HOW TRENDS SHAPE THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Malaysia and Indonesia

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Chapter

5

New Media and the Delusions of Freedom: From the Ethical to Political Economy Problem

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INTRODUCTION

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Many people easily assume digital technology revolution is an important instrument for enhancing the democratic process. Some people also believe digital media platforms will further strengthen the emergence of democratic participation and political freedom. But is it true that the development of digital technology can be in line with the increasing quality of democracy? In the context of developing countries such as Indonesia, this phenomenon is interesting to study more deeply. This chapter intends to critically examine these optimistic premises, as well

Content

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Since 1994, online media has developed and begun to be widely practiced in Indonesia, so that it cannot be completely said to be a new thing. Many local or national printed mass media have launched their online versions for profit differentiation purposes. For example, Tempo Interaktif (interaktif.tempo.co), in response to the banned pressures experienced by its print press at that time, is now developing and competing with other online media such as detik.com, suratkabar.com, or Mandiri Online (Ruky & Hasan, 2020). Currently, there are hundreds of official Indonesian news sites using an "online digital" service platform for information packaging. This does not include unofficial sites that take part in this internet virtual business.

Digital platforms enlivened the media industry business in Indonesia in early 2004 along with the development of various types of social media which are increasingly

becoming favorite media for the public, such as YouTube (2005), Facebook (2006), Twitter (2008) and Path (2010). The media industry is still controlled by a group of old conglomerates. In 2011, a research on "media ownership" by Merlyna Lim noted thirteen media groups controlling all commercial television stocks, own five of the six highest-circulating newspapers, the four most popular online media sites, most radio networks, and a "significant number" of most local television networks. Lim's (2010) research shows corporate interests have gained dominant power in the entire landscape of media ownership in Indonesia. This finding of data is also confirmed by the results of other research, such as those conducted by Ignatius Haryanto or Yanuar Nugroho et al. in Tapsell (2018), regarding the portrait of media control in Indonesia. In 2012 Yanuar Nugroho found twelve large media groups controlled almost all media channels in Indonesia, both print media, television and digital media (Tapsell, 2018, p. 75).

Due to the demands of the development of digital technology, many media companies have changed their business strategies. Media convergence on a multi-platform basis continues. It could be said that the players operating in the new media sector were no different from the old rulers of the media. This transformation is imperative that must be done to face the media business competition. The power of the conglomerate, which is equipped with its various platforms, is quite dominant and at the same time far more resilient because of its large funding support. Media Group, Jawa Pos Group, Kompas Group, Lippo Group, CT Group, Global Media Com and EMTEk are all powerful conglomerates in the media competition in Indonesia. They all have industrial power in the digital online media sector.

In his critical note, Tapsell pointed out basic findings related to digital development trends in Indonesia. Digital media is a space, confirming the divergence of Indonesian society. What Tapsell meant was the divergence between elites trying to exert influence through their big conglomerates and ordinary citizens who wanted a change. This contest has become a key feature of politics for a period of time when the new media business began to develop (Tapsell, 2018, p. 227).

In contrast to conventional mass media, new media, especially social media types, have combined various features allowing for various communication opportunities, not only between individuals, but also on a group scale even on a very broad mass scale. Social media allows everyone to become a communicator who produces and simultaneously disseminates

information messages to an unlimited public. Hyper-actuality and interactivity are social media's comparative advantages compared to conventional media, which are patterned on a more or less linear communication model (Sudibyo, 2019, p. 211).

New Media: Hope and Anxiety

In general, the development of new media is considered to provide great hope for the world community (Rogers, 1986, p. 30). It is considered to have contributed to increasing the acceleration of progress and the quality of a more open democratic space arrangement. The world community will be more open and not isolated. This growth of media is optimistically believed to be the 'foundation of freedom and democracy' (Wilhelm, 2003, p. 6-14). It is also believed to be able to create openness and accelerate interaction between humans. Its presence brings great hopes about the advancement of civilization which can overcome various obstacles in "space" and "time".

The main problem is the quality of media content. This anxiety arises mainly because of the argument that the novelty of media technology does not exist in a value-free space. The position of media control and ownership determines the tendency to control the formulated content of the media. Since the beginning, the development of digital technology can not only be interpreted as a physical change in technology, but as part of the transformation of a new form of power. The digital revolution is brought about by the driving engine, namely the logic of the market economy, which assumes that technology is an important means and instrument to help control and dominate the market. Technology is not merely a passive instrument but is designed according to specific motivations and interests. Therefore, technology is essentially never neutral and value-free.

In the digital media control mechanism, freedom is not entirely freedom, but is freedom within the limitations of choice (Sudibyo, 2019, p. 244). These choices are deliberately provided and in fact they limit our choices of freedom. It is as if we are in freedom. These are the illusions and paradoxes which are very evident in the promises made by new media technologies. The resulting social risks will be quite considerable if the instrumentalist reasoning of this media becomes the heart of our awareness in using the media. This problem will be compounded by serious risks regarding privacy controls and control over personal data, which is very vulnerable to misuse. This transformation of the

face of digital capitalism has created a phenomenon known as "surveillance capitalism", a very specific logic condition of capital accumulation which has emerged simultaneously with the development of digital technology. This impact is manifested in various important concepts such as "internet of things", "cloud of things", and "big data" which greatly influence privacy controls, personal data, and freedom and democracy (Zuboff, 2019).

The presence of new virtual technologies such as internet networking and online media contributes to the transformation of a new 'material civilization' and at the same time contributes to the dynamics of the cultural system of society which is currently developing rapidly (Ellul, 1980, p. 1). The complexity of the relationship between humans and technology in all its dimensions has given rise to many theoretical views. Many people appreciate it as a natural necessity, but many also give critical notes. The presence of new media today is closely related to the fundamental problem of material technological civilization. Technology is no longer conceptualise as a technical device issue but is conceived as a vast entity which is an integral part of human civilization. Technological tools as a mediator between humans and the world are part of the bodily human experience (Ihde, 2008, p. 100-108).

The sophistication, effectiveness and speed of technology (Mitchan & Mackey, 1983, p. 1-4) of new media in packaging news unconsciously influence the subject to follow the 'technical logic and patterns' inherent in the body of technology. The most important thing is the issue of technical performance rather than the content and meaning of the news. The limitations of the subject to reach media technology as a whole, often make the effects and consequences of the technology, not easily controlled by humans. In Don Ihde's in Lim (2008) terminology, the creation of more sophisticated technology will give birth to a tendency toward unconscious goals (Latent Telic). In the heart of modern knowledge, Mark Hokheimer once critically dismantled "modern rationality" which still had a congenital flaw, namely the 'crisis of technological rationality' which had side effects and consequences, which were difficult to predict and sometimes counterproductive to its original ethical spirit (Sindhunata, 1987).

The main problem that is always present is that the progress and sophistication of the technical format of technology is not always able to automatically meet the basic needs of "truth", "meaningfulness", "mutual understanding" of the expected communication will

(Wolton, 2007, p. 214). Through special filtering and coding, namely through cognitive conventions transforming media ideas and interests, the technological rationality of the media increasingly encourages and creates a greater distortion of communication. This is the serious problem of mediated mass communication, which emphasizes surface rather than substance. Jean Baudrillard's in Hidayat (2012) critical exclamation could have hit the spot that "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning". This session wants to emphasize that in the new media era, a lot of media is more oriented towards the pragmatic goals of reporting but reduce the important dimensions such as ethical principle.

The Distorted Rationality of Communication

There are several important problems need to be noted related to the increasing trend of the media technology revolution, especially in terms of autonomy, mastery and speed. First, the assumptions of acceleration and mastery are in some ways problematic if they are not put into the more humane basic spirit of communication, namely building equality and mutual understanding. Has this technology space really led to the correct communication *habitus* as promised? In reality, the mediated reality of life cannot always describe the more complicated reality. It sometimes contradicts the assumptions of speed and mastery. Sometimes the existing reality is determined by various interactions of meanings created in a concrete world whose processes often have to be slow. The pursuing for real time news with faster deadlines in online media mechanisms has tended to unwittingly build a pattern of imagining reality beyond the true reality.

Second, instead of being able to form a human communicative rationality, instrumental rationality with dominant economic motives distorts reality into fictional reality framed in the sensation and the construction of virtual media. The great utopia that online media is able to shape and present accurate, fast, free of access, and interactive information content, data and news is more of a problematic categorical imperative. Representation of reality does not operate in "empty air", but in the interest scheme of news which is no longer value-free. On the extreme side, it often goes beyond the true "reality of understanding" and forms a completely different "hyperreality". This is actually a typical paradox of communication systems mediated in virtual worlds.

The logic of speed also encourages the media to prioritize the packaging of performance and presentation of information rather than the quality of the content and meaning of the news. Quietly, due to the increasingly advanced technical capabilities of the media, what is present is not the truth of content but technical performance in the form of schemes that are linked to the essence of media techniques in the form of normal transitions and programmed based on abstraction (Haryatmoko, 2007, p. 27). The performance formalism of how information should be packaged is more important than building information depth. It is in this tendency of formalism that the distortion of communication is becoming more widespread and increasingly unavoidable. When this distorted formalism is accustomed to a culture in expressing the news, the ethical spirit to build a correct information space will be lost.

Media Reason and Market Dominance

It is rather difficult not to attribute the development of today's digital media technology for the sustaining movement of economic reasoning. In the market sense, anything which can be sold and makes a profit will be the goal. The market is not passive. Generally, the market will always encourage any method and way of thinking to support the profit sustainability. The current 'neoliberal' economic system has been able to ground its powerful creed and mantra to convince the whole society that it is important to fully believe in the "market logic" that only this system is the best and should be adhered to in building a better society order in the future. The matrix of "profitability" has even influenced people's attitudes, ways of thinking and behaving (Wibowo & Wahono, 2003). Operating and metamorphosing technological imperatives are often not easily controlled by the sublimated power of human consciousness. Especially by those who are far from the reach of power who determine how technology should be structured. The relationship between the user or consumer society and technology has positioned society as simply a user. The pattern of relations is governed by all technical mechanisms and categorical imperatives of value inherent in technology. Most of these relationship cultures are developing rapidly in the third world countries such as Indonesia, which mostly only stand as a consumer society rather than a producer. As a consumer, he is always faced with the given choices. The paradox is easy to develop. This process inevitably influences the formation of a mentality and culture in using technology.

Jürgen Habermas in Hardiman (2003), gave a reflective and theoretic note about how humans perceive all their life relationships with technology. Habermas is one of those thinkers who does not want to be indulged in blind optimism about technology. But he was also neither pessimistic nor opposed to advances in the presence of modern technology in society. It is not technique and technology *an sich* which threatens modern human freedom, but a disturbance in the dimension of 'communication' that needs to be re-examined. The important point, as quoted by Franz Magnis Suseno (Suseno, 2005, p. 28), is that objective rationality is not entirely wrong. It is rationality in the field of work, in human relations with nature. The relations among humans cannot be captured in the rationality of the object. This is where the important point of developing human relationships, that is to promote communicative rationality (Suseno, 2005, p. 29).

When Habermas's normative framework is confronted with the current problem of media industrialisation praxis, what is very important is the constant struggle to examine more critically whether the structure of democratic relations, which is an important foundation of public life, has led to a real democratic situation, including the right to regulates how technology for the public should be determined. Has the built public discourse have shown the characteristics of free communication, truth-oriented and upholding equality and mutual understanding? If this situation has not been established, the public communication habitus, at least according to this theoretical belief, will always be colored by distortions of interests, both visible (manifest) or hidden (latent). To make matters worse, technology in this situation also takes over the incompatible realm of human existence. Instead, it resulted in a distortion of communication that was getting worse. This situation has given rise to many crises in modern society.

Habermas's theory of communicative actions with the dimensions of language interaction, even though it seems utopian, makes a valuable contribution to creating an understanding of communicative actions which can minimize distortion. At the same time, it builds an ethical foundation for a new vision of communication in modern society. What is most important about human communication is how to find basic common ground and build an egalitarian consensus of meaning with others. The creation of consensus is very important to encourage rationality of communication that can bridge differences and distortions across cultures (Jones, 2009, p. 237). Even the use of techniques and technology must always be built in this basic spirit. If not, then technology will again fall into the inhuman practice of

controlling others. If this is the case, then the occurring social changes will only give birth to many "pathological realities" rather than the actual human emancipation (Hardiman, 2003, p. 18), such as social inequality, injustice, poverty, oppression, environmental pollution, violence, and other humanitarian problems.

Conclusion

There are three main conclusions in this chapter. First, the development of new media has not entirely had a positive influence on the democratization process, which economically and politically still dominates the direction of the political journey itself. Second, the intervention of economic liberalization in the democratic public sphere actually causes democracy to not run completely. Third, it requires governance of access to ownership and management of new media technology that is more oriented towards a better vision of developing a democratic public sphere.

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