

Conference Paper

Democracy and Facebook – A Case Study of Anti-LGBT's Facebook Post Removal on Indonesian Netizens

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Abstract

This research aims to provide an overview of how Indonesian netizens voiced their anti LGBT (Lesby, Gay, Bisex, and transgender) views on their Facebook account. This study uses a netnography method to observe Facebook account of Indonesian netizens that are voicing anti-LGBT expression. The results show that the new media is not value free. Administrators of the new media, in this case are administrators of Facebook community, have their own values. Those who are not in line with the value of the Facebook community had their contestation with the administrator's values removed.

Keywords: Democracy, social media, netnography, anti-LGBT, Facebook

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1. Background

Facebook has removed writings and images that are voicing anti LGBT view. The removal of the posts is considered damaging, by some Indonesian netizens, for the democratic atmosphere which had become the hallmarks of new media. Prior to anti LGBT polemic, the presence of new media is viewed as an alternative to express freedom of opinion. This research aims to provide an overview of how the netizens in Indonesia voiced their anti-LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) opinions using their Facebook account.

LGBT is certainly contrary to Islamic values followed by majority of Indonesian population. When a widely popular Indonesian *ulama* (Islamic cleric), nicknamed Aa Gym, wrote on his Twitter account that he would stop using LINE (a popular messaging service) because it blatantly promoted LGBT messages, many Indonesian netizens spread a captured screen shoot of Aa Gym's post through a variety of new media, including Facebook. In addition to the distribution of the captured screen shoot, netizens also conducted anti-LGBT campaign through Facebook. Many of those accounts got alerts from Facebook, stating that their posting containing anti LGBT content is not allowed.

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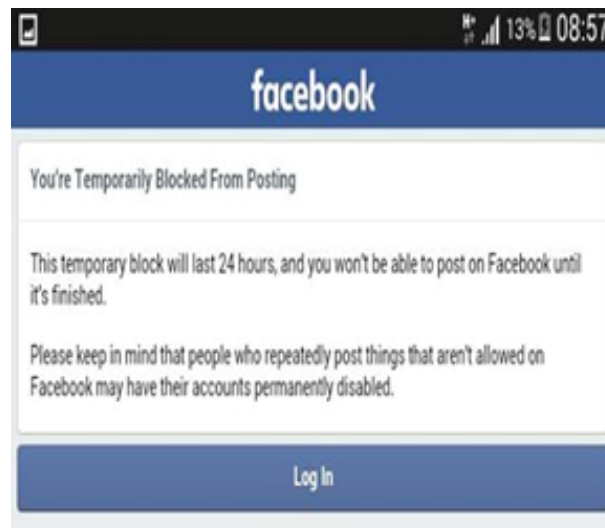


Figure 1: Captured Screen shot of warning from Facebook.

The following image shows alert from Facebook to one user account, after they post anti LGBT content:

After receiving the notification, the anti-LGBT posts disappeared from the user's Facebook account timeline. Facebook also froze the user account, which was inaccessible for 24 hours before it could be used again.

Netizens started to notice the removal at the beginning of February 2016, with Valentine Day ahead. At that time, the LGBT campaign got its momentum for more persuasive 'marketing'. Valentine Day, became a moment for pro-LGBT group to introduce themselves and demanded their rights to be accepted by the community. Naturally, the majority of the Indonesian Muslim community and scholars refused to support the pro-LGBT group to circulate their tenets. It was the reason behind the influx of many posts on Facebook and other social media that voiced anti-LGBT concerns, which clashed with the value embraced by Facebook administrators.

This study aims to provide an overview on what is the value that drives Facebook users to still continue using their accounts following the removal of their Facebook posts. This study will also find out what implications the removal of the posts brings to the development of democracy in Indonesia.

This study applies the text analysis theory into Facebook as a social media. It includes blogs, social networking, wikis, forums, and virtual world. Blog, Wiki, and social networking is a form of social media is the most commonly used by people all over the world. Kaplan and Haenlein [8] defined social media as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content. There are six types of social media according to Kaplan and Haenlein, namely: 1). Collaborative

projects, 2) Blog, 3). Content communities, 4). Social networking sites, 5). Virtual games worlds and 6). Virtual Social Worlds.

The focus of this research is Facebook, which blocked the accounts of users voicing anti-LGBT views. The policy and action to block anti-LGBT posts illustrate a stark contrast with various previous studies that conclude social media has a positive impact on democracy and its development.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative netnography method with a constructivist paradigm in examining the Indonesian netizen's Facebook accounts that posted anti-LGBT texts or images. There are 7 accounts examined in this study, the user accounts name is: DK, EM, AM, MP, PFA, NY, and LJ. Those accounts were selected since the account owners got a warning from Facebook, and had their anti-LGBT posts removed by Facebook.

The qualitative research paradigm started from a phenomenological object built on particular situation as understood by certain individuals or social groups, and relevant to the purposes of the research. Qualitative research assumes that systematic research needs to be done in a natural environment, and directly to the human action or interaction itself to define and interpret the events of social, and not in the artificial environment such as experiments.

Qualitative research methods are often used to find out why and how human behavior, opinions, and experiences are on certain subjects. Qualitative researchers interested in understanding the constructed meaning, i.e., how people understand their world and experience they hold ([12]: 13). Qualitative research places the viewer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive materials and practices that make the world observed. These practices are changing the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretation to the world.

Denzin and Lincoln [3] describes that constructivist paradigm adopted the ontology of the relativists (the ontology of relativism), transactional epistemology and dialectical or hermeneutical methodology. Research objectives of the constructivist paradigm are directed toward producing various comprehension of the reconstruction, with themes that have properties of trustworthiness and authenticity.

The method used in this research is netnography. According to Kozinets, netnography is a research method that is specifically designed to study online community and culture. Research conducted by Kozinets, as the originator of this method, performed in the blogosphere (blogging), microblogging, video casting, podcasting, social networking sites, virtual worlds, and many more.

Through netnography method, according to Kozinets, researchers can study the beliefs, values and customs and behavior of a particular online community or group. As more and more people use the Internet, they use it as a communication tool which allows it to empower the formation of society, so as to create a new culture that is created via computer and mediated by social interactions.

3. Findings and Discussion

The owner of account MBH, a friend of AS, said that her account was blocked by Facebook. AS earlier had said his Facebook account was blocked. The revelation attracted reaction from their Facebook friends. According to MBH, he is not famous like AS, only a random common Facebook user, but he was blocked for posting anti-LGBT opinions.

AS has a high profile among his circle in Facebook. When his account was blocked for posting anti-LGBT message, he wrote about the blocking in his Facebook post. He also mentioned on his timeline whenever his friends had their accounts suspended. With this tactic of mentioning, anti-LGBT campaign forms a large online community. Facebook user AS often campaigned against liberal Islam and took this issue as part of his campaign. His activities are not only campaigned through his Facebook account, he is also often invited as speaker on anti-LGBT events. Based on his friend's suggestion, he started a campaign against Facebook's blocking of anti-LGBT posts.

The label is suggested by a friend of AS, is account owner ARD. In ARD's own Facebook account, we cannot find posts that suggest anti-LGBT views because they were all blocked. As a result, ARD's Facebook wall contained no post during the study period when anti-LGBT issue was at its peak, a strange phenomenon giving ARD's meticulous tendency when posting on Facebook.

Another account owner named AMAM, also a friend of AS, wrote that the removal action was based on complaints from other Facebook users, who do not like the post. He also provided links to websites that proclaimed that there was an online community/social media force, with neat coordination and continuous monitoring, with the task to report on anti-LGBT posting. These sites, showed captured screenshot successfully obtained from the closed group. This post by AMAM brought many comments as response. Among those commenters was EK, whose Facebook account was also blocked. He wrote that Facebook had a double standard. He cited an example where he reported anti-Islam posting and got response from Facebook that the status being reported did not violate Facebook community standard.

Among friends of AS, some tried to post links to anti-LGBT sites/news to test whether these postings would be deleted. Most of them were removed. Those not removed usually only provided links without additional comment that showed anti-LGBT view, as happened to account owner MYP. He only shared the link of the

news found from his friend's account ZM. His comment was also taken from the words written in the news. Another Facebook user named JD had another interesting experience, she posted many anti-LGBT posts, and her posts were not removed because she didn't use anti-LGBT language, but the contrasting view of LGBT argument, accompanied by a funny language.

While JMBT, whose account had been blocked, chose to post anti-LGBT opinion without comment, simply frequently post a picture indicating anti-LGBT. Non-direct tactics also chose by DK, whose account had been blocked twice, she did not stop her activities; she changed the words of LGBT into *lagibete* (not in the mood). She also associates the blocking with funding from UNDP to the LGBT movement. She did not hesitate to criticize UNDP with camouflaged language, and questioned how could the UNDP as an organizational entity of international level, poured funds to support a program that is contrary to the traditional, cultural and religious values of a nation? He also challenged the state to be able to block the UNDP program, because the state's status as sovereign entity was at par with UNDP. Similar to DK, the account owner NY also faced blocking from Facebook. The blocking of his account was reported on Islamic websites just as the blocking of AS made it to the news outlet.

These people did not only continue to post anti-LGBT view, they also established an NGO for LGBT social assistance, which they named *Peduli Sahabat* (Care for Friends). NY wrote that UNDP and Mark Zuckerberg have the same mission, to guarantee the success of the LGBT as an international project. Document obtained from UNDP mentioned that LGBT is a project for Asian countries, especially South East Asia and East Asia executed between 2014-2017. While the founder of Facebook, MZ, openly wrote in his account that the month of June is the month of LGBT. He also added a rainbow sign to be used in user's Facebook account as an icon for supporting LGBT movement.

Anti-LGBT posting attracted a lot of comments. These posts and comments of anti-LGBT view were publicly and widely shared on Facebook. The commentators and users saw the removal as a form of phobia from the LGBT community. Moreover, as a resident from country with a Muslim majority, many have attributed the blocking as a form of injustice, where postings insulting and discrediting Islam and Muslim are not seen as a violation of Facebook community guide. This study shows that the new media is not a value-free. Administrators of new media, in this case Facebook, have their own value. Those who are not in line with the value of the Facebook's administrator and then post that contested opinion will have their posts removed.

4. Conclusions

Facebook community standards, especially on hate speech, stating that if your posts are included in the category of content which attack people based on race, ethnicity,

nationality, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, sex, gender, gender identity, disability or illness, it then must be deleted. It is the basis of anti-LGBT content removal. But this study shows Facebook has double standard, when faced to the content insulting Islam, Facebook replied "*different voice-even if they were offensive- can the make the world better*". It shows that the Facebook is not value-free. Even if they make and have a standard, they do not always refer to those standards.

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