Unfriend Facebook Behavior as Political Symbolization on Social Media

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Abstract

This research examine how people can do unfriend on facebook with their friend, what is the reason and how the action affect in their relationship in real life. Many people use social media to express their political views. Sometimes their political differences change the relationship between them. Qualitative method was used in this research with descriptive analysis and using Mead's symbolic interactionism theory.

Keywords: Unfriend; Facebook; Politics

Introduction

Currently in any part of the world there has been a revolution in digital technology. The Internet as an icon of digital technology has been able to penetrate the boundaries of space and time. One of the products of digital technology is social media, which allows people to maintain relationships with others without meeting physically. Survey conducted by the Association of Indonesian Internet Network Providers (APJII) during the year 2017 revealed that more than half of Indonesia's population is connected to the internet. In other words, there's 256.2 million population of Indonesia today, as many as 132.7 million people have been connected to the internet. Interestingly, 30% of internet users are active users of social media.

Social media offers ease and speed in disseminating information, giving and receiving responses, observing the circulation of information, making comparisons of information. No wonder social media like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Line and Instagram have a lot of fans, because everyone can easily interact with each other regardless of space and time. Social media has transformed into a social space withthe increase of personal technology, such as mobile phones, tablets and laptops. Various themes of conversation such as personal issues, family, social, even politics (a quite sensitive theme) began to roll in this social space.

The political theme as social media conversation in Indonesia has been massive since the 2014 General Election. Social media users used to discuss political issues, ranging

from candidate or government programs, campaigns, to political fake news (hoaxes). In this context, social media can be seen as the embodiment of the concept of public sphere, as proposed by Jurgen Habermas.

Public space is a democratic space or a social discourse which citizens can express their opinions, interests and needs discursively (Hardiman, 2009:128). Public spaces are outside the confines of the private space. In the public sphere, people can freely participate in common conversations on social issues. Habermas (in Calhoun, 2012) exemplifies the formation of public space in Europe, as the phenomenon of cafes in Europe evolves around the 17th and 18th centuries.

Linda Civitello (in Makki, 2011) says that the growth of cafes makes Europeans have a reason to gather in public spaces without involving alcohol. In the cafes everyone from different professions, classes and social status can meet and engage in common conversations on social issues. This condition marks the three most important characteristics in public space institutions called by Habermas, namely sociability, equality and communication (Calhoun, 2012).

The concept of mass media is not yet known at this cafe era. News spreads by word of mouth, or through pamphlets spread in cafes (The Economist, 2011). As the mass media grew, starting with newspapers, followed by radio and television, news was possible to reach a larger audience. The mass media, especially in democratic countries, becomes a new public space that mediates conversations with various elements of society. New media era marked by the rise of social media sites, public space is mediated by interconnected technology. The conversation can be very specific and go beyond the interests of mass media, but at the same time reach a large number of audiences.

In this era, the dialogue in the public sphere occurred two ways. But with mass media, the conversation becomes one way. The power to determine media content is centralized in the hands of media corporations and journalists. Society have minimal control. Thereafter, they choose an alternative media that is more appropriate to their needs. In the era of new media, the interaction become more personal. Everyone can customize the media according to their interests and needs. In Facebook, media customization can be done in various ways. Blocking friends, disconnecting friends (unfriend), or hideother people's status from timeline (Bode, 2016: 1).

Facebook networking system can be used as a space to exchange ideas between its user. However, the existence of political sentiments and differences of opinion seems to make the usershave to unfriend another user, although they have been friend for long time. Unfriend behavior is a symbolic statement of a Facebook user against another user who disagree or contrary to opinion, or their political choice.

Basically, unfriend Facebook phenomenon counted rare. The survey conducted by Pew Research (in Bode, 2016: 1) reveals that only less than 10% of respondents have ever done a unfriend on Facebook. Yet this phenomenon is quite unique because it occurs in various parts of the world: in Indonesia in the momentum of General Elections 2014 and

Jakarta Province Elections 2017; in America in the 2016 General Election; and in Israel on the issue of the Israeli-Gaza conflict of 2014.

In addition, unfriend can be seen as a fairly complex behavior. This is because unfriend must pass some boundaries (Bode, 2016). First, the structural constraints associated with regulating the account. Some Facebook users may not know how to unfollow or unfriend. Moreover, these social media sites regularly update the settings. Second, social constraints related to the personal relationships of one account owner with others outside the social media. Unfriending a friend or family on Facebook, is likely to affect their relationship outside of social media. Therefore Facebook users are assumed to have a very strong foundation for unfriend based political reasons.

Problem

The unfriend phenomenon on Facebook is a form of action from one Facebook user to respond another users. This action is very likely caused by several things. Unfriend is a manifestation of a symbolic attitude towards the political views of friend. Through unfriend behavior, the offender interacts with certain symbols to be interpreted by others.

From the description above, we will examine this issue based on the symbolic interaction concept of George Herbert Mead. This concept is a way of thinking about the mind, self, and society by using the tradition of social psychology as the foundation of the existence of human needs to interact with each other. This concept teaches that meaning emerges as an interaction between humans, both verbal and nonverbal. Through action and response, humans actually give meaning to their words or actions, and hence man can understand an event in a certain way.

The core of Mead's theory is the concept of self, namely "I" and "Me", that is where the self of a human being as subject is "I" and the self of a human being as an object is "Me". "I" is a non-reflective self-aspect which is a response to a spontaneous behavior without any consideration. While there is a consideration"I" turn into "Me". Mead argues that a person who is "Me" acts on the basis of consideration of the norms and expectations and the existence of others. While the concept of "I" occurs when there is spontaneity space, then spontaneous behavior arises and creativity beyond the expectations and norms that exist.

The concept of symbolic interaction was influenced by social structures that shape or cause certain behaviors, then it form symbolization in social interactions of the society. In other words, this concept emphasizes that people in society are never separated from social interaction (society), and interaction in society manifests in certain symbols that tend to be dynamic (mind).

From the above explanation, researchers formulate research questions as follows, how does someone who does a Facebook unfriend define themselves?; How does Facebook's unfriend behavior considered as a symbolic action?and how does Facebook's unfriend behavior form a symbolization in social interaction?

Literature Review

The symbolic interaction theory was pioneered by University of Chicago Philosopher Professor George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), primarily referring to Mead's Mind, self, society (1934), which is a collection of lecture notes codified by his students after Mead's passed away. The development of Mead's theory goes on through further interpretation and elaboration, in particular by Herbert Blumer, one of the Mead students who coined the term "symbolic interactionism" (Ambarwati, 2016)

Symbolic interactionism is concerned with the interaction behavior among people in society. Itexplains the classical differentiation in sociology about actors and structures. Social structures and meanings are created and maintained in social interaction (Littlejohn, 2001).

In symbolic interactionism, man is the first and most important social object. They were conceptualized as actors who have need to connect with other humans through symbolically meaningful communities and symbolic worlds (Bryan Crable, in Littlejohn and Foss, 2009). Meaning is generated through interaction between humans (Littlejohn, 2001)

We use meaning to interpret what is happening around us. Interpretations such as internal conversation (self): The actor chooses, checks, delays, groups and transforms meaning based on the situation around him, and used it as a guide for his actions (Littlejohn, 2001).

Barbara Ballis (in Littlejohn, 2001) summarizes the main premises of symbolic interactionism into six points:

- Humans make decisions and actions based on subjective understanding of the circumstances surround them
- Social life was dominated by interaction process more than structure. Therefore the process of change takes place constantly
- In the symbols of their main social group,humans understand their experiences through meaning, and language becomes an essential part of social life
- The world was structured through social objects whose names and functions are socially determined
- Human action based on interpretation, which defines and gives meaning to the relevant objects and actions in a situation
- Individuals are significant objects, and as other social objects, defined through social interaction with other individuals

As mentioned above, symbolic interactionism theory pays deep attention to the process of human interaction. Language as one of the essential means of interaction gained an important position in this theory. Symbolic interactionism doesn't view meaning as singular; but is generated through social or communal agreements on the proper use of every word (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009). Meaning in words is not on the

object, but in the response it produces. Understanding the meaning of a thing, as well as understanding how to act and behave towards it (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009).

Mead discusses three main concepts in the idea of symbolic interactionism, namely the mind, self and society.

1. Mind. Mead defines the mind as the ability to use symbols that have the same social meaning (Ambarwati, 2016). The use of this symbol occurs in human interaction. This symbol can be a language, expression, body language, behavior and so forth. It's basically a mutual agreement. Symbols are used as long as their meaning is socially agreed. By interaction through the use of symbols this activity of thinking is possible.

The mind reflects and creates the social world. While learning the language, humans learn social norms and cultural values that constrict behavior. At the same time, humans learn ways of shaping and transforming the social world through interaction (Ambarwati, 2016). Mind can be viewed as a way of human understanding of the various situations that occur around it, to create meaning and determine the actions to be taken.

2. Self. Mead defines self as the ability to reflect away from the perspective of others (Ambarwati, 2016). The results of understanding and the creation of meaning made by the mind and internalized into self. At this point Mead asserts that self can be both object and subject. It becomes the object because the meaning creationwas influenced by the social structure of symbolic agreements. But on the other hand it is also subject because it has the mind and the ability of reflection that dialogue the mind with itself.

3. Society. Herbert Mead defines society as a network of social relationships created by humans (Ambarwati, 2016). As mentioned above, individuals connect with others through a symbolic world that has meaningalready. At this point the structure that contains agreements on the use of various symbols was perpetuated. However, as described in the previous point, the individual still has the ability to reflect. This allows them to produce a distinctive meaning, but still be understood by social agreement.

Social Media

Social media are Internet-based applications built on the ideology and technology of Web 2.0, enabling creation and exchange of user generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Through social media human beings establish social relationships with others through the medium of technology.

Through social media, users can represent themselves as well as interact, work together, share, communicate with others, and form a virtual social bond (Nasrullah, in Ambarwati, 2016). In relation to political posts, social media can be seen as the embodiment of the concept of public sphere, as proposed by Jurgen Habermas.

Public space is a democratic space or a social discourse, in which citizens can express their opinions, interests and needs discursively (Hardiman, 2009: 128). Habermas (in Calhoun, 2012) exemplifies the formation of public space in Europe, as the phenomenon of cafes in Europe evolves around the 17th and 18th centuries.

By interpreting it as a public space, users perceive social media like Facebook as a free and open forum for expressing opinions, raising political criticism and expressing political tendencies.

Unfriend Facebook on Social Penetration Theory

Another stage of relationship development is described by Mark L. Knapp (in Kurniati, 2014) which mentions that there are ten stages of relationship development consisting of five stages getting in and five stages getting out. It shows that when communication changes, the interpersonal relationship also automatically changes as well. The ten stages are:

- Getting In

1. Initiation stage. Someone begin to interact with others and represent themselves positively.

2. Experimenting Phase. Someone begin to learn about their interaction opponents,e.g. they choose a topic of conversation that is considered attractive to both. At this stage the exchange of general information about self has begun through a light conversation.

3. Intensifying. The interaction has been more intimate. In this stage each person can interact with terms that are understood together.

4. Integrating. At this stage each person is able to perform activities together, explore each other's properties and sense of empathy has increased.

5. Bonding. Relationships that are created begin to be inaugurated, can take the form of marriage.

- Getting Out

1. Differentiating. Someone begin to feel that they are different from their partner. Emphasize more on differences than similarity. This stage is called "escape"

2. Circumsribing. Communication begins to be limited by discussing only safe and non-conflicting topics.

3. Stagnating. Communication that exists between the couple began to feel awkward. Communication feels like with strangers.

4. Avoiding. Each person physically begins to separate. Rarely or no interaction at all.

5. Terminating stage, the bond began to break and each side began to build the distance physically.

Unfriend Facebook is the act of severing friendship in social media. Friendship system on Facebook gives control for users to choose friends (add friends), hide

activity or posting certain friends (hide features), eliminate all activities or post friends without disconnecting friendship (unfollow), to disconnect friendship (unfriend). With the breakdown of friendship relationships in this social media, both parties have limited access to view the profile page and other activities on Facebook.

Regarding concept of Knapp, the differentiating stage in facebook occurs when someone begin to see the post his/her friends, either it's a status post ora news share. Circumscribing stage occurs when facebookaccount use hide features, they hides a particular post from their friend that creates a conflict between them. Unfollow can be described in the concept of Knapp as avoiding stage, now each person has no interaction in Facebook because one of them omitted the whole post from his friend. And unfriend is the terminating stage where an account user disconnects with his friend on Facebook.

Unfriend behavior on Facebook can be seen as a fairly complex behavior. Because to do so must pass some boundaries (Bode, 2016). First, the structural constraints related to managing accounts on Facebook that require users to have knowledge to control their accounts. Second, social constraints related to personal relationships with others outside the social media. Therefore, Facebook users are assumed to have a very strong foundation for unfriend based political reasons. Bode (2016) study itself affirms this assumption. The higher one's interest in politics and ideology, the greater the potential to unfriend on Facebook with political reasons.

Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological research strategy, a tradition that focuses its attention on meaning, structure, and the essence of the experiences of people, groups, or society on a phenomenon. According to Patton (2002: 105) Phenomenology comes from the philosophical tradition developed by Edmund H. Husserl as a study that studies how people describe something and experience through their interpretation. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze this research.

Data collection techniques is a method that will be used by researchers in collecting data. Researchers collect data by conducting in-depth interviews by first selecting informants through purposive sampling technique. Neuman (2013) mentioned the sampling through purposive sampling is done by first determining certain criteria of the object in accordance with the purpose of the study. Criteria for selecting informants in this study are as follows,

1. Informant understand features of Facebook,

This criterion indicates that informants are not just Facebook users but understand about the features that exist in Facebook. Bode (2016) says that unfriend must go through several restrictions, including the structural constraints associated with regulating the account.

2. Informant has right to vote in the election

This criterion indicates that the informant has chosen a candidate leader, both at the regional and state level. This also makes the informant had experienced exposure to political news in Facebook.

3. Informant did unfriend their friend on Facebook

This criterion indicates that the informant once did unfriend Facebook as an interaction response in social media.

Result and Discussion

The self-concept consists of "I" in which the individual acts as subject and "Me" as an individual as an object. From the data it is found that there is a continuous dialectic between "I" and "Me". The dialectic arises because:

a)   Age maturity, where an increasingly mature age will affect whether the informant acts as subject ("I") or acts as an object ("Me").

b)   Differences of opinion, which intersect with the principle or information that is considered sensitive by the informant. When the difference of opinion occurs within the acceptable limits of the informant, there is no unfriend. But when there is a post excessive opinion that happens unfriend on Facebook.

The concept of symbolic interactionism from Mead which is also discussed in this research is about mind and society. The mind in this study refer to the knowledge of informants about political symbols that are posted in Facebook. While society is refer to people who influence the political views of informants. From existing data, informant preferences or the extent to which the informant is interested and deepens the political news, correlates with the concept of informant mind that will trigger unfriend behaviour. News or information obtained will form political symbols in the minds of informants. Concept of mind in this study explain that the interpretation of the symbols may change over time, in line with changes in situations found in social interactions. As for society, every informant has its own social network. These networks will affect the mind and the self of informants, which then also trigger unfriend action. However, although there is influence, the concept of society may not be too significant in influencing unfriend Facebook behaviour of the informant. This is well-founded when considering other data that informants actually have their own political preferences formed from the concept of mind, coupled with self-defining informants themselves.

Someone does a Facebook unfriend in response to his interaction with a post (symbol) made by his friend on Facebook. This action certainly passes certain stages as set forth in the five-stage concept of farewell from Knapp. The stages of separation in social media are just going through differentiating stages where there is a difference of opinion in Facebook.Circumscribing stage occurs whensomeone sees excessive post (hide), avoiding a friend's account post can be considered as un-follow and the

terminating stage is unfriend. In the Facebook stage that is used differently, a person can just follow the stage, or it could be random.

Conclusion

Based on the results of research and discussion, the conclusions in this study are as follows:

1. There is a dialectical process in self-concept. "I" and "Me" when someone does a Facebook unfriend.

2. Facebook unfriend behavior is considered as a symbolic action because the behavior is a response from the interaction between users of the account with posts from friends, either in the form of article sharing and Facebook status. This is possible because Facebook users have knowledge of political symbols (mind). The political view of the society affects the actions of unfriend although its influence is different to each individual (it may be an educational or media environment).

3. In accordance with the above exposure that Facebook unfriend to form a symbolization in social interaction. Actually there are interactions other than unfriend in Facebook, namely hide, unfollow and block. But in social media, not all individuals go through the same stage in doing unfriend.

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