CLEANING UP THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT: A STUDY OF VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNITY OF MAKASSAR, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the use of social media as a virtual forum to discuss about the environmental cleanliness programmes in Makassar city, Indonesia. Utilising virtual ethnography, this study combines narrative analysis – to observe visual and textual narratives as a form of discussion – with face to face interviews to understand how communication patterns are formed virtually when discussing the topic. This study also aims to understand how the community members participated both in the real world (offline) and the virtual world (online). To understand this phenomena, communication components of virtual interaction are employed. This study concluded that the topic of conversation in the social media consists of two distinct topics: the main topics and the additional topics. The main topics were formulated and uploaded by the admin who were previously discussed in person between other admins and several community members. The main topic was uploaded in the social media group to get community members' responses, whereas the additional topics were uploaded and written by community members. The main topic is related to the city cleaning program initiated by the government of Makassar city. Some of the main topics were followed up with actions in the real reality by community members. Based on this analysis, there is no diametrical difference between real reality or phenomena that existed in the real world (offline) with the reality that existed in the real world (offline), in which the community members participated in the environmental cleanliness program.

Keywords: Virtual ethnography, social media, local environment, virtual community.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of their presence, humans always need certain media to convey their messages. Media can be in the simple form of sounds, images, and gestures which were widely used in the past for communication activities. However, along with the development of human civilization, media was created even more complex to help people in facing communication challenges that existed in their respective times. Following this phenomenon, new forms of media were created to help people interact with each other. If in the past, communication and interaction between people were limited to a certain space and time, the existing media technology have overcome these limits. With the presence of media classified as 'new media', or what is called by scholars as social media, became a necessity in people's lives. In the digital era, people will be stressed when this social media cannot be accessed in just a few hours, they feel something is missing.

Social media has an important role in people's lives. However, without realizing it, social media (such as Facebook and Twitter) has changed many aspects of people's lives; Social media changed cultural behaviours. From the positive side, social media can be a medium of

communication and a means of connecting people. In fact, it can even be said that if in the past communication was word of mouth practice whereas in the digital era, the process produces complex messages (multimodality). The world is becoming more accessible.

In Indonesia, the development of communication technology has experienced rapid growth since the year 2000. For example, in 2010, there were 24 million people had access to the internet through various platforms. This development was significant compared to the number of internet users in 2008 which only reached 25 million people. This figure illustrates that 18.5% of the total Indonesian population could access the internet.

Graphic 1: The use of social Media in Indonesia

Source: www.Thechinasia.com
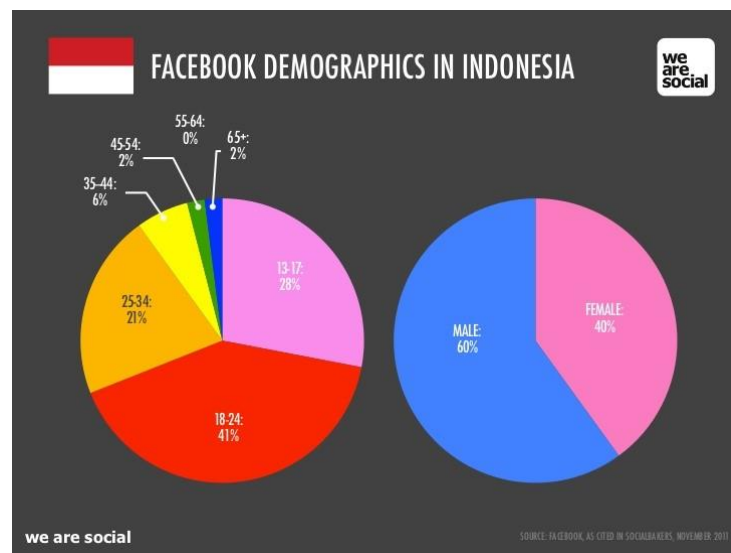
On the positive side, social media has vital role in building relationships between individuals. Through social media, human communication networks are formed; connecting people from different regions, even from different continents. Another positive role that social media has, is the ability to connect people who have not met for a long time. In addition, social media can transfer knowledge, information and even facilitate learning processes. The most recent social media development is the application of business transactions.

Apart from the positives, social media also has a negative influence on people's lives which can possibly bring undesirable changes. The unpreparedness of the community towards the influences of external culture that has entered through social media often makes us believe the information is true even though the information given is not suitable for our culture.

The rapid increase in the use of social media certainly has an impact on people's lives, namely changes in communication behaviours. For example, our society today often uses indirect communication rather than direct (face to face) communication when it comes to communicating and interacting with friends, and relatives. The result is a change in communication patterns and communication behaviours. The use social media not only affects how people behave when communicating but also influences the content of the message, as well as their way of thinking

In addition, social media is also used as a medium for exchanging information, conveying ideas and discussing topics society concern about. These can be about health, economy or local the environment. In Makassar city, for example, since 2015 social media has been used as a forum for delivering information, submitting ideas, discussing local environmental issues which was originally initiated by residents then later on supported by the government of Makassar city.

Because it is carried out via online and takes place on social media, some social scientists categorize the activity as a virtual activity (Fuchs, C., 2017; Caliandro, A., 2018; Hine, C., 2015); (Dell, H. (Ed.)., 2011), for example, argues that virtual is a personal experience and a relationship which utilizes computers and technology. In relation to social media it can be said that personal experiences and relationships occur and take place personally in the media space. Thus, forums of discussion initiated by community members in Makassar as mentioned previously, can be virtually examined using suitable methods. In this context, this study focuses on the activities of virtual communities by employing a virtual ethnography and visual narrative analysis. These approaches help facilitate a comprehensive understanding of communication patterns derived from the virtual forums.

Research Methods
This study employed a virtual ethnography approach developed by Hine (2015) who emphasizes the use of the internet in everyday life by applying basic principles of classic ethnography. The applied approach in conjunction with visual narrative analysis aims to analyse virtual discussion themes and topics on activities of the local environmental cleanliness carried out by members of the *Makassar Bersih* community (*KOMBES*). The objective of this study is to analyse the communication pattern of virtual discussion concerning environmental cleanliness programmes in Makassar city and how is the relationship between offline and online activities. The virtual activities refer to the sending of ideas (posts), comments and responses and face to face interaction in the form of texts, images, emoticons, and links (hyperlinks). In addition, this study also observed activities that are offline or face to face interactions related to cleaning up environmental activities and comments about the Makassar program.

Results and Discussions
Composition of Online Thematic Discussion
Having analysed the communication components functioned as a coding instrument (see Hine, 2015), this study found that the messages posted and responded by members of the Community are delivered through written texts, images, links and emoticons which consist of both main and supplementary topics. The main topics were formulated and submitted by the administrators who previously discussed these topics in person between fellow administrators and several community members. This main topic was discussed on the Facebook group to get community members' responses and participations. These responses were in the form of emoticons symbolised support and justification to proceed further actions following either the administrators or community members' posts in relation to the city cleaning program issues.

The communication components (See Hine, 2015) consist of delivering ideas, objectives, settings/locations, messages, and the rules of interaction to help the understanding of how group members comprehend the composition of their conversations and topics. Based on the interviews, the Facebook group was initiated by the city government who invited community members to participate in the program. Since the group is closed (closed group), participation is limited only to group members. The communication patterns also configure the internal

communication practices between fellow administrators to implement the environmental cleanliness programmes in Makassar city.

The followed-up actions by community members, generally were promoted by community members after having discussed the topics in the group. In addition, the supplementary topics on the other hand were also formulated and delivered by community members. The configuration of the communication pattern can be shown visually in the formulated model as follows:
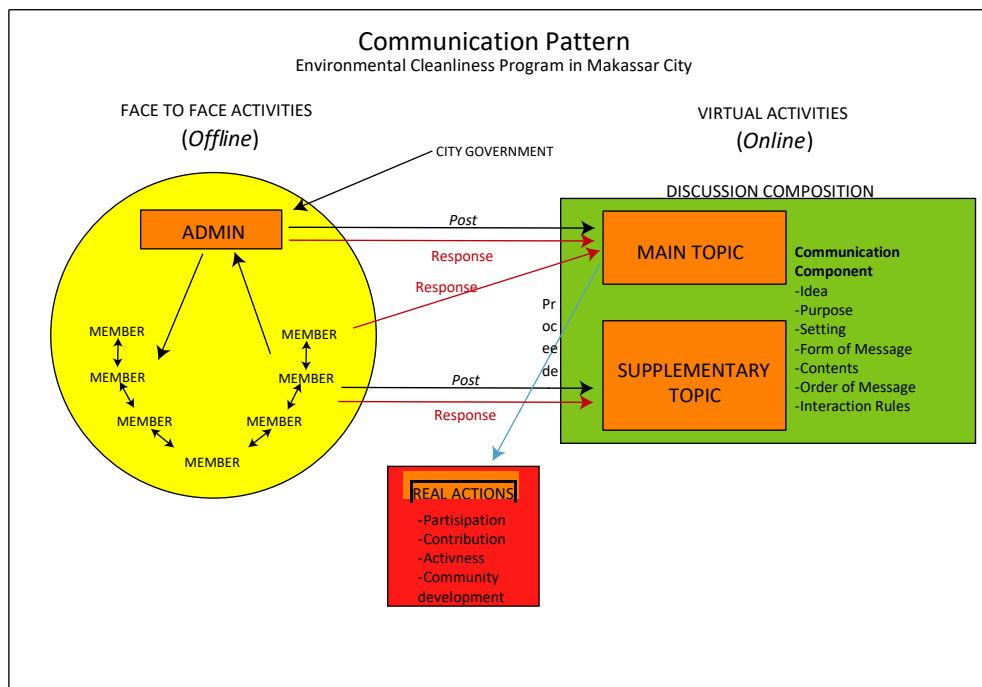
Formulated by researcher

Motivation to Join the Community

Based on the interviews with informants, this study found that there were two motives of group members to join and carry out the local environmental cleanliness activities. The motivation of the first group was to follow up their previous daily environmental cleanliness activities in their local area. This type of group is categorized as the self-awareness group. The motivation of the second group was to actively perform environmental activities after having joined the community.

In relation to the activities involved, the community members were grouped into two different types of involvement: the group members who were members of the Makassar Clean Community Facebook Group, and the group members who were not members of the *KOMBES* Facebook group. The group members who are considered as the most active in posting issues were the members of the government staffs (such as head of district, secretary of district, head of village and head of the cleanliness program).

Based on the interviews, this study found that the discussion or conversation themes were posted on a daily basis through the Makassar Community Facebook Group. This was stated by Juliarman who posted *'Mariso Hebat'*. According to him, all themes posted through the Makassar Clean Community Facebook Group were on a daily basis and related to the village and sub-district programs as an outline of the City program,

Relation between Virtual Discussions (online) and Actual (offline) Activities
Since the group was initiated by the government staff, the issues posted on the Facebook group was dominated by a government program concerning the local environment. This also confirms that the group was initially formed in order to promote the government program as a public relations' activity. Interestingly, however, group members who were not of the government staff also posted issues that were not related to the government program. Based on the visual narrative analysis, half of posts made by non-government staff members were dominated by family, religion and even current political practice matters.

The non-government related topics generally did not attract the government staff members to respond. In effect, the topics created new separated discussions by which formed a configuration of varieties of issues on the virtual group. Based on the visual narrative analysis and interviews, the configuration of topics represented the actual issues (offline), which were initially articulated by non-government members. This linkage between offline and online activities confirm the relationship between the posted issues and the actual issues. The religion topics, for example, inserted by non-government members to remind Muslim group members to pray on time. The post with a picture posted at the time of praying (*shalat*). Some group members, responded to agree with this reminded praying message and correlated it to the official environmental cleanliness topic posted by government members on how prayers can affect the success of the program.

The political practice topics such as local government election, although were not part of official topics, brought the attention of the group members to respond and comment. Interestingly, the government members also responded and commented on this topic, which, as discussed previously, non-official topics have never attracted the government members. By analysing the communication component, it can be seen clearly that this political practice topic can be related to the actual local government election event conducted by the Local General Elections Commission (*KPU*). It is proved that the Virtual Group has also been indirectly used for political campaign by government members to promote their candidate.

Based on the above discussions, it can be concluded that there is a clear connection between real activities (offline) and virtual activities (online). The virtual activities have a synchronisation to the offline activities and vice versa as a confirmation that the activities are sub-sequences of one another. The environmental cleanliness activities carried out by group members in real reality has to be seen as complemented activities with virtual discussions by group members. The chosen topics, pictures, emoticons and hyperlinks are constructed by group members to represent the actual issues in the real life. Both realities cannot be separated.

Participation as an implementation of virtual discussion.
In relation to participation as the implementation of virtual discussion, this study found that the implemented activities can be grouped into: (1) Contribution of thoughts, donations, assistance, and providing tool kits by group members. These activities included suggest or promote the idea to implement in real life (offline). The ideas posted in the virtual group were generally discussed before proceeding to action. Some group members because of their absence of participation donated money to support the program. The working bee (*gotong royong*) as a part of Indonesian tradition was one of the popular activities in the community that encourage group members to participate. In this occasion, group members can choose to provide tools for working or their own effort to help; (2) Active in the forum by organising meetings. This participation was done usually by younger group members who have more

time to organise virtual discussions and offline meetings; and (3) the last type of participation was to motivate group members to participate. This participation was usually organised by older group members both in online and offline activities.

CONCLUSION

The communication pattern of the virtual discussion, is that the messages posted and responded by members of the community are delivered through written texts, images, links and emoticons, which consist of both main and supplementary topics. The configuration of the communication practices consists of government staff and non-government members. The group members of government staffs dominantly organised the discussions on the program and motivate other group members to participate in the program. There is no diametrical difference between real reality or phenomena that existed in the real world (offline) with the reality that existed in the real world (offline), in which the community members participated in the environmental cleanliness program.

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Figure 1. The use of social Media in Indonesia. From https: www. Thechinasia.com

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