Digital Democracy in Popular Culture: Nurhadi-Aldo as Meme and Political Critics

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ABSTRACT

Digital Democracy in Popular Culture: Meme and Political Critics. Meme has become a popular subculture that cannot be separated from the internet sphere. Meme have become an agent of free speech that allows a discourse to be communicated, changed, dispersed without the need of conventional conversation. The upcoming Presidential Election 2019 in Indonesia has become one of the discourses that often, using memes as its agent. Memes, while being a medium of expressed humor and satire, also become a media critic of Indonesian democracy practices. This research is a descriptive qualitative research with data collection method through observation and literature studies. This journal sees the meme of Nurhadi-Aldo as a discourse of political criticism wrapped in comedy and satire in response to the 2019 Presidential Election using structuralism approach from Anthony Giddens.

Keywords: Internet, Memes

INTRODUCTION

On the last April 17, 2019, the Indonesian people will re-celebrate the democratic event marked by conducting the Presidential Election of the Republic of Indonesia (PILPRES) 2019. The general election in Indonesia is not new, where the first general election was held in 1955 to elect members of the House of Representative (DPR) and members of the Constitutional Council. However, the general elections in Indonesia are held periodically and regularly after 1971 with a period of 5 years.

In the upcoming 2019 ELECTIONS, the General Election Commission (KPU) has set up two candidates to take part in the 2019 presidential ELECTION. The candidate partner are the incumbent Joko Widodo and Ma'ruf Amin with arrangement number 1, and Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno with arrangement number 2. By the time the writer was composing this journal, a series of presidential election activities have entered the presidential and vice-presidential campaign period, on September 23, 2018-13 April 2019. During this campaign period, presidential and vice-presidential debates were also held and can be watched live via electronic media for instance television as well as online media in live broadcasts.

Political campaign was intended to convey the vision, mission and work programs of each candidate aimed to persuade the public to elect the relevant presidential and vice-

presidential candidates. As said by Charles U. Larson, political campaigns oriented to certain candidates are motivated by the desire to gain power in politics, in this case to become President and Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia for the period of 2019-2024.

The increasement of internet users in Indonesia since 2008, the stream of information about the latest news was flowing massively every day. This is shown by the increasing number of cell phone users from 124.81 million (54.61%) in 2008 to 371.4 million (142%) of the total population of 262 million in 2017. Of this amount, based on data WeAreSocial.Sg, internet users in Indonesia in 2017 reached 132.7 million, with a penetration of 51% of the population. While active social media users reached 106 million (40% penetration), and active mobile users reached 92 million (35% penetration) of the total population. Therefore, logically the presidential and vice-presidential campaign was also carried out through these online media, to be expected that it will be easier and faster in communicating the vision, mission and work programs offered.

These process of campaigning through online media then creates a topic of discussion among society, due to the openness of information access on the candidates presidential and vice-presidential candidates. This information is not only bound on the vision, mission, and work program, but also covers all matters related to both presidential and vice-presidential candidates such as the supporting political parties, the track record of each candidate, etc., which results in a heated political climate in Indonesia even before the arrangement of the Presidential Election activities began.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a descriptive qualitative research that focuses on the describing a phenomenon. This research is expected to give new point of view in analyzing a discourse, especially in describing how the visual language in meme, both verbal and non-verbal, to be able to convey meaning. To make contributions in visual communication design sector, especially in active campaigns that use online media. This research can also be considered for further research, in addition, this research is also expected to be one of the guidelines for graphic designers about how messages are constructed in campaigns and the use of online media for sharing.

Literature Review

Richard Dawkins (1976) first introduced the term meme to describe the mutation of human genes in the scattering, replication, and modification of ideas in the context of cultural evolution. In the application, the meme is one of the ways in which ideas are imitated, distributed, and mediated from person to person, through interaction or speech, both through analog and digital medium (Brunello, 2012). According to Brodie in Sandy (2016) Meme is a replication of information received by humans in which the information is related to various social events experienced by humans so that the information is created and copied even more. Whereas in popular terms in the mass media, meme is better known as replication of an image with text added where the text has meaning related to the topic to be discussed. (Sandy, 2016) Whereas according to

(Yun, 2014) Meme is a connection of the text and images, or the integration of images with text, where this element of text and images should not be separated, both of them must present, when one of the elements is missing, the context of the meme will be lost and the continuity of the text and the picture will also be lost. The term Meme was popular in 2009 with the presence of yeahmahasiswa.com website which contain parody of daily student life, for instance parody of students who are undertaking their final assignments, or parody of students problems in doing their thesis, but the scope of the meme itself is growing wider not only discuss the topic of student life, but grows into the topic of politics, and this meme is shared by netizens through various social media and sites on the internet (Sandy, 2016)

Satire

Definition of Satire according to the Oxford dictionary, satire has a purpose in exposing and criticizing the people's mistakes, thus, a satire always has a criticism function (Berger, 1997). Satire is usually packed in a mild form of humor that has sarcasm or irony. While the definition of Graphic Satire is a message with a satirical tone that is packaged in visual form. According to Steven Heller (1981), there are 5 techniques in creating a satirical graphic, namely:

1. Expressing/ something in a strange, and unusual way.

2. Distortion, using hyperbole

3. Contrast, using things that have the opposite paradoxical nature, or irony.

4. Indirection, using metaphors, symbols, parodies, etc.

5. Surprise, using unexpected logic.

Agent and Structure Relations

According to Anthony Giddens, the interaction between agent and structure forms a new rules or norms, which is then known as structuration. The interaction created to become a resource that allows the memes which can spread to reproduce themselves, with a structure and production that has a characteristic.

Structuralism

Structuralism is an ideology or a viewpoint which says that all societies and cultures have a common and permanent structure, where the purpose of Structuralism is to find out for the deepest structures of reality that appear disordered and diverse on the surface in a scientific manner (goal, strict and distant). (Roen, 2011)

The characteristics of the structure be:

- Looks irregular on its surface, but there is a constant mechanism.

- Besides being constant, the mechanism also has a pattern and organized, it has elements blocks that can be used and combined to explain on the surface.

- Considered aim by the researchers, who can keep a distance from the factual in their research.

- Its approach used is like a language, which shows the elements according to the purpose of delivering a message. As in language there are micro elements to mark it, namely pronunciation and sounding.

- Structuralism is considered beyond humanism, since it tends to reduce, and ignore the role of the subject.

DISCUSSION

The upcoming 2019 Presidential Election drew the attention to society because it is the second time the same precedential candidates had competed for the presidency. Public participation in supporting selected candidates is increasing. The limited number of candidates to be chosen creates the polarization of votes in the public to be more obvious. Especially in an online world where everyone can express their opinions and show their support for one candidate. This phenomenon is by what happened in the 2014 presidential election, where online media became an interactive medium for both candidates' supporters.

Nurhadi-Aldo as a parody pair of presidential candidates

Figure 1. Nurhadi-Aldo
Source: http://instagram.com/Nurhadi_Aldo

The polarization of the parties was resulted from the result of the previous Presidential Election, the tension between the two supporting parties is heating up which can be seen on online social media such as Facebook, Instagram, etc. there is new occurrence which did not occur in the previous Election, which is the appearance of the third candidate pair who became the polarization vote solver.
The candidate pair is Nurhadi-Aldo, who appeared as a meme since December 2018. Nurhadi is a masseur from Kudus, while Aldo is a fictional character made up from merging faces of several Indonesian politicians. The appearance of this pair is due to the

many black campaigns done by both official 2019 Presidential Election candidates' supporters. Society started to be separated. Nurhadi-Aldo has come to reduce conflicts between both parties (interview with BBC, 2019). The candidate pair has succeeded in attracting citizens' attention, since it was first uploaded in December 2018, until now the couple has more than 180,000 followers on Facebook, 480,000 followers on Instagram, and 110,000 followers on Twitter.

Figure 2. Nurhadi-Aldo Poster
Source: http://facebook.com/DildoforIndonesia

Visually, the Nurhadi-Aldo pair has an organized graphical system. In the picture above can be noticed several things that make this pair interesting:

1. The use of a simple color palette having red and white dominant colors, which is identical to the flag of the Republic of Indonesia with gray as a tertiary color. This color choice makes graphics clean and easy to read by the audience.
2. Photo of Nurhadi-Aldo candidate pair wearing red and white koko clothes paired with black cap is similar with the image commonly displayed by Indonesian politicians.
3. The setting of contrasting the letters to form sexually suggestive words in the abbreviation of the candidate name (Nurhadi-Aldo is abbreviated to ' Dildo') and the name of the Coalition (Koalisi tronjal-tronjol maha asyik) makes the pair name and coalition name easy to be remembered by the audience.
4. The pun on the English word used as the candidate slogan "McQueen YaQueen" (pronounced "more convincing") makes the pair's slogan extremely easy to remember since it has comedy elements.

This graphical system is applied to almost all online media which is uploaded, both by the Nurhadi-Aldo team, as well as by netizen. This method was also be done by the Jokowi- Amin pair. This pair uses a more colorful graphics system with information content in the form of vision-mission socialization, explanation of Jokowi's achievements during his tenure, quotation of presidential and vice-presidential candidates, etc. In selecting media, the pair of Jokowi-Amin chose to use Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as the main medium.

Figure 3. Posts uploaded example of the Jokowi-Amin candidate
Source: http://facebook.com/jokowi.amin

In addition, the use of the graphic system has also been used by the Prabowo-Sandi couple who supply a visual identity manual that regulates the use of logos, and format samples of several types of media, including banners, billboards, profile pictures, etc.

Figure 4. Prabowo-Sandi Visual Identity Guide
Source: http://prabowo-sandi.com

The Prabowo-Sandi candidate use red and white dominant colors in their graphics system so that they are matching with the red and white flag image. This candidate also uses several photography in their campaign media. Prabowo-Sandi chose to use the website as the main media to convey their vision and mission, moreover there is also

content in the webpage that can be downloaded so that supporters can use the same graphical system in each upload on the Prabowo-Sandi candidate pair. Beside web, an official Instagram account is also used which has more of the activities of candidate pairs and other content that is also like a persuasion.

Figure 5. Prabowo-Sandi webpage
Source: http://prabowo-sandi.com

Satire and criticism of Nurhadi-Aldo
The most visible difference from Nurhadi-Aldo's social media post compared to the two official candidate pairs can be seen from the organic interaction that occurs between the messenger and the audience. The messages conveyed were also loaded with humor and satire which sometimes added criticism of the political life and daily life.

Figure 6. Example of the Nurhadi-Aldo post
Source: http://instagram.com/Nurhadi_Aldo

An example can be seen in Figure 7 below which reads "Nasionalisme hanyalah dalih penguasa untuk mengont(r)ol rakyat". Besides providing another perspective on

nationalism, Nurhadi-Aldo also slipped sexual humor which consistent with other content by removing one letter so that it had a different meaning. It is still within the context of a general election, where the content of nationalism is still one of the most often used topics by each candidate by giving the impression that when someone does not vote for him, then that person's nationalism is lacking or even none. In addition, there is a connotative meaning of the phrase 'penguasa mengont(r)ol rakyat which indirectly means that the government 'exploiting' the people using an excuse of nationalism.

Figure 7. Example of a Nurhadi-Aldo post spiced with sexual jokes
Source: http://instagram.com/Nurhadi_Aldo

Other examples of criticism addressed to college students and demonstration is shown in the Figure below:

Figure 8. Example of a Nurhadi-Aldo post
Source: http://instagram.com/Nurhadi_Aldo

In the picture says "Ikut masa aksi jangan cuma selfie mahasiswa goblok!" This post is accompanied by the following information:

> "Not only has the governing class that became Nurhadi's focus pointed in his every criticism. The college student's situation was also became the attention of the man with the ability in genital masseur. According to him, most students nowadays were only study and pursue fast graduation without understanding the surrounding social reality. The meaning of the students today has deviated from the "Agent of change" become Job search and wealthy Agent. On the contrary, a minority of college students who understand social reality even use the demonstration as a place for selfies. Nurhadi engage all students not to be afraid of future since the future are in their hand if they united.

> #McQueenYqueen #NurhadiAldo

This post highlights current students who are experiencing characteristic shifts compared to students who are actively engaged as agents of change who act as supervisors of the ongoing democratic process in Indonesia such as in 1998 where the student movement became one of the crucial factors that played a role in the revolutionary war.

More than just a meme

The distribution of the Nurhadi-Aldo meme is like the competing pair candidates, which is having vision, mission as well as legislative candidates. The meme distribution in general are not owned by a particular agency and is free to be modified by anyone, however the Nurhadi-Aldo meme is an anomaly, since it has an 'official post' in which all post uploaded by supporting team while the meme is the created by netizen appears in the form of video or photo support, and the post seems to be as a legislative candidate from Nurhadi-Aldo.

Figure 9. Example of Nurhadi-Aldo legislative candidate's post
Source: http://instagram.com

This post of legislative candidates allowed Netizen to competing their creativity in composing sentences that are humorous but reflecting netizen's current anxiety. From the figure 9 above, the title used refers to a song that is popular in the community, and the slogan and contents of the work program have an expression of anxiety that indirectly reflects the anxiety of community in general, specifically on point number 3 which is "Memberikan duit belanja minimal 1M per bulan". This post is following the netizen conditions dominated by millennials and Z-generations who concerns about financial problems.

The relationship between agents and structures is clearer by analyzing the Nurhadi-Aldo meme. Where Netizen acted as the agent and supporting team of Nurhadi-Aldo played the role as structure maker. Although it is packed with parody nuances, the structures formed have a solid foundation. This can be seen from several posts that supply information toward hoax post on behalf of Nurhadi-Aldo which has the potential to be misused to attack one of the official candidate pairs (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Example of a Nurhadi-Aldo post
Source: http://instagram.com/Nurhadi_Aldo

The Nurhadi-Aldo supporting team became an active agent who keep the continuousness of the structure that had been built. This is in line with what was said by Zittrain (2014)," "At the base of a lot of the memes is an authentic, unguarded, involuntary moment. The communities around internet culture enforce this as a norm. If the authentic core that makes a meme relatable leads to commercialized popularity, it can retroactively reduce from its authenticity." The authenticity of a meme is a norm held by all netizen, therefore,

memes that have impure content and do not stand for a fair netizen will automatically sink into a sea of memes that circulate daily.

CONCLUSION

Meme is not something new in the way of communicating in cyberspace. The term meme was originally meant as socio-biological concept evolved into a distinctive cultural structure in which an image is spread through replication, duplication, and distribution, to become funnier and more unique pictures added with text having Comments on the Internet. Today memes are becoming a trend in expressing opinions to online media since of its simple to create and supported by freedom to express.

Memes are contextual and depend on the location and the conditions in which the meme is created, replicated, changed, and shared. In this study the context taken as background is the 2019 Presidential Election which become the main attention to the society.

The meme that appear in response to the 2019 Presidential Election are different from other memes and earlier elections since it is produced centrally.

This shows that meme, although their distribution can be extremely broad and free, can be united in a well-structured order if agreed upon by many people. Nurhadi-Aldo Meme becomes one of the historical memes that stand for the netizen opposition to the polarization of political parties in Indonesia, as well as resistance to the increasingly non-conducive political atmosphere. Moreover, memes that appear are having a stronger structure than the meme that appeared in the United States towards the United States Presidential elections in 2016, despite having a similar political climate character.

This study proves that meme in Indonesia has been growing very rapidly and can be used as digital record of accomplishment course of democracy in Indonesia and become an agent of change that stands for the public anxiety nowadays. Through memes, can help us to see the cognition and active involvement of the public towards the current social and political issues.

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