Cybertroops: Contestation and Polarization in The Perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis

Khoirun Nisa Aulia Sukmani[1], Taufik Setyadi Aras[2]

[1,2]Department of Cultural Anthropology, Institute of Indonesia Arts and Culture Bandung, Indonesia

Abstract: The political year is approaching; every five years, Indonesia faces a contestation of democracy and political games. Cybertroops act as a volunteer force in influencing public opinion on certain topics, creating polarization that attracts the attention of the government in defending against opinions that damage and endanger Indonesia's integration. How is it viewed? This research uses social media ethnography to observe the landscape of cybertroops and virtual police in their respective domains. Critical Discourse Analysis is used to see how cybertroops to work in cultivating public opinion, while virtual police monitor and minimize the growth of public opinion polarization.

Keywords: Cybertroops, Virtual Police, Social Media X, CDA

Correspondence:

Name Khoirun Nisa Aulia Sukmani

Email auliasukmani@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The 2024 political year has reached the initial stage of the election of the president, vice president, members of the central and regional legislatures. Every half decade, Indonesia is confronted with a "political war" contested by cybertroops on social media and political volunteers. The way this political is carried out is by turning certain topics into heated debates on social media. Like on X, the topic being shared must become trending, and is effective way to change public opinion. To illustrate, the case of 'KPK and Taliban', cybertroops made the hashtag a trending topic on *Twitter*, which effective to change public opinion to support the government (Wijayanto & Berenschot, 2021).

Refer to Sugiono, if we go back to 2009, the term buzzer emerged due to the explosion of social media users in Indonesia, especially Twitter. The term buzzer originally referred to users promoting a company, disseminated, and campaigned a message so that it could become public opinion (Arianto, 2020). However, in 2012, during the DKI Regional Election period, buzzers had a negative impression. Buzzers began to conduct political campaigns by assaulting political opponents and building opinions to support a potential leader (Sugiono, 2020).

Ali and Maarif research stater that "The use social media in elections can be traced back to the 2012 gubernatorial election in Jakarta, in which Jokowi – formerly mayor of Solo and sill a relative political outsider – defeated the incumbent Fauzi Bowo. His victory war partly due to an energetic social media campaign driven by digitally-savvy volunteers" (Alizen & Maarif S, 2021). In 2012, Jokowi and Ahok were successful in their campaign using social media. The Jokowi and Ahok success team used social media as an effective space for campaigning by forming the Jokowi Ahok Social Media Volunteers (JASMEV) (Suci, 2024). JASMEV on social media is to form opinions by conducting a cyber war, with the aim of conquering wide public support and demolishing opponents psychologically (Fatmala et al., 2020).

The cyber war continued in the 2014 presidential election, where Jokowi and Prabowo were opponents, both candidates' campaigns used more organized influencer and buzzer to campaign on social media (Alizen & Maarif S, 2021). Then, in the 2017 election for governor DKI Jakarta, Anies Baswedan defeated Basuki Tjahja (Ahok). The issue of religious blasphemy becomed trending the election period. The rumor that Ahok

committed religious blasphemy long before the election was used as a bullet for the success team of his political opponents to conquering public opinion (Sawri, 2020). This dirty campaign had a big impact on the 2019 presidential election. Identity politics wad the campaign theme of both successful team of 2019 presidential candidates. Cybertroops focus on religious-themed opinions, and several groups who want to gain share of government have succeeded in creating polarization in society (Sugiono, 2020). Until now, the influence of social media on presidential elections, especially in Indonesia, has become a crucial space or medium for political contestants (Sinpeng, 2020).

Discussing about cybertroops, conforming to Yatun (2021) they include influencer, buzzers (including fake accounts) and bots (semi-automated robot accounts). Those -referring to cybertroops- massively create contestation to influence public opinion, especially on social media. Selecting a topic to influence public opinion is a must for cybertroops, this is related to the engagement they will be obtained later. Regarding influencing public opinion, there are differences among each group of cybertroops. Influencer, who have many followers (artist, public figures, or political figures), often use their personal accounts to convey personal opinions in subtle language under the guise of educating. Conversely, Buzzers are anonymous troops whose occupation is to disperse certain content and assault or prevent people from conveying that contrast with theirs. Buzzer does not hesitate to use harsh language to assault others (Rasidi & Sukmani, 2021; Wijayanto & Berenschot, 2021).

Lastly, bots are robot accounts whose function is to simultaneously broadcast or upload hashtags on certain topics from influencers or buzzers. They are almost similar to buzzer, but bots only carry out one-way communication with people who have opposing opinions with their (Fatmala et al., 2020). Briefly, cybertroops always discuss a certain topic that has been concur on to influence public opinion. A recurring topic that always arises in this political game is how Pancasila is used as a framing to define who is Pancasila and who is anti-Pancasila. Cybertroops, especially buzzers, specialize in topics related to nationalism and Indonesia's dark history, while influencer usually focus on integration, moderation, and Indonesia unity (Rasidi & Sukmani, 2021; Sastramidjaja, 2021).

Those on social media give rise to polarization (Neyazi, 2020) in understanding the political context that is currently occurring in Indonesia. This polarization is the impact of resistance from netizen to political games that are considered dirty (Sastramidjaja, 2021). The real impact of polarization in this game is that there are many cases of bullying, ridicule, and even doxing of political forces on social media. Discussing about social media -this research- refers to social media X (Twitter), because X makes it simple to display text, images, videos, and links, although convenience responses (Twitter Indonesia, 2022).

Bullying can happen to anyone, depending on which opponent the cybertroops attack. They can attack using text, pictures, news, and videos from the past to show bad behavior and crimes that have been committed (O'Malley, 2021). An example of how state officials experienced bullying and ridicule during the contestation – referring to the election-. Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs, who was subjected to malicious comments by netizen regarding his upload on social media X. "*I am ashamed to have such a politicing as you, you have such an attitude*" reply netizen to post @mohmahfudmd.

Polarization, bullying, and doxing behavior among netizens on social media enticing the government's interest in taking prevention measures (Bjola, 2018; Talamayan, 2020). Contained in circular number SE/2/11/2021 signed by National Police Chief Listyo Sigit on Friday, February 19 2021, this circular letter is used as a guideline for handling suspected violations of the ITE Law. Virtual police will involve the community and influencer in implementing their duties, especially regarding the ethics of using social media. Another discourse is the activation of the virtual police in relation to opinions that are damaging and dangerous for Indonesia integration, however, this activation raises a

new issue, to wit the "criminalization" of netizens who convey their opinions on social media (Dragu & Lupu, 2021; Irham, 2021).

Cybertroops have a big impact on elections in Indonesia. Political manipulation carried out on social media is used as a tool for certain groups to gain profits, such as by influencing policies and laws for personal interests (Wijayanto & Berenschot, 2021). During the campaign process, the candidate's success team conducted a cyberwar as a discourse battle to influence public opinion; this had a major impact on polarization in society (Fatmala et al., 2020). The ITE Law, which was design to solve problems of inter- action and communication via the internet, especially on social media, does not work for political cybertroops and is widely misused by those in power to deliberately punish the opposition for malicious posts on social media (Sugiono, 2020).

The upheaval resulting from the wave of "dirty politics" opinions carried out by cybertroops and the government's efforts to "fortify" this wave are interesting to discuss further. Moreover, cybertroops have started to strategize and move their fingers to masquerade in the 2024 election contestation, and witness the virtual police move in carrying out their duties as supervisors during this upheaval. This research focuses on how cybertroops strategy to create discourse to influence public opinion and how the government carried out supervision in the 2024 presidential election process using vir- tual police on social media.

2. Materials and Methods

This research focuses on the activities of cybertroops and virtual police on social media, especially social media X. This activity is related to the 2024 election contestation and monitoring of opinions formed by netizens. Social media ethnography as a method for observing online activities intertwined with offline activities (Postil & Pink, 2012; Suk- mani, 2018). This method is utilized for the collection of data through engagement re- garding the contestation created by cybertroops in influencing public opinion, and ob- serving how supervision is carried out by the virtual police, which collaborates with the community and influencers in its implementation. Subsequently, Social Network Analy- sis (SNA) Python was used to collect data on online activities related to the 2024 election contestation by collecting subject or account uploads using the keyword 2024 election, virtual police, influencer, buzzer, and bots.

The cybertroops accounts were selected based on their relevance in creating opin- ions regarding the 2024 election from the Phyton result. It will be seen that each group of cybertroops shape the discourse and engagement obtained in the uploads. The virtual police are the result of Python, as seen in how netizens respond to pinion created by cybertroops and official police accounts in following up on cases false information during process election 2024 on social media X. This article explains how the Critical Discourse Analysis concept works in the activities of cybertroops and virtual police on social media X. The data obtained, such as uploaded text, images, video, and forms engagement on social media X form account cybertroops and virtual police, us used as a basis for ana- lyzing using the Critical Discourse Analysis concept.

3. Results and Discussion

Discussing about social media X, utilized as a space to record digital trace and provide the latest information, especially regarding developments in the political world in Indo- nesia. 2024 is a political year that will once again give rise to polarization in building public opinion. Political contestants use social media X to form opinions and campaign to influence people's thoughts and choices. Cybertroops and netizens establish of com- ments and uploads in the form text, images, or videos, which are the raw material for creating opinions. The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective by Fairclough (2003) is used to analyze how the text, images, and videos used by cybertroops and netizens on social media X. There are three models in this theory that are used to analyze how materials work, to wit, text in the form of descriptions, which are used to analyze uploads in the form of text, images, or videos. Furthermore, discursive practice is a form

of interpretation to analyze the text being formed (the interaction between the production and the reader of the text). Lastly, social practice is and explanation for analyzing socio-cultural practices that occur at situational, institutional, and social levels. Cybertroops and netizens are actors in the three Fairclough models, which will be analyzed further in the following three sub-chapters:

3.1. Cybertroops: Contestation and Public Opinion

The first model that Fairclough uses to analyze CDA is text, where the subjects in this research, to wit cybertroops, build opinions on social media X using text, images, and videos in various uploads. Cybertroops, which are volunteers whose aim is to influence public opinion or perspective through certain topics, have a crucial role in creating narratives about government or political issues on social media (Sastramidjaja, 2021). The way "cybertroops" works consists of several individuals working together (Keller et al., 2020), according to Wijayanto and Ward *"which is a fluid network consisting of buzzers, influencers, coordinators, and content creators who work together to influence public opinion on social media"* (Wijayanto & Berenschot, 2021).

Technology (social media) as a contribution to the contestation of the political year in Indonesia as a place or digital campaign space. However, since the digital space began to be used for campaigning, the term "dirty politics" has begun to develop (Sastramidjaja, 2021). This is suspected in the posts of cybertroops to "sell" the names of political contestants in various way. For example, in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, Anies Baswedan won over Ahok because of the buzzer's efforts to use the topic of blasphemy against religion (Alizen & Maarif S, 2021). An online campaign carried out by Moeldoko to support the Democrat Party's Extraordinary Movement by doxing the family of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (Wijayanto, 2021). These cases are examples of how manipulation by cybertroops works on public opinion in the digital space (Sastramidjaja & Wijayanto, 2022).

The 2024 political year, the contestation that occurred started with posts attacking each other by the 2024 election contestant troops. The usual way of attacking each other is by using digital trace or the opinions of the contestant supporters. Images 2 explains how opinions are created by influencers to bring down political opponents. These forces -influencer- make fun of political opponents implicitly, with the aim of getting netizens of political opponents to comment on the opinions that have been made.

"Honestly, until now, I have never seen Gibran speak in front of a forum to express his thoughts. Even though he is a vice president candidate, you know. If elected and the President is permanently absent, he will replace the President. He will be responsible for the fate 270 million Indonesian people…" (Eko Kuntadhi (@ekokuntadhi1), 2023, 18 November 2023).

Opinions formed are based on the mistakes or weaknesses of political opponents when campaigning; this can be through news article, television, posts on social media, and actual events that occurred to political opponents.

However, posts from buzzer troops are open in forming opinions; they are not afraid to ridicule and bully political opponents and their supporters. The topics discussed in his uploads utilize viral events -fyp, trending- on social media (Tik-Tok, Instagram, X). The ridicule and bullying aim to make netizens indignant and comment on these opinions. Our intention in presenting images (screenshot) of influencer and buzzer uploads is to illustrate to readers how these use "word and/or sentences" to form opinions on social media. Unconsciously, netizens were provoked by responding to these posts in the same way -counterattack- to defend their favorite contestants.

Replies from netizens through "replays and quote retweets" are the main target of cybertroops, because with these replies, the aim of these troops is to influence public opinion beyond the word success. The way netizens comment – counterattack- influencers and buzzers are quite diverse, giving rise to new opinions that can be used as "material" the cybertroops for their next upload. The impact of polarization occurs among

netizens themselves, resulting in a "war" between netizens to defend their favorite contestants.

We borrow the term polarization; in KBBI (2023), it means "division into two opposing parts." This research, we interpret it as differences of opinion as a result of netizens retaliation against cybertroops on social media. These differences of opinion include personal perspective on political contestants, track records (in negative terms), political dynasties, dirty politics, and even the dark history of Indonesia. We believe that these polarizing topics pose a significant threat to the integrity of Indonesian society because the impact of the debate is the digital space and the real world.

3.2. Netizens as Virtual Police

Former discussion, we thought that there was polarization among netizens on social media X regarding the topic of the 2024 election. The question is: how can the government overcome this problem? In fact, this problem always exists, not just during elections. In 2021, the government unusually operated a creative path of handling cases related to the ITE Law, to wit, virtual police and cyber police, which aim to handle "criminal" cases digitally and educate the public to be ethical when using social media (Berliana & Fitriyah P, 2022). Many cases going viral and receiving police attention.

"Sobatkom, recently, the Indonesian National Police (Polri) launched the Virtual Police program as part of maintaining public security and order (kamtibmas), especially in the digital space, so that it is clean, healthy, and productive. #Firtual #CerdasHukumDanHAM [Thread Tweet]" (Ditjen IKP Kominfo (@djipk), 2021, 8 March 2021).
This new policy has become a topic of discussion because it is considered to hinder democracy in Indonesia. Especially for people who are critical of government policies or performance, the term "criminalization" appears as an impact of digital surveillance. The National Police Chief also suggests that the public -netizen- and influencers on social media, participate as part of this virtual police (Irham, 2021).

The virtual police, which is currently functioning in monitoring social media, is interesting to observe, especially in relation to the role of netizens and influencer. This research focuses on netizens and influencers do their role as virtual police to monitor polarization due to the development of heterogeneous of public opinion regarding the 2024 election. The monitoring carried out by netizens as virtual police is intertwined with social media ethics. Retaliation with opinions is composed of sentences that implicitly and explicitly have a specific purpose depending on which political opponent is being attacked.

We assume that the role of netizens as virtual police here is to filtrate posts that are implicitly and explicitly negative. Although the way netizens filter by using "rude" sentences is certainly unethical. Meanwhile, influencers, who are "famous" in society, are closely related to issues of nationalism and integration. The polarization that occurs is undebatable with "rudeness," so posts of counsel surface to respond to this polarization. Apart from that, they prefer to report uploads that have an impact on contestation and polemics to the police by mentioning the account @DivHumas_Polri. The role of netizens and influencers in monitoring activity on social media has been quite successful. However, in reality, the monitoring has actually contributed to creating polarization on social media X. The reason is that when influencers carry out monitoring by giving advice or complaints, comments will surface from netizens that the upload is a way of campaigning for influencers to support contestants, as is the case with netizens.

If the reader looks closely, the discussion in this sub-chapter is Fairclough's second analysis model, to wit, discursive practice. The implementation of virtual police is a form of government response to the interpretation of opinions in cybertroops posts. Then the term virtual police were used as a bulwark by netizens to counterattack cybertroops posts on social media X. This interpretation has given rise to many new narratives, which have further exacerbated the existing polarization. The discursive practices in this research case

are the main reason why the polarization that occurred eventually became a habit that occurs on social media X.

3.3. *Critical Discourse Analysis: Fairclough Social Practice Model*

The former sub-chapter have explained how texts and discursive practices work on social media X by cybertroops and netizens. Cybertroops attempt to create opinions by using text, images, or videos to influence people's perspective. The text created by cybertroops regarding the contestation of presidential and vice-presidential candidates succeeded in causing a commotion in society. This commotion was a result of interpretation of the text by netizens and cybertroops, which Fairclough afterward known as a model of discursive practice. Netizens interpret a text, image, or video from various perspective by utilizing their role as virtual police. This perspective id reflected in various comments by netizens to confirm or dispute the text constructed by cybertroops. Creating opinions -texts- and interpreting -discursive practice- is a response that then cause polarization, where this impact becomes a habit of netizens on social media X. Fairclough then said this impact is a form of social-cultural practice resulting from two models: text and practice discursive (CDA) works on social media X.

4. Conclusions

The way cybertroops work undoubtedly drive public opinion and causes polarization. Netizens and virtual police do the role of monitoring and filtering uploads that can cause "noise". They, as netizens and influencers, have been quite successful in monitoring activities on social media. However, in reality, this monitoring is actually considered a tool of polarization on social media X. The reason is that when influencer carry out monitoring by giving advice or complaints, comments appear from netizens that the upload is a way for the influencer to campaign to support certain contestants. Therefore, netizens are expected to be wise in interpreting every piece of content (text, image, or video) contained on social media, especially when it comes to providing responses, comments, likes, and retweets, both negative and positive. This feedback is variable for the success of cybertroops.

The current problems of cybertroops and virtual police on social media X can be an important study for revising or reorganizing regulation regarding activities and interactions via the internet. Indonesia is a democratic country where every person has the right to voice their opinion; however, if this is limited due to the interests of certain groups, it will have a much major impact, such as a loss of trust in the government and police, reduce integration, and increasingly severe polarization. Researchers realize that the data from this research is still inadequate for explaining the dynamics of Indonesia politics on social media. Limited access to SNA data collection means that the data obtained is insufficient for further analysis of how cybertroops and virtual police work on social media X. Researchers hope that this research can be develop further considering that political dynamics in Indonesia will continue to experience changes.

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