

KUALA LUMPUR FEMINIST PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNET CITY CONVERSATION NOV 25 2018

Moderated by Syar S. Alia, Supported by APC

Venue: Malaysia Design Archive

Time: 2.30pm – 4.30pm

Participants: Around 19

Introduction

- Background of moderator and APC
- Housekeeping announcements
- Feminist values of participation
 - Collectively create a safe and comfortable space for sharing, discussion and listening
 - Recognize and value diversity in the room
 - Be aware of language and context diversity
 - Be collaborative and participatory
 - Let's handle disagreements constructively
 - Respect each other's privacy and agency
 - Ask for and establish consent for posting pictures or quotes of/from other people
 - Be careful with tagging and identifying people online
- Participants' Introduction
 - Everyone is asked to share their name and their first substantial memory of the internet/being online

Presentation of the Feminist Principles of the Internet (FPI)

- What is a feminist approach to the internet and how is it relevant to people's experiences?
- The history of the formulation of the FPI
- The 5 clusters and 17 principles
- Showing the FPI website

Exercise: Embodying the Internet

- Participants are presented with a large sheet which has a drawn human figure (Figure A) and are asked to write down experiences they've had online that have evoked feelings in their body and locate it on the figure (Figure B).

- Pictures and answers below.

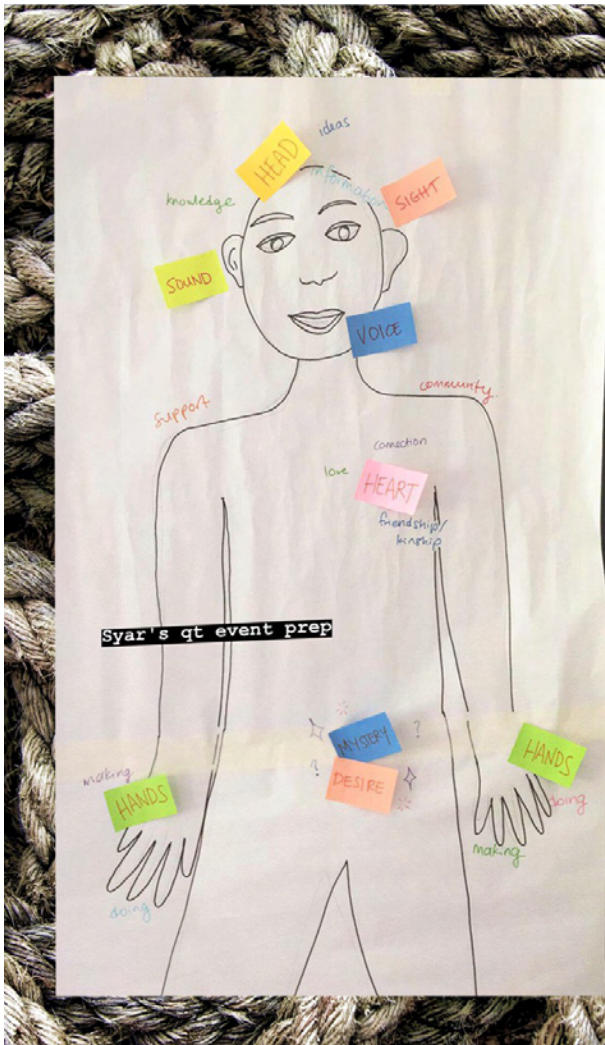


Figure A



Figure B

Photos taken by Liy. Background Photo by [Tim Boote](#) on [Unsplash](#).

Head + Neck + Shoulders (Knowledge / Ideas / Information / Support)

- ASMR (neck)
- Consent
- Divination brujeria
- Expand worldview
- Find work
- Having vent sessions on Skype (shoulder)
- Imagination/fantasy
- Learning about mental health and treatments

- Meet other poets
- Myth-making/busting
- Neck aches from PC/mobile use
- Support (shoulder)
- Tarot reading

Sight

- ART
- Inspiration via Tumblr, Pinterest etc
- New fabric patterns
- Painful/sore eyes
- Physically seeing family/friends
- Read manga/watch anime
- Video as evidence
- World / women's history / documentaries (overlap with head)

Sound

- Listening to music
- New Frank Ocean music
- New languages
- Podcasts
- Video essays

Voice

- ART
- How to pronounce words correctly
- Stopping harassment IRL
- Vlogging (overlap with Sight)
- Writing / expression

Heart (Connection / Love / Community / Friendship / Kinship)

- Chatting with long distance friends and family
- Consent
- Dating (online)
- Discussing similar thoughts with new people
- Harassed, shamed, bullied
- Healing work

- Likes, hearts, wow, sad, angry
- Mean comments
- Old photos online I can't delete
- Seeking love from AIs
- Sending nudes
- Supporting GoFundMes / Crowdfunding
- Video call family
- Video chats (flirt & watch TV)

Mystery + Desire

- Buying sex toys online
- Cervical wellness
- Erotica
- Healing work
- Lesbian porn
- Non-consensual pics and messages
- PCOS
- Tarot readings
- Tinder Gumtree
- Tumblr porn gifs
- What to eat? Cook?
- Yoga videos

Hands + Arms (Making / Doing)

- Activism
- Awareness websites
- Baking
- Getting help!!
- Herbalism
- Learn DIY from YouTube
- Make videos
- New DIY clothes to make
- Online hugs
- Organize events
- Promote real life events
- Reminding people they are loved (overlap with Mystery / Desire)
- Shamanic drumming meditation
- Sore hands
- Spread awareness about causes I care about

- Writing poems

Legs + Feet (Movement / Where You Stand / Roots)

- Babes on Insta bring me to my knees
- Decolonizing
- Genealogy / heritage
- Healing work
- Inspired by travel blogs to travel around the world
- Kicking nasty / mean people
- New place to eat
- New travel choices
- Research / answer questions ? find readings
- Solidarity with Malaysian issues
- Talking to cool people makes me want to go visit them
- Tweeting information and resources when I'm in international meetings
- [Wikimedia Community User Group Malaysia](#)

Conversation

NOTE: A transcript of this conversation was disseminated to all participants who gave their emails at the start of the event. Those who have consented to be named have been named, and to protect the privacy and safety of participants who have not indicated their preference one way or the other, those participants' names and other identifying details have been redacted from this report.

The conversation was opened by asking people their general thoughts after the presentation and the exercise, and what they would like or want on the internet that isn't already there, that would be a more feminist approach (however they defined it).

Human relationships online and all its nuances | Embodiment & Expression

Participant A: How can we be kinder online? Especially in Malaysia. As an outsider, I feel that maybe it's good sometimes that I can't understand Bahasa and the nasty things people say. Especially as a woman, and because of the work I do. I expect a guy to be a dick and I can handle that but it's so much more painful when it's women attacking other women. **There should be some kind of Principle around – how can we help each other do better.** We should have a call-up culture instead of a call-out culture, where we talk to each other from a place of love, respect, empathy, a willingness to want to do better and an understanding that we're all flawed.

People can go on Twitter / WhatsApp / Facebook / email, say something about you, and then block you, and you have no avenue for redress. People don't have to acknowledge you in your humanity. They can make complaints on those platforms and never address you directly.

Moderator: So perhaps a Principle around solidarity, or accountability. Where people have conversations with each other instead of being reactionary.

Nelly: I think as long as a person has access to the internet and you share a mutual social circle this can happen. I think what's annoying is when someone calls you out and uses specific words that you have used before – I met this person, and this person said, and my friend said. The entire social circle knows it's you.

Participant A: Yeah, they don't name you but they know it's you.

Nelly: For me I think there are two choices: You can let it slide and take it offline to these mutual friends. People are going to gossip anyway. Or you can do it online and tag the person and openly say that this person was addressing me, this person has refused to give me space for redress or say my side of the story, and I am leaving this here for everyone to look at and make your own choices. Be it online and offline, when two people interact in such a manner – online, the conversation may begin with two people but it doesn't end with two people.

Moderator: There's a public and private consideration when it comes to how the online space facilitates human relationships. What I think about while I'm hearing you guys talk about this is Embodiment. Because this is about who we are as real people but I also think it's about things like Privacy & Data, Memory – how long is this one event going to stay in this social circle or this online community because they have screenshots or 'receipts' so to speak. Your words are never going to be lived down because you can't delete certain things.

Zaty: You're not allowed to. Because if you delete then people say you're erasing what you said. But if you keep it on, people might still retweet what you said, even though you don't agree with it anymore. Which one is the right cause of action? Especially if you regret posting something.

Social networks without social design? Part 1 | Embodiment & Expression

Liy: I think being online has given us more options of interacting with any sort of conversation. You say something and I can laugh at it or reply or not reply to it, now I can like or not like, I can favourite it, I can RT it but not like it. There are a lot of different

options to how to interact with any sort of input you get. But they don't necessarily come with "Here's the responsibility for how you want to do these things." You have to decide meaning – oh she liked it, but she didn't retweet it, and that means something. Okay I'm going to go check my ex's Instagram, don't double tap ANY photos because then they'll know I've been there. Heaven forbid you'll like an old photo – it says so much about you that you were going down this rabbit hole. So we've loaded different features with emotional baggage of what it might or might not mean. And we put that on ourselves, and I think we define that.

So as to what **Nelly** was saying – you can have a conversation online and other people can watch and "like" the answer they think is right and I think that's quite validating to have the option. Oh there's an asshole tweet, okay. And someone's replied to it and I agree with them so I'll give it a thumbs up. It's quiet solidarity on my end, I don't have to jump in and say anything. So it's a gift and a curse.

Moderator: What I'm hearing is there are so many personal stories of the times people have been hurt by something that's happened online, or the times in which the online space has prevented clarity and communication and has exacerbated certain things that maybe without the online space, could have been easily resolved. These things shift spaces so quick – I have a fight with you in real life, I go on Whatsapp, I chat with a friend about it, it leads to other things. That's quite individual – we all have different relationships with different people and we're all going to react to it in different ways.

Participant A: How can we be kinder? I think the internet is so reactive, so [skewed to] guilt and shame?

Moderator: Do you think it's built in that way? To tie back to what **Liy** said about all these ways we have to communicate online and some of those don't even involve saying anything – some of those literally involve not doing things, for example not 'liking' something. So then we think about the design of Twitter, about how much effort is being put into things like 'Like' buttons and RTs. There's all this discourse around quote tweets. Now if somebody decides to disagree with you, they want their whole follower base to disagree with you as well, they quote tweet you and then that's broadcasted to a much larger audience than you maybe intended. That's built into the thing you're using. In WhatsApp it's forwarding messages. On Facebook, if you're part of a private group, even if I don't invite you maybe you can see that your other friends are joining it. These examples are in the circles we occupy, the ones immediately around us. How does that echo upwards? In terms of how the tools that we use online are designed in such ways that they're not built for accountability.

Participant A: I just don't do Twitter. I go on there maybe to promote an event or

something.

Moderator: Right. I'm very involved on Twitter. I made that choice, in the same way you made the choice not to be involved. When we make that choice, do we know about all the different features of the platforms that are going to lead to all these different relationship dynamics and connection and considerations? I can tell you, I did not. I didn't know one day I'd subtweet someone and they'd subtweet me and we never actually mention names but all of our followers would know who we were both talking about. Nobody prepared me for that in the Twitter Terms of Service (TOS), which of course I did not read. So the Terms of Service are not built for human relationships. They don't say "Hey person signing up for a Twitter account, please be mindful that you might get attacked in this way and here are all the different resources that could come in, and maybe you shouldn't take it so personally" – no one's using that kind of human language. And why not?

Nelly: Do you think that's because we constantly tell ourselves that there is this separation – this is virtual, this is reality? And what is on virtual is not real because it's virtual! This is not who I am. I'm only allowing my followers to see only certain aspects of me, that's why it's virtual.

Participant B: But do you also think that this time now – I think now, there is no difference. That line is just kind of gone. So maybe in hindsight, to maybe save yourself, you might think of that is virtual and this is real. For your own sake. The fact that [this map from the Embodying the Internet exercise] is here shows that it creates *that* many sensations in us. There's evidence right here that we get affected by it. I think that line has completely blurred, literally disappeared to some extent.

Anonymity | Embodiment

Zaty: I think maybe for a lot of people who are very open to using their identities online that would be the case but for sites like 4chan everyone's anonymous, you can say or post anything you want. For those people the lines are definitely not blurred, they're very black and white. There's the dark side of the internet.

Moderator: I would say what is thought to be the dark side of the internet, or at least an internet where everyone's anonymous, used to just be the internet. Real name policies didn't come into play until social media networks started saying no we need to know who you are because we don't want you to scam people on our platform where we need to make money so you need to attach your real name and face on your account. Before I didn't have my real name as my username and nobody cared – that was okay, that was the nature of the internet.

But the internet that we know now is not the internet that started, right? So we also have to question about what we think about anonymity – is anonymity always in service of harassment, in service of being mean? Some people use anonymity so that they can be themselves online, because their physical self cannot be that. So then what – do we ban anonymity? Then the people who are using it for “good” can't use it anymore? That's the feminist approach to the internet which for me is constantly asking questions and never really getting any answers. Trying to get closer to some form of *understanding*, if not answers.

Social networks without social design? Part 2 | Embodiment

Participant B: Coming back to the Terms of Service for these platforms, which are quite hard and technical. The softer aspects are never taken into consideration like the ones that we are discussing right now purely because everything is patriarchal and thought of in that manner.

Moderator: Like, the soil of it is not feminist? Or human focused.

Participant B: Exactly, because it's more exploitative. And if you're coming from that direction, that's how you build up the social media maps.

Nelly: It's logic vs emotion.

Moderator: Yeah we have to think about it – the tools that we use, who built them, in what context were they built? So this question of being kinder – was that ever asked of anybody that made Facebook or WhatsApp or Twitter? That's a question that we have to ask; if they're not asking it and we're asking it in this room, how do we then come together to make that kindness or whatever else we want happen in whatever spaces that we're in.

Alternative models | Access, Embodiment, Economy

Moderator: Some people think it's not possible to work with the platforms and tools that already exist. They might think the best way is to go off the grid, don't use a single thing from these assholes, I'm going to build my own internet. Not everyone can do that and that goes back to capacity to design – so few of us have access to that information and capacity building. So yeah, how do we all get in on a feminist internet where we're kinder?

Zaty: I think I remember hearing about some people trying to make something like a

"feminist Facebook" (they don't call themselves that, it's a social media platform) called **The Take**. It was women powered, and for women. It's very pro-women, although an issue was that it excludes non-binary people. Someone did try, although I don't know how well they did it.

Moderator: Yeah, I think there are several examples of people trying to create alternative social media platforms. But we're all still on the same platforms, so I feel **skeptical**. I want a story not of "Someone tried" but of "Everyone's trying." A lot of what we know is still based off of these big models, maybe it goes back to the soil is rotten.

Participant B: We talked earlier (during the presentation) about how many people post and follow baby-related content on social media. I think it's not that different from an offline practice of showing off your kids – in my experience, I haven't yet been to a home where the child hasn't been made to perform for the guests. I see that the things that are happening online are nothing but extensions of what we're already doing, what's already happening in your reality. It's just happening in a different space – the tools are different but the mindset is the same.

Liy: And I think the biggest difference now is that a bigger corporation is making money off it. The parents don't [often] get richer from it, but Facebook literally gets richer from your baby pics.

Nelly: What if it's not about completely deleting Facebook or building something completely new?

Moderator: That's a binary for sure.

Nelly: Why is subversion not an option? Figure out how all this social media works, find out how they manipulate you and get you into a certain mind space and you say, I'm going to make sure this thing works for me.

Moderator: I think that's as valid as anything else. I think there are people very committed to working "from the inside". Making use of corrupt tools to make things that aren't as corrupt or things that subvert that corruption. I think these things all have to happen at the same time.

Some of us (like those of us here) have the privilege of time and other things to come here and talk about this but others may not and they may feel stuck where they are. I think for me a feminist approach to the internet is also about dreaming – about all the different ways the internet can be.

Exercise: Imagining a Malaysian Feminist Internet

Participants are asked to write down or draw their ideal Malaysian feminist internet – a place that facilitates everything they put on the earlier map that elicited positive feelings. Imagining a different kind of online experience, and what the internet *could* look like.

Here is what the participants shared:

- Zero (unsolicited/negative) comments on people's bodies
- No shaming of those trying to survive under capitalism (sex workers, people who fundraise)
- Humanity / Heart / Empathy
 - The internet facilitating real life
 - If you can say it privately do that first
 - No ghettos (**Participant A:** I feel like we're in our own worlds – we're talking to each other as feminists or whatever but we don't necessarily intersect or interact with other kinds of people, and that's something – we really learn and grow and develop through meeting people we don't agree with, and like finding ways to understand each other - that's how we develop our empathy, ourselves and our own sense of truth. It's this thing of we're just in our little silos. Google has already decided what kind of person I am from the footprint I've developed from 15 years of being on there – when I search for something, they're going to give me what they think I want to know. What do you do about the dude you've known since you were 16 who keeps saying asshole things on your posts? Do you kick him off? If we end up keeping this curated space – but sometimes I feel like I have to protect the other people I know on Facebook from those asshole comments.)
 - Intersectionality
- Remember your humanity
- Where everyone feels safe to learn and be themselves, where we can trust others and build a healthy supportive community
- Freedom and safety could go hand in hand
- Build each other up instead of a space for hate and discrimination
- Kindness, empathic, loving <3
- Do nothing – just be aware of what makes you be the way you are. Then, take a small step everyday (**Moderator:** This is a good reminder that an ideal feminist internet is deeply possible and not an impossible thing to dream. It doesn't have to be a static linear thing, you can take steps everyday to make it real)
- Spread love, live & let live, stop violence and hate, peace
- Ideal feminist internet
 - Decolonial, critically. (**Meghana:** It impacts how we view the world and how we

use the internet – the lens we look at. Especially from a Malaysian context, a lot of countries in Asia and South Asia have been colonized, so the way that we may look at the world or even glance at content at the internet is already coloured by our colonial [experience] So I think whatever that we do it needs to start from a decolonial place)

- Inclusive as opposed to exclusive
- Accepting of all genders and sexualities
- Loving and big-hearted
- Empowering and enlightening
- Exercise of freedom and power of choice
- Respectful discussion/discourse
- Non-violent
- Spiral of expression/expansion (**Meghana:** This is a heart based thing, where you come away from the internet feeling expansive)
- My ideal would be a kinder, more safe space where people think before saying stuff online. I'd like to see the internet be less toxic, where people interact with more maturity & love
- Progress to the point where the space itself need not be questioned within framework of a patriarchal setting
- A space for people who are afraid to speak in real life, they can find shelter in the internet, it can be more of a help than in real help. It's hard to find people you can relate to, your circles might be too small.

