

Conference Paper

Social Media and the Issue of 'Gafatar' in Indonesia

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Abstract

Gafatar (Fajar Nusantara Movement), which was established in 2011, became controversial being accused of blasphemy, and treason against the state in early 2016. The government then repatriated thousands of their followers from Mempawah, West Kalimantan. This paper examines how the media framed the controversy, and consequently shaped public opinion of the movement.

Keywords: framing, gafatar, public opinion, social media

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1. Background

The internet has not only changed the speed of media communication but it has also pushed the boundaries of ethical communication, confront and challenge the establishment [10]. Thus, the transformative powers of information technology raise many questions about media responsibility in their reporting and framing of events and issues. Gamson's study on framing notes a relationship between framing and the social movement in creating collective action in the society [2]. This paper reports on an analysis of how Gafatar was reported and framed by the social media. It also draws from an interview with ex-Gafatar members, journalists, researchers and academicians to discuss the issue. The study found that the social media played a significant role in shaping the public opinion of Gafatar as a deviant movement and a traitor against the state.

2. Method

This study analyzes the reports about the Gafatar according to five online media from January to March 2016. The following figure shows the topic of Gafatar reported.

Based on the data, we can conclude that most of online media gave a negative opinion regarding Gafatar. According to Robert M. Entman, media is one of the factors in cascading activation model. This shows that the interpretation of certain events will

Issues	The Reporting Related to The Gafatar				
	<i>viva.co.id</i>	<i>republika.co.id</i>	<i>tempo.co</i>	<i>cnnindonesia.com</i>	<i>tribunnews.com</i>
Deviation/ Blasphemy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Treason against the state	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Conflict with local People in Mempawah	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

TABLE 1: The Issue of Gafatar in *Media Online* (January-March 2016). ✗The reporting on the news seems to be more neutral. ✓The reporting on the news creates public opinion in negative way.

promote to society, which the ideas mix with the original message [4]. In this case, people who receive the message can interpret the news about Gafatar differently.

The enclosed FGD was held on September 23, 2016 to discuss about the issue of Gafatar. The FGD was attended by 25 persons, including journalists, scholars, academicians, NGO, and a number of participants from multidisciplinary backgrounds. This FGD was not an attempt of making prejudice or justification, but this FGD was intended more to find a solution from different perspectives. We have also interviewed ex-Gafatar members, and scholars from various backgrounds to find out their views about the issue of religious freedom in Indonesia.

3. Finding and Discussion

3.1. The Tubulence of Media: Gafatar, What Is It?

There were several central issues about Gafatar blowing up by media: firstly, the issue that Gafatar had much to do with the rebellion and separatist organization from NKRI (The Unitary State of Republic of Indonesia). It is because of the organizational structure of Gafatar, which consisted of presidential, ministry and so on. Secondly, Gafatar was perceived as a deviant organization and misguided from the fundamental teachings of Islam. This issue was highlighted through the issuance of MUI’s fatwa and a joint decree (SKB) of three ministries banning the Gafatar activities. Thirdly, the existence of Gafatar had disturbed local community due to the spreading issue of ‘*Millah Abraham*’. Fourthly, in post-relocation of GAFATAR, media proclaimed that Gafatar had committed treason. In the Focused Group Discussion, those responsible for Gafatar rejected these accusations. In their perspective, Millah Abraham was not a sect of Islam, it is a new faith that saw Musadeq and Messiah as the prophet. Because they were not Islam, the fatwa of MUI is misplaced as well as they were clarified that

they come to Mempawah purely for farming rather than for separation from the state. Otherwise, Gafatar's relationship with the local community has never been in conflict. When the conflict happened at that time, it was because the intervention of many parties had framed them as a victim before the law.

Meanwhile, according to the result of FGD and interview, they never get involved with the local people in Mempawah, especially the Dayak residents. In fact, according to them (anonymous), their arrival to Mempawah was because of the invitation from the Dayak leader. Then, they also never planned treason against the state. Their agenda was just to do farming in Mempawah. They also objected to being regarded as deviant from the teaching of Islam by MUI because they were not Muslim, but Millah Abraham.

3.2. Media and Public Opinion Construction

Gafatar's public stigma had affected not only the physical but also the psychological state of ex-Gafatar members. Indeed, some of them did not recognize what 'Millah Abraham' was. Their agenda was purely about farming to run up government program about food sustainability. They only understood that their program had nothing to do with either separatist movement or 'Millah Abraham'. Understanding new religious movement, such as Gafatar, we could not justify them through one single eye. However, there are still the aspects of human right as a citizen that should be protected.

Media, showing the perpetrator of conflict disproportionately, has caused the material loss for the Gafatar. It is ironic, since their life after the conflict has become unstable and without economic prosperity. Indeed, media framing had alienated them from their own community. Even many of them had alienated themselves from their own community because of worry with negative community prejudice. These phenomena commonly happen when media framing effectively shapes community assumption.

4. Conclusion

Shortly after the fall of the Soeharto regime, media were no longer identified as a government tool, nor were they tightly controlled by the state. Media, especially social media, has focused on fast information. Ironically fast information is not supported by accuracy, strong analysis and proportionality in framing and communicating the information. On the other hand, the readers are able to give any comment without revealing their identity. The unintended consequence is that fast information is perceived as the only truth of the information. This construction and media framing is what happened to most Indonesians in consuming the information. Thus, it is necessary to be highly critical in one's media choice for news and information, especially on the Internet.

In seeing Gafatar as a victim, we could propose that Internet education, especially in talking about a deviant group, is needed to educate the community to be a more discerning social media consumer.

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