Government Public Relation: Toward Media Richness and Interactivity

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Abstract
The development of information and communication technology disrupts the communication model of government institutions. The increasing penetration of social media users from year to year and the development of the “richness” aspect of social media as industry 4.0 progresses, encourage government public relations to focus more on social media management. Social media becomes the primary choice in publishing policies and disseminating information. One of the most distinctive social media rhetoric functions is its interactivity function. This study aims to evaluate the selection of social media by government public relations to run or engage its public relations activities and how government public relations as the institutions social media account manager address the interactivity of social media. The analysis was done with media richness theory and interactivity concept. The study used an interpretive paradigm with a qualitative approach. The study was evaluative, based on observation and literature study. The results of the study found that social media became the primary choice in publishing policy and dissemination of information with account management strategy customized to the “richness” of each social media and valence messages to be conveyed. In the evaluation of the use of interactivity aspects of social media by government public relations, it was found that although social media account manager skills are adequate but not always this interactivity technology is utilized optimally. It is therefore to be understandable as the impact of sociomaterial of social media management.

Keywords: computer-mediated communication, government public relation, interactivity, media richness, social media.
Introduction

The development of information and communication technologies disrupt the communication model of government institution. With the development of digital technology, communication model of bureaucratic organizations which first started as centralized, formal and have strict boundaries between internal and external communication is now becoming hybrid in nature, where it becomes decentralized, informal and there are connection between internal and external (Meijer, 2016). Bureaucratic organization is considered no more suitable with the dynamics and the nature of informational community that is complex and required to be modernized to be able to maintain its effectiveness and legitimacy for the public (Meijer, 2016). To establish such idea e-government is created. The e-government initiative covers the whole online communications and government activities. Internet platform that has been develop with mobile technology is an important element that support the most crucial part from the public communication model, which is the need for the government to communicate openly, honest and punctual with its people, without manipulating the information that they share (Heise in Graham, 2014).

In 2017, the internet users in Indonesia are 143,26 million people or 54,68% of the total Indonesian population. The second largest access is social media with 87,13%, with the top 3 social media are Facebook, Youtube and Instagram. Meanwhile, the internet usage for public service is to access information related to laws / regulation (APJII, 2017). The fast development of information technology and communication in the information era that can be seen through the penetration level of internet user in Indonesia, creates a new challenge for the government public relations in connecting the government with the people.

In their role as the connecting bridge, the government public relation gathers, process and disseminate information related with the program/policy, activity and achievement of the institution up to the reaction of the institution for the response, aspiration and opinion developing in the community for the said institution. In the midst of today’s diversity of media communication, government public relation is required to be able to choose the right media for internal and external communication. With the increasing number of people becoming a part of social media, communication through social media becomes one of the interesting alternatives and becomes the choice for government institution to connect with the public.

Social media application are widely adopted by various government worldwide, from the United State of America (Mergel, 2013a), European Union (Bonson et, al., 2012), and China (Lu et, al., 2016). Meanwhile, Indonesian government respond the development of social media by implement guidelines for the use of social media by government institution (Permenpan-RB, 2012). Several goals in the use of social media by government are listening, talking, energizing, supporting, and embracing (Permenpan-RB, 2012). The government’s efforts to build engagement with its citizens are evident
from the government’s presence through the official accounts of various ministries in the social media space. External communication through social media offers an experience that focuses on individual personal and optimized in order to take place in real time. According to Kaplan & Haenlein, social media is a group of internet-based applications built on the foundation of ideology and Web technology 2.0, and which enables the creation and exchange of content between users (user generated content) (Yadav, 2015). Web technology 2.0 that underlies social media applications provides great opportunities for its users, not just for consumption but also the creation of online content, dissemination and sharing of information on an unprecedented scale (Terras, 2015).

Social media as part of digital media has a multifunctional rhetorical dimension (Messaris, 2006). One of the most prominent characteristics of social media is its interactivity. Interactivity as a technological attribute of a mediated environment that allows for reciprocal communication or exchange of information that gives room for the interaction between communication technology and the user through technology (Bucy, 2007). Interactivity is not a characteristic that necessarily attaches itself to new media, because interactivity is the attribute of the communication process itself (Ariel, 2015). It is the communication process that determines the interactivity level of any information exchange. Interactive technology changes the topography of persuasion. For example, many of the persuasions that are encountered today, take place online via tweets, posts, hashtags, and emojis, rather than face-to-face (Perloff, 2017).

Various studies regarding social media has been develop around the interaction between the government, citizen and social media from various point of view whether from the government side social media technology and also citizen participation. Previous research has shown how social media is used by government public relations to promote democracy, participation, and transparency. Social media is highly utilized by the local government as a means of communication with the community, such as polls, monitor opinions, and publish information (Graham, 2014). While the challenge faced is the limited human resources that can manage social media. Other studies have shown local government preference in selecting media and content types depends on the institutional context. Significant differences in levels of citizen engagement have also been found between media and content types and in different institutional contexts (Bonsón, 2015). In campaigning a message through social media, it should be understood that each type of social media has a distinctive sociomaterial system. To capitalize on that, government organizations need to collaborate with many individual actors and organizations in co-creation of messages to achieve desired goals (Picazo-Vela, 2016).

In the regulation regarding the guidelines for the use of social media by government institution, it is requested that the government institution to spread the right message in the right social media (Permenpan-RB, 2012). This brings up the question, is the social media chosen by the government institution are in accordance with the need? Given the importance of the role of social media and interactive technology in supporting
government public relation tasks in carrying public persuasion in this information era, another question arises on how the reaction of the agency in relation with social media interactivity? Even though there any many studies in social media management by the government but his article will discuss the issue from the media richness perspective and interactivity that has not been discuss in previous study. The goal of this study is to explore the use social media by the government and the interaction within through the concept of media selection and interactivity through the evaluation of several social media accounts owned by the Ministry of Finance which will be further described in the form of descriptive at result and discussion.

Literature Review

Framework of Social Media Interaction at Government Field

Mergel in Lu et, al., (2016) proposed a framework that explains the interactions between government, citizens, and social media and depict the important component of the using of social media by government that impact the phenomena of the social media using at public sector. The using of social media in government field involving three entity: 1) government agencies that manage the social media account; 2) social media services that used by institution to deliver the information and engage with citizen; 3) citizens who connected with government through social media.

Figure 1. Social media interaction framework of Mergel, adapted by Lu et, al., (2016)

The government aims to conduct the transparency and develop participation and collaboration with its public through social media. There are four potential impacts of social media implementation at public sector: 1) improving transparency of public sector; 2) improving policy making; 3) improving public services; 4) improving knowledge management and interagency cooperation (Bonson et, al., 2012). Based on Mergel framework, there are three levels of social interactions via social media using: 1) one-
way interaction such as information dissemination by government; 2) two-way interaction such as the dialogue between agency and citizen; and 3) networking or collaboration such as crowdsourcing solution (Lu et al., 2016).

There are many studies that contribute to the framework of social media interaction in public sector by focusing on government side or social media technology side and there also increasing studies on citizen perspective. This study try to enrich the framework by describe the relation of government agencies to social media capabilities by way of media richness, and depict the social interaction of government with citizen via social media through the concept of interactivity.

**Media Richness Theory**

The Media Richness Theory perspective is used to describe the selection of media with certain characteristics to accomplish a particular task (Daft and Lengel 1984; Daft and Lengel 1986). "Richness" refers to the diversity of media and the ability of information to change the understanding in a certain period of time (Daft and Lengel, 1986). According to Daft et al., (1987), media richness depends on: (a) Ability to send feedback. A rich medium allows the receiver to ask questions or verify understanding and the sender to make corrections; (b) Multiple cues. It refers to he use of several sign in communication such as physical presence, sound, graphic symbols, etc.; (c) Language variety. It refers to range of meaning that can be conveyed with language symbols or the extent to which the use of natural language could convey a wide range of concepts and ideas; and (d) personal focus on the medium. Personal focus references both an infusion of affect and a tailoring to the receiver’s frame of reference and needs. While the more simple media or "leaner" media is a media that has only a few availability for non-linguistic sign and provides slower feedback. Each communication media has a certain capacity in conveying information. There are media that communicate data more effectively, there are media that communicate symbols effectively. Face-to-face and telephone communication is better at communicating symbols. While computer-mediated communication is better at communicating data (Dainton, 2011).

The premise of media richness theory is that organizations must communicate to reduce uncertainty and obscurity (Daft and Macintosh in Ferber et al., 2005). Uncertainty relates to a lack of information, while obscurity is related to the ambiguity of the message that led to the emergence of multiple interpretations. The "rich" media is considered more appropriate to deal with an unclear situation or equivocal situation. While the "leaner" media is more appropriate to reduce uncertainty (Daft, 1986).

The presence of new media brings challenges to media richness theory because of its unidimensional nature and instrumental objectives (Sheer, 2004). Selection of communication media can not only be based on the instrumental purpose but also on its interaction purpose. Ferber et al. (2005) revealed that with the development of technology, open the possibility of "leaner" media to become "richer". Refers to social
information processing theory, user take advantage of other social communication systems such as language, response time, or written attitudes due to the lacks of the available sign in face-to-face interaction to build relationship in the context of computer-mediated communication (Jahng & Jeremy, 2016). It argues that self disclosure is an important element of online relationships and impressions. In this article, media richness theory will be use to evaluate the type of media social being choose by government public relations in conducting in public relation activity.

Interactivity

Interactivity is an important element in communication process and it is use as a strategy in maintaining relationship that provides contribution for the success of a relationship (Ariel, 2015). Utilization of interactive features penetrates computer-mediated communication. Messages that comes from interactive website can change the nature of the message significantly therefore the interactive feature can serve as a persuasive message (Sundar et al. in Yang and Shen 2017). Kiousis (2001) define interactivity as a communication technology that can create an environment that is mediated and participants can communicate (one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many), whether all at once or not and participate in reciprocal messages (Kiousis, 2001). Liu and Schrum (2002) view interactivity as a level of when two or more parties that are communicating, can interact with each other, in a communication media, in messages and in a level where the effect is synchronize with each other. Rafaeli dan Ariel (2007) suggest popular conceptualization of interactivity which are synchronicity, control, rapidity and speed, participation, variety of choices, directionality, hypertextuality, connectedness, experience, and responsiveness (Ariel, 2015).

According to Ariel, researcher defines interactivity more of a three different research perspective, they are: (1) interactivity as a variable related with perception (perception-related variable), that focuses itself from the participant/individual experience and self reports, (2) interactivity as process related variable, that focuses from how the participant/individual mutually transfer information with each other, and (3) interactivity as medium of characteristic, which focuses on the technology display of the medium and its ability to trigger activity (Ariel, 2015). Rafaeli in Ariel (2015), suggest separate interactivity into three model, they are non-interactive, reactive, and interactive responses. Basically, interactive response means message that have a high level of responsiveness.

According to Bucy and Tao (2007), based in its location, interactivity consist of: (a) objective interactivity which is a visible actual feature; and (b) perceived interactivity, which is the extent to which users can recognize and understand feature capabilities. Web interactivity provides advantages to the enjoyment, attitude and behavior aspect. Meanwhile high level web interactivity can cause disruption for its user in processing information, obtain understanding, or enhance memory of a message (Yang dan dan Shen,
McMillan categorizes interactivity as the following: user to user, user to system and user to content (McMillan, 2002). Ariel (2015) added those medium/agent to medium/agent. In its development Sundar (2017) added another dimension and conceptualize interactivity into 3 components: (1) modalities (medium feature); (2) message feature; (3) source feature. Yang and Shen (2017) summarize the explanation for the dimension operationalization as follows: (1) modalities interactivity is how to serve a message that is enriched through interactive message. For example image function, audio, video, 3D display, tabs, drag, etc. (2) message interactivity is a user to user contingency message and interaction between users. For example, exchange of two-way messages, whether between users such as through the chat room function or discussion forum, or between users with the system through hyperlinks. (3) source interactivity is the extent to which the user can function as the source of the content it receives. For example, personalization and customizing content through interactive function such as search box, customize panel etc. Through the above interactivity concept, we will see how the government public relation staff manages the interactivity in its institution’s social media account.

Method

This article is an evaluative study that uses qualitative approach. Evaluation is a process for describing and judging activities on the programs. Qualitative approach is a method for exploring and understanding the meaning that comes from social problems (Creswell, 2010). Qualitative approach in the evaluation study can provide an important image about a program in whole, thus covers the description in the program implementation, the analysis for the program implementation, strength analysis and the weakness of the program. This study evaluate public relations activities of the Ministry of Finance through social media Facebook, Youtube, and Instagram in a campaign to answer the issue of state debt. This qualitative study involves collecting data through observation conducted at the Ministry of Finance and its social media account and literature studies. The data analysis is done inductively and the final report has a flexible structure. Through these studies we will see how public relations select the media to disseminate information and manage the interactivity of the social media accounts.

Results and Discussions

Ministry of Finance is a state institution that is responsible in managing state finances and state treasury. The output generated by the Ministry of Finance are in the form of public services and regulations and policies in the field of finance and state treasury. One of the policies generated by the Ministry of Finance every year is the State
Budget Policy (Anggaran Pendapatan Belanja Negara). As a state institution, it is important for the Ministry of Finance to maintain public trust in the mandate that has been commissioned which is to maintain fiscal stability. On March 23rd 2018, the Ministry of Finance publishes a Press Release entitled "Troublesome Debt" ("Mempermasalahkan Utang"). The press release was the response of the Ministry of Finance to the publication of debt-related issues that becomes public discussion. The first point of the Press Release stated "The attention of politicians and some economists about the debt conditions of recent months is truly remarkable. It is said to be remarkable because this issue is made and debated as if Indonesia is in a state of debt crisis so people through social media are also affected and busy talking about it" (Ministry of Finance, 2018).

Through the press release, it can be seen that the Ministry of Finance have a great concern to the public opinion in social media regarding the credibility of the Ministry of Finance in carrying out its duty to manage the state debt. Social media management at the Ministry of Finance is under the responsibility of sub-section of electronic publications, Publications Management Section, Communication and Information Services Bureau, Secretariat General Ministry of Finance. Sub-section of Electronic Publication has the following duties such as the preparation, broadcasting, and publication on social media of information and policies on financial management and state assets and the results of its implementation. There are 6 (six) social networking sites managed by the electronic publication sub-section, they are: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Google Plus, and Linkedin. Each media social managed by one account manager that responsible to update the content of media social account and interact with follower. In this article, the authors evaluate the Ministry of Finance public relations activities in terms of social media selection and management of interactivity in Facebook accounts, Instagram, and Youtube of the Ministry of Finance on a video uploaded as the Ministry of Finance Public Service advertisement entitle "Gamblang tentang Utang" ("Clear on Debt") with the hashtag #MenjawabUtang ("#answeringdebt") dated March 27, 2018.

Media Selection

Ministry of Finance uses variety of media to reach internal of external stake holder. One of the media use is social media, among others: (1) Facebook with the account of @KemenkeuRI. This account is launched since February 2012 and has a total of 137K followers and 132K likes; (2) Instagram with the account of @kemenkeuri. This account is launched since November 2015 and has a total follower of 152K. (3) Youtube with account of @Kemenkeu RI, has a total of 12K subscriber. In the campaign of answering debt through video post entitle "Gamblang tentang Utang" ("Clear on Debt") with the hashtag #MenjawabUtang ("#answeringdebt") dated March 27, 2018, we can found that viewer of the said video was 7.1K in Facebook, 26.1K in Instagram and 2.3K in Youtube.
Comments on Facebook 12, on Instagram 249 and on Youtube 0. All three social media in its post directs its users to watch the said video and to have a comprehensive information, the user is directed through a hyperlink for the explanation of state debt in the Ministry of Finance website www.kemenkeu.go.id/MenjawabUtang.

From the ability to send feedback aspect, Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube, together provides posting, comment, reply, and share features in real time. Ministry of Finance Facebook and Instagram account opens the comment feature for its post. While the Ministry of Finance Youtube account disable the comment feature. Youtube accounts are only used to upload video of an event or official event of the Ministry of Finance, exclusive interviews of the Minister of Finance, and Public Service Advertisement. From the aspect of multiples cues, Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube all have sign features that can be used to support computer-mediated communication, such as the “Like” features that is provided if you like a post. The “Like” feature in Facebook has a variety of emojis character. The post feature to upload image/picture, video or statement. In Facebook a variety of emoji, stickers and font style is available. Profile feature to display the users feature. Facebook and Instagram also has a stories feature which is a feature that shares photos and videos that automatically disappears after 24 hours. In addition, the three social media has hashtag feature that has a function to group a certain content. From language variety aspect, Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube provides variety of language that are capable to communicate a wide variety of language and use natural language. Also beside that, those social media also have a feature to filter comment, starting from a word, phrase, emoji, and hashtag. The last aspect, which is personal focus, refers to the communicator consideration in choosing the media is influenced by a reference framework and the need to the message recipient and the channel capacity in carrying a symbolic message. In this matter, Facebook capacity is more of carrying information. Meanwhile Instagram and Youtube capacity is more of a symbol because they are basically meant for aesthetic visual communication.

Based on the above finding, Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube are include in the rich media category, because although the communication built through such social media is mediated by computers or mobile technology, the said social media have a variety of features that can support the communication between the users in real time with a massive amount of numbers. This therefore confirms the previous findings that unidimensional nature and instrument possessed by a new media brings challenges to media richness theory (Sheer, 2004) and opens a great possibilities for changing a leaner media to richer media (Ferber et al.). An interesting case is found in the Ministry of Finance that the Ministry of Finance only uses Youtube as a one way communication. While Facebook and Instagram are two way communication. This confirms personal focus category Daft et al (1987) that in considering media selection the Ministry of Finance public relations use Facebook and Instagram to build engagement with the public while Youtube is merely a means of publication. This is also supported by the number of
internet user (netizen=internet citizen) are on all the three social media. In terms of conformity of messages and message channels, clarification of information about state debt to the public has a high level of urgency as it may affect the conduciveness of financial markets and degrade the credibility of the Ministry of Finance. Therefore the selection of Facebook, Instagram and Youtube as a message channel confirms the findings by Sheer and Chen (2004) that message complexity, including valence/strength of message is a factor in matching between message and the medium. Rich media is more suitable in communicating complex tasks.

The premise of media richness theory said that organization must communicate to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity. Rich media is more suitable to reduce uncertainty and leaner media to reduce ambiguity. With the development of social media as a rich media, social media is the right media to reduce uncertainty, in this matter to provide the lack of information about state debt. On the other side, social media richness can also reduce ambiguity with the capacity of social media that can be control by the account holder. Ministry of Finance social media account manager understand how to control the rich capacity of social media and making it leaner therefore reducing ambiguity in the flooding of information about state debt, which are not necessary true. Therefore the social media chosen by the Ministry of Finance to communicate the explanation of state debt is correct, however the understanding of the account manager in managing communication pattern through social media is much needed.

**Interactivity**

In terms of interactivity modalities, namely the use of interactive functions to present the message clearly, social media account manager of the Ministry of Finance have the skills in utilizing the interactive functions available in each social media. This is demonstrated through video uploads that have good visualization and message posting. The presence of Ministry of Finance through its posting uploaded on social media accounts is very important, because it can increase public trust as revealed by Cyr, Hassanein, Head, and Ivanov (2007) that social presence is an important prerequisite for building interpersonal trust in a computer-mediated communication. Also, the use of a special greeting to the followers with the title "temankeu" is also a plus in improving engagement personally with the followers. The skills of the social media account managers in using the interactivity function, impact the appearance and persuasion of the messages served. This is in line to what Sundar says in Yang and Shen (2017) that interactivity is the most distinct advantage of computer-mediated technology that can explain the heuristics of different users. The extent to which the account managers understand the use of interactive or perceived interactivity on social media becomes significant compared to just looking at objective interactivity as revealed by Bucy and Tao (2007).
In terms of interactivity of messages shown through the exchange of messages between users or between users with the website system, it can be seen that the exchange of messages between followers is quite high, in Instagram with 249 comments and about 25% of those is a reply or mutually reply from previous comments between followers, while on Facebook only 12 comments, while in Ministry of Finance Youtube account the comment access is not opened. From the entire comment, the account manager post is found in the comment field. Meanwhile, from the exchange of messages between users and the website system, the account manager provides hyperlinks that aim to facilitate easy access to key information sources and the use of hashtags to make it easier for users to find similar information. Facebook followers share 317 times of the video uploaded. The striking difference between interactivity between users on Facebook and Instagram is also quite interesting to observe considering Facebook has a greater capacity in carrying information than Instagram which is basically intended as a social media exchange of photos and video. Such discrepancies are possible with the use of comment filtering features in social media by the account managers based on internal operational guidelines of social media account management. In addition, the lack of engagement between account managers and followers can also occur due to the lack of personnel as the account managers as stated by Bonson's (2015) findings. This finding confirms previous researcher's statement that interactivity is an attribute of the communication process, not necessarily attached to new media (Ariel, 2015).

In terms of source interactivity, which can be seen through the extent to which users take advantage of the personalization and customization functions available in social media, the Ministry of Finance’s social media accounts manager uses that advantage such as to disable comment functionality and filter comments or use of other customization panels. In previous research it is found that web interactivity brings benefits to the aspects of enjoyment, attitude, and behavior. While web interactivity that is too high causes disturbance for the user in processing information, gain understanding, or strengthen the memory of a message (Yang, 2017). Therefore, disabling the interactivity function that can reduce the effectiveness of information processing is deemed necessary.

From the above finding, it can been seen that even though social media have a high interactivity capacity that happened with the public in the Ministry of Finance account it tend to apply a one way interactivity. This might occur due to the lack of social media management staff and a consideration that if a much wider dialogue are open, regarding state debt, from the interactivity feature, it will further gives more ambiguity in the information regarding state debt. Meanwhile, if we relate this with open government, the lack of two way interactivity between government institutions with the public can reduce the level of government collaboration with its citizen and also reduce the public interest to participate in overseeing the government policy through the public space.
Conclusion

The development of information and communication technology brings fundamental changes in communications conducted by government public relations both internal and external communications. The increasing penetration of social media users from year to year and the development of the "richness" aspect of social media as industry 4.0 developed, encourage government public relations to focus more on social media management. Social media becomes the primary choice in publishing policies and information dissemination with account management strategies that is customized to the “richness” of each type of social media and valence of messages to be conveyed. Social media as a rich media is seen to have advantages because it can reach large number of public in real time and at low cost. However the social media richness is not entirely determined the success in conveying a message. It requires the understanding of the social media manager to manage the social media richness. The type of social media chosen by the Ministry of Finance in communicating the message of state debt is correct. The capacity of each social media are manage in accordance with what is required.

One of the most distinctive social media rhetoric functions is its interactivity function. The skills of the public relations staff, who are managers of social media accounts of an institution/agency, are indispensable in utilizing the interactive features available in social media with various strategies, as these skills impact on the persuasion aspect of the message being conveyed. In the evaluation of the use of interactivity aspects of social media by government public relations, it was found that although the skills of the social media account manager are adequate but this interactivity technology is not always optimally utilized. Interactivity that tend to happened one way. This can occur due to the lack of staff availability in managing social media accounts or the consideration of information dissemination effectiveness. It is therefore to be understandeable as the impact of sociomateriality of media social management because high web interactivity actually interferes with the process of receiving information or the cognitive process of the message recipient (Yang, 2017), but at the other side, public relation staff need to gain public attention through social media. Therefore, interactivity management strategies need to be understood by the account managers in order for the public engagement to be preserved but the message to be conveyed can also be understood as it intended. Meanwhile from the open government perspective, a one way interactivity that is required in some cases but needed for a long term, has the potential to reduce the people participation and collaboration with the government.

This research is expected to be an input for government public relations, especially the account managers of government institution’s social media, in choosing the right social media to run or engage public relations activities and in managing the interactivity of social media. Even though social media is a rich media it cannot just take advantage the richness of such media without understanding the type of information that requires
rich media and which one requires a leaner media. Social media itself even though it is a rich media it can be made leaner by it users. If the government public relation wanted to convey a message through social media that has the potential to create ambiguity and turbidity in the public, it is better to convey such message by taking advantage the richness of social media as minimum as possible. In the other hand if it wanted to convey a massage with the purpose to clarify the unclear information in public, then the government public relation must take maximum advantage of the richness of social media.

This study has limitations because it is only an evaluation with literature study and observation. In the future, further research is needed on the level of interactivity of government social media accounts that is seen from the account follower’s perception as well as the effectiveness of social media accounts in disseminating information or counter negative opinions. Other study that can also be done are in relation the significance and the dilemma of role face by the manager of social media account such as a conflict between personal interest and the institution and also how far media social institutions represent the institution itself.

References

Journal article


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