

## Social Media: Democracy in the Shadow of Fanaticism

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### Abstract

Social media as a new democratic space has offered many possibilities to access information and interaction with other users but at the same time, can endanger the life of democracy itself. The research aimed to find out the types of fanaticism in social media and how it can endanger the life of democracy in Indonesia. This research was conducted in Malang from April-August 2016 and used descriptive qualitative method with interview and documentation as data gathering techniques. Meanwhile, the sampling technique was a purposive sampling and used interactive model from Miles & Huberman data analysis with three components namely: data reduction, data display and verification or conclusion withdrawal. The research results showed that there were two types of fanaticism in social media; politic and religion fanaticisms. Both types promote their ideology through fanpages, personal accounts and websites that circulate in social media. This research also found that fanaticism could endanger the life of democracy because it would not allow differences and against the principle of democracy where diversities are celebrated. Some fanatic postings ignited debate and conflict and some other silently brain-washed people to be radical. Social media has cultivated fanaticism and ignited conflicts among people. It has become a “war zone” where anyone can say anything to anyone including some sensitive issues such as religion, politic and race.

**Keyword:** *social media; democracy; fanaticism*

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### 1. Introduction

The year of 2014 was a momentous year for Indonesia. It was the year of legislative and presidential election. Closer to the presidential election, the political turmoil was uplifted. We must remember that Indonesia has applied direct election system since 2004, and this means that people can vote directly for their legislative members and president. This is a new chapter for democratic life in Indonesia. With the booming of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Path, Instagram etc, politicians and President candidates also use social media to promote themselves or their vision and mission. Most political figures today use social media as a tool to interact directly and effectively with their voters and participants. Social media offers its user to share and react to any information. The information in social media and internet, in general, is basically without limit. Anyone can create mass media-like websites and share any information. Related to the 2014

Presidential election, a lot of things were going on in social media. Information, news and campaigns from the candidates (Joko Widodo and Prabowo) were disseminated every minutes in social media not to mention also the massmedia-like websites. There were many black and negative campaigns in social media and people could just hit the share or like button. They did not realize the impact of what they have done.

Social media has been popular more than a decade and no one would think that social media would have power to change people's life significantly. With some features of social media such as Facebook and Twitter allow users to interact and participate more. People can express their thought or idea freely and share information to other users or give comment to people's walls. That has made social media as a new public sphere and a new democratic space. The massive and rapid information distribution in social media has made people receive abundant information at the same

time so they can not think whether they need the information or not. This flood of information can give bad effects for internet users. It is possible they get miss-directed information, hoax, black campaign and defamation. If they believe in the information, they might be misinformed or misled. Some websites promote the political or religion ideology recklessly and made people become fanatic. That fanaticism can be seen from the last Presidential election. People can easily insult, mock or make fun of presidential candidates and unfortunately those action can still be seen up to now. Even though the election was over but the dissatisfaction and hatred can still be seen. We can see people make meme just to make fun of certain issue, or insult our President (Joko Widodo) with harsh comments. Those actions show how political fanaticism can hurt people.

From this paper, we argue that fanaticism can endanger the life of democracy. Because it does not respect the democracy that our founding fathers had fought for. The social media users cannot differentiate between public or private place where norms and etiquette must still be kept. So, it is important for us to understand how fanaticism can endanger our democracy. By doing so, democracy can still be upheld and diversities in Indonesia preserved. In the end fanaticism will not be a shadow for the life of democracy in Indonesia.

## 2. Method

This research was conducted in Malang, East Java from April-August 2016. This research used descriptive qualitative method to describe the detailed condition or process and also interrelated findings on the subject of research (Sutopo, 2006). The data gathering techniques were interview and documentation. Meanwhile, the sampling technique was a purposive sampling. Purposive sampling tends to choose the right informants who know the problems and can be trusted as reliable sources (Sutopo, 2006). There were twenty active internet users as informants for this research. They ranged from housewives, worker, students, academics and journalist. The analysis used interactive model from Miles & Huberman (1992). This analysis has three analysis components namely: data reduction, data display and verification or conclusion withdrawal.

## 3. Result and discussion

### 3.1. Democracy in Indonesia

*“Democracy should be a celebration by an involved public. Citizens should be active because it is through public discussion, deliberation, and involvement that societal goals should be defined and carried out.”*  
(Dalton in Ruskell, 2016)

Indonesia has a long history of struggle for democracy. After the fall of the ruling Soeharto's regime, Indonesia experienced a new democratic life, the reformation era (*Reformasi*). The Reformation era happened in 1998 generated by students and young people who held big demonstrations to send down Soeharto's regime. These demonstrations created massive chaos and victimized many. Maybe because of the massive force from the people, Soeharto was willing to give up his presidency. It became a new history of Indonesia. After the falling of the Soeharto regime, Indonesia finally experienced a different atmosphere in its democracy. The Press gained its freedom, and the number of media increased significantly from printed media to electronic media (Piper, 2009). People could express their thoughts freely. The press as the fourth estate became a significant indicator of a democratic country.

For the first time in 2004, Indonesians held a direct election for their city mayor, governor and president. An election is another indicators of a democratic country where people can express their thoughts and vote for their political view. There were many new political parties and offered various ideologies. New leaders were expected to reform the politic and economic situation and Indonesia became a real democratic country. Compared to other ASEAN countries, the democracy and press freedom in Indonesia is better because government does not fully control the media. Now, after 18 years of the reformation era our democratic ideology is facing another challenges. With the development of information and communication technology (ICT), democracy is brought to another level, it is social media era where people can participate more in politics and other aspect of democratic life.

Presidential election in 2014 gave a different chapter to the democracy in Indonesia. This election is phenomenal because it has dragged people into two big groups: Joko Widodo and Prabowo supporters. Since the President candidates were two, people only had option to choose Joko Widodo or Prabowo. The parties of the candidates tried hard to promote them in main stream media and social media. The supporters of both candidates were also active to discuss and promote them in social media such as Facebook and Twitter. There were many pieces of information, campaigns, meme had gone viral there and they ignited a never ending debate in many groups. The good news was people talk about politics freely from the *warung kopi* (coffee stalls) to the level of academic. For the first time, people discussed about politics just like discussing football or celebrities. Everyone could suddenly become a commentator and analyst to the political situation in Indonesia.

### 3.2. Social media as a new democratic space

Information and communication technology have developed rapidly. With the advent of the internet, technology allows us to interact with people throughout the world. One popular output of the internet has been Social Networking Sites (SNSs) or as they are popularly known: social media. Social network sites (SNSs) or social media are the latest generation of 'mediated publics' - environments where people can gather publicly through mediating technology. In some senses, mediated publics are similar to the unmediated publics with which most people are familiar - parks, malls, parking lots, cafes (boyd, 2007). People can use mediated publics same as unmediated publics. People can socialize and interact just like in parks or malls. So, social media might be considered as a new public space in a similar vein as more traditional public spaces. With social media, we can exchange information, photos and build a wide social network. The power and influence of social media can be used for positive and constructive things.

Social media today has become an important part in people's life as it has shaped and changed the way we interact each others. Social media has generated new habits for its users. People can do almost anything in social media, such as reading news, sharing information, pictures and videos, commenting on others posting. Social media have becoma a new democratic space for Indonesians. From the Presidential Election 20014

for instance, social media had become importants tools for campaign and information dissemination. Academic researchers found that people who comsume news media will likely being civically and politically engaged (Journalist's Resource, 2015). When people consume more news they will be more informed and they can decide their political point of view and participation.

In Indonesia the internet users are about 88 million and mostly they use social media (internetworldstats, 2016). Today, most people will think that social media is a need rather than just a medium. Social media spreads information and ideas exponentially from one user to another. When a story gains popularity and people share it rapidly, it is called to have 'gone viral' the right term to describe how an information spread from one to another (Ruskell, 2016). The popularity of social media has been used by certain people to endorse their ideology such as politics, religion, lifestyle, beliefs etc. We can find easily websites, fan pages or personal accounts which express certain thoughts and ideology and try to invite people to join and in the end of the day follow their ideology.

From this research to Facebook users it was found out that most of the informant agree that social media as a new democratic space for its ability to accomodate people's aspiration and express their thoughts and they have use and participate in forum or discussions. A direct connection to certain public services or government's social media accounts has made complain or critics heard and responded quickly by the authorities. This shows how people's power can really make changes as what the purpose of democracy where political, cultural, economy and social differences are recognised as basic human rights (The principle of democracy). But, at the same time they are also concerned to the information circulated because some of them were hoax or provocation and could trigger conflicts.

As mention earlier that Social media can be consider as public space, so it demands the same norms and rules as public space where we have to respect other people. If we go to malls or park, we have to use public facilities wisely as other people also use it. In public places there are several rules such as no smoking in the building, do not litter or step on the grass. Those rules mostly understood by people when they visit public are. Now, how about Social Media? Even though we have personal account and we invite people to be our friends, that does not mean it is private space.

This research captured famous figures in social media and how people react to them. Actually, there are many new ‘celebrities’ in social media who gain thousands of likes and shares. They deliberately use the power of social media to influence people. Jonru and Denny Siregar for instance, two figures who are famous in social media for what they post and their political point of view. Jonru is famous as Prabowo’s participant from last Presidential election. He shared anything related to the candidate. After the Presidential election finished, now he shares controversial posting and hatred to the ruling government and Joko Widodo as individual. In other side, there is Denny Siregar who is Joko Widodo participant. He has given positive information about Joko Widodo from the Presidential election till today. Probably, he tries to balance the information about Joko

Widodo. The battle of those two figures are just an example of how freedom of speech and expression in social media emerged. Most participants of this research know Denny Siregar or Jonru from their postings. From the following Facebook postings, we can see how those two figures represent themselves. Jonru tends to post some provocative status related to politics or religion. It was about corruption and religion sentiment, he used Islam to criticize Ahok as Christian, while Denny Siregar tend to post something positive and openly show his support to Joko Widodo. From their postings show how religion and politic can be discussed and generated likes, comments and shares. As it can be seen that each post gained thousands of likes and shares and hundreds of comments. The more controversial a posting is, the more likes and share they get.



Figure 1. Jonru’s Fanpage



Figure 2. Denny Siregar’s Fanpage

Misleading information, hatred and hoax can be circulated easily in social media and no one can really control them. In one side, freedom of speech and expression is part of democratic life and must be nurtured but on the other side it is also a ‘war zone’ of mixed interests.

### 3.3. You are what you follow

In social media people from different background, ideology and preference get together and interact. As a new public sphere and democratic space, people want to show and express

their beliefs and thoughts so they join certain groups, and fanpages according to their interest and follow certain people or websites. From their activities we found out their ways of thinking and preferences. For instance, Joko Widodo supporter would follow his account, read from his news website which tend to expose good side of him, join with groups under the same interest. Just by looking at the activities (like and share) we can conclude someone’s ideology or political preferences.

Because of easy access of the internet, people can create websites and blog quite easily. Those media make people able to write or post anything. We can see many websites contained 'news' being promoted or shared in social media. Those websites share information, news, video, photos and certain cause. They act as mass media and share information or news just as the main stream mass media. The problem is only few of them are mass media. It means that everyone can act as a journalist and write news-like information and direct public opinion. Mass media has power to influence people and direct public opinion (Biagi, 2010). The real mass media will be controlled by KPI (Indonesia's Broadcasting Committee) and can be sued for misleading information or defamation. But those mass media-like websites are not mass media and can not be treated as one (H.Subiakto, personal communication, 15 September, 2016). Those non mass media which act as mass media can be dangerous for spreading wrong information. If a user consumes news from the wrong sources, they will be influenced and directed by their way of thinking. If you follow or subscribe website which share hatred or racist then you could be either a hater, or a racist, even both.

Fanaticism become the root of radicalism and racism, we can see many examples for this. The cases of suicide bombing in several places such as in Jakarta, Medan and Solo couple of months ago showed that fanaticism to certain ideology could be dangerous. From the case of Saint Yosep church bombing in Medan, it was found that the bomber

was inspired by information about ISIS in the internet (merdeka, 2016). He has no correlation with ISIS network but he was exposed with the information and obsessed to it. It showed that the exposure of information can influence the way we think. In social media there are many fanpages or media-like websites which share many misleading information. From this research showed that most of the informant said they could differentiate between mass media and non mass media websites but when they were asked how to do it, they did not know how to check or make sure if a website is mass media or not, they only see the name of the website. Only few knew because they have journalist or academic background. For common social media users, the non media or media-like websites are dangerous because people can be misled. And if they follow or subscribe those websites they can get wrong information. Most of the informants from this research get information from trusted sources. They prefer choosing the famous mass media such as Kompas, Detikcom, Tempo and some local websites than websites with unfamiliar names.

You are what you follow, that is very relevant to social media today. We can see how people's interest, politics and religion fanaticism just by looking at what they follow, share or like. Social media as a new public space has now become obvious for its users. Because the characteristics of social media; networking and sharing, then people will try to ask or get together with other users who has same interest and ideology

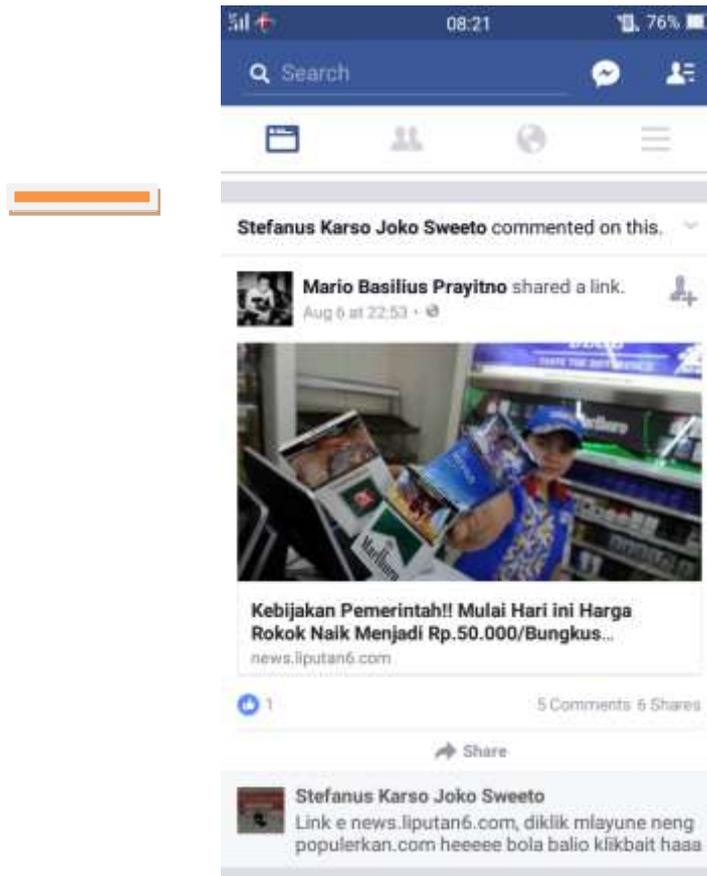


Figure 3. Hoax in Social Media

The picture above for instance, is about the issue of government's regulation on cigarette price. It said that the government would increase the price into IDR 50,000. This issue was only hoax but the Facebook user shared it and was misled by the website's name. Infact, when you click the news website, it is directed to populerkan.com not news.liputan6.com. This news had gone viral a couple of months ago in some websites and we found out also that the headline and the content was totally different. It shows that people can create an issue and make it circulated in social media to get profit because in internet click and share can make money. It does not always understood by the internet users including some of the informants of this research.

### 3.4. Fanaticism and democracy

The terms fanaticism and fanatic come from the Latin adverb *fānāticē* (frenziedly, ragingly) and the adjective *fānāticus* (enthusiastic, ecstatic, furious) (Marimaa,2011). Webster's dictionary explains a fanatic as "a person with an extreme and uncritical enthusiasm or zeal, as in religion or politics". The source of fanaticism is based on mind and then manifested into action (Marimaa, 2011). Fanatics will think what they believe is the ultimate truth and they can not except different beliefs, critics or opinions. Fanaticism endangers democracy where diversities is celebrated. We can see many forms of fanaticism around us related to religion and politics. From last Presidential election there were many people devoted themselves to one of the president's candidates and they could do crazy things just to show their support.



Figure 4 & 5. President Joko Widodo is being insulted in social media

Eventhough the Presidential election has passed but not all people can accept Joko Widodo as Indonesia's President. The pictures above showed how hatred was expressed by individual and shared to others or a group few months ago. People made fun of president Joko Widodo and called him crazy when he was honoured with traditional costume in Samosir island, North Sumatra. It was shared by Prabowo's supporter. As mention before that social media can be a new democratic space but expressing idea or thought should not insult others especially president as a symbol of a country. This form of fanaticism can ignite conflict among users and it can be seen from the comments of each posting and some new postings that tried to defend Joko Widodo or gave a clarification about the traditional outfit and why it

was worn only by important people.

Another form of fanaticism in social media is religion fanaticism. There are so many fan pages and websites representing certain religion and promote their ideology. Recently, there is a big movement to push Islamic law as country's foundation. In social media, everyday we see many postings and sharing related to Islam and the movement of Islamic law. The following pictures show how people can share a provocative news from a non mass media website. The force of Islamic law is always promoted by FPI (Islamic Defend Troops) and supported by Islamic websites. The next picture is also provocation that used Ahok issue as non moslem governer of Jakarta. It says that Ahok is a missionary who wants to eradicate the various faces of Islam.



Figure 6. Provocation from FPI



Figure 7. Defamation to Ahok

The participants of this research were also aware of the forms of fanaticism in social media. Mostly they do not like provocative postings and prefer not to read or share them but they do not do anything to prevent them. They agree that fanaticism can endanger the life of democracy because fanaticism will not allow any differences. Based on Wahid foundation research (Kick Andy, 2016) the number of intolerance in Indonesia increased significantly these couple of years. People can be racist or radical because of the exposure of information they get. Radicalism is not related to education, economy and social status but it is related to the information they get. If people are being exposed to provocative information continuously from the wrong sources than they can be influenced and become radical too. This finding is line with theory of dependency about media effects from Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur. This theory argues that in modern society, audience depends on mass media as the source of information and knowledge and also about the orientation to what happened in society. The effect

of media in this theory are cognitive, affective and behavioral. Even though social media cannot be categorized as mass media but the users find and promote link to information, news and knowledge from this media. From this research most participants spent more than two hours for social media. They used that two hours mostly to read news and see new postings. With the exposure of information continuously, the effect to the audience could be: strengthen what audience beliefs (cognitive), create anxiety (affective) and move the society or ignite conflict (behavioral). In the context of fanaticism, when audience is continuously exposed to certain ideology (religion or politics) from wrong sources, they will be misled.

Freedom of speech in democratic countries is appreciated and social media as public space and a new democratic space has same rules as other public places where people must respect other people and differences. As the biggest Moslem country in the world, Indonesia applies

Pancasila (the Five Principles) as the country's foundation and diversities are respected. The push of a religion law as country's foundation has denied the history of this country. Democracy as the country's system is a point of no return therefore every citizen must respect it. So, fanaticism in politics or religion can endanger the life of democracy in Indonesia.

#### 4. Discussion

We believe that fanaticism will not bring Indonesia into a better country. With so many problems we are facing at the moment, it is important to understand how social media works so we will not easily provoked. This research tries to offer some solutions to eliminate fanaticism, radicalism and intolerance in Indonesia, they are:

1. Internet and social media today have become an industry oriented to profit. This is the same as main stream media where mass media is a profit oriented industry (Biagi, 2010). Since profit is the goal, social media will try to make people engaged all the time through what it is called as click bait. Click counts money same as share, like and comment. So, it is wise not simply or easily believe any information you read directly because the fanpage, personal page and website will compete to get click, like and share. It is possible for fanpages or websites to deliberately provoke people to get attention and finally get click.
2. Media literacy is important to be conducted. Many internet users are not aware what is going on in social media and what the impact of what they do is. As public sphere, social media is same as other form of public places where people can see what you do so be careful in sharing private information or choosing information sources because you are what you follow.
3. We have to be critical in consuming information. We have to ask, check and find the balance of the same information.

4. Understanding that everybody is the same and will demand to be treated the same. To be different in faith, beliefs and preferences are something usual. In democratic life, everybody free to express themselves but also respect others.

#### 5. Conclusion

Social media as a new democratic space has offered many possibilities to access information and interaction with other users but at the same time, it can endanger the life of democracy itself. The research results showed that there were two types of fanaticism in social media; politic and religion fanaticisms. Both types promote their ideology through fanpages, personal accounts and websites that circulate in social media. This research used theory of dependency about media effects from Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur to understand how fanaticism can be nurtured by social media and what is the media effect to the audience. Even though social media cannot be categorized as mass media but the users find and promote link to information, news and knowledge from this media. From this research most participants spent more than two hours for social media. They used that two hours mostly to read news and see new postings. With the exposure of information continuously, the effect to the audience could be: strengthen what audience beliefs (cognitive), create anxiety (affective) and move the society or ignite conflict (behavioral). In the context of fanaticism, when audience is continuously exposed to certain ideology (religion or politics) from wrong sources, they will be misled. In conclusion, the many forms of fanaticism in social media can be the shadow for the life of democracy in Indonesia.

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