

# Agent of *change agent* : Indonesia's missing substantial rationality to conserve local wisdom and control modernization

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**Abstract** Today's society easily expresses hatred and partiality. People who disagree curse through social media, insult in comments, even make physical contact as persecution. Whereas, Indonesian culture as a collectivistic society has local wisdom to maintain harmony and avoid conflict. Modern technology and media are the main accused tool to mobilize and ignite mass sentiment. Is it true that those West modern products are actually destroying Indonesian local wisdom? What does Indonesian need to maintain social balance after media literacy and regulation such as only a normative discourse that didn't work? This study analyzes questions with cultural studies in the critical paradigm. Result shows modern technology and media meet practical needs of individualistic societies oriented to instrumentalist rationality. While collectivistic culture in Indonesia is full of substantial rationality, such as self-resilience, magnanimity, and equality. When Millennial is born in a digital culture, a social system is needed to deliver cultural value. That is not only based on instrumental rationality such as regulation or literacy, but also generates the need for substantial rationality.

**Keywords;** *Local Wisdom; Substantial Rationality; Agent of Change Agent*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Social media becomes a new ecosystem where institutions, regulations, and individuals relate to the digital world. Giddens termed those three as systems, structures, and agents [1]. This digital media shifts information's consumers to become *prosumers* [2]. That is, not only accepting or becoming a consumer, but also being a producer of that information.

Technology that is termed as Web 2.0 by Terras [3], is said to offer a large potential of its users to become active creators. The idea of production and reproduction is explained by Giddens as a duality of structuration, whose effects enable action and transformation. Individuals finally have the will, choice, and production opportunity using digital technology. But this is not enough to make good results if human actions are not equipped with knowledge and responsibility.

March 2017 a photo was spread with #BanIslam hastag after the attack on six dead and 50 injured. It captured a hijab woman on a phone call at the crime scene, Westminister Bridge-UK [4]. Ruteere, a special reporter on contemporary

racism, reported racial issues, discrimination, ethnic intolerance and hatred through the internet to UN. This is as expressed by the Russian Federation, that there is no country free from racism and extremism [5].

In Indonesia, interaction on social media is not different from other countries, colored by negative content and hate speech. The Director of Cyber Crime Investigation Agency recorded 47 persecution cases in 2017 [6]. The execution was carried out on the owners of social media accounts who were accused of insulting religion and theologian. Cumulatively, the Director General of Information and Public Communication added 800 thousand negative content in a year [7]. Politics, is suspected to be the trigger for the spread of negative hate speech and propaganda. For example an increase in sarcasm utterances reached 117 cases due to the second period of Jakarta governor election during March 7th to April 15th 2017.

The question will be; whether it is really a social system that occurs globally. Or it is precisely as a result of each agent having the ability and resources. Then, where is the system built by culture long before the technology was created? It is clear that Indonesia collectivism culture prioritizes the values of harmony, friendliness, generosity and group respect. Supposedly, the implication of this value minimizes the existence of hate speech, provocation, or negative propaganda. The frightening thing is if the impact of Western technology is damaging Indonesian local wisdom. What does Indonesian need to maintain social balance after media literacy and regulation such as only a normative discourse that does not work?

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study uses literature review and media studies by describing Anthony Giddens Structuralism and other new media related theories. With a critical paradigm, concepts and phenomena are analyzed with a qualitative approach and presented with descriptive.

### III. DISCUSSION

How should we understand digital media and the effects of digital networks on global communication? Complexity theory tries to discuss on how complex a digital media is today. According to Urry [8], we are in the midst of a paradigm shift, called the angle of complexity. That is the era of transition from society from analog media (print and electronic) to digital society.

Urry shows an example of applying complexity theory to media studies. A cartoon case was the Prophet Muhammad in the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*. Urry explained that the demonstration due to the publication of cartoons was not merely a result of religious confusion, but also the existence of historical, cultural, social system and press issues behind it. The second is the emergence of the internet. According to Urry, the internet is a new qualitative media that answers the needs and character of several media. For example, its existence is practical, inexpensive, easily accessible, and preferable.

In short, complexity on digital media shows two elements, the complexity itself and the concept of mediated communication. To unravel the complexity, more complex methods are needed. What digital media offers and the platforms in it must be used to unravel the problems they have caused.

Hutchby agreed with Urry's argument about complexity by formulating affordance theory [9]. He explained that digital media has the capacity to inherit social characteristics and impacts. Digital media has implications for the sociomaterial constellation, a mechanism for recognizing material and social as a co-constituent part of potential action that can be done in digital media.

Giddens departs from the thought of the interaction between agents and structures in creating a meaning system and social order. None is more dominant from others, otherwise it needs each other. The system becomes an institution that connects behavior, relationships, individuals, even with non-human elements. While agents are actors who interact based on structure, a domain of rules and resources. The duality between the institutional structure and the interaction of agents continuously conducts analysis that continues to reproduce social meaning.

Continuity continues in the trajectory of time and space. Wherever and whenever continuity moves, social construction is needed because it becomes an ecosystem where agents and structures meet. With its speed, digital media is a technology that transcends these two dimensions. So there is no time structure to explain or underlie interactions, and the agent does not have time to interpret and think about actions. Thus, new, more complex, and viral social problems are created, such as speeches of hatred, provocation, or lies.

Madianou & Miller [10] see the development of digital media actually does not eliminate the essence of the importance of relationships in interpersonal communication.

An individual will choose based on the social, emotional, and moral consequences of a media. Because the character of media varies, a person also gives different intentions to experience and relationship management. So, the development is not only on technology, but also new relationships between social and technological aspects [11].

Institutional dimensions (significance, dominance and legitimacy) relate to the dimensions of interaction in three ways; communication, power, and sanction. Significance becomes the interpretive scheme to agents when communicating. The domination structure is felt by agents in the form of authoritative power or orders. Then legitimacy structure is based on the norm. What is currently felt when interacting in digital media is that each agent communicates based on mere significance with the regulatory limits. But legitimacy of truth that is based on norms has not been a concern. In fact, it is not only right or wrong, the agent's actions are legitimized by both good and bad. This is what is missing, which actually begins the theory of structuralism and Marxism; that power must go with meaning and norms [12].

Giddens said the analysis could move on through system integration. Surely he must elaborate on the structure and agents which has been driving high-speed digital media. Meanwhile, what is attempted so far, regulation and media literacy, seems has not been able to deal with digital viruses. Regulations for creating structure, and literacy to develop a generation that is literate. So what would be created must be more basic than just regulation and elaborating agents.

The first attempt is to elaborate the structure : law and regulatory system. Regulation or law derives from social values and norms that contain sanctions as responsibility of its violations. Values and norms regulate what an individual must do, which, its good or bad is determined by social construction. Therefore, it is more local and subjective. For example, a statue can be judged to have high artistic value for one community but it can also be considered vulgar and disgusting for other people. Above locality, individuals have more general considerations, namely moral. Moral philosophy objectively evaluates facts. For example, in general, everyone will feel sorry to see a crying baby regardless of whether the baby is black, white, dressed in expensive, or dirty.

The speed of technology facilitates the search for resources (information) for the production of meaning. This speed is also morally possible and should also be used to reproduce meaning. Concretely, reproduction of meaning must go through process of developing knowledge, by adding information sources and comparing them. Then, an agent has to be responsible for tracking the authenticity, check, double-check, recheck, and even cross-check sources. By covering both sides, an agent morally fulfills the obligation to understand a fact based on all parties.

Indonesia's individual character is maintaining harmony. Confrontation in collectivistic communities is more avoided and mutual-face or other-face tend to be prioritized. Conflict, contact, even the context of communication is made in such a

way that it still maintains the proximity of interpersonal relationships. For this reason, high-context communication styles become a reference for the communication style of collectivist culture [13].

By integrating all those objective efforts, the agent will be able to reproduce meaning according to the structure. He has fulfilled moral obligation as a human to think before acting. Humans remain agents by placing technological means only as resources to create meaning. It is not precisely humans worshipping technology, making technology an agent that treats and creates humans as a means. Or in other words, human needs actually become a means of developing agents (technology).

The second elaboration is currently media literacy which has been aimed at various activities. These agents are expected to understand how the system and structure work. Intent, individuals know the form and meaning of a media. Digital media is a spectrum that elaborates all dimensions, especially speed and connectivity. When digital technology makes interconnected and complex media, agents must also be integrated and organized.

Schroeder explains theory of media's role in social change [14]. He criticized three dominant theories that understand digital media and media in general. First, *Network theory*, describes two elements that see all media best understood when working through networks. The later element explains the power of media regulators that are increasingly focused on a few transnational media conglomerates. But on the other hand, this concentration also produces social resistance. Second, *Mediatization theory*, explains, in national differences, relationship of people in society is increasingly mediated. Third, *Actor-network theory*, focuses more on technology than media. He emphasizes agency (technology influence) not as structure; and the non-human physical environment is not related to action of will. This theory assumes that science and technology are sharpened and constructed by specific local social contexts. Therefore, the roles and impacts often cannot be generalized.

Giddens revealed that an organized control center is a force that dominates less central system. This is a gap that must be exploited from digital technology, where he is handing over the control center to agents. No more meaning is created by a few major media, but each free agent reproduces meaning. And it is this nature of dynamic reflectivity that is characterized by Giddens in the character of modernity.

In his modernity theory, Giddens explains consequences brought by globalization [15]. First, the separation of space - time and second, release mechanism. What is happening now is the first element in which technology can mobilize agents physically or virtually beyond the time limit. But we have not yet fully reached release mechanism, symbolic abstract system that divides technical, professional and knowledge expertise into parts for agents. Media literacy that has been done seems to only share technical knowledge and ability to buy resources. But what is left behind is literacy to share

professionalism and knowledge. For example, how to use media ethically, respond to information, understand media character, think about impact, and reproduce information.

It is not enough when an agent makes a post, replies, or even apathy on digital media. If an agent is silent and does not quickly adjust to change, he/she will be left behind in the digital system. The social movement drags from limitations to freedom that seek openness to democracy and participation. Then the agent must move to find other agents to interact, dialogue, and move together to produce group movements. If technology turns media into intermedia, digital literacy creates agents into interagents, or agents of *change agents*.

Concretely, it is represented as a joint social change movement. This happened in Indonesia Reformation May 1998. The movement was successful because all social agents moved together with their respective roles, functions and resources. Like the power of digital media; no matter how many agents they will not succeed without speed, connectivity, and integration.

The structure in the form of regulations is elaborated into a moral philosophy and agents produced by digital literacy produce agents that are integrated. Both become systems for teaching social values and creating meaning. In fact, the cultural value as a structure between the West and Indonesia is different. Technology as a Western product becomes a tool for disseminating their ideology [16]. The needs of Western individualistic values that are trying to be fulfilled are oriented to practicality. Therefore, digital media technology is built on a speed platform. Their instrumental rationality is aimed at means and subordinating values [17]. Whereas Indonesia with a collectivistic culture attaches great importance to substantial rationality that promotes self-resilience, generosity and equality.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Modern technology and media meet practical needs of individualistic societies oriented to instrumentalist rationality. While collectivistic culture in Indonesia is full of substantial rationality, such as self-resilience, magnanimity, and equality. When Millennial is born in a digital culture, a social system is needed to deliver cultural value. That is not only based on instrumental rationality such as regulation or literacy, but also generates the need for substantial rationality.

Technology has eliminated the limits of space and time. Social media becomes a digital ecosystem where institutions and interactions produce meaning and social order. So the character of fast and connecting digital technology, must be utilized. The structure of legal regulation, extracted from local cultural values, is elaborated in a more general moral philosophy. Concretely on the attitude to be responsible in receiving and interpreting information to then add elements of knowledge before reproducing meaning. Then agents produced from literacy are organized into a fast and institutionalized social movement.

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