

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND NON VIOLENCE POLITICAL MOBILIZATION: CHALLENGES IN DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

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### ABSTRACT

In the context of an authoritarian government, social media can be a tool of protest and criticism of the government and mobilization to end all forms of violence and repression to support the democratic process. Social media encourages political participation through online interactions of information and ideas involving various civil groups and communities. Tunisia and Egypt in Arab spring phenomena were examples where social media plays a vital role in encouraging democratization and preventing prolonged conflict and violence by governments. However, on the other hand, social media can also give a threat and challenges to democratic stability because the massive dissemination of information cannot be adequately controlled and supervised by governments, where individuals or groups that are not responsible can spread hate speech, and fake news because of certain political motives. So regulation is needed as an instrument to criminalize perpetrators, as well as collaboration between civil society and the government in monitoring, civil society groups can utilize anti-hoax discussion groups to make literacy or education regarding the use of social media wisely and correctly in order community is not easily damaged understanding to maintaining democracy stability.

**Keywords :** *Challenges, Democratic Society, Social Media, Political Mobilization*

### INTRODUCTION

Democracy is considered as a choice in the order of state life. Values of equal rights and freedoms are the substance of the demands of citizens to encourage the birth of democracy. In its development, the spirit of democracy has engulfed a number of countries. There were at least three waves of democracy (Huntington, 1995). First, the beginning of the 19th century until the 1920s when America and a number of countries in Western Europe changed from authoritarianism to democracy. The second wave occurred in the period 1943-1962 when the newly independent states became a democracy, but in the 1950s, they were mired in civil or military authoritarianism. The third wave of democratization began in 1974 through the 1990s until now. This wave of democracy is far more complicated than the two previous waves of democracy. Four of them are weakening the legitimacy of the authoritarian regime, increasing globalization or economic liberalization, the impact of similar processes in the region (snowball effect), and external pressure.

Nevertheless, the development of democratic life experiences ups and downs, challenges, and obstacles. Globalization marked by advances in information technology gave

birth to many new media emerging, this is considered to strengthen democracy, and vice versa can threaten democracy. The emergence of social media as digital technology provides new space for political engagement, education, business, and even international relations (Olabamiji, 2014). This is characterized by the use of various communication formats such as images, video, text, and audio and is driven by a combination of information and communication technology via the internet (Bowman & Willis, 2003). Social media is very interesting because it differs from traditional media in three ways: First, the ability to facilitate two-way interaction with large numbers of people at the same time; Second, ability to connect users each other directly; Third, users are free to join in social media which costs very low. (Frentasia: Omede, 2015).

However, democracy has provided wider space in human communication, freedom of expression, and advancements in communication and information technology in the world today. As a trend, social media lately has changed the face of governance and democracy which is the main concern of social scientists. Social media is considered capable of becoming an instrument for strengthening political functions such as socialization and political participation of citizens that can strengthen and encourage democratic values (Breindl & Francq, 2008). Social media through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, etc. have empowered citizens to question and criticize all government policies that do not take sides.

This is what happened at the Arab Spring events in Egypt and Tunisia. Authoritarian policy regime, the brutal actions of the government apparatus, capable of mobilizing the community to encourage non-violence through social media, undermine the system of these countries towards a democratic transition. Where, social media as an instrument opens a place for people to connect, communicate, and participate in managing the governance of their country without resorting to violence. This is revolutionary because it can make greater and better improvements in demanding transparency, accountability, and democratic reform.

But it is undeniable that social media also becomes a tool that can threaten the stability of democracy, the euphoria of freedom to express opinions for online people (netizens) in a democratic country is used to spread hate speech, and hoaxes that trigger community polarization and can break down the unity of citizens. The ability of social media capable of bringing about social transformation, encouraging and advancing democracy is not in doubt. But the problem is the lack of regulation, ensuring regulation is implemented, and

control of social media is seen as a threat to democracy. The characteristics inherent in the internet and economic benefits are associated with the widespread adoption of technology that makes it difficult for governments to impose rules for new media as applied to traditional media (George, 2003).

Freedom of expression is a fundamental issue for democracy and essential for social media. Freedom of expression is the foundation on which social media is made. This article will further discuss social media which has become a trend, a space for opinion and expression that can advance democracy, but like a double-edged sword, the use of social media in politics also presents challenges and becomes a space that poses a threat to democracy itself.

### **Social Media, Non-Violence Political Mobilization Towards Democratization**

Social media and democracy focus on the issue of equality. One substance of democracy is equality in law. Likewise, social media networks provide equality to people regardless of their status. It is also important to mention here that the social media landscape is a form of citizen democracy that involves political rights to freedom of information access and information exchange (Dick, 2012). One pillar of democracy is access to information. Information is considered a source of life for democracy, so the lack of information causes a bad form of deformation (Ohiagu, 2010).

The role of social media in conversation can be seen in the Arab Spring or the Arab Revolution that engulfed the Middle East. The revolution in the Middle East cannot be separated from the role of social media and technology which caused this revolution to spread transnationally. The revolution that took place in the Middle East "Arab Spring" in early 2011 was seen as a fourth wave of democratization like the three waves of democratization examined by Huntington (Grand, 2011). The revolution is a 'liberal' response from authoritarianism that calls for political liberalization and democratization in the Middle East. Another perspective emphasizes the event as a process of democratization that is built naturally. This perspective looks at social movements that are present and growing, using technological advances to articulate their movements to encourage the growth of natural democratization processes (Howard & Hussain, 2013). The Arab Revolution / Arab Spring showed a "domino effect" on other Middle Eastern regions. This event like a chain phenomenon that influences each other based on geo-strategic and geo-political principles

which occurred in some countries in this region. The revolution began from Tunisia to Egypt, Algeria, Yemen, Bahrain and Libya.

Social media contributed to the revolution in Tunisia and succeeded in overthrowing Ben Ali from his seat of power. In 2010, in terms of press freedom, Tunisia still had the 'worst media environment in the world' where civil liberties and political rights were barely developed (Freedom House, 2012). Media infrastructure in Tunisia is already modern for a country in this region. One in four families has a broadband connection. Ninety-five per cent of Tunisians had their mobile phones at the time. And Tunisia has the highest Facebook penetration rate compared to overall internet users in all of the African Region (Müller & Hübner, 2014; OAAfrica, 2012). Tunisia is the only country affected by the Arab Spring uprising that experienced a transition to electoral democracy and became a country with limited freedom following successful elections in October 2011 (Freedom House, 2012). Tunisia is a country where the Arab Spring movement originated, and Facebook's involvement can be analyzed without external interference by other regimes in transition.

The revolution in Tunisia began with the action of Mohammed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old vegetable trader who set himself on fire on December 17, 2010. Bouazizi's act was published in a blog by Lina Ben Mhenni and in a short time captured the attention of many people. On Facebook social media, for example, there is the slogan "Syieb Saleh" that is used by media activists to mobilize the Tunisian people to fight back while social media twitter mobilizes the masses with the hashtag #sidibouazid (Lotan, Ananny, Gaffney, & Boyd, 2011).

Facebook serves as the main channel for protesters to spread information from the outskirts of Tunisia to the centre. However, at different levels, demonstrations in the Tunisian provinces could only break out because previous information flows from the centre of Tunisia to the periphery had brought information about the principles and values of democracy. Facebook allows Tunisians to connect with groups of Tunisian expatriates living abroad (Arieff, 2011). Furthermore, Facebook facilitates democratic values in rural areas and is the main thing to inform Tunisians about inequality in their country. The function of the Facebook demonstration is crucial for the spread of the revolution from Tunisia to Egypt and other countries affected by the Arab Spring movement (Sowers & Toensing, 2012).

In Egypt, social media effectively participated in demonstrations and protests to overthrow of Mubarak regime. The Facebook social revolution in Egypt was initiated by one

of Google's employees who happened to be on duty in the Middle East region and is a resident of Egypt named Wael Ghonim. In July 2010 Wael Ghonim created a Facebook account called "We Are All Khaled Said". This account was created as sympathy for Wael Ghonim for one of the Egyptian people named Khaled Said who was a brutal victim of local police in one of the internet cafes in Alexandria (Alaimo, 2015). This account finally began to develop and capture a huge mass and became an account of anti-government groups/communities. The revolutionary movement is getting stronger due to the spread of information on social media on the internet and cell phones. Print & electronic media such as newspapers, magazines and television news are monitored and controlled by the government - so online media is an alternative source of information and communication that connects Egyptian society. Various other accounts have sprung up to support the revolutionary movement. Wael Ghonim supporters who are also anti-government create another Facebook account called "6th of April Youth Movement" as a voice of resistance.

Egypt has a large number of active internet users, which includes 80 million internet users. Of that amount, only 15-17% of the population of around 5.2 million active users of Facebook social media are young people who are behind the Egyptian people's revolution through social media (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). In the case of Egypt, social media is used to make it Egyptians are aware of mobilization on the streets. A study of Protesters in Tahrir Square found that 28.3% first heard about the demonstration on Facebook - the second most common source of information, after face-to-face communication, where 48.4% of the protesters became aware of mobilization. Overall, 52% of the protesters have a Facebook profile, and almost every one of them uses it to communicate about demonstrations. (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). Tunisia and Egypt, were countries where social media can mobilize movements to protest government regimes.

### **Social Media Challenges For Democratic Stability**

In addition to the function of social media has created opportunities and spaces for people to interact and express their thoughts on political issues. In its development, social media is increasingly popular and becoming a mainstream platform. But the presence of this media also presents controversy and increasing criticism (WDD, 2009). In terms of democracy, social media also has weaknesses. This is an excellent platform to spread false news and hate speech (Front, 2019). The problem of identifying and verifying multiple sources and contents shared or posted on social media accounts is a major threat to

democracy stability. Many facebook, twitter, Instagram and numerous blog accounts were created without people whose names are already known. As well as accounts that are unclear who are the creators and who are the owners, these accounts are sometimes used for criminal activities.

### **Learn from the 2016 US Presidential Election and Social Media Crime Groups in Indonesia**

Cases of syndicates making accounts and fake content at the 2016 American Presidential Election were events where social media is a challenge for democratic stability. The American Ministry of Law in February 2018 charged 13 Russians and an Internet Research Agency (IRA) company from Russia. This group worked professionally and systematically which has a graphic unit, tasked with making various types of images, in addition to that there was a team in charge of maximizing their artificial content appearing in the ranks of search results, there were an information and communication team and a budget team that manages funding expenses (O'Sullivan, 2018). IRA adapted existing techniques of digital advertising to spread disinformation and propaganda by creating and managing advertising campaigns on various platforms, often using fake personas or imitating activist groups. They were engaged in a number of social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. In 2016, IRA Facebook posts reached 2,442. and 2,611 Instagram posts, and 57,247 Twitter posts (Howard, Bharath Ganesh, & Liotsiou, 2018).

In May 2016, a group of people held an anti-Muslim demonstration in Houston, the United States with the slogan "Stop Islamization in Texas", they opposed the establishment of the Library of Islamic Knowledge. Not long after that, another demonstration emerged which chanted the right to promote Islamic values. The demonstration began with a war of words on Facebook. "Heart of Texas" Facebook page continuously shouting negative prejudice against Muslim groups. Instead, the Facebook page titled "United Muslim America" continues to shout equality rights for Muslim Americans. It was later discovered that the two pages were fake, both controlled by the Russian propaganda organization, (IRA) the Internet Research Agency (O'Sullivan, 2018). This divisive politics is related to the US Presidential Election, end of 2016.

Social media is vulnerable to engineering and crime. The main arena of political struggle underwent a shift. Political propaganda is no longer focused on conventional media

but is turning to social media. No one expected that social media that freed the community would also divide people's defences, and even undermine the country's sovereignty. People who have ideological preferences and political support to certain groups will quickly be consumed by provocative issues and swallow them whole issues like a belief, and this will be aggravated if from the beginning they did not like the group or had supported certain parties.

Another case in Indonesia is related to the capture of the Saracen group in 2017 and The Family Muslim Cyber Army (MCA) in 2018. The second mode of this group is to spread hate speech, hoaxes and SARA-smelling content for political motives, namely regional elections and the Presidential Election. Saracen set a tariff of around Rp.72 million in proposals offered to several parties. They are willing to spread hate speech and racial content on their social media to order. The uploads were in the form of words, narratives, and memes, whose appearance directs the reader's opinion to have a negative view of other community groups. This syndicate used Facebook groups including Saracen News, Saracen Cyber Team and Saracennews.com to gather more than 800,000 accounts. The MCA group does not have a management structure like the Saracens. However, they work systematically. (BBC, 2017; Kompas.com, 2018a)

The contents distributed by the perpetrators included the issue of the revival of the Indonesian Communist Party, abduction of ulemas, and defaming the good name of the president, the government, and certain figures. Including spreading lies about the persecution of religious leaders and the destruction of places of worship. (BBC, 2018).

Social media can be a fertile seed for friction, or even open conflict in society. Today the development of information technology, online applications and the internet has increased the speed and scope of sharing media messages, which then led to practices that sometimes violate ethics and are counter-productive for progress (Henry, Sam, & Joshua, 2013). Arie Sujito in Kompas (2018b) views that hoax spreaders are enemies of democracy. A hoax can have implications for the choice of someone to choose a prospective leader. The spread of hoaxes is also considered to create an atmosphere of debate before the election is not ideal. Public debate is no longer a matter of programs or ideas, but rather a hatred that mingles with ethnic, religious, racial and intergroup issues. This is getting worse because people can get caught up in conflict and violence. Social media presents a dilemma between freedom of authority approval. The issue of religion and race has indeed become the main object to play with the sentiments of social media users. Rationality is ignored, and the primordial feeling

takes precedence. Once touched by his primordial sentiments, not a few social media users whatever their educational background, profession, and social class can become violent to their fellow human beings.

## **CONCLUSION**

Social media that grows and continues to develop due to advances in technology, information, and communication has provided space for people to access information, and spread it. The essence of democratic values regarding freedom of expression is used as a basis for the people to use social media in encouraging democratic values. This is reflected in the events of the Arab Spring, which hit countries in the Middle East region. Tunisia and Egypt are examples where social media plays a vital role in encouraging democratization as an effort to prevent prolonged conflict and violence, where people can articulate their interests, exchange information, and mobilize movements that undermine authoritarian regimes in the two countries.

However, on the other hand, social media is also a space that poses a threat to democracy because the massive dissemination of information wrapped in sophisticated technology cannot be adequately controlled and monitored by the government. The problem that becomes the main concern on social media is when someone can create multiple accounts or fake accounts that are difficult to identify their authenticity and are used by certain elements to spread hate speech, hoax because certain motives are a big challenge for the government to overcome it. Indonesia and America are examples of two countries where social media is used as a tool to polarize society and potentially create political instability in a country. Political motives are on the agenda for groups using social media as instruments that threaten and distort democracy. So in this case in addition to regulation as an instrument to criminalize perpetrators who must exist and need to be applied, a collaboration between civil society and the government in monitoring also needs to be strengthened, where civil society groups can utilize anti-hoax discussion groups by using other media to ensure content the news is accurate or not. In addition digital literacy regarding the use of social media wisely and correctly also needs to be encouraged so that the community is not easily damaged understanding. Finally, joint efforts to curb the high hoax flow on social media need to be made to save the quality of democracy.



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