

Internet Memes and Indonesian Online Anti-Terrorism Movement

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Abstract—Online media have also contributed to the movement of anti-terrorism in Indonesia like the one done by internet memes. After the terrorist attack in M.H. Thamrin street, Central Jakarta on 14 January 2016, the so-called Sarinah bombing, a number of internet memes went viral in the internet and social media in responding to the terrorist attack. This paper addresses this topic by exploring, investigating, analyzing, and explaining the phenomena of internet memes related to the terrorist attack. Particularly, the analysis focuses on the variety and the contents of the internet memes as the response and messages of the internet and social media users related to Sarinah bombing. This interdisciplinary study is a qualitative-descriptive research that involves the study of language-cultural studies and terrorism studies. The memes are analyzed by using Semiotics theory of Umberto Eco and the concept of terrorism studies. Finally, these kinds of memes besides as the signs of voices of some Indonesian people through online communication for fighting terrorism, it can also be called as part of the sign of Indonesian online movement of anti-terrorism in the internet and social media.

Keywords—*Internet Meme, Terrorism, Online, Anti-Terrorism Movement, Semiotics, Indonesia.*

I. INTRODUCTION

After the terrorist bomb and gunfire attacks on 14 January 2016 at around 10.40 A.M., on M.H. Thamrin Street, Central Jakarta, Indonesia, a number of internet memes were spread virally in the internet and social media. The terrorist attacks was near to Sarinah mall then called “Sarinah bombing.” The terrorist attacks targeted a Starbuck cafe in the mall and a police post in front of the mall. After the first two blasts of suicide bombings, the attack was continued by gunfire of shootings the police in the area and the other six blasts from the attackers during the gunfire. Finally, the police killed two attackers bringing guns during the shooting with the police. The terrorist attack killed eight people namely; two suicide bombers, three attackers, and three civilians and around 26 people injured from both police and civilians. ISIS network then claimed the attacks [1].

The internet memes went viral in the internet and the social media sphere after the Sarinah bombing during that day until several days after that. The memes went viral in the internet such as blogs, websites, and internet forums also through social

media such as Facebook, Instagram, Path, Twitter, and What Sapp. “Internet meme” is a term that is known especially among internet and social media users. It becomes popular especially in the last decade. For this study, the definition of “meme” that is related to internet and digital communication, based on online English *Oxford Dictionaries*, that „Meme“ (/mi:m/) is: “An image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users, oftently with slight variations” [2]. In online Indonesian dictionary of *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI)*, “meme” is “image footage from television shows, films, etc. or pictures that are modified by adding words or writings for humorous and entertaining purposes” [3]. The term “meme” here refers to “Internet meme”—used in the internet and social media communication.

Nowadays, memes cannot be separated from the internet, social media, and digital communication because it becomes part of ways of communication. Limor Shifman, an author of *Memes in the Digital Culture*, said that “Memes are becoming a truly important part of how humans communicate with one another. They appeal to our need to be part of a larger group, and simultaneously our desire to be individuals” [4].

Memes have been used in the internet world in the last few decades, however it becomes very popular in the last decade. It can be said that the first meme is „the Dancing Baby“ made in 1996 by a graphic designer named Michael Girard. What is more, in 2012, the word “meme” started to get its high popularity noted by Google Trends graph [4].

In Indonesia, memes have been known since the birth of internet discussion forums in the late 2008 [5]. However, it becomes very popular since around 2012 when the meme community in Indonesia was established named “Meme Comic Indonesia” as the biggest Indonesian meme community with more than 1,7 million members through Facebook fan page [6].

This study of internet meme related to the response of internet users to the terrorist attack of Sarinah bombing is an inter-disciplinary study that involves linguistics, cultural studies, and terrorism studies. Erhan Aslan explained that “They [memes] may seem basic, but from a linguistic point of view, They’re surprisingly sophisticated. Meme creators use “multimodal grammar” (in other words, images and captions) to express and share ideas and opinions.” Shifman also adds that “Internet memes, as we know them today, are units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated and transformed by users.”

He also argues that “a meme is not a single idea or image which is spread across social sites, but a group of items that were created with awareness of each other” [7].

Many internet memes in responding to Sarinah bombing are in the form of image and most of them use some photographs from the tragedy with some captions and some others are pictures with captions and posters with only some words or has tag. The memes are used with some purposes and messages. The purposes of meme in general are like other artworks, such as song, poetry, short story, comic and caricature, namely as art for art, entertainment, promotion.

It also expresses voices or views, delivering messages, spreading values, political agenda, propaganda, and jokes or comedy. The memes in responding Sarinah bombing voicing, expressing, sharing, delivering, and spreading ideas, opinions, and messages in the internet and social media that has become part of the online movement related to anti- terrorism. This is the significant of doing this research to study in the field of language and culture as well as to contribute to the study of terrorism. On the other hand so far, there have been many studies on terrorism in Indonesia, however no one has discussed internet memes in connection with terrorism cases, especially Sarinah bomb attack in Jakarta.

Based on the above background, this paper focuses on analyzing several viral internet memes in responding to the Sarinah bombing on 14 January 2016 in M.H. Thamrin Street, Central Jakarta. This paper addresses this topic by exploring, investigating, analyzing, and explaining the phenomenon of internet memes related to the terrorist attack. Particularly, the analysis focus on the variety and the contents of the internet memes as the response and messages of the internet and social media users related to Sarinah bomb attack. The internet memes are regarded not only as art and for expressing opinions but more than that as part of an online movement of anti-terrorism. This is explored and explained in the next part by using semiotics theory of Umberto Eco and terrorism studies.

II. SEMIOTICS AND TERRORISM STUDIES

This study is interdisciplinary that involves linguistics, cultural studies, and terrorism studies. The analysis uses semiotics theory developed by Umberto Eco in the book of *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976). According to Eco, “Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else” [8, p. 7]. He explains that using Morris’s definition that “something is a sign only because it is interpreted as a sign of something by some interpreter... Semiotics, then, is not concerned with the study of a particular kind of objects but with ordinary objects insofar (and only insofar) as they participate in semiotics.” He adds that “the interpretation by an interpreter, which would seem to be characterized a sign, must be understood as the possible interpretation by a possible interpreter” [8, p.16].

Terrorism is a national and international threat. The Indonesian government officially stated that terrorism is a national threat when the replacement of the Government Regulation (PP) in lieu of Law No. 1 of 2002 concerning the

Eradication of Terrorism Crimes on October 18, 2002. This level was then increased to Law number 2 whose contents were taken from the PP. This law was ratified on April 4, 2003. In responding to terrorism in Indonesia various religious institutions strongly have condemned acts of terror, one of them is the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) which issued a fatwa on the prohibition of acts of terrorism in Fatwa No. 3 of 2004 concerning Terrorism. MUI emphasized that all acts of terror that cause fear in the community are illegitimate. Based on *Ijtima Ulama*, the Indonesian Fatwa Commission on December 16, 2003 established a fatwa on terrorism. The MUI warns terrorism or suicide bombing as a prohibited act.

The term “Terrorism” according to the *Encyclopedia of Terrorism* is a term that has a lot of understanding, but in general this definition of terrorism refers to three factors, namely using the method of violence, the target is civil society or government, and aims to instill fear and impose political and social changes. In particular, terrorism is “violence against civil society as a target with the aim of creating political and social change [9, pp. 359-360].

Meme in this study is seen as a text whose meaning is interpreted using contextual concepts or theories and by relating them to the context. Therefore, the memes are analyzed not only the contents but also by seeing the context of the society and the terror attack by the understanding of terrorism cases and studies.

III. METHOD

The primary data of this research are some internet memes in the form of images that contain photographs and pictures with captions and poster with some words or has tag that respond to the Sarinah bombing attack on 14 January 2016 on MH Thamrin street, Central Jakarta. The memes are collected from the internet taken with the keywords of Meme Bom Sarinah 14 January 2016“. Based on this, there are 12 articles (see [1], [12], [13], [14], [15], [16], [17], [18], [19], [20], [21]) that have collected several memes from many sources of the internet and social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Path, and Instagram. Furthermore, to understand and explain the contents of memes the semiotics and terrorism studies were used. Besides that, qualitative-descriptive approach with content analysis was applied with close reading of the text that involve interpretation into new analytical narratives [10, p.23].

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Internet Memes & Anti-Terrorism Movement

The internet memes in responding to Sarinah bombing were around 31 images from 12 articles. The memes were categorized into several topics based on their contents. Based on this classification they were divided into 8 topics.

1) Hashtag #Prayforjakarta

One of the first responses by internet and social media users in the internet and social media to Sarinah bombing is by using the hashtag #Prayforjakarta as seen on Figure 1. This hashtag was also used as a meme that showed the empathy and support

for the victims of the terrorism.

Fig. 1. Meme with has tag #Prayforjakarta



2) Hashtag “We are not afraid” (#Kamitidaktakut)

After the attack, people showed their support to the police and to encourage Indonesian people for not afraid to terrorism. This can be seen from the has tag memes #kamitidaktakut (we are not afraid) as seen on Figure 2. The memes showed optimism that Indonesia recovered soon after the attack because “we are not afraid” of terrorism and we were brave to fight against terrorism.



Fig. 2. Memes with Hashtag of #Kamitidaktakut

There were other memes that also showed the same messages but by mocking and saying directly face to face to the perpetrator of terror (terrorist) in the street holding a gun that we were not afraid of terrorism. The memes used the terrorist photo edited by adding other characters and captions that showed “not afraid of terrorist.” The following memes are present on Figure 3.



Fig. 3. Mocking the terrorist

The same messages with stronger images were delivered by using some other memes that also showed that the people were not afraid of terrorists. This is shown by the photos of the Indonesian people who were not hiding from the terrorist but crowded the terror scene for watching the gunfire between the terrorist and the police and seeing the terror scene. The memes as seen on Figure 4 try emphasize to the bravery is a symbol of fighting terrorism.



Fig. 4. People are watching the gunfire and the terror scenes

3) Street Sellers around the Terror Scene

After the bombing and during the gunfire between the terrorists and the police, many people in the surrounding crowded the scene including the street sellers. Some food, snack, and drink sellers came to the scene for selling to the crowd including the police who were on duty. Figure 5 and 6 describe such situation.



Fig. 5. The drink and snack sellers close to the scene



Fig. 6. The peanut and satay sellers close to the scene

From the memes, it can also be seen that the crowd who watched or around the scene were buying the food. The memes also emphasize even the ordinary people like street sellers do not afraid of terrorist. The memes try to depict the phenomenon as another act of bravery and support of the people for the police who were on duty.

4) Mocking the Terrorist

Some other memes are parody by using terrorist photo and captions that mock the terrorist by calling him deaf because he was phoned and ordered by ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi to attack Suriah but he went to Sarinah. Because of this he was scolded by his leader. This kind of mocking shows one of the acts and ways of fighting the terrorist by joking him for being deaf. Here are the mocking memes as seen on Figure 7.



Fig. 7. The parody of mocking the terrorist

5) Selfies with Terrorist and Terror Scene

Another phenomenon during and after the Sarinah bombing was that some people around the scenes took photo selfie with the background close to the scenes. This attitude does not mean that they are not empathy to the victims, but in other perspective this is a part of the movement of not afraid of the terrorist and wants to support the fighting of terrorism be there and showing the selfie photo close to the scene. Here are photo selfies as

available on Figure 8.

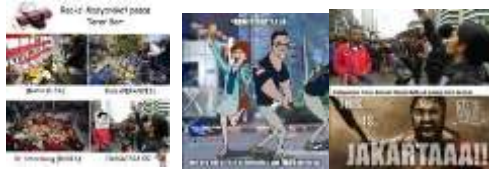


Fig. 8. Selfies close to Terror Scenes

6) Joking the Terrorist

Another joking memes for the terrorist is by giving some captions in his photo not related to terror captions, but by joking him as a tissue seller in the street by adding a box of tissue replacing his gun on his hands. The other one is a joke by saying “Do not shoot [say love to] Sarinah because Sarinah [a name of a girl] has already a boyfriend.” These jokes as part of the act of not taking him seriously and also look him down. See Figure 9 below.



Fig. 9 Joking and mocking the terrorist with other issues

7) Fighting Traffic vs Fighting Terrorism

An issue related to how the police facing the terrorists in Sarinah bombing also appeared. A meme as a joke shows a comparison between the police task for traffic and the police task for fighting the terrorists. The meme implicitly shows that handling traffic jam in Jakarta is more difficult than fighting against the terrorists because it only needed several police while facing traffic jam need a lot of police (Figure 10). In other word, in metaphorical meaning, it is to degrade the status of terrorist.



Fig. 10. Joking on handling terrorist with traffic jam

8) Police Appearance

The last topic is the attention of the people to the appearance of some polices who were involved in the gunfire with the terrorist in the scene. Some of the police were wearing cool and branded fashion items that became one of the attentions and hot

talks of the people in the internet and social media. This act of the people shows that they try to better talking the good side of the police to support the police than talking the perpetrators of the terror. Another meme also shows the bravery of the police who were not wearing complete uniform to face the terrorists but they are very brave. In other words, the memes try to highlight the police who are not only cool in fighting terrorism but also in fashion as seen on Figure 11.



Fig. 11. The police are cool in fighting terrorism and fashion

The number of the meme that is quite a lot shows that there are many topics and messages that are delivered by the internet and social media users. All of the memes deliver the same point that is fighting against terrorism or anti- terrorism. The number, the contents, the messages, and the viral aspect in many media of internet and social media have shown as part of the online movement of anti-terrorism in the internet and social media.

As it is said by Faturochman, a social psychology expert at Gadjah Mada University (UGM) Yogyakarta “such memes as acts of resistance or anti-terror against the tragedy of terror and not because of insensitivity. Forms of resistance or anti-terror acts can vary and for those who do not have weapons, making the incident as a joke or mocking the terrorist is one of their ways that can be done. Thus, the people try to overcome its fear by changing it fighting terror through memes.” He also adds that “Indonesians have different characteristics compared to Europeans or Americans. Indonesians are more relaxed” in responding the case [11].

In short, in semiotics point of view, in this case, the memes as the signs of voices of fighting terrorism and anti-terrorism movement. Indonesian people have creative and relaxed ways to fight terrorism and to deliver anti- terrorism messages by using internet memes with various topics and images as the signs of the voices of some people. The memes are also as the signs of part of the online anti- terrorism movement that involve not only the creators of the memes but also the receivers or the audience that is the internet and social media users in Indonesia but also in the world.

V. CONCLUSION

Meme compared to other forms of communication is simpler, shorter with only a few words, and easy as well as entertaining to read. This is because memes usually are in the forms of images of photos and picture with short captions or just some words or hashtag. Similar to comic strips or caricatures that also have entertainment values because of the humor and art aspects. This is one of the strengths of meme as part of digital

communication in internet and social media, where most of the users are young generation.

Memes in respond to Sarinah bombing which contain anti-terrorism messages are the signs of creation of internet or social media users as one of their efforts and ways to fight against terrorism and campaign against the spread of terrorism especially in the internet and social media.

Finally, as an online movement, this kind of memes quite effective for spreading and delivering messages and influencing other people to participate in creating and spreading similar memes in the internet and social media. The memes also deliver and spread the messages to public as an effort to create collective awareness in fighting against terrorism that can be done through many ways and one of them through internet memes.

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