



Social Media Constructive Role as Virtual Public Sphere: Study on Charity Action of Twitter Account @elsyandria

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Abstract

This research aimed to study how social media role as virtual public sphere channel in moving masses in a charity action initiated by individual actor. This research, in particular, studied a case of charity action for online motorcycle taxi driver named Sri Rahardjo in the donation invitation held by Twitter account @elsyandria. The research findings showed that social media can become a channel to initiate and realize social transformation movement in charity action to help people even though they do not know each other. When social media is able to transform into virtual public sphere, it can lead to constructive public debate and discourse oriented towards common interests. At this point, social media has become an important part of social change.

Keywords: *Charity Action; Social Transformation Movement; Social Media; Virtual Public Sphere; Twitter*

1. Introduction

In this current globalization era, people are more familiar with social media usage, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Line, and YouTube. Those social media become widely used communication media as well as information source. Through social media, people have communication and changing communication and news at a time. Dissemination of information and news through social media is extremely fast. Therefore, people are able to spread and get up to date information in a very short time. In term of cost, social media has minimum cost; hence its usage is cheap and affordable. It becomes the strength of social media which motivates people to use it.

In its development, social media is not only as communication tool and information source for its users, but it also has function as virtual public sphere (Van Dijck & Poell, 2015). The existence of social media creates new encounter knots as a breakthrough which is never imagined before. Social media is able to transcend human limitations in forming friendship network and new community based on ideological similarities, idea, agenda, and in the same side on an issue. After the presence of social media, circle of friends and community thrive without the limitations of space and time. The knots of friendship and community gave birth to various kinds of thoughts, discourses, political movements, and it even touch the aspect of social solidarity.

Concept of friendship and information network power shaped through social media as channel of virtual public sphere is widely used as an effective mass mobilization media. One of them is the emergence of social movements in charity actions to invite people to donate or become a volunteer in a social activity, and other volunteer activities. Prita Care Coin (Koin Peduli Prita) movement and #SaveSATINAH movement become real practice examples which have been academically studied regarding how virtual public sphere is able to be a vessel as well as an effective way to move mass.

Bawarti (2014) had conducted a study on the blog home page of *koinkeadilan.com*, as part of Prita Care Coin (Koin Peduli Prita) movement, to review about aspect of power sense within a text on an interview held in the virtual public sphere. The research finding showed that, textually, this text used wording and metaphore, and also transitivity and modality showing power sense. Besides, in discursive practice, this text was produced, spread, and consumed as power, by looking at the characteristics of coherence and intertextuality. Meanwhile, in social practice, this text has power effect because it succeeds to practice hegemonic process which rotates the power. However, it is not through violence, it uses communication and argumentation process in the public sphere as explained by Habermas.

Sari dan Siahainenia (2015) analyzed regarding how far social movement entering virtual public sphere especially on the case of Satinah. The research finding showed that the virtual sphere has been able to be public sphere for society to defend themselves through community collective activities moved by certain parties. The idea of 'just retweeting' to make the information about Satinah widely spread, and it can also be noticed by accounts registered on Twitter. Ideas to carry on solidarity action to support liberation of Satinah up to fundraising to collect release funds for Satinah are some things related to pluralism of ideas in the social movement on the virtual public sphere.

In the mid January of 2020 a driver of motorcycle taxi (online ojek) named Sri Rahardjo suddenly became viral in the conversation of Twitter and Instagram. The owner of account @elsyandria shared story life of Sri Rahardjo through her post on Twitter and Instagram. Besides, through her post, the owner of account @elsyandria initiated social movement to help the motorcycle taxi (online ojek) driver. Unexpectedly, the donations collected reached 114 million rupiah. Elsy did not only ask the driver to buy a new cellphone for work, but she also took him to buy furniture for the house, electronic goods, new motorcycle, and new clothes (www.tribunpontianak.co.id, 2020).

The newest information is about the influencer and celebgram Rachel Vennya who showed her care after COVID-19 attacked Indonesia. She did social movement by holding fundraising for donation through Kitabisa.com to help hospitals which were lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) against corona virus. In less than 24 hours, Rachel Venya was able to collect donations of more than IDR 1 billion. "Honestly, I want to say thanks to my friends, my online friends who had had collaboration with me to hold donations against COVID-19 and now it's more than IDR 1 billion, less than 24 hours" said Rachel Vennya as quoted by Kompas.com on Instagram Story on Wednesday, March 18th, 2020 (www.kompas.com, 2020).

If celebgram Rachel Vennya collaborated with Kitabisa.com to hold fundraising, the owner of account @elsyandria holding fundraising for online ojek driver Sri Rahardjo, was a single actor who, despite acting on personal initiations and movements, was also able to create a collective charity movement with the same goal in a virtual public sphere. In these cases, it can be seen that social media function has developed to be public participation in the virtual public sphere. Based on the explained background, the researcher is interested to study how are the roles of social media as a virtual public sphere channel to move masses, case study on charity action for motorcycle taxi (online ojek) driver Sri Rahardjo in a donation invitation invited by Twitter account @elsyandria?

2. Theoretical Study

Habermas Public Sphere Theory

Public sphere theory was explained by Habermas (1991) who critically thought about liberal democracy, civil society, public life and social change in the 20th century. Habermas started his idea by making formula regarding bourgeois politics which in his view it had function to bridge the concerns of private people in social, economic, and family life that got to grips with demands and concerns of social and public life.

In history, public sphere is a place in which individual and government authorities are met within the discussion and critical debate about public matters. That kind of discussion has function as counterweight to political authority in face-to-face meeting in public areas with the physically occurred. Habermas saw dynamic public sphere as positive power protecting authorities within their limits, so their decisions are not humiliated.

Moreover, Habermas had view that in this public sphere private people gather to form a public, in which public logical reasoning will work to oversee the running of state power. In this context a condition is finally created, in which individual and group are able to form public opinion (Habermas, 1991).

Virtual Public Sphere

Public sphere can be comprehended as opened “social sphere” in which the society can freely build and express their opinion without pressure and coercion done by any people. The development of *Information Communication Technology* brings the virtual public sphere emerging to the surface. Therefore, in the recent years the social media is getting stronger to become virtual public sphere. The virtual public sphere is artificial “imaginary space” or “virtual”, in which every person can do everything which they usually done in everyday life in new ways (Lim, 2002).

Virtual public spheres are in virtual communities that have different social interaction characteristics from real communities. In the real communities’ life, social actors’ identities who establish interactions are more clearly identified. Within them, there are embedded symbols which indicate group affiliation, class, and ideology. Meanwhile, in the life of the virtual community the identity is hidden behind the sign (account). In this community life, information about political issues can spread very quickly and reach very wide audiences. Various forms of transaction which are occurred from public issues also take place openly, or able to penetrate the boundaries of agreed political norms and ethics (Usman, 2014).

The interesting thing from virtual public sphere can be summarized in to three, they are: (1) identity of social actors hidden behind signs, (2) Political issues are spread quickly and reach very wide audience without being limited by space and time, and, (3) The community is then directed to develop their lives through social networks (*the network society*) (Sari & Siahainenia, 2015). The most popular example of social network sites are Facebook, Twitter (microblogging), Instagram (photo and video sharing), and Youtube (video sharing).

Social media platforms have possibility to retain various controls of users in the personal network creation, such as “add a friend”, “subscribe” on certain channel, or “follow” other users (Junaedi, 2011). Social media also offers subplatform, direct chat, and integrate various digital object such as video and photo. Since social media is based on internet, the users can create network, have communication with other people, and do other activities in realtime. Besides, the users who use social network for supporting their activities can be one step ahead of those who do not use it.

There are four principals to generate social media as virtual public sphere. First, the principle of equality which means equal rights for all individuals or groups on social media to access information, disseminate and discuss it for the common good (*collective interest*). Second, the principle of freedom of

responsibility in which all parties free to utter and express their idea as long as it is done without violating the corridors and the rule of law. Third, principle of independence, it means that all entities on social media have rights and freedom of opinion and expression without fear of intimidation and threats from any authority (state, society or religion). Fourth, social media in the concept of network society are connected to each other. The development of information and communication technology has made the world like a landscape without borders (*the flat world*).

3. Research Method

The research was conducted using descriptive qualitative approach to describe how social media roles, as a virtual public sphere channel, moves masses in a charity action initiated by personal actor. This research used study case research method of charity action for motorcycle taxi driver (online ojek) Sri Rahardjo in the donation invitation invited by Twitter account @elsyandria. Technique of collecting data was conducted by documentation technique through secondary data collection in the form of news and information about charity actions for motorcycle taxi driver (online ojek) Sri Rahardjo in the donation invitation invited by Twitter account @elsyandria published in print media and electronic social media.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

Social movement is an activity aiming to make a change in society. Social movements can also be a form of response to phenomenon which occurs in society. Previously, many social actions are initiated or carried out by organizations or corporations. The actions can be donation, training, or activity that requires direct involvement in the community. Due to social action done repeatedly or regularly and planned, those activities turn into a social movement.

Nowadays, the presence of social media gives impact to social action or social movement which was previously initiated by organization or corporate. Therefore, recently, there are many individuals have emerged to invite the community to take an action which can provide change and impact in society.

Tiffani Danitz dan Warren P. Strobel (2011) expressed that the development of information technology has helped society activist to achieve their movement's goal by exposing issues, facilitating public education, and mass mobilization to support the movement.

The charity action carried out by the owner of the @elsyandria account through the Twitter platform in mid-January 2020 was one of the phenomena of using social media that was able to mobilize the masses through social movements in fundraising. On January 18, 2020 the @elsyandria account posted the story of her experience meeting with online motorcycle taxi driver named Sri Rahardjo at almost midnight at Bogor Station. The @elsyandria account wrote in quite detail about her meeting with Sri Rahardjo, an online motorcycle taxi driver. Not only explaining her interactions with Sri Raharjo, the account @elsyandria also wrote her opinion of Sri Raharjo's figure, both in terms of what she saw and what she told in the conversation.

Sri Rahardjo, as written on the post of @elsyandria account, is an online motorcycle taxi driver who is 68 years old. At that age, Sri Rahardjo still works hard until midnight even with his limitations. The persistence which is existed along with Sri Rahardjo's limitations prompted @elsyandria account to write about Sri Raharjo's figure as well as to hold fundraising to help improving Sri Rahardjo's condition. The followings are some quotes of @elsyandria account's post which told about her experience when she met with Sri Rahardjo.



Image 1. @Elsyandria account's post on Twitter, January 18, 2020

The sharhere are many stories shared on social media and it finally becomes viral because the shared stories are related to humanity, so it gets more attention. The post of the owner of @elsyandria account related to online motorcycle driver, Sri Rahardjo, is phenomenon example which is able to attract many parties symphaty. As a result, the charity action carried out by the owner of the @elsyandria account managed to collect donations totaling up to hundreds of millions of rupiah. Mentioned in her post, the donations received were even beyond the expectation of the @elsyandria account owner. The owner of the @elsyandria account who was originally moved to hold fundraising just to buy a new cellphone for Sri Rahardjo and get service for his motorcycle, in the end, she was able to help more by buying a new motorcycle and renovating Sri Rahardjo's house. The following is one of post of @elsyandria account on her Twitter.

“Dear twitter saya percaya dengan kekuatan media sosial,kita bisa menjadi jembatan rezeki untuk orang lain ♥ @gojekindonesia” (Akun Twitter Elsy Sandria @elsyandria, January 18, 2020)

(Dear Twitter, I believe in social media power, we can be a bridge of fortune for other people ♥ @gojekindonesia” (Twitter account of Elsy Sandria @elsyandria, January 18, 2020)

The choice of using Twitter social media here also supports the success of the donation action carried out by @elsyandria, where the Twitter account in this donation action is transformed into a virtual public space that has the power to play a constructive role in fundraising purposes (Phethean, Tiropanis, & Harris, 2015). The belief that the Twitter account @elsyandria has in the power of social media for the success of raising donations for charity actions is supported by the narrative of the message conveyed. In his post, Bakhan, the owner of the Twitter account @elsyandria, packaged a message accompanied by a picture as tangible evidence of the intention that was built to strengthen the invitation to donate.

The transformation of social media as a virtual public sphere in charity actions initiated by the @elsyandria account can be seen from the study of the four principles which underlie social media as a virtual public sphere. First, the nature of the conversation that @elsyandria opened on Twitter provides space for anyone to respond in comments, likes, and shares. It can be seen from societies' response on Twitter post of @elsyandria regarding her written charity action. The post got 78.8 thousand likes, and 68.8 thousand comments. In this case, @elsyandria account opens communication and interaction chance on the post which she made. All people have chance and opportunity to become part of formed communication. This is in accordance with the principle of equality for social media as virtual public sphere. The principle of equality here means that there are equal rights for all individuals or groups on social media to access information, disseminate and discuss it for the sake of collective interest.

Second, the charity action initiated by @elsyandria fulfills the principle of freedom of responsibility in which all parties free to utter and express their idea. Freedom, here, means the expressed ideas do not violate applicable law. The Twitter conversation opened by the @elsyandria account opens space for anyone to convey their ideas in relation to social movements in charity actions to help others.

Third, the conversation formed by the post of @elsyandria related to charity action which will be conducted fulfills independence principal, in which all entities have rights and freedom to express their opinion without without fear of intimidation and threats from any authorities. In this case, there is no limit from any authorities which limits the space for movement and freedom of opinion from anyone who responds either in likes, comments, or shares. All parties who take part in the conversation built by @elsyandria are free from intervention; hence it can minimize the possibility of the emergence of hegemonic practices from other authorities which generate the independence of social media creates a climate of healthy discussion and dialogue.

Fourth, social media in the concept of network society are connected to each other. The character of social media basically has mechanism and pattern of relations between individuals which are almost similar to social relations in the real world. However, social media is able to reduce distance and able to cancel face-to-face obligations in interaction and communication. The principle of network society which can transform social media into virtual public sphere can be seen from how the conversation started by the @elsyandria account is able to be a place where people can connect with one another with topics of conversation related to charity actions organized by @elsyandria.

The fulfillment of the four principles of equality, responsible freedom, independence, and the formation of a network society in the charity action initiated by the @elsyandria account through the Twitter and Instagram platforms, is tangible form which social media has been transformed into virtual public sphere based on the phenomena happened. Next, formed virtual public sphere is also able to birth social movements which have many impacts.

In one of the posts on the @elsyandria account, it can be seen that the owner of the @elsyandria account understands very well that social media has great potential to move masses and carry out fundraising through Twitter platform:

“Tidak menyangka akan viral, akhirnya saya menyimpulkan bahwa, seriap orang mempunyai kekuatan tersendiri, energi tersendiri, karena Allah memanglah pemilik sebarang-banyaknya jalan, cara dan petunjuk. Ada waktunya, semua ada masanya.” (Twitter account @elsyandria, January 18, 2020). *(Didn't think it would go viral, I finally concluded that, everyone has their own strength, their own energy, because God is the owner of as many ways, and directions as possible. There is a time, and everything has a time.)* (Twitter account @elsyandria, January 18, 2020).

The owner of the @elsyandria account hopes that her posts will be seen by her followers and there will be people who are moved to participate in helping Sri Rahardjo, and it was finally realized and became viral.

By making social media to be virtual public sphere, the constructive potential of social media can be maximized. If it is realized, social media can be an important capital for constructive and not destructive social transformation. Basically, social media is neutral and value free. However, the enormity of social media power is able to become a channel to initiate and realize social transformation movements. In other words, social media can be constructive, but on the other hand it can be destructive. The power of social media to be inclined towards destructive or constructive will largely depend on the

use of social media itself. The users can highlight the destructive side of social media, or otherwise maximize its constructive potential.

The charity actions carried out by the owner of the @elsyandria account can be categorized as constructive side of social media. The virtual public sphere is instantly formed when other individuals comment on the Instagram and Twitter pages of @elsyandria. Discussions started by parties who have similar vision, and they gave support in sentences of support, words of admiration, up to the donations which were finally collected.

Finally, the initiation of charity actions carried out by the owner of the @elsyandria account as individual through social media as virtual public sphere has been able to generate a movement of concern in big waves. Even though the parties who contributed to being donors in this charity action for online motorcycle taxi drivers do not know each other, the constructive role of social media itself has moved the masses in the virtual public sphere change.

Conclusion

This research aimed to analyze one example of real actions regarding how social media as virtual public sphere channel contributes to social movement development. In addition, social media also have possibility to generate the society having network across borders, interact in real time, and generate beneficiaries from the movement.

Charity action for online motorcycle taxi driver, Sri Rahardjo, in the donation invitation invited by Twitter account @elsyandria became important case study which can explain that even individual actor is able to bring a chance through network power formed in social media in a virtual public sphere channel. In this case, social media have transformed to be virtual public sphere which gives birth to constructive public discourse, so it is more oriented towards common interests and able to become a motor in caring movement for others.

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