped by how the importance of gender inequality. Many people are concerned about gender issues by finding cases that emerge on media, mainly social media. Indonesian Youth movements present well on how they produce and share information about it (Arditya, 2020). Keeping the update and spread the new area include the activities of young people in consuming information. Young people are the driving force in voicing these various messages of gender equality on social media. Besides, using social media must be supported by the ability to carry out analysis and evaluation. The point of view also departs from the audience's perspective as the center of the campaign carried out on this social media and its activities. So social media is contributing to shaping audience knowledge about their thought, believes, and behavior.

The movements began with knowledge and understanding about gender studies and feminism. The terms' feminism,' 'feminist,' and even 'gender' is still questioned by most Indonesians. This term causes the ideas about how irrelevant this is to Indonesian values. That makes the urgency of gender awareness is essential. Feminism is a women's movement that fights for the fate of women and human equality. According to Hooks (2000, p. 8), "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." The issue of feminism is not a single thought or school but consists of various ideologies, paradigms, and theories (Hanum, 2018).

Although there are various analyzes and different ideologies, this feminism has one thing in common in the struggle for gender equality. The struggle for gender equality is conveyed through various contexts. However, in the most basic sense, a feminist is a person – male or female – who believes in equality, especially sex and gender equality.

Youth, who believe in gender equality, plays a vital role in society to spread the many perspectives. Begin from their worries about the current condition about gender inequality has raised their voice to speak up. This research describes youth roles to speak up about gender inequality through social media. This study aims to determine the youth values, beliefs, and

roles for raising gender awareness in social media. And then, by increasing that awareness by understanding more about gender sensitivity issues, the youth were able to present how they act as users and as producers.

## 2  Methodology

This research used a qualitative approach of phenomenology. This type of research is descriptive qualitative research that describes the meaning of human interaction. Moleong (2004) suggests that descriptive is data collected in words, pictures, and not numbers. This opinion on descriptive research is described to obtain data from manuscripts, interviews, field notes, photos, videos, personal documents notes or memos, and other official documents. This study uses an interpretive paradigm by looking at phenomena and exploring experiences from the object of research, starting from efforts to find explanations about social or cultural events based on the perspectives and experiences of the people being studied (Neuman, 2006).

Data were collected from females and male's university students as youth respondents through forum group discussions and in-depth interviews from March to June 2021. Informants in the research will be adjusted to the research needs and adjusted to qualitative data research findings. Researchers can explore interesting data from research informants with the characteristics of a.) youth aged 18-25; b.) concern about gender (in)equality studies; c.) using social media actively; d.) eager to involve in raising gender awareness activities.

The most critical stage in the research process is the collection of research data. The problem's formulation is determined if the researcher gets the correct data and follows the research objectives. The data collected in this study are primary and secondary. The analysis approach uses several analytical methods, namely interactive data analysis consisting of data collection, data analysis, data verification, and conclusions from Milles Huberman. Milles and Huberman (1994) state that qualitative research analysis consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification.

## 3  Result and Discussion

### 3.1  The Factors, How Youth Deals with Society

The history of gender differences between men and women occurred through a very long process. It was shaped by several reasons, such as socio-cultural conditions, religious conditions, and state conditions. With this long process, gender differences are often considered natural or biological provisions that can no longer be changed due to the beginning of gender inequality in society (Rokhmansyah, 2016).

Brannon (2011) also states that gender is not a matter of biological description but a social label, so a label that separates "masculine" and "feminine" emerges. Masculinity is synonymous with individuality, competition, and violence. Gender differences then become a reference in working in the economy, education system, social interaction, and childcare system. These cultural values tend to validate values that are considered male characteristics while at the same time demeaning feminine characteristics (O'Shaugnessy & Stadler, 2005).

When born, our gender has been determined by what we look physically and will further define our society's role and social functioning. Gender identity is socially constructed because it is viewed differently depending on a culture or community, but it is subconsciously agreed

upon (Butler, 1990). A man and woman are finally taught to have characteristics that are considered according to their gender. In a conservative community, gender is fixed. Female means feminine and male is masculine. In a particular family culture, it has an ideal image about how girls, and boy's performativity. This image also deals with what girls have to do to become gracious women. The informant from the fixed gender stereotype family often deals with things about the father asking her daughter to become feminine, including how to do fashion and roles at home. Being sporty and 'tomboy' is not proper.

Sex is intertwined with gender. It includes the understanding of gender roles, gender identity, and gender performativity. The problem arises when one sex is not compatible with their gender. Femininity and masculinity are associated with stereotypical gender roles. Society finally also constructs ideas about gender roles. Activities such as doing chores at home, cooking, and improving skills in dance or sing are what girls do. Before and after a baby is born in Indonesia, parents have prepared specific colors for their children, pink for girls and blue for boys. In addition to the pink and blue standards, color categorization such as soft and pastel colors for girls and dark colors for boys is still happening.

The family is the minor institution of society and is the first place to teach various things. Parenting and education provided by parents shape a person's mindset and behavior in interacting in society. According to Marcia (1993), family background, significant others, expectations from the social environment (including extended family, school, and peer groups), exposure to variations in identity, and adult figures provide a solid foundation for identity. Some informants come from conservative families. Their family sets themselves on rules and roles for men and women to act. For some informants, gender roles construction causing discomfort because it was intertwined with the reproduction system.

Gender roles had become a stereotype that will continue to be perpetuated in social life. Women are educated to grow up to be graceful people and have a soft feeling, should not do heavy work, and must cook, while men must be solid and dashing individuals, should not cry, and must think logically. Peer groups consist of same-sex friends, so showing emotional traits is forbidden as weaknesses should not appear in men. Showing weaknesses means not being strong, so bullying is another problem to face. They are trapped in toxic masculinity. Stereotypes are an assumption about a particular thing or group. The result of community construction will eventually shape gender stereotypes.

Before the media social occurs, it burdens the individual at the community, the differences between public and domestic and man job or woman job are obvious. However, now work for the home could be an option because we are not dealing with the hunt or war activities again— gender role in developing and growing. Everyone could do every role. Role sharing, for instance, shows everyone should have critical thinking about do's and do not's regarding their ability, equally.

Now, the informants deal with gender roles in the family by getting more knowledge about how to do and promote gender equality in daily life, such as sharing the household chores, noticing signs of violence, voicing for women, commenting on the sexist situation, listening and reflecting more about other problems. And then, these youths turn it into messages and spread them on media. These messages about equality are conveyed through various means and media. One of them is by using new media to touch the realm of social media further. The flow of information from new media, especially social media, currently has no limitations.

Nowadays, social media seems to be the only media that can give all of us the freedom to spread news and information, which is also unlimited. In the new media era, the dissemination of gender issues is proliferating. We can see several online platforms, especially social media, which many people currently love in seeking information and sharing or voicing gender issues.

Currently, various communities and organizations, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies have social media. Today, many communities have social media that provide news related to their movement.

**3.2 The Value, What is The Youth's Belief**

Humans must interpret the meanings and symbols obtained, which are then used in interpreting situations, making policies and changes, and seeing actions, solutions, advantages, and disadvantages in every interaction process they do. Misunderstanding of gender puts the character of women and men differently. Gender role is a set of behaviors expected behavior (norms) for men and women. Variations in gender roles among the various cultures and periods show that culture is indeed shaping our gender roles (Butler, 1990). The rationale for gender is the 'body'. Since gender determines whether a person can bear children or not, women who can give birth and raise children must stay at home and take care of their children.

The assumption is that feminine women and men manifest psychological characteristics, such as men being considered brave, strong, and brave. On the other hand, women are considered soft, weak, obedient, and so on. However, it turns out that these differences in character give birth to acts of violence. Various acts of violence arise due to violence, such as domestic violence, rape, genital mutilation, sexual harassment, prostitution, sexual exploitation, and others. For this reason, an understanding of gender awareness to realize gender equality is very much needed in supporting various gender-based social movements.

Gender studies are something that the youth understand after reading and finding cases or events experiencing inequality. The youth got the perspective from the feminist movement. Feminism helped them understand more from cases involving the informants' experiences, such as catcalling, taking pictures out of consent, bullying, body shaming, and sexual harassment. These bad experiences lead the informants to learn about gender and feminism and slowly construct the values. And also, facts of lack of gender awareness in terms of gender sensitivity on women journalists (Ritonga, Murwani & Ritonga, 2017).

Commonly campaign for women's human rights to bodily integrity and autonomy on matters such as reproductive rights, including the right to abortion, access to contraception and quality prenatal care; for protection from violence within a domestic partnership; against sexual harassment, street harassment, and rape; for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; and against all other forms of sex-based discrimination. Women are only accessible once they have done away with what they consider an inherently oppressive and dominating system. As long as that system and its values still exist, society will not be able to reform in any significant way.

The cases include how the people understand the way women speak up, how they struggle, and how frontal their words are matter. Understanding the scientific perspective of symbolic interactionism theory sees that humans are very active and dynamic figures in this social life and are goal oriented. Humans are equipped with the ability to think; social interactions form this thinking ability. In this social interaction, humans learn the meanings and symbols in thinking and then acting content about how more women should uproar on social media. Women have the same potential as men as leaders.

Hooks (2000) describes sexism as being perpetrated by men and women socialized from birth to accept sexist ideas and actions. All women are capable of demonstrating their ability to achieve equality and working to attain it. Therefore, change may happen without changing the structure of society. The notion that it is 'natural' pervades all social and legal systems, taxes, and the division of labor, especially the media. (Branston & Stafford, 2010). The youth believe

the values of freedom, sympathy, empathy, tolerance, independence, empowerment, and self-acceptance are the keys to beginning changing society's structure by raising gender awareness.

### 3.3 The Activity, Youth Role on Social Media

Youth – young people between the ages of 13 and 25 are productively developed and influence contemporary research, practice, and policy on gender and race references (Wyn & White, 1997). History has proven as the existence of youth invents many subcultures to speak up their mind. 'Youth' means trying to understand them as a group that grew up negotiating for their future in the national and cultural context in which they live (Wyn & White, 2017). They enjoy themselves being visible and heard of by many people.

Social media acts as a bigger platform to speak up their mind by various users as audiences. Many topics uproar regarding preferences to be heard in Indonesia, such as gender (in)equality and mental health with the highest internet use. The digital platform is the easiest way for the youth to have activities. Pandemic is also why most youths are spending more time interacting in the digital world. Youth tends to speak up freely and be outspoken.

Moreover, university students as youth from different backgrounds can speak. Gender awareness is one topic that needs more attention because gender equality is a problem, especially on social media platforms. They often speak up on online and offline platforms. Before doing the activities, they gain knowledge about if by following several communities that provide information. They also learn from the community by sharing and caring for and from each member.

First, they are acting as a producer. In West Sumatra, there are various activities carried out by young people, as individuals and community members. These informants are the member of the community such as literary, religious and debating community. As a student, they often held social campaigns and webinars. Because of the pandemic, now they only have activity online by using digital media. The effects provided by various campaigns and outreach on social media and the convenience it enables young people to create, reproduce, and share such content to raise awareness of gender equality.

Social media allows users to interact with each other, even with family, friends, acquaintances, and strangers. The youth use social media to connect with people who had the same interest as them. Social media such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, are used for social networks, and WhatsApp, line, and telegram are commonly used as an instant messaging on web-based communication forums.

Individually, they often wrote features to media online or wrote on their account on Instagram, Twitter, and speaking through audio on Spotify or anchor. The informants freely choose the most accessible social media platform to speak their minds. They learn about audience segmentation and how to inform people effectively by being a content creator. They were often writing or making posters for a campaign on celebrating days. They keep posting, at least once a week, about gender content on every platform. Because, not only explaining and implementing youth's values on a social platform, but these youth are also required to be active and dynamic in understanding this pandemic as an opportunity and then acting by producing content following developments and needs.

Second, they are a share. They said sharing is caring. In the beginning, they are educating their circle in close friends and family, and then sharing the news or discussing the viral cases on Twitter or Instagram. On Twitter, they could discuss with many people with the same interest about the topic. Mainly the topic talks about bolder topics such as harassment, discrimination, oppression, and abuse. The topic then could be shared on WhatsApp group or personal chat also. On Instagram, the feed  and instastory  feature could be an option to share a more persuasive

message in one way. Third, as a commentator. They like to give comments about current issues, celebrating day and trigger warning viral cases.

Currently, social media users in the world during the Covid-19 pandemic have increased, people are free to consume a variety of content from social media (Simon, 2020). The greater freedom of expression marks the development of the digital media era. Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Line, WhatsApp, Spotify, and Anchor are examples of social media that can channel freedom of expression. The youth's social media activities are to share and support gender-equality knowledge and give critical understanding. All the activities have the purpose of changing the users' mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors. There are three steps of acting as agents of change by the factors, the values, and the roles.

Firstly, the factor. The youth did the actions because of their past and ongoing experiences as personal and sociostructurally factors. They got influences by parents, peers, social community, and media. They observed the environment around them and found inequalities. So the youth had the purpose of educating people evenly because gender topics sometimes are not acceptedly well in a religious or conservative community. Second, the values. The respondents believed even the most minor thing indeed would have an impact. They begin to do it by self-empowering themselves first and then empowering the people through social media. They can affect each other by sharing the contents continuously. And third, the action. The result showed that youth as an agent of change had various roles in raising gender awareness. They begin their roles as students and community members, such as debating clubs, religious youth communities, and literacy communities. They spoke through parts of society directly, soft or straightforward methods, and offline or online platforms.

The ease and flood of access to information make young people too busy to participate through the repost feature available on social media. This understanding of gender awareness discusses gender-sensitive communication, gender and sex differences (gender), and gender stereotypes (Turkey. A Guide of Gender Equality in Communication, 2017). Young people are the driving force in voicing these various messages of gender equality on social media. Many youth-led organizations have sprung up in educating the public. This movement is not only at the organizational level but also at the individual level. The remaining youths hold various activities that discuss gender issues tailored to the current active audience at the organizational level. The point of view also departs from the audience's perspective as the campaign's center on social media.

**Analysis**

People are growing in a world that provides various information choices equipped with the convenience of technology that accompanies it. Information technology in the media accommodates information choices that can build interaction and encourage social and cultural change. People choose to access social media regarding the content. In the new media era, every individual and the social, cultural, economic, and political group must interact actively with new media.

More importantly, expressing individual or group identity is how each group then uses the new media as a means of communication to empower or liberate themselves. Feminism as a women's liberation movement that seeks to fight the subordination of women has applied new media to essential issues. One of the critical concerns is the potential of new media in offering an idea of liberation and empowerment. Certainly, facilitates the development of gender with the flow of feminism, which leads to the expansion of information effectively and efficiently. The presence of the internet as a new media makes the variety of information that can be obtained increasingly diverse.

The media, of course, form public awareness, one of which is related to gender. Information technology in the media is required to accommodate information choices that can build interaction and encourage social change. Many social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, and Tiktok have emerged in spreading messages of gender equality. For example, @vice and Vice Indonesia at @viceind, Magdalene @magdalene, and @indonesiafeminis.

Moreover, various global gender equality movements such as #metoomovement and #heforshe are carried out by young people to increase gender awareness in the international world. Thus, the youth as an agent of change will represent the great movement to raise gender awareness. Furthermore, they are doing the roles by repetitive motions. Furthermore, the youth's role in implementing gender sensitivity issues will give more value to gender equality on social media.

Social media has become a necessity for many people. Even information that comes from online media is mostly opened through links on social media. Social media is a medium to socialize and is done online, allowing humans to interact without being limited by space and time. The increasing number of internet users who are also social media users have been struggling with mass media. Audiences have many choices of new social media on the internet, and they can access it anytime, anywhere within their grasp.

Youth roles begin with the sense of social and justice, and furthermore, they are doing research and making more evaluation. Every human being has the same rights and opportunities to develop their potential. Gender inequality is one of the things that hinders the opportunities they have. The youth hope they could contribute to changing the perspectives about gender by raising gender awareness. Awareness needs process, progress, and constant development. Human has infinite changing value, but by the system, the changing is not possible. Nevertheless, as a person, it could be done single-handedly.

**Discussion**

As part of a productive society, young people must take, filter, produce, and reproduce various gender issues supporting gender equality. This research examines how the efforts made by young people to create a society, both young people themselves, who are aware and understand gender issues. This study explains how vital young people's role is in spreading gender understanding to the public through social media. This research illustrates scientific references for the public about the importance of youth roles to understanding gender equality, starting from the messages conveyed through social media. This research is also expected to be helpful for the development of further research.

The youths want to highlight returning to being characteristic, compassionate, full of sympathy, and empathy. The family must be educated talking about gender as women and men need each other. Furthermore, schools should do the same by facilitating the students, parents, community, and government. As individuals, youth must be educated critically about media literacy, especially the use of social media.

How could this matter become so important because the research described in this paper has implications for raising gender awareness specifically for youth and whoever interest in gender and media studies? Furthermore, this writing is needed to attract parents, diverse communities, policymakers, educators, and scholars. It should affect how the mind, attitude, and behavior towards gender inequality should be change. The youth roles had to trigger other people to do more even though. With the action about consistency, learning, awareness, keeping up the update, concern, do not become bystander, do something, share, and care about people. It requires more discussion and more action to do, even by the smallest and simplest acts.

## 4 Conclusion

Youth as an agent of change is need for raising gender awareness. It begins with the understanding of how vital gender education is. Messages supporting gender equality have emerged since the emergence of the feminist movement. Gender awareness is the solution to the lack of gender sensitivity issues. The role of young people in voicing various messages about gender equality is based on the importance of understanding these gender issues, especially in social media. The youth's had values and beliefs from feminist perspectives as the basis for doing activities on social media. The youth independently use social media to do the campaign while producing, reproducing, sharing, and spreading the information. The youth can control their actions by acting as producers, sharers, commentators by Using social media. Moreover, they hope to provide a social change in their social life.

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