Hoax Logic in the Political Activities of Indonesian Netizens on Twitter

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This article discusses how to comprehend "hoax logic" as a political category in the conversations of Indonesian netizens on Twitter. The discussion on hoax logic explores four elements of social media logic proposed by José Van Dijck and Thomas Poell (2013). Research data was obtained by observing conversations of netizens considered as opinion makers on Twitter and from survey results about hoax along with netizen conversations. This study found that hoaxes are disseminated by using political buzzers as well as bots that are mutually connected and stimulate one another. Hoax logic can subsequently be accepted as truth. This study may help us understand hoaxes within the context of netizens' political activities on social media. However, as a political category, this study may have implications on the obscure boundaries between hoax, satire and criticism that netizens convey to the government on social media, particularly Twitter.

Keywords: *Hoax, Logic of Hoax, Netizen, Social Media, Political Polarisation, Twitter.*

Introduction

Hoax has emerged as an unsettling phenomenon in society and may contribute as a threat to the rise of social political tensions in several countries (Utami, 2018; Cerase and Santoro, 2018). These tensions arise as hoaxes contain false information or come in the form of fake news. Hence, under certain contexts, hoaxes may be perceived as fake news (Gorbach, 2018). Hoaxes taking the form of fake news may also cause anxieties and unrest in the social and political, (McGonagle, 2017; Ogbette, 2019), business (Figueira, and Oliveira, 2017) or religious sector (Douglas, 2018). As a global phenomenon, hoaxes have emerged within

cyber culture due to the advent of social media as a form of new media. Social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, has become a means for exchanging information amongst citizens, commonly known as netizens. Netizens are citizens who conduct their activities and interact via various online networks (Hauben and Hauben, 1997). The interactions amongst netizens has indicated a new era of hyper interactive communication (Khang, Ki, and Ye, 2012).

In Indonesia, the prevalence of hoaxes has even led to the rise of solidarity amongst citizens to jointly combat them by issuing various declarations of "Anti-Hoax Community Charter" in a number of regions. Furthermore, some community groups voluntarily provide fact checkers of various database sources that can be quickly used to clarify hoaxes. Volunteer groups working as fact checkers include Indonesia Hoax Buster (IHB), *Forum Anti Fitnah*, *Hasut dan Hoax* (FAFHH – Anti Libel, Provocation, and Hoaxes Forum) and the Indonesia Hoaxes Community (IHC) (Astuti, 2017). Nevertheless, the plague of hoaxes continues to spread extensively throughout various social media platforms.

According to a survey by Mastel (2019) concerning the National Hoax Epidemic of 2019, 87.50% of hoaxes in Indonesia were disseminated via social media. This resulted in a decrease from 92.40% of the same survey conducted in 2017. Despite experiencing a drop by as much as 4.90%, social media remained the most substantial means for spreading hoaxes. In the Indonesian context, this indicates that hoaxes have become an information plague in the era of social media-based interactions.

In terms of content, the survey conducted by Mastel (2019) also indicates that hoaxes containing political issues (political hoaxes) amounted to 93%, which is the largest hoax content followed by issues of SARA (*suku, agama, ras, dan antar golongan* – ethnicity, religion, race and intergroup relations) amounting to 76.2%. The significant number of hoaxes containing political issues disseminated via social media in Indonesia may have also emerged on account of the large number of people using social media in Indonesia as a means of interaction. According to a survey by APJII (2019) on the penetration and behaviour of Indonesian internet users, as many as 64.8% or 171.17 million people out of 264.16 million of the Indonesian population are internet users. From that figure, Facebook (50.7%) was the most visited social media platform, followed by Instagram at 17.8%, YouTube 15%, and Twitter 1.7%.

Politics being the largest hoax content in Indonesian netizens' activities shows that there are highly complicated relations. For instance, why do most hoaxes contain politics? Does the increase in the number of social media users in Indonesia correlate with the increase of political hoaxes? Is the emergence of the large number of political hoaxes a result of the Indonesian political context as indicated by Utami (2018) and Astuti (2017)?

This article provides some suggestions regarding these complex relations by using social media logic. According to Van Dijck and Poell (2013), social media logic refers to the processes, principles and practices of various social media platforms that are used to process information, news and communication, and more generally, the way in which netizens channel them via conversation traffic on various social media platforms.

Hoax in New Media Context

In its broadest definition, hoaxes have always been an ancient tool of propaganda. They can be traced back to the ancient Roman period when Antony met Cleopatra. Octavian who despised Antony devised a campaign of a specific design. Octavian wrote a short slogan on a coin to ruin Antony's reputation. The coin containing Octavian's writing had subsequently spread amongst the public (Kaminska, 2017). It became the most ancient media initially used to disseminate a hoax.

The case of the 'Great Moon Hoax' in 1835 is recorded as the first notorious hoax incident spread by mass media. It took place on the 21st of August, 1835 when the New York *Sun*, advertised the discovery of life and civilization on the moon featuring illustrations of activities on the moon. The article was a highly elaborate deception since Herschel did not actually observe life on the moon. Herschel himself was not aware that his findings would greatly fascinate the American and European communities once they were reported by the printed mass media (Krensky, 2014).

Accordingly, beginning in the 19th century through to the end of the 20th century, the presence of electronic mass media (radio and television) produced various types of news, during various periods, as the advent of mass media as a news producer brought about various information disruptions (Posetti and Matthews, 2018). Several hoax news that emerged in mass media activities were disseminated, amongst others through the radio drama *War of the Worlds* in the United States in 1938 (Schwartz, 2015), the television program *The Daily Show* in 1996 (McChesney, 2011), or print media news from the NY Times concerning the *War on Terror* in Iraq in 2003 (Southwell, Thorson, & Sheble, 2018).

The above explanation distinguishes between hoaxes and legends of folklores. Although folklores feature untruths that are spread via mass media and gain public response, these are not hoaxes, because they are part of the cultural process and are unintentional (Emery 2004). Hoaxes should also be distinguished from scams, because a hoax is intended to reach a lot of people, it is opened and large scale, whereas a scam is intended to have a limited target, it is sometimes restricted to certain individuals or social groups. A scam constitutes ab attempt to deceive others to gain benefit, for instance by taking money from others by (Silverman,

2015). A hoax is also different from a prank. According to Pellegrini, 2008), a prank is "a mischievous or humorous trick." It contains a mischievous element for the pursuit of pleasure.

In another context, a hoax also differs from a rumour. According to Silverman (2015), rumors are "unverified and instrumentally relevant statements in circulation that arise in the context of ambiguity." A hoax should also be distinguished from satire. According to Phiddian, 2013 (as cited in Rubin, Conroy and Chen, 2015) a satire is "a rhetorical strategy (in any medium) that seeks to wittily provoke an emotional and intellectual reaction in an audience on a matter of public significance."

Consequently, these various forms of differences make it possible to identify hoaxes through the types of media used, the public response and the intentional factor or motive of the perpetrator in distributing them. These three elements are the essential substance of a hoax, distinguishing it from other similar statements. These substances are elaborated by Curtis D. MacDougall (1968) in his book *Hoaxes, in which* the author explains that a hoax is defined as "a deliberately concocted untruth made to masquerade as truth." This means that the information may contain an error. Meanwhile, hoaxes are erroneous information deliberately produced as truth or made to conceal the truth (Silverman, 2015).

In this context, a hoax is defined as an untruth faced against a truth. This understanding considers a hoax as identical to fake news, which emerged within the culture of a relationship between mass media and politics. Hence, fake news may be defined as false news containing information deliberately created to mislead people and often contains a particular political agenda. According to Alcott & Gentzkow, 2017, fake news is not only misleading, but also has no factual basis, and is presented as though it were a series of facts. Based on the various explanations above, a hoax can be defined as false information without factual basis deliberately circulated by anyone through various media channels (both old and new media) as truth and receives a wide public response.

Currently, internet based new media serves as a determining context in the circulation of various hoaxes. Accordingly, today the advent of internet based new media has generated a cultural effect that is extensive, difficult to predict and disruptive and has also altered the dynamics of human relations (Davey, Christopher J. et. al, 2010). The participation and interaction of netizens in the era of new media are key elements in that change. Lavinson (2014) explains the scope of new media as a form of new media, i.e. information on anything in any form can be distributed more quickly and expansively, which may lead to new social forms, lifestyles and power structures within society.

Social media is one of the interpersonal channels of communication that emerged within the culture of new media. Through various social media platforms, hoaxes can be produced by anyone, anywhere, anytime and for any purpose. This eventually led to the exponential growth of hoaxes as they are no longer distributed by a certain participant through a particular medium and for a specific purpose as was the case in traditional media culture. As a result, various systems of social interactions and relations have undergone changes on account of the fact that there were changes in the distribution and consumption of information. In order to understand how the activities of various social media platforms created a new social order, Van Dijck and Poell (2013) turned their attention to social media logic.

According to the authors, social media logic is understood as the functioning of four basic elements: programmability, popularity, connectivity and datafication which respectively differ but mutually reinforce one another. The social media logic initiated by Van Dijck and Poell (2013) was inspired by the idea of mass media logic proposed by David Al-theide and Robert Snow (1979). When defining media logic at the end of the 1970s, Altheide and Snow selected a number of elements, of which some were associated with the capacity to frame reality and some with the media's claim of neutrality or independence. Al-theide and Snow (1979) define (mass) media logic as a set of principles or common sense rationality developed in and by media institutions that penetrate every public domain and dominate their organizing structure. Hence, the life the society and institution is a part of media culture.

The social media logic framework of Van Dijck and Poell (2013) was employed by Enli and Simonsen (2018) to explore how 'social media logic' impacts two different but interrelated professions, journalists and politicians. By analysing one of the main principles of social media logic, 'connectivity', Enli and Simonsen (2018) show that the use of social media by journalists and politicians strongly correlates with their professional norms and that 'social media logic' is still associated with 'media logic' of mainstream and broadcasting media. The social media logic of Van Dijck and Poell (2013) also inspired this article to explain how hoaxes are produced based on their own logic within the context of Indonesian netizens' political activities on social media.

Programmability, Polarised Hoax

Hoaxes are construed differently from the perspective of Indonesian netizens. According to a survey conducted by Mastel (2019), as many as 88% of Indonesian netizens perceive a hoax as deliberately disseminated false news. The national survey held throughout Indonesia involving 941 respondents indicates that 87.5% of netizens consider social media as a channel for spreading hoaxes. Despite 88% of netizens perceiving hoaxes as deliberately disseminated false news, as many as 43.5% chose to forward them onto others because the

hoaxes were acquired from (or disseminated by) reliable/trustworthy individuals. Another part of the survey shows that 63.3% of respondents would believe the hoax if it was disseminated by reliable/trustworthy individuals.

In terms of contents, the survey indicates that 93.2 % of hoaxes that were most often received by netizens refer to social and political news. This percentage has not shifted a great deal from a similar survey conducted two years earlier. . The MASTEL survey conducted in 2017 shows that 91.8 % of hoaxes in circulation were associated with social political issues. Furthermore, the 2019 MASTEL survey indicates that 70.7 % of circulating hoaxes come in text/written form and 34.6 % of respondents receive hoaxes on a daily basis. The prevalence of hoaxes circulating via social media was acknowledged by 41.9 % of respondents as it has the capacity to influence public opinion.

Therefore, based on the survey results, it can be stated that, "a hoax is false news that generally features politics in the form of text/writing deliberately distributed on a daily basis via social media to netizens, in which the recipients may subsequently distribute the false news since it is obtained from individuals they trust." This is the general description on hoax dynamics and activities in Indonesia. Generally speaking, it is a portrait of a hoax within the context of Indonesian netizens' activities that specifically correlates with politics through various social media platforms.

According to current studies (Utami, 2018; Juditha, 2018; Salam, 2018; Santosa; Hasfi, and Triyono, 2018), hoaxes only begun to emerge on a massive scale in Indonesia as a netizen activity within the context of new media since the 2014 Presidential Election. Numerous hoaxes were seen to emerge in an unrestricted manner at the time from the supporting groups of both Prabowo Subianto and Jokowi, who were the presidential candidates in the 2014 election. Each group had disseminated hoaxes to discredit their opposition. Many hoaxes circulated in relation to Prabowo's personal life, whereas hoaxes about Jokowi were mostly based on issues of race and religion. Jokowi ultimately won the 2014 Presidential Election.

Nevertheless, according to Syahputra (2017), Kusumarani and Zo, (2018), Parahita, (2018) and Alamsyah, Rochmah and Nurnafia (2020), the 2012 Jakarta SCR Regional Election may be referred to as the first occasion in which the power of social media was utilised as a means for political campaign. The 2012 Jakarta SCR Regional Election paved the way for the eventual polarisation of netizens in Indonesia. The origin of netizen polarisation was observed to have begun its crystallisation process during the 2014 presidential election. Hoaxes massively emerged within the climate of new media along with the polarisation of netizens and political rivalry between Jokowi and Prabowo continuing on to the 2017 Jakarta SCR Regional Election.

Shortly after, the polarisation of netizens on various social media platforms had intensified during the 2019 presidential election as it witnessed once again the rivalry between Jokowi and Prabowo as political contestants. The existing polarisation had increasingly cultivated the propagation of hoaxes. Each supporting group strove to find necessary information to satisfy their conviction for lending support to their preferred presidential candidate and for rejecting the presidential candidate they oppose. In this context, hoaxes function as information that can be utilised to fulfil the desire for the rise of identity politics. The process occurred rapidly in various conversation enclaves on social media amongst netizens with similar political orientation or identity, thereby making it difficult to critically develop a public agenda. This process is referred to as an echo chamber by Gromping (2014).

Meanwhile, Syahputra (2019) explains this condition as a spiral of anxiety which illustrates the process that an individual undertakes as either an active or passive netizen on open social media, such as Twitter, or restricted social media, such as Telegram and WhatsApp. The process refers to a concealed increase in anxiety experienced by individuals on account of having differing political inclinations from others, wherein these differences turn into conversations containing expressions of hatred at all levels of social media platforms. Consequently, this leads to open anxiety and may bring about status wars between social media users. This spiral of anxiety emerges within the tradition of the cyber community in the era of new media.

Echo chamber and spiral of anxiety in the activities of netizens on various social media channels may explain how hoax logic emerges, given that there is already an established political polarisation in place. This means that most hoaxes emerge as a result of the political polarisation cultivated within an echo chamber and a process in the spiral of anxiety. A hoax is then accepted as truth when it is produced or disseminated by a person who the recipient knows (or does not know), as long as that person belongs in the same group with similar political references on various social media platforms (both open platforms like Twitter or restricted ones such as WhatsApp).

The element of netizens' political polarisation will thus correlate with people's political preferences, the capacity of internet based communication technology and interactions or activities amongst netizens on various social media platforms. This polarisation is the most crucial element of hoax logic as a deceit is accepted as truth and subsequently disseminated via various social media channels as validated truth. The process occurs because untruths or deceits are validated by other netizen groups. However, this first element of hoax logic can function given that there are existing participants from each of the polarised netizen groups. The respective groups have their own participants who are known as opinion leaders and opinion makers. These participants are represented by either authentic/verified or anonymous

accounts that are extremely active on social media in producing and distributing hoaxes. These hoax participants and their activities are known as political buzzers.

Popularity and Political Buzzers as Participants of Hoaxes

The term buzzer refers to the concept of buzz marketing, which is a marketing activity of a product on communication media channels to create disruptions. This disruption is aimed at competitors to attract target audiences (Syahputra, 2017). Business participants use buzzer accounts to promote their products, wherein promotions are carried out by using buzzer accounts with more than 5000 followers. This amount is considered capable of reaching out to more consumers to find their products (Nanda, 2018). Thus, a buzzer illustrates a netizen who is paid by a company to disseminate a certain brand or product promotion on social media sites. In terms of political campaigns, buzzers are recruited to promote issues that are advantageous to certain candidates (Lim, 2017).

In the activities of netizens on social media within a polarised political context, buzzer accounts have become significant participants in propagating hoaxes for political purposes. According to Lim (2017), although volunteers for all political campaigns in Indonesia claim that they focus on positive messages, this did not actually occur in practice. Meanwhile, no candidates have openly admitted doing so. In the context of Indonesian politics, Prabowo and Jokowi were political rivals in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections. The hoaxes circulating on social media during this period were inseparable from the representation of the two political groups that were polarised through the personification of Prabowo and Jokowi.

More specifically, the existing context turned hoaxes into a political tool to attack the opposition through various techniques of information manipulation. One of the frequently used techniques was memes. According to Davison (2015), meme in social media conversations is part of the culture, usually a joke which gains influence through online transmission. Technically speaking, according to Shifman (2013), a meme is understood as "cultural information that passes along from person to person, yet gradually scales into a shared social phenomenon." As one of the units of information in conversations on social media, a meme is a visual metaphor as a reflection or replication of reality altered by netizens. As a consequence, memes often feature hoaxes as well.

Subsequently, hoaxes may eventually become truth that is acknowledged by the group that benefits from them. This is the result of netizens actively engaged in Twitter for the purpose of finding what they consider and validate as truth. The process of validating hoaxes is made possible because they are disseminated by (verified or anonymous) Twitter accounts that are popular amongst netizens. According to Van Dijck and Poell (2013), the popularity of these accounts is conditioned by the algorithm components functioning in social media platforms.

On Twitter's platform, an account's popularity may increase through Twitter's trending topic by using algorithm that boosts certain topics and suppresses others (Taina, 2012; Rieder, 2012; Gillespie, 2014). Through various features, Twitter's Trending Topics enables netizens to boost the rank of hoax topics and popularise accounts that produce and distribute them.

The hoax logic that functions on Twitter within the context of identity politics in Indonesia is also acceptable, since each cluster of polarised netizens employs robot accounts. These accounts are like soldiers or online troops (cybertroopers) that are ready to popularise an account and boost trending topics on Twitter. According to Gorwa (2017), cybertroopers are not only used by groups criticising the government, they are also employed by the government. . Cybertroopers as an online tool are utilised to manipulate information via Twitter and other social media outlets to dictate public opinions, disseminate false information and undermine criticisms.

Connectivity and Mutual Stimulation Nonlinearity

The activities of polarised political buzzers on Twitter mutually stimulate one another in the form of action-reaction, thereby causing uproars and even raising tensions both online and offline. Such tension is built up as political buzzers not only function to promote issues that benefit the candidate they support, but also attack candidates that they do not support by using various expressions of hatred. In the culture of new media, the activities of netizens on social media such as Twitter have an effect on other netizens, dubbed as opinion makers. These opinion makers on Twitter stand alone, yet are inter-connected.

Such portrayal of social media is mentioned by Klein (as cited in Porta, 2013), as a 'web like image,' as the activities found on social media are likened to a spider's web. Within the web, a hub (web centre) exists as the centre of all social media activities. These hubs are connected to a participant who functions as the bridge. These bridges spread information or messages to all other web participants. Borgatti and Lopez-Kidwell (2011) consider that these participants are playing the role of bridges in a delicate bond with other participants. Despite the bond fostered between them, they maintain connection on social media on an intensive basis.

Fellow netizens in polarised groups utilise bot accounts to increase and stimulate intensity so that the disseminated opinion contributes to boosting conversation traffic on social media. According to Forelle et. al (2015), bot accounts are part of software that creates content on social media and interacts with people (netizens). The more frequent bot accounts are utilised for political purposes, the more likely it is for information (including those containing hoax) to be able to circulate quickly. According to Wooley (2016), the use of bot accounts for political interests took place in several countries such as Azerbaijan, Italy and Venezuela.

These bot accounts were used by the government and political elites. They employed bot accounts to attack dissidents or critics of actual issues (Alexander, 2015). According to a report made by the Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford University (Bradshaw and Howard (2019), the capacity of bot accounts functioning as cyber troops in Indonesia is still in the low category. Nonetheless, the activities of cyber troops employed for particular group interests have an impact on reinforcing public polarisation. This is due to the tendency of buzzers and cyber troops to experiment by only using bots to intensify disinformation and manipulate truth. In their report, the Oxford Internet Institute also found evidence of the growth of organised manipulation campaign on social media.

Hoax participants as bridges that stir up activities on social media sometimes use bot accounts to mutually stimulate other participants. This mutual stimulation amongst participants within the same interest group, and other participants conducting the same action in other groups, has an action-reaction characteristic. A hoax participant, who is an opinion leader may release false news, which may trigger a reaction from other hoax participants of varying groups. The action-reaction relationship is perceived as including the process of denial, destruction, various information modification with a purpose determined by the sender, such as attack, manipulation and counter-attack by using various means (cyber, psychological) that would influence/disrupt the opposition. Additionally, it can also be achieved by way of deceit, renouncement, denial, disinformation, including threats (both subtly and blatantly) against actual information published by the government or other relevant parties (Hutomo, 2016).

As the participants mutually stimulate each other in the form of action-reaction amongst polarised netizen groups, content in the form of conversation texts are interconnected (intertextuality). Such intertextuality may occur within a cluster of polarised netizens or amongst the clusters. This interconnectivity explains that a conversation text is interlinked with other texts. However, although these texts are associated, a conversation text may be detached from other texts. As a result, a conversation text can only be understood once we have read the other texts. This explains why even though connectivity mutually stimulates, there is nonlinearity.

The change of interaction pattern amongst individuals is brought about by social media's nature which enables each netizen not only to consume information, but also to produce and distribute it. This new attribute allows anyone active on social media to participate as both a consumer and producer of information. Hence, each activist or social media user plays a role as a distributor of messages (Weeks and Holbert, 2013).

Datafication, Digital Footprint of Hoaxes

According to Mayer-Schoenger and Cukier, datafication is network platform's capacity to create and store all data, including data pertaining to social media user's demographics,, profile and location (Schönberger & Cukier, 2017). As a result, any activity conducted on social media can be dataficated. Internet based datafication provides new means of interconnected human interaction or a new approach to study the world, identities and the future (Gamble and Gamble, 2012). This also explains how activities on social media work as processes of digitalisation, interactivity, virtuality, dispersal and hypertextuality (Lister et. al., 2010), or numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability and transcoding (Manovich, 2002).

The latest development in the datafication process relies on the processing of substantial amount of data collected, thereby creating what is often known as artificial intelligence (AI) (Papadimitriou, 2016; Tambe, & Rice, 2018; Chansanam and Tuamsuk, 2020). Therefore, by using a certain set of tools, any conversation mediated through social media is heading toward what Zappavigna (2012) considers as 'searchable talk.' This is also the case for conversations amongst netizens that contain hoaxes. They can be pursued, found, and redistributed by buzzers as opinion makers in order to support or undermine various groups. The process of pursuing such conversation is known as digital identity on social media, particularly on Twitter (Thomborrow, 2015; Warburton & Hatzipangos, 2013; Murthy, 2018).

The term digital footprint is frequently used by netizens in the context of their political activities on Twitter. In this context, a digital footprint is understood as the process undertaken by a netizen belonging to a certain political cluster group to find data in the form of any information stored in the status of netizens from the opposing political cluster groups or in the form of online news media which is then utilised to immobilise, undermine, degrade or dispute netizens from opposing political groups. This process may influence the formation of public opinion on social media.

Conclusion

Hoax logic in the political activities on Indonesian netizens on Twitter can be understood as interactions amongst netizens who have already been politically polarised. In this context, a hoax is a political communication strategy programmed to tarnish the reputation of opposing political groups. In the process, hoaxes are disseminated by using political buzzers that are interconnected. This interconnectivity mutually stimulates, yet assumes a nonlinear attribute. The entire process on interconnectivity can sometimes use old information, which is data stored within a large data system.

Hoax logic in the context of netizen's political conversation in Indonesia has led to uproars in the timelines of netizens' conversations on social media (particularly Twitter). Thus, it is difficult to distinguish which information is fake (hoax) and which is true, because netizens are polarised. As a result, the truth is not determined by factual truth, but by the person who delivers the information. This polarisation pushes netizens to only believe information that can validate their political preferences. Whether a hoax is true or false is thereby determined by the messenger's identity, instead of the message's content.

Consequently, this study may have implications for new means of understanding hoaxes within the context of netizens' political activities on social media. As a political category, it may also have implications on the obscure boundaries between a hoax, satire and criticism. In the clamorous conversations engaged in by netizens, hoaxes symbolise noises while satires and criticisms are voices.

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