

## **The Role of Buzzer Groups in Policies for Handling the Covid-19 Pandemic on Social Media**



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**ABSTRACT:** Controversial policies in handling the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia have become the subject of discussion in online media and social media. The subject of this discussion became a cyberwarfare (war of information), especially in social media which resulted in changes and shifts in public opinion towards the government. Cyberwar that occurs in online media is played by the political buzzer which aims to spread negative propaganda against the government so that it threatens national sovereignty and resilience. The increasingly widespread distribution causes high pressure from the public to immediately take extreme steps to prevent the spread from spreading further. Through social media platforms, there is a cyberwar between netizens to form arguments and discourses that can influence public opinion. Freedom of expression in the use of social media is used as a gap for buzzers to agitate and propaganda to win a cyberwar.

**KEYWORDS:** Cyberwarfare; Political Buzzer; Propaganda; Covid-19

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The rapid development of technology provides convenience for us to communicate and interact with other people without being limited by distance and time. The increasing number of internet users, especially social media, has become very influential in human life today. Various information can be easily accessed and shared through the internet, both formally through online news portals and informally through social media. The use of social media which was originally intended to provide convenience, comfort for someone to communicate and interact with others, has recently shown the opposite situation. Currently, social media is more widely used by audiences with various hidden motivations, interests, and intentions, most of which have a negative impact on users and society. The existence of the internet as a means of information on social media and online media causes information that has not been verified to be true and whether or not it spreads quickly. Through social media, various information is disseminated every day. The presence of share, like, hashtag, trending topics on social media platforms does not rule out the possibility of influencing the interest and consumption of audience information.

In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic situation, the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Informatics as of April 2020 has collected 554 hoax reports related to the corona virus (COVID-19) spread on a number of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Youtube. There are at least 893 hoax info that have been successfully taken down, and 316 hoax info are still in the takedown process. Based on data quoted through the media [cnbc.indonesia](http://cnbc.indonesia), there are approximately 89 suspects, 14 of whom have been detained.

The spread of negative information and provocations in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on the psychology of people who are now haunted by a sense of anxiety and unrest due to the corona virus. Although social media does not have limitations in restricting information, stakeholders use this opportunity to create propaganda in order to realize a hidden political agenda.

The use of the Twitter and Facebook platforms is more dominantly used as a means to build opinions and discourses containing hate elements. The hate message was delivered continuously without stopping by the buzzer community to netizens to spread the hate speech. Some of the strategies used by buzzer groups are strengthening hate arguments with agitation and propaganda techniques by making fake news (hoax) or spreading hate speech against a character or group.

Phenomenon of the massive spread of COVID-19 has become a polemic between pro and contra government groups on social media. For example, the narrative of the regional quarantine discourse which is currently being debated has caused uproar among netizens in cyberspace. Netizens were provoked and provoked by very provocative and agitative hate messages and discourses with a number of content in the form of racist and sarcastic memes and videos. Based on these problems, this paper examines how the polemic of government policies due to the spread of the covid-19 virus on Twitter and Facebook social media.

# The Role of Buzzer Groups in Policies for Handling the Covid-19 Pandemic on Social Media

## II. THEORITICAL REVIEW

### A. Social Media

The use of social media which was originally intended to provide convenience, comfort for someone to communicate and interact with others, has recently shown the opposite situation. Currently, social media is more widely used by audiences with various hidden agenda, motivations, interests, and intentions. Most of it have a negative impact on users and society. Kotler and Keller state that social media is a medium used for its users to share text, images, sound and video with other people or companies. While Kaplan and Haenlin define social media as an internet-based application with the use of ideology and web 2.0 technology, where users can exchange information on the application. The use of social media can be done and accessed anytime and anywhere, because apart from being accessed via a computer, it can also be accessed by a smartphone.

### B. Political Buzzer

The development of the massive use of social media has given rise to the buzzer industry which is used as a reinforcement of public opinion and ideas in seeking support. The involvement of buzzers in Indonesia in political events has contributed negatively to the image and meaning of buzzers. The term buzzer originally came from the world of marketing, which was intended to increase marketing through branding techniques to the public. Then the buzzer became known when it entered social media. The use of this buzzer was then used to support political campaign activities through the massive dissemination of information and messages on social media. Currently, the trend of using buzzers has shifted, where buzzer services were previously used to campaign for products or services, are now used as political tools and weapons to campaign propaganda messages to the public.

### C. Agitation and Propaganda

Agitation comes from the Latin word meaning to move or move. The agitation message consists of information, facts, explanations, suggestions, invitations, to exclamations. The purpose of this agitation is an effort made to attract attention so that the reader of the message is moved. The message from this agitation practice is critical by growing the audience's emotions with a sense of injustice, hatred, uncertainty, equality of fate so that the audience dares to act. According to Herbert Blumer, agitation is more often used to invite people to engage in politics. Agitation begins with creating contradictory conditions in society with the aim of raising the enthusiasm of the public to move political movements and oppose the fate that has been accepted so far. In addition, practitioners of agitation are carried out so that the public is willing to make great sacrifices for direct goals and is willing to sacrifice their lives to realize a political ideal. The person who performs agitation is called an agitator, that is, a person who tries to cause dissatisfaction, anxiety, or rebellion against others. Agitation has a negative connotation because it is inciting, threatening, disturbing, arousing discontent among the public, and encouraging rebellion. Then propaganda according to Harold D Laswell is an attempt to influence human behavior and actions through the manipulation of information. The representation of the information in question can be in the form of messages, writings, pictures, videos, or music. In practice, agitation and propaganda usually go hand in hand. That is, when a person performs acts of agitation at the same time he is also doing propaganda. For this reason, in the past the Soviet Union government always associated agitation with propaganda and created a special department called the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, which is known by the acronym *Agitrop*.

### D. Cyberwarfare

Cyber War or cyberwarfare, in an article written by Kurdinanto Sarah and Rudy A.G. Gultom, has a meaning as a war that has used computer networks and the Internet or cyberspace in the form of a defense strategy or attack on the opponent's information system. Cyber warfare is known as cyber warfare which refers to the use of www (world wide web) facilities and computer networks to conduct war in cyberspace. Richard A. Clark, an expert in the field of government security in his book *Cyber War* (May 2010), defines Cyber War as the act of penetrating a country against another computer network with the aim of causing damage and disruption. The Economist magazine explains that cyber war is the fifth domain of war, after land, sea, air and space. From several definitions from experts, it can be concluded that cyber war is a war that uses computers and the internet by utilizing cyberspace by penetrating one country against another country's computer network with the aim of attacking the opponent's information system.

## III. RESEARCH METHOD

The research in this paper uses a qualitative approach by understanding the methodology based on a social phenomenon that occurs. Furthermore, this type of research is descriptive which aims to describe how the role of social media, especially the twitter platform, can spread agitation and propaganda to netizens in cyberspace, especially on the policy issue of handling COVID-19. In the qualitative cluster approach, the case study steps for data collection are inseparable from the general characteristics displayed in qualitative research. Data analysis was carried out based on three flow of activities that occurred simultaneously, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or clarifications. In this data reduction there is a process of selecting, simplifying, abstracting and transforming rough data that emerges from written records.

## The Role of Buzzer Groups in Policies for Handling the Covid-19 Pandemic on Social Media

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The existence of the buzzer industry on social media has shifted into a means of political campaigns in order to realize a certain agenda. The current situation of the Covid-19 pandemic is used as an arena to support the government's handling policies in tackling the spread of the corona virus. Clusters of government supporters are competing to buzz the content and news related to the government's new policy in tackling the corona virus. As an example of the image above, the content related to "New Normal" aims to carry out socialization and a call to jointly apply the new order of life during the pandemic crisis.

On the other hand, every statement that appears in the media regarding government policies and actions is immediately carried out by counter-opinions and propaganda by government opposition groups, which seem to invite and incite followers and netizens to distrust the government's actions. Leading opinion by government opposition groups aims to spread the notion and doctrine of teachings as well as efforts to discredit the government. In addition to spreading provocative news, several posts and content also spread the ideology of the caliphate as a solution in dealing with the current covid-19 outbreak.

The use of social media in this paper illustrates how high resistance and polemics in the buzzer industry are among cyber media. The inability and unwillingness to validate and verify data or information causes the public to be easily consumed by provocative news circulating. In addition, the role of the political buzzer industry, which likes to generate propaganda in the form of hate speech and appeals as well as incitement, has a major impact on people's psychology in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, there has been a crisis of public confidence in the government in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Handling the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia must involve all components of the nation. Not only the government and the private sector, but also the active participation of the community. One of them is how the community plays a role in preventing the spread of disinformation and hoaxes that often circulate on social media. The misuse of social media has a major impact on the public's perspective, so that it has the potential to disrupt national security and order.

In the polemic issue of government policy discourse in tackling the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, the use of the buzzer industry plays an active role in influencing public opinion without prioritizing the substance and content of the message conveyed to the audience. In the SNA (Social Network Analysis) map, it can be concluded that the tweets conveyed only take advantage of the common perception and emotional tendencies to win the sympathy of netizens. The narrative battle also cannot answer the meaning, definition, of the term government or regional quarantine. All are just debating government policies without conducting a deeper study. Therefore, it is necessary to have education in the form of literacy and transparent narratives to prevent misuse of information or messages from social media which can then threaten public security and order.

### CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data above, we can see various phenomena that occur not only current events, but also how people respond to these phenomena, especially social media users. The news circulating gave rise to many opinions that were formed and formed a pattern which in the end grouped them into two blocks, namely the pros and cons.

The involvement of the buzzer industry can be clearly found in the efforts to amplify messages to the audience (netizens) by utilizing several strategies, including the use of hashtags or #hashtags to build conversations naturally or artificially, then utilizing news site snippets to increase the credibility of the content, as well as utilizing a network owned by buzzer groups and short messaging applications such as WhatsApp Group media and Telegram to spread content. The strategies and methods carried out in the buzzer community resulted in public interaction on social media with a variety of reactions generated.

In the anti-government group, the typology of message dissemination is carried out dynamically and is bolder in expressing opinions. It can be seen from the Twitter account from the opposite group, which is an anonymous account (buzzer) using a more emotional approach in expressing opinions to create a public discourse. Meanwhile in the Pro-Government group, they have more motives to use influencers as informants to the public, acting as public intermediaries for the information submitted. The status of posts on social media that are controversial will cause more reactions than their readers, because the different opinions held by each thought will have an impact on debate.

It was revealed that the habit of fighting nerves on social media can interfere with mental health. It can be said that the process of agitation and propaganda is contained in provocative narratives and discourses that are carried out continuously by buzzer groups on the twitter platform.

In addition, this phenomenon can describe a situation where the freedom of communication in cyberspace is more likely to be destructive than constructive, caused by comments in the form of utterances or statements by netizens that are not accompanied by good behavior. The democratic process through cyberspace is increasingly threatened by the presence of buzzer groups who continue to spread negative opinions and thoughts to the public.

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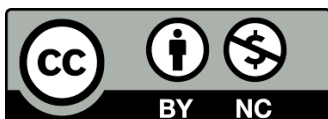
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