

## Homophobic comments on @gitasav's instagram content for the international women's day 2023

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**How to Cite This Article:** Nabasa, P.P. et al. (2024). Homophobic comments on @gitasav's instagram content for the international women's day 2023. *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi*, 8(2). doi: 10.25139/jsk.v8i2.7775

Received: 30-01-2024, Revision: 27-05-2024, Acceptance: 19-06-2024, Published online: 24-07-2024

**Abstract** This research aims to understand how homophobic comments on @gitasav's Instagram account in the context of International Women's Day 2023 are analysed using netnographic study with the application of computer-mediated communication (CMC) theory, feminist standpoint theory, and reception theory. There is a tendency for netizens to accept Gitasav's content in her uploads celebrating International Women's Day 2023, although, at the same time, negative comments such as insults, sarcasm, foul language, disappointment, and homophobia towards Gitasav and the LGBTQ+ community also still fill the comments section, taking the point of view that Gitasav's results from this research showed that 44% of the comments were positive, followed by 35% of neutral comments. Then the negative comments amounted to 20%. Positive negative comments were 1% and negative positive comments were 0.19%. After being classified with Reception Theory by Stuart Hall, 236 comments were in the Hegemony Dominant position, 107 comments were in the Opposition position and 8 comments were in the Negotiation position. There is a tendency for netizens to accept Gitasav's content in her uploads celebrating International Women's Day 2023, although, at the same time, negative comments such as insults, sarcasm, foul language, disappointment, and homophobia towards Gitasav and the LGBTQ+ community also still fill the comments section, taking the point of view that Gitasav is no longer seen as the Muslim woman she has traditionally been with LGBTQ community.

**Keywords:** homophobia; international women's day; netnography; sentiment analysis

### INTRODUCTION

Social media has become one of the most accessed and popular mediums for its ease of use and benefits. Its advantages include building relationships with others, serving as a means of information and communication, providing a platform to showcase one's image, and facilitating individuals in the realms of business, career, education, and politics (Hartinah, 2019). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2009), social media is a combination of online applications designed based on the ideology and technology of Web 2.0, which forms the foundation of social media, enabling internet users to create and exchange information through these platforms (Tosepu, 2018). The use of independent social media is what enables anyone from various backgrounds around the world to utilise social media, including in Indonesia. According to the latest report from We Are Social and Meltwater titled 'Digital 2023: Indonesia', the active social media usage rate in Indonesia as of January 2023 was 167 million users, equivalent to 60.4% of the total population in Indonesia. This survey also indicates that the average social media usage by Indonesian people through any device is 3 hours and 18 minutes, with WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook being the top three social media platforms used in the same year (datareportal, 2023).

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Through social media, users can connect with others in different parts of the world without regard to distance or time. Its inclusivity allows individuals to respond to information openly by providing feedback in the form of comments or disseminating received information to a wider audience (Wijayanti, 2022). For most people, social media is not just a place to get interesting information, but it is also a lifestyle. Social media is often used as a means of self-expression and sharing everything. Social media provides convenience for individuals and communities to expand their friendship networks with the same interests (Muqsith, 2022). Social media is an internet-based platform that allows users to participate, create, share experiences, and easily exchange information (Moriensyah, 2015). However, like many other things with advantages, social media also has negative impacts that can harm users and those around them, one of which is hate speech.

Hate speech, also known as '*ujaran kebencian*' in Indonesian, is a form of communicative behaviour involving insults, agitation, incitement, and the like towards an individual or group based on certain views, such as religion, race, nationality, ethnicity, gender identity, skin colour, and similar topics (Kurniawan, 2015). In the digital era, the development of hate speech culture has been implemented within social media platforms, essentially used as a space for interaction with others using various methods such as text, video, memes, images, audio, and hashtags, including applications like Instagram (Muqsith, 2019). Instagram, as a social platform supporting diverse perspectives from various backgrounds, ages, races, genders, and sexual orientations, faces a challenge that cannot be immediately overcome. Generally, hate speech is often directed towards Instagram users with a large following or those considered social media celebrities, commonly known as '*selebgram*' (Instagram celebrities).

Gita Savitri Devi, commonly known as Gitasav, is a well-known influencer and celebrity from Indonesia who frequently shares educational content and her life experiences as a female Muslim student living in Germany through various social media platforms, including Instagram. As an Instagram celebrity with hundreds of thousands of followers and a cosmetic chemist, she often shares content about creating her skincare products using natural chemical ingredients. Gitasav is also recognised as an intelligent Muslim woman who expresses her opinions straightforwardly, often sparking controversy among netizens. In one of her posts, Gitasav responded to a comment from a follower stating that her agelessness was due to not having children. This opinion led to controversy as netizens concluded that Gitasav and her husband, Paul, were a child-free couple, meaning they chose not to have children after marriage (Sapinatunajah, 2022).

Gitasav gained attention in Indonesian media and trended on various social media platforms such as Twitter and TikTok due to her controversial statements on LGBTQ+ topics in November 2022. The discussions were triggered by Gitasav's remarks about Popo Barbie entering women's toilets and LGBTQ+ issues in the 2022 Qatar World Cup. Netizens speculated that Gitasav was 'pro' LGBTQ+ and normalised both incidents. Shortly afterward, Gitasav went viral again in Indonesian media after her post celebrating International Women's Day 2023 in Hamburg, Germany. The post featured a paper held above Paul's head, Gitasav's husband, with the word 'LGBTQ+' written on it, and Gitasav smiling while making a peace sign. The post received many negative comments from netizens expressing their hatred towards the LGBTQ+ community.

Negative comments directly targeting the LGBTQ+ community can also be categorised as examples of homophobic behaviour. Homophobia, according to the American psychologist George Weinberg, as cited by Plummer in his book '*One of the Boys: masculinity, homophobia, and modern manhood*', is an anxiety experienced by individuals when around homosexuals (Amelia, 2020). The prevalence of such behaviour is still common due to the strong intolerant attitude exhibited by Indonesian netizens. Intolerance towards the LGBTQ+ community and homosexuals persist, leading to unpleasant treatment (Prahasmati, 2023). This mistreatment can manifest as homophobic comments, such as those seen in Gitasav's post. Although Gitasav did not explicitly state her support or acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, Indonesian netizens, who largely condemn LGBTQ+ behaviour, drew such conclusions and consciously left homophobic hate speech comments on the post.

Based on the researcher's search, no studies specifically address netnography of homophobic comments on @gitasav's Instagram account regarding the content of International Women's Day 2023. However, some earlier studies focus on netnography, such as

'Cyberbullying on Social Media: A Netnography Study on the Comments of Rahmawati Kekeyi Putri Cantikka's YouTube Account' by Luthfyyah et al. (2022), 'Symbolic Reactions of Cyberbullying Victims on Instagram and Facebook' by Septaji (2019), and 'Political Figures' Sarcasm on Social Media' by Radita Gora and Lasmary Girsang (2022). Additionally, research by Listiorini et al. (2019) and Rokhmansyah (2020) delves into the discourse on hate speech by the Indonesian government against the LGBTQ+ community in online media. These studies reveal that LGBTQ+ groups are often treated as objects rather than subjects in the media due to government dominance, hate speech, stereotypes, stigma, and heteronormative values with religious principles.

Although various studies have explored netnography, homophobic comments, and feminism individually, few have examined the interconnection between these variables, especially analysing comments on influencers like Gitasav. Additionally, there is limited research analysing homophobic comments on posts by celebrities or influencers, prompting the researcher to explore the phenomenon behind dominant figures marginalising submissive parties by posting homophobic comments. Based on the background that was described earlier, the research question addresses how the researcher aim to understand homophobic comments on the Instagram account @gitasav within the context of International Women's Day 2023 are analysed by using a netnographic study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research employs a qualitative approach. Creswell outlines that qualitative research involves the exploration and understanding of the meaning of individual and group behaviours, to describe social or human problems. Additionally, the researcher adopts a critical paradigm for this study. The critical paradigm assumes that reality is the result of historical processes and social, cultural, and political forces that exist and develop within society (Dachi, 2019). The research utilises Netnography as a method. Netnography is derived from the combination of the words 'internet' and 'ethnography', representing an extension and adaptation of ethnography used to understand situations, life, and activities in the online world built through internet infrastructure (Eriyanto, 2021).

The data collection techniques employed by the researcher are aligned with Netnography, including observation, data archiving, and literature review. The data sources obtained by the researcher include primary data generated through netnographic research methods, specifically in the form of archival data. This data is supplemented with the help of Nvivo 12 and Microsoft Excel to find research data through word queries and sentiment analysis. Additionally, secondary data is obtained from relevant literature studies and other sources such as the internet, books, documents, and articles related to the research (Sugiyono, 2021). The data analysis technique utilised by the researcher is virtual ethnography with the Netnography method. According to Kozinets, data analysis in Netnography research involves coding, noting, abstracting and comparing, checking, refinement, generalising, and theorising (Eriyanto, 2021). The research was conducted from March to September 2023. To collect data, the researcher used an Instagram account or online platforms to seek informants.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this study, the researcher observed comments within the context of International Women's Day 2023 uploaded by Gitasav on her personal Instagram account on March 9, 2023. A total of 785 comments in the comment section of the Instagram content @gitasav celebrating International Women's Day 2023 were selected using an Excel spreadsheet to separate hashtags, mentions, and emojis, which were then classified into five comment classifications: positive comments, negative comments, neutral comments, positive-negative comments, and negative-positive comments for sentiment analysis based on the comments in the content. After the selection process, the researcher found a total of 540 comments, and the data in the form of these comments would be further analysed using the built-in word query coding feature in Nvivo 12 software to obtain a word cloud, which represents the most frequently used or mentioned words in the Instagram comment section.

Based on the predetermined classification indicators, comments on Instagram @gitasav celebrating International Women's Day 2023 can be used to identify or distinguish between

comments with positive sentiment, comments with negative sentiment, and comments with neutral sentiment.

About out of the 540 comments selected, 236 comments, or 44% were positive, making them more prevalent than other types of comments. There were 107 negative comments or 20%, and 189 neutral comments, or 35%. Additionally, there were 7 mixed positive-negative comments equivalent to 1%, and 1 mixed negative-positive comment equivalent to 0.19%. Therefore, it can be concluded that the International Women's Day 2023 content posted by Gitasav on her personal Instagram account was generally well-received by netizens. The positive sentiment comments included netizens defending and appreciating Gita for her actions, which they considered heroic, as they felt she was celebrating International Women's Day 2023 and fighting for equal rights for women inclusively, regardless of background, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. On the other hand, netizens who commented with negative sentiment focused on their concerns about Gitasav's content, which they deemed misleading because Gitasav indirectly showed support for marginalised groups in Indonesian society, specifically the LGBTQ+ community. These netizens also believed that the LGBTQ+ community originates from Western ideologies that are far from Eastern traditions, and thus, her support was condemned and feared as a form of propaganda intended to garner sympathy from netizens, particularly Indonesian netizens, to normalise LGBTQ+ using a feminist approach.



**Figure 1.** Wordcloud  
Source: Data Processed by Author (2023)

Based on the researcher's analysis in Figure 1, it was found that netizens tended to leave more positive sentiment comments using the word 'Gita', which appeared 69 times out of a total of 97 comments. The word 'LGBTQ' also received comments, but with a negative sentiment intention, appearing 49 times out of a total of 99 comments out of the 540 comments analysed. The content sparked controversy among netizens, with some feeling that it did not align with Indonesian values and norms, and there is a perceived need for regulations regarding the posting of such content, even though it was posted on Gita's personal Instagram.

## Classification of Netizen Comments

Reviewing the literature results, the researcher was interested in understanding the virtual community bonds according to Kozinets, which could be used to identify netizens in the Instagram comments section of Gitasav's International Women's Day 2023 content. After classifying the types of virtual communities, the next step involved transferring the classified comment transcripts using sentiment analysis, which were then grouped based on the themes

that emerged in the interpretation of the research subject. The second stage involved analysing these themes, taking into account the processes of interpretation, individual characteristics, interpretation methods, and the social and cultural context that shaped the interpretation process. The third stage involved grouping the emerging themes into three categories of interpretation: dominant position, negotiated position, and oppositional position. The researcher explains that the comments selected for analysis in this section are comments categorised according to sentiment analysis, which is divided into five types: positive comments, negative comments, neutral comments, positive-negative comments, and negative-positive comments, totalling 540 comments.

## Discussion

The content uploaded by Gitasav on her private Instagram page to celebrate International Women's Day 2023 provides an understanding of the interactions that take place, as evidenced by the comment section filled with interactive dialogues among netizens expressing their views and beliefs. The interactions among netizens in the Instagram comments of @gitasav are asynchronous, a form of interaction involving text that utilises computer devices and the internet, resembling comment forums in the provided column. This is because users have sufficient time to adjust their communication according to their comfort, as asynchronous channels are used as a Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) medium (Walther, 1996).

One effect of implementing an interaction ecosystem on Instagram is the freedom of expression for netizens to express their thoughts on posts and comments openly and freely. However, this freedom of expression, not accompanied by strict regulation, triggers hate speech behaviour represented using offensive words, excessive sarcasm, or bullying towards individuals or marginalised groups. In this context, the objects of oppression are often directed at the content creator, Gitasav, and the LGBTQ+ community, who become easy targets for expressions of hatred. Hate speech behaviour on @gitasav Instagram post is frequently found in the comment section of the controversial content. Several acronym words that often appear with hateful meanings in these comments include 'Indo/Indonesia', 'Deviation', and 'LGBTQ' as the top three words with the most negative comments compared to others.

The spread of hate speech comments, including homophobic remarks in Gitasav's Instagram comments, is further reinforced by the characteristics of social media that believe interaction participants will build a new identity to be themselves, present themselves as someone else, or intentionally not reveal their identity or remain anonymous (Maulida, 2021). This anonymity serves as the key in social media for many participants to engage freely without fear that their identity can be disclosed. In this narrative, the hyper personal model of Computer-Mediated Communication is executed through the involvement of netizens who share similarities when communicating in limited signal channels. This behaviour is carried out as an action to influence, educate, and inform someone based on their perspectives and views to be witnessed by netizens from all walks of life and create a discourse in social media communication.

The analogy of hate speech towards marginalised parties reflects the concept of post-truth, where netizens create facts relevant to them by emphasising these views through expressing personal opinions for personal interests, even though there is evidence contradicting those views (Lockie, 2017). The post-truth era provides comfort for those who engage in it by voicing false news and propaganda. One footprint of post-truth on social media is fake news and hoaxes (Alimi, 2018). The dissemination of messages like propaganda against the LGBTQ+ community is done by utilising existing narratives using the presence of technology that influences the spread of messages and these propaganda techniques. Technology is also cited as the reason for the spread of fake news; in other words, technology becomes a deterministic factor in the spread of fake news (Muqsith, 2021). This mindset causes netizens to be intellectually blinded by their excessive paranoia towards the LGBTQ+ community because of their reluctance to interact with or relate to the LGBTQ+ community (Grasiani, 2010).

West, Turner, and Miller explain that minority groups and women have different perspectives from those in power. Standpoint Theory reveals that the views of marginalised groups are influenced by thoughts facing stereotypes and biased gender knowledge. When related to Gitasav's content in celebrating International Women's Day 2023, it can be observed that Gitasav actively plays as a representative for marginalised groups, namely women and the

LGBTQ+ community, who are often marginalised due to their position in society. They are dominated by the patriarchal cultural construct and gender bias, which considers men as the axis of the group and has compartmentalised women's lives and behaviour. Gender inequality and discrimination against gender and sexuality minorities become more apparent in a society that prioritises men (Parker & Parker, 1979).

Departing from the roots of feminist thought, Gitasav's Instagram content in celebrating International Women's Day 2023 is a form of resistance to the patriarchal system that continues to be ingrained in society, whether culturally, religiously, or socially hierarchical. The essence of feminist thinking is to eliminate patriarchal institutions such as industry, family, prostitution, and heterosexuality, which are considered norms (Indainanto, 2020). The system suppresses marginalised groups by projecting gender bias and sexual bias onto existing entities. Women have the right and control over their bodies, independent of men. They have the authority to make decisions about everything related to themselves and their bodies (Taqwa, 2023). In the context of the feminist perspective of the LGBTQ+ community, efforts are made to criticise and prohibit all forms of discrimination and racism while building a modern social construction that is open to various lifestyles beyond heteronormative hegemony.

The feminist movement is involved because it strives to overthrow the order of discrimination and racism for the broader community, especially those sandwiched by the pressures and cultures prevailing in that social sphere. The feminist movement serves as an agent of change and education for society regarding the concept of oppression for women and marginalised groups. In this narrative, Gitasav appears as the subject and agent of feminism (change agent), her content as a product, and her private page as a platform to build a new narrative that can assemble new perspectives among netizens regarding the meaning behind the celebration of International Women's Day 2023. The aim is to create a more inclusive and tolerant social reality and raise awareness about all forms of discrimination and racism that often occur in the general social structure of society.

A strong relationship exists between social construction and human awareness of their social reality, making awareness a crucial element in the process of forming that social construction (Agustiningsih, 2018). Personal knowledge plays a significant role in shaping an individual's awareness, contributing to the construction of a reality associated with Netspeak and Netlingo. These terms reflect various emotional outbursts, including satire, sarcasm, ridicule, and negative stigma towards various perspectives within the audience classification responding to the Instagram content posted by @gitasav in celebrating International Women's Day 2023.

Based on sentiment analysis of Gitasav's content in celebrating International Women's Day 2023, it was found that 236 comments, or 44% were positive, followed by 189 neutral comments equivalent to 35%. Negative comments amounted to 107 equal to 20%. There were 7 comments corresponding to 1%, classified as positive-negative, and 1 comment, equivalent to 0.19%, as negative-positive. According to the Theory of Computer-Mediated Communication, interactions on social media cultivate a reality of freedom of expression, accompanied by user anonymity, facilitating the tendency to implement online-based criminal behaviours, such as hate speech. Hate speech comments, particularly directed at the LGBTQ+ community in Gitasav's posts, were evidenced using words like 'sick', 'contagious', 'deviant', and 'forbidden' as symbols of homophobia, used to stigmatise the marginalised LGBTQ+ community for behaviour perceived as conflicting with the values and norms of Indonesian society, which is religious and adheres to Eastern customs

## CONCLUSION

Through the Feminist Perspective Theory, Gitasav's Instagram post is a tangible implementation of voicing the rights of marginalised groups due to the patriarchal culture in their social position, which is visibly acknowledged by the netizens in the comment section. The content also generates a product of thought, the concept of feminism, demanding the elimination of patriarchal systems that discriminate against and marginalised women and the LGBTQ+ community, as the content takes a stance in favour of the freedom of marginalised groups against the patriarchal cultural constructs. Based on the research findings, there is a tendency for acceptance among netizens towards Gitasav's content in her post celebrating International Women's Day 2023, as seen in the numerous comments expressing tolerance, support, and defence for both Gitasav and the LGBTQ+ community.

This research could be expanded by gathering more data from various media sources. It is not limited to analysing content solely on Instagram but could extend to other platforms like Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok. Furthermore, the research could explore not only specific content but also other content that may contain homophobic comments. The netnographic method could also be enriched by applying linguistic corpus analysis, a developing approach in the fields of media language, linguistics, and critical discourse analysis. This would make a significant contribution to the study in the field of Communication Science, particularly in the context of media, hate speech, and sexuality. It is also suggested to develop the research in a more discursive and ideological direction, considering the media aspect and the movement of religious ideologies.

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