SEEKING ANSWERS IN THE SHADOWS THE USE OF AUTO-BASED ACCOUNTS ON TWITTER/X AS A PLATFORM FOR SOCIAL Q&A

PENGGUNAAN AKUN BERBASIS OTOMATIS DI TWITTER/X SEBAGAI PLATFORM TANYA JAWAB SOSIAL

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ABSTRACT

Twitter/X has emerged as a pioneer in the new landscape of communication through auto-based accounts. In Indonesia, these accounts, commonly known as 'Menfess', allow users to share messages and have become a medium for social Q&A interactions. This study investigates the use of auto-based accounts in social Q&A interactions by the Indonesian community. Employing a qualitative approach, the study involved in-depth interviews with ten Indonesian teenagers aged 18-25 years, who are active users of Twitter/X. The findings reveal that auto-based accounts have enriched media consumption in Indonesia, making it more interactive and transforming Menfess not only into a channel for anonymous confessions but also a forum for discussion and knowledge-sharing, especially on sensitive topics. Furthermore, users believe that auto-based accounts not only broaden their perspectives but also enhance their confidence when facing conditions of cognitive dissonance. Nonetheless, there is a tendency towards confirmation bias, where users seek information to justify their pre-existing views. This tendency impacts users' trust in the credibility of sources.

Keywords: anonymity, auto-based account, menfess, social q&a, twitter.

ABSTRAK

Twitter/X telah menjadi pelopor dalam lanskap baru komunikasi melalui akun berbasis otomatis. Di Indonesia, akun-akun ini, yang umumnya dikenal sebagai "Menfess", memungkinkan pengguna untuk berbagi pesan, serta menjadikannya medium tanya-jawab sosial. Penelitian ini menginvestigasi penggunaan akun berbasis otomatis dalam interaksi tanya jawab sosial oleh masyarakat Indonesia. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini melibatkan wawancara mendalam terhadap sepuluh remaja Indonesia berusia 18-25 tahun sebagai pengguna aktif Twitter/X. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa akun berbasis otomatis telah memperkaya konsumsi media di Indonesia menjadi lebih interaktif, menjadikan Menfess tidak hanya sebagai kanal pengakuan anonim tetapi juga sebagai forum diskusi dan pertukaran pengetahuan, khususnya pada topik-topik sensitif. Lebih lanjut, pengguna menganggap bahwa akun berbasis otomatis tidak hanya memperluas perspektif, tetapi juga meningkatkan kepercayaan diri dalam menghadapi kondisi disonansi kognitif. Meski demikian, terdapat kecenderungan pada bias konfirmasi, yakni pengguna mencari informasi sebagai pembenaran untuk menguatkan pandangan mereka sebelumnya. Kecenderungan ini berdampak pada kepercayaan pengguna terhadap kredibilitas sumber.

Kata Kunci: anonimitas, akun berbasis otomatis, menfess, tanya jawab sosial, twitter.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has transformed the way we communicate and disseminate information. Twitter, being one of the most utilized social media platforms, offers a range of features for users to engage with each other. Twitter has been renamed to 'X' as a result of changes made by Elon Musk on July 22, 2023. Therefore, to prevent confusion and address the common practice of referring to the platform as Twitter, this article will use "Twitter/X" when mentioning Twitter or X.

One of the intriguing features of Twitter/X is that users can utilize auto-based accounts as a medium for sharing opinions (Dwiwina & Putri, 2021). Auto-based accounts are accounts that allow users to send messages through the direct message (DM) feature, which is then shared with their followers by generating tweets based on the content of the messages (Riauan & Salsabila, 2022).

In Indonesia, auto-based accounts were initially popularly referred to as "Menfess", an acronym derived from "Mention" and "Confess". This activity involves sending anonymous secret messages containing expressions related to various subjects about specific individuals (Hardiansyah & Wahyudi, 2022). Over time, these Menfess accounts have evolved to cater to users according to their individual preferences. They cover various topics, including music, movies, education, and even culinary.

Users also utilized Auto-based accounts as a platform for asking and answering questions related to daily life (Riauan & Salsabila, 2022). This indicates that the rise of auto-based accounts on Twitter/X has facilitated the development of diverse discussion topics that cater to the preferences of their followers, resembling the format of online question-answering (online Q&A) platforms.

Online Q&A is defined as a web-based platform where individuals express their information needs in everyday language, collaborate with others, and engage in discussions to obtain responses that fulfill their informational requirements. Choi (2013) pointed out the existence of four distinct categories of online Q&A services, including community-based, collaborative, expert-based, and social Q&A. In this context, Twitter/X can be categorized as a social Q&A platform.

Morris et al. (2010) in Liu & Jansen (2017) defined social Q&A as the utilization of social resources to seek and obtain information through online platforms. In contrast to traditional information-seeking methods such as search engines and online databases, Social Q&A provides a more personalized search experience and yields enhanced outcomes.

Kanthawala et al. (2016) revealed that community responses on online platforms were more effective in answering questions. In the context of virtual communities, conversations become more personalized and engaging, catering to the unique situations of the questioner (Lee & Brusilovsky, 2017). It enables people to engage in human-to-human interactions to seek and share information, all while enjoying the convenience of virtual communication.

Interestingly, the questions on auto-based accounts are shared anonymously. Peddinti et al. (2017) discovered that Twitter/X's lack of a strict real-name policy allows users to create unique pseudonym accounts and preserve their anonymity among other users. This feature has established Twitter/X as a preferred platform for sharing and accessing information while keeping personal identities confidential. Additionally, the accounts serve as a tool for posting, commenting, and engaging in discussions on specific topics, all while maintaining a layer of privacy (Ammari et al., 2019).

Anonymity enables individuals to freely share information and experiences, address issues, and gain a deeper understanding without the fear of direct sharing with others. It also serves as a source of motivation and self-actualization (Avdijan & Rumyeni, 2022). Furthermore, a study by Mardiana and Zi'ni (2020) revealed that anonymity is a key motivator for Twitter users to express themselves more openly and evaluatively. Being anonymous provides them with a sense of freedom to share their thoughts and feelings without worrying

about revealing their identity or facing negative repercussions from their disclosures.

As a medium used to initiate question-and-answer forums, it's important to understand how users of auto-based accounts perceive the trustworthiness and credibility of responses to their questions. In online communities, Bilgrei (2018) found that trust can be established in several ways. First, shared stories and rules within forums create a sense of unity, strengthening trust and cooperation among members. Second, the use of specialized language indicates a deep understanding of the topic, enhancing the authenticity and credibility of members. Third, an individual's online reputation provides a basis for expectations and reliability, aiding in the assessment of trust among members.

Research on the credibility and trustworthiness of online Q&A is still relatively scarce. Even more, the use of auto-based accounts on Twitter/X is a new phenomenon and very popular in Indonesia. This study aims to explore how users of Twitter/X make use of auto-based accounts, originally designed as a Menfess platform. Furthermore, this study will explore the role of anonymity in motivating users to ask questions and how users believe in the credibility of the responses they receive to their inquiries.

Therefore, the research questions are as follows:

How do Twitter/X users in Indonesia utilize auto-based accounts as a platform for social Q&A?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design
This study employs a qualitative research approach through in-depth interviews. The approach aims to achieve a comprehensive understanding by delving into human behavior. Qualitative research is known for yielding valuable insights through the examination of narratives, observations, and systematic analysis of collected interactions.

Sample and Participants

Purposive sampling was chosen for an in-depth analysis. Participants are selected based on the following criteria:

1. Participants must fall within the teenage age group.
2. Participants must have anonymously made inquiries through Auto-based Twitter/X accounts on at least three separate occasions.

Data Collection
A digital poster containing a request for participation in an interview is distributed through the reply columns of tweets on various random auto-based accounts during October 2023. Prospective participants who agree respond in the sub-reply section and are later contacted through the direct message feature.

A total of ten informants, all of whom are females, were successfully interviewed via Google Meet with an average duration of 20 minutes each. They are as follows: (1) D, 24 years old, diploma degree graduate, (2) A, 25 years old, vocational high school graduate, (3) AF, 23 years old, diploma degree graduate, (5) IYU, 22 years old, Bachelor's degree, (6) AS, 23 years old, Bachelor's degree, (7) DY, 24 years old, Bachelor's degree (S1), (8) BR, 21 years old, high school graduate, (9) LY, 20 years old, high school graduate, (10) KW, 23 years old, Bachelor's degree.

The interviews were carried out utilizing semi-structured questions, enhanced by guidelines crafted from an extensive literature review. These questions were divided into two main sections:

1. Participants' general information and their usage of Twitter/X.
2. Participants' engagement with auto-based accounts, covering their motivations, frequency of use, the types of questions they pose, as well as their perceptions, trust, and overall impact.

Data Analysis
All collected data were manually transcribed into an online Google Sheet. Additionally, since the

conversations were in Indonesian, they had to be translated into English. The interview transcripts were coded using both deductive and inductive approaches. In the initial stage, the data were categorized according to the thematic topics outlined in the interview guidelines, which were informed by the literature review conducted during the question preparation phase. Subsequently, coding was performed inductively by repeatedly reviewing the interview transcripts to identify novel aspects that had not been captured in the initial coding process. This approach was also employed to ensure that the research adhered to grounded theory principles.

After the categorization process, the researcher identified recurring patterns and concepts that aligned with the theoretical frameworks relevant to addressing the research questions. This phase involved refining the dataset by removing less pertinent information, ensuring that the results closely aligned with the study's objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

User Motivation

Twitter/X stands out as a diverse platform, mirroring the eclectic interests of its users. Many rely on it for current updates, including job vacancies, news, and weather. Equally, it's a haven for entertainment enthusiasts, from manga and K-Pop to movies. Beyond that, users appreciate its storytelling prowess, as seen in the exploration of alternate universes (au) and in-depth threads on trending topics. It's also a resource for academic and practical information, blending leisure with learning.

"There was certain information I was unaware of, and this information was known by communities following specific Autobased accounts. Thus, I began interacting with these accounts to gain knowledge that only certain groups knew." - Informant 3

Most informants have indicated that auto-based accounts hold a distinct place in the digital environment by providing access to niche information often unavailable on common social networks. Whether it's to satisfy a simple curiosity, quench a thirst for knowledge, or

engage in meaningful dialogue, the platform delivers. Not only does its welcoming environment encourage interactions, but it also fosters a sense of community even between strangers. Auto-based accounts can provide personal responses grounded in individual experiences, serving as a personal testament for informants to factor into their decision-making.

"I was drawn to the interesting replies from people on auto-based accounts. I wanted to join in and share information with others, even if we didn't personally know each other. It's a great way to gain insights."
- Informant 5

Compared to other online Q&A, the informants also highlighted the responsive nature of auto-based as a major benefit. They appreciated the platform's swift and widespread communication capabilities, especially when contrasted with the more insular interactions on platforms like Instagram, which tend to confine discussions to a user's existing social circle. The informants viewed auto-based accounts on Twitter/X as a crucial space for engaging the conversation to include a broader, global community, which is indispensable for anyone seeking prompt and wide-ranging engagement on current issues and debates.

"Autobased accounts have the potential to connect with hundreds of thousands of people, thus increasing the probability of receiving the desired or necessary answers more quickly than Instagram stories. According to my account's statistics, only about one-third of my followers view my stories, and even then, there's no certainty of obtaining the desired response." - Informant 7

Anonymity Serves to Pose Sensitive Questions
Despite successfully attracting a much wider audience, informants feel that specific matters, including sensitive topics, are not easily discussed on any social media platform, including Twitter/X. Therefore, the anonymity feature offered by auto-based accounts appears to be a key factor in their decision to engage more with the platform. Auto-based accounts allow individuals to express their opinions and ask questions without fear of judgment, a sentiment strongly echoed in user experiences.

"In my opinion, it's essential, especially when you want to ask about things that others might find challenging to address. Auto-based accounts provide that safety due to their anonymous nature."

- Informant 9

Furthermore, the informants articulate a nuanced understanding of the risks involved in online discussions, particularly when addressing polarizing subjects such as feminism and patriarchy. The experience of one informant, who faced heavy criticism after commenting on such issues under their real name, exemplifies the potential for intensive scrutiny and social vulnerability. This underscores the intrinsic value they place on the ability to communicate ideas and opinions in an environment insulated from personal judgment.

The neutrality of auto-based accounts is also highly valued, promoting unbiased discussions and allowing a free exchange of ideas. This impartiality gives users the confidence to engage in dialogues focusing solely on discussion content, which is seen as instrumental for fostering a democratic idea exchange.

"Anonymous interactions remove any awkward stage, allowing for more flexibility in showcasing the asker's ignorance." - Informant 7

In essence, the informants collectively appreciate the anonymity and neutrality provided by auto-based accounts on Twitter/X, which not only serve as a safe haven for open dialogue and knowledge exchange but also empower users to confidently ask sensitive and taboo questions without fear of negative judgment. This confidence in the platform's capacity to protect their privacy encourages users to continually engage with auto-based accounts for their inquiries.

Trustworthiness in the Answers

Informants engage with auto-based accounts to challenge, confirm, and strengthen their own arguments, often asking questions that range from critical to casual out of curiosity. Their proactive use of these platforms goes beyond seeking validation for their preconceived notions; they actively pursue a deeper understanding and subtle nuances of various topics. This approach showcases their strategic use of responses as a way to inform and refine their perspectives. They place a high value on receiving a wide spectrum of input, which is integral to developing well-rounded opinions.

Their level of trust in these accounts varies, with some adopting a cautious stance by treating the information received as a preliminary insight rather than a conclusive judgment. Others have greater confidence in certain responses, yet they stay alert to the possibility of mistakes. This vigilance is particularly pronounced when the questions posed are of significant importance.

"I don't believe the credibility is 100%. I assess based on logic and data, not just opinions. I never take answers at face value. I always weigh and compare with other opinions." - Informant 1

"I trust the answers, but I also compare them to what I already know." - Informant 6

Interestingly, most of the informants also admitted to occasionally asking questions they deemed less important. This was solely driven by curiosity and playfulness. They confess to posing these questions just to observe others' reactions or to understand what others find appealing. These responses highlight various motivations, ranging from personal interests to the pursuit of entertainment. A prevalent sentiment among several respondents is the sheer delight in interaction.

"I've asked questions that might seem insignificant simply out of curiosity and for fun. Even if no one responded, it wouldn't be an issue. I just wanted to gather perspectives from others, even if the topic wasn't essential." - Informant 3

In their quest for answers, informants prioritize the rationality and relevance of the content over the verification status of the source when looking for personal advice and recommendations. They value clear and applicable responses that demonstrate depth of understanding to them, irrespective of the source being verified or anonymous. This tendency is influenced by the eroded credibility of verification badges, which can be acquired, thereby muddling the equation of trust.

"My main goal is to reinforce my arguments."
- Informant 2

The study by López et al. (2020), which reveals individuals' tendencies to favor and trust

media sources that align with their own ideological perspectives, offers empirical support for the concept of confirmation bias within the use of auto-based accounts. This bias is evident in the way users employ these platforms for querying information that reinforces their pre-existing views, exploring diverse opinions, and indulging in intellectual pursuits. Users' engagement with auto-based accounts is both deliberate and strategic, as they craft questions to confirm, challenge, and broaden their understanding. In actively comparing the information received with what they already believe and seeking out additional proof or consensus, users exemplify a deep-seated preference for community-validated knowledge. This process not only aids in their personal learning but also contributes to the broader, multifaceted discourse in the community, aligning with confirmation bias as a fundamental driver of media interaction.

Furthermore, informants' selective trust and scrutiny of auto-based accounts can be explained by Leon Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory. This theory posits that the psychological discomfort caused by contradictory information leads individuals to favor sources that agree with their existing beliefs. Informants, therefore, gravitate toward responses that confirm their views, seeking cognitive consistency and avoiding the unease of oppositional perspectives. Such a tendency to seek affirming information significantly influences how they interact with media and assess the credibility of various sources.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings underscore the transformative role of Twitter/X's auto-based accounts in the daily lives of Indonesian citizens, highlighting a shift from passive consumption of media to active engagement and contribution. This shift is reflective of a larger movement towards leveraging social media for empowerment and education. Menfess, which initially served as channels for anonymous confessions and casual exchanges, have improved into sophisticated forums for sharing insights and soliciting advice across a range of subjects.

In delving into the intricacies of cognitive dissonance theory and confirmation bias, the research reveals how these psychological dynamics play a pivotal role in the way users interact with information on these platforms. The tendency of users to seek out information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs—confirmation bias—serves as a strategy to reduce the discomfort associated with cognitive dissonance. This selective engagement with content illustrates a nuanced approach to digital information consumption, where users are not merely passive recipients but active participants in navigating the complexities of digital communication.

The anonymity offered by Twitter/X has encouraged an open and candid exchange of information, allowing users to discuss sensitive and potentially stigmatizing topics in a safe space. This speaks to the broader societal context where users may face barriers to open expression and highlights the role of digital platforms in overcoming these barriers. The platform's neutrality and the perceived impartiality of anonymous interactions contribute to an environment where discussions are judged on the merit of the content rather than the identity of the contributor.

Furthermore, the informants' nuanced approach to the platform's content, suggesting they balance the anonymity and convenience of Twitter/X with a critical evaluation of the information provided, indicates a discerning consumption of online content. Their trust in responses is not absolute; instead, it is calibrated through a personal validation process. This sophistication in information handling signifies a mature user base that seeks to responsibly navigate the psychological and informational complexities of digital communication.

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