

## ACTIVITIES ON TWITTER AND THE 212 DEFEND ISLAM RALLY THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE INDONESIAN ULEMA COUNCIL

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### **Abstract**

*This article discusses the perspective of the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia – MUI) regarding social media activities and the 212 Movement, referring to the Aksi Bela Islam (Action to Defend Islam) in Jakarta. MUI's perspective is of utmost importance as MUI is seen as playing an important role in triggering the 212 Movement, which was carried out as a protest against the perceived religious blasphemy committed by the Jakarta Special Capital Region Governor at the time, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Abok). MUI's fatwa on Abok subsequently led to a disagreement in defending religion or defending the state, and it had been openly and unrestrictedly debated among netizens on social media. Social media activities (chiefly Twitter) relating to this case had positioned MUI's fatwa in numerous discussions that were littered with various expressions of hatred. This article aims to contribute a novel understanding pertaining to the relations between religion, ulema, fatwa, and social media activities.*

*[Artikel ini membahas perspektif MUI terhadap aktifitas social media yang terkait dengan Aksi Bela Islam 212 di Jakarta. Pembahasan ini penting karena MUI dianggap berperan penting dalam memicu gerakan Aksi Bela Islam, yang merupakan protes terhadap Abok karena dianggap telah melakukan penodaan agama. Fatwa MUI tersebut berakibat pada ketidaksetujuan dalam membela agama atau membela negara dan secara*

*terbuka dan tidak terbatas memunculkan debat netizen di media sosial (utamanya Twitter), serta menjadi bahan diskusi yang mengarah pada ekspresi kebencian. Artikel ini juga menawarkan sebuah pemahaman baru terkait hubungan antara agama, ulama, fatwa dan aktivitas dalam media sosial.]*

**Keywords:** Social Media, Twitter, 212 movement, MUI, Ma'ruf Amin

## A. Introduction

Activities on social media, like Twitter, in this article are understood as all active activities, such as posting statuses or commenting on other netizens' conversations, or passive activities, such as retweeting, following, or liking anything that comes to the public's attention resulting in gradual or immediate mutual linkages among netizens. This understanding is more common than the previously known terms of activism, clicktivism, or slacktivism.

Activism refers to the role taken up by individuals to fight against what they consider as political oversights or to conduct political changes by using nonviolent means.<sup>1</sup> In the context of virtual culture, the concept of activism may develop into what is known as clicktivism, or slacktivism. Clicktivism describes the online activities of a netizen who is passive in their social media activities, indicated by their actions of simply clicking the like, follow, or retweet buttons, without any negative connotation against such activities.<sup>2</sup> However, recent developments show that clicktivism activities have also entered the political realm, hence clicktivism may be considered as public expressions on social media that bear political orientation. Gibson and Cantijoch consider this as an

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Reitan, *Global Activism* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Hernando Rojas and Eulalia Puig-i-Abril, "Mobilizers Mobilized: Information, Expression, Mobilization and Participation in the Digital Age", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 14, no. 4 (2009), pp. 902–27; Homero Gil de Zúñiga, Logan Molyneux, and Pei Zheng, "Social Media, Political Expression, and Political Participation: Panel Analysis of Lagged and Concurrent Relationships", *Journal of Communication*, vol. 64, no. 4 (2014), pp. 612–34; Homero Gil de Zúñiga, Nakwon Jung, and Sebastián Valenzuela, "Social Media Use for News and Individuals' Social Capital, Civic Engagement and Political Participation", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2012), pp. 319–36.

‘e-expressive’ mode of participation.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, slacktivism refers to political activities carried out via social media, it has no impact on real life political outcomes, yet it merely functions to enhance the feel-good factor of the users.<sup>4</sup> According to Morozov,<sup>5</sup> slactivist activities are not a new phenomenon within virtual culture. The terminology emerged in 1995 as a synonym for ‘armchair activism’, or the combination of the word activism and slacker. This term is used to describe a form of online activism, including all its ensuing activities from online petitions to social media campaign to raise netizens’ awareness.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of clictivism and slacktivism emerged as a response to the early optimism of social media’s capacity to enhance and intensify the democratic participation of citizens that is effective in mobilizing collective action.<sup>7</sup> In practice, clicktivism and slacktivism are ambiguous concepts on account of clicktivism and slacktivism activities being criticized as containing weaknesses and are politically ineffective.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the conceptual description of clicktivism and slacktivism is

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<sup>3</sup> Rachel Gibson and Marta Cantijoch, “Conceptualizing and Measuring Participation in the Age of the Internet: Is Online Political Engagement Really Different to Offline?”, *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 75, no. 3 (2013), pp. 701–16.

<sup>4</sup> Henrik Serup Christensen, “Political Activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or Political Participation by Other Means?”, *First Monday*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2011).

<sup>5</sup> Evgeny Morozov, “The Brave New World of Slacktivism”, *Foreign Policy* (19 May 2009), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/05/19/the-brave-new-world-of-slacktivism/>, accessed 21 Feb 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Butler, “Clicktivism, Slacktivism, or ‘Real’ Activism? Cultural Codes of American Activism in the Internet Era”, M.A. Thesis (Denver: University of Colorado at Boulder, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, “Small Change: Why the Revolution will not be Tweeted”, *The New Yorker* (2010), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-change-malcolm-gladwell>, accessed 21 Feb 2019; Ethan Zuckerman, “New Media, New Civics?”, *Policy & Internet*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2014), pp. 151–68.

<sup>8</sup> Gert Cornelissen, Natalia Karellaia, and Emre Soyer, “Clicktivism Or Slacktivism? Impression Management and Moral Licensing”, in *European Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 10 (2013); Benjamin Waugh et al., “The Influence and Deception of Twitter: The Authenticity of the Narrative and Slacktivism in the Australian Electoral Process”, *14th Australian Information Warfare Conference* (Perth: SRI Security Research Institute, 2013).

difficult to operate due to its rather vague path.<sup>9</sup>

Activities on social media, be it in the form of clicktivism or slacktivism, within the context of the 212 movement (particularly in the run up to the Action to Defend Islam III held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, 2016) may be described as highly dynamic and even full of cynicism, various expressions of hatred from both groups of netizens that were polarized between supporting and rejecting the 212 movement.

The Action to Defend Islam was triggered by a speech delivered by the then Special Capital Region of Jakarta Governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (commonly known as Ahok). During his remarks in the Thousand Islands regency on September 27, 2016, Ahok mentioned verse 51 of Al-Maidah chapter from the Holy Qur'an while he was on a working visit to the islands to inspect a grouper fish farming empowerment program. He stated that the program would still continue even if he were not elected governor in the Jakarta gubernatorial election in February 2017, thus people did not need to feel compelled to elect him if they merely wanted the program to resume. A part of Ahok's speech subsequently considered to have insulted the Qur'an as the holy book of Muslims is as follows:<sup>10</sup>

“In your inner hearts, ladies and gentlemen, you may feel you cannot vote for me, because you have been lied to by (people) using Al Maudah verse 51 and so on. That is your right. So, if you think you cannot vote (for me) because you fear of being condemned to hell, because you are

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<sup>9</sup> Cat Jones, “Slacktivism and the Social Benefits of Social Video: Sharing a Video to ‘Help’ a Cause”, *First Monday*, vol. 20, no. 5 (2015); Chih-Wei Hu, “Health Slacktivism on Social Media: Predictors and Effects”, in *Social Computing and Social Media*, ed. by Gabriele Meiselwitz (2014), pp. 354–64; Jonathan A. Obar, “Canadian Advocacy 2.0: An Analysis of Social Media Adoption and Perceived Affordances by Advocacy Groups Looking to Advance Activism in Canada”, *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2014); Alexandra Segerberg and W. Lance Bennett, “Social Media and the Organization of Collective Action: Using Twitter to Explore the Ecologies of Two Climate Change Protests”, *The Communication Review*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2011), pp. 197–215; Václav Štětka and Jaromír Mazák, “Whither Slacktivism? Political Engagement and Social Media use in the 2013 Czech Parliamentary Elections”, *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2014).

<sup>10</sup> “Pidato di Kepulauan Seribu dan Hari-hari hingga Ahok menjadi Tersangka”, *BBC News* (17 Nov 2016), <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-37996601>, accessed 26 Dec 2016.

being fooled, it is fine. This is your personal calling,” he said.

“This program (of providing capital for grouper fish farming) will continue regardless. So, ladies and gentlemen, don’t ever feel bad that you can’t vote for Ahok,” he added.

The clause *‘dibohongi pakai surat Al-Maidah 51’* ([you] have been lied to using Al Maidah [verse] 51) is deemed by some Indonesian Muslims as an insult to the Qur’an. They demanded the National Police of the Republic of Indonesia to bring Ahok before the law.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the People’s Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia or DPR (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*) also urged the national police to immediately examine Ahok.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in order to examine Ahok, the national police stated that a fatwa or edict from MUI would be required, thus any report made without its attachment would be duly rejected.<sup>13</sup> According to the national police, blasphemy cases fall under the purview of ulema.<sup>14</sup>

A number of figures criticized the blasphemy fatwa issued by MUI. These criticisms of MUI’s fatwa questioned its legal enforceability as a part of the positive laws prevailing in Indonesia.<sup>15</sup> On social media, MUI had been bullied with accusations of corruption by netizens. Even the MUI Chairman K.H. Ma’ruf Amin had personally experienced bullying.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “FPI desak Polisi tetapkan Ahok sebagai Tersangka Malam ini”, *Rappler.com* (11 Mar 2016), <https://www.rappler.com/indonesia/berita/151189-fpi-polisi-ahok-tersangka>, accessed 26 Dec 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Bunaiya Fauzi Arubone, “Komisi III Desak Polisi Periksa Ahok”, *Rmol.id* (14 Oct 2016), <https://hukum.rmol.id/read/2016/10/14/264483/>, accessed 27 Dec 2016.

<sup>13</sup> “Tak Ada Fatwa MUI, Bareskrim Tolak Laporan soal Ahok”, *pilkada.jpnn.com* (10 Jun 2016), <http://pilkada.jpnn.com/news/tak-ada-fatwa-mui-bareskrim-tolak-laporan-soal-ahok>, accessed 29 Dec 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Joko Panji Sasongko, “Din Syamsuddin: Polri Minta MUI Terbitkan Fatwa Soal Ahok”, *CNN Indonesia* (18 Jan 2017), <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20170118210112-20-187285/din-syamsuddin-polri-minta-mui-terbitkan-fatwa-soal-ahok>, accessed 20 Jan 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Azizah Fitriyanti, “Wapres Tegaskan Fatwa MUI Bukan Hukum Positif”, *Antara News* (20 Dec 2016), <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/602514/wapres-tegaskan-fatwa-mui-bukan-hukum-positif>, accessed 3 Jan 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Anom Prihantono, “Ketum MUI Mengaku Tenang Dibully Soal pernikahannya”, *Antara News* (23 Nov 2016), <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/597861/ketum-mui-mengaku-tenang-dibully-soal-pernikahannya>, accessed 5

Social media had been one of the open arenas used to mutually criticize those supporting the fatwa and those against it. Activities on social media, eventually, served as one of the factors that instigated the protests held by both parties.<sup>17</sup>

In Indonesia, such protests held by two different groups are unrestricted due to the existing democratic system that guarantees every citizen to freely express their opinions and convey them openly via social media. This may consequently lead the online community (netizen) and social media to play a role as agents of social and political change.<sup>18</sup> Given social media's specific characteristics within an unrestricted democratic climate, social media activities in Indonesia have been found to be highly dynamic. Such high social media activities may even have an impact in social movements and political changes in Indonesia.<sup>19</sup>

However, this article will not be discussing how social media (such as Twitter) had been used or how it had influenced the Defend Islam Rally. Instead, this article aims to specifically explore MUI's perspective regarding the 212 movement within the context of activities on social media. As based on this perspective, MUI on the one hand is considered to be the institution that issued the blasphemy fatwa leading to the emergence of the Action to Defend Islam. Yet, on the other hand, MUI had been harassed on social media as a result of issuing the fatwa. Thus, the research question posed in this study is: 'What is the perspective of the Indonesian Ulema Council regarding social media activities in the 212 movement case?'

This article attempts to face Indonesian Ulema Council's religious edict, which is sacred in nature due to its position within the realm

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Jan 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Lince Eppang, "Greg Fealy: Medsos Mendorong Gerak Keagamaan seperti Aksi Bela Islam", *Netralnews.com* (11 Dec 2016), <https://www.netralnews.com/news/religi/read/41449/greg-fealy-medsos-mendorong-gerak-keagamaan-seperti-aksi-bela-islam>, accessed 6 Jan 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Steven Gordon, *Online Communities as Agents of Change and Social Movements* (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Merlyna Lim, "Many Clicks but Little Sticks: Social Media Activism in Indonesia", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 43, no. 4 (2013), pp. 636–57; Yanuar Nugroho and Sofie Shinta Syarief, *Beyond Click-Activism? New Media and Political Processes in Contemporary Indonesia* (Jakarta: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012).

of religion, off with the unrestricted realm of social media activities. The freedom of expressing one's opinion in a free democratic climate through social media has led to the emergence of various hate speech or expressions of hatred among the public on social media. Hate speech in this article is defined as an insult upon the identity of a group in order to oppress its members and reduce their rights.<sup>20</sup> Hence, in current social media life, the resilience of a country and its politics is frequently being contested, tried, and disputed on social media by the public through online means.<sup>21</sup> Various debates coupled with hate speeches on social media can be found displayed openly in real time, including past disputes concerning the religious edict issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council. The discussion in this article, thus, utilized social, political, historical, and religious approaches.

## **B. Liberalization of Social Media Space and Protest Rally**

The results of a survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Provider Association or *Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia* (APJII) in November 2016<sup>22</sup> indicate that out of the 256,2 million Indonesian, 132,7 million or equal to 51,8% were internet users. From the total of 132,7 million users, 38,7 million (29,2%) were 35 to 44 years old, 32, 2 million (24,4%) were 25 to 34 years old, 23,8 million (18%) were 45 to 54 years old, 24,4 million (18,4%) were 10 to 24 years old and 13,2 million (10%) were 55 years old and older. As much as 31,1 million people (25,5%) used the internet to find information and 129,2 million (97,4%) of the total internet users had utilized social media as their most-frequently-accessed content.

Such immense number of social media users in Indonesia indicates the high level of activities found on social media, which may hence lead to changing patterns of social interaction. With regard to social media

<sup>20</sup> Cherian George, *Hate Spin: The Manufacture of Religious Offense and Its Threat to Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Trotter and Christian Fuchs, *Social Media, Politics and the State: Protest, Revolutions, Riots, Crime and Policing in the Age of Facebook, Twitter and Youtube* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia and Polling Indonesia, *Infografis Panetrasi dan Perilaku Pengguna Internet Indonesia: Survey 2016*, Survey (Jakarta: Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia, 2016).

activities, every social media user not only consumes information but they may simultaneously produce and distribute information as well. As a result, the production and distribution of information through social media become greater and are easily disseminated. This new characteristic enables anyone actively engaged in social media to penetrate and be concurrently involved as both a consumer and producer of information. Every social media activist or users consequently play the role of message distributors.<sup>23</sup>

This has, thus, made it difficult to formulate what social media is in itself. Several new understandings concerning social media refer to the digital technology characteristic it embodies and emphasize on the contents or interactions generated by the users.<sup>24</sup> Through the characteristic of its media, social media is capable of identifying the direction of its message<sup>25</sup> or utilizing specific tools such as Facebook or Twitter to show its interaction model.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, social media is not merely media used to establish social network relations, it could rather be deemed as activities, practices, habits, and behaviors of every individual or lifestyle in their interactions with the virtual world. However, generally speaking, social media can be understood as an *online platform* to interact, collaborate, and create/share various types of digital contents. These various activities illustrate the form of liberalization taking place on social media in the cyber culture.

One of the social medias considered having an influence on protest rallies and political change is Twitter. Twitter, a micro-blogging social media service with a 140 characters content limit, has the power of influencing

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<sup>23</sup> Brian E. Weeks and R. Lance Holbert, "Predicting Dissemination of News Content in Social Media: A Focus on Reception, Friending, and Partisanship", *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 90, no. 2 (2013), pp. 212–32.

<sup>24</sup> Merlyna Lim, "Seeing Spatially: People, Networks and Movements in Digital and Urban Spaces", *International Development Planning Review*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2014), pp. 51–72.

<sup>25</sup> Michael L. Kent, "Directions in Social Media for Professionals and Scholars", in *Handbook of Public Relations*, ed. by Robert L. Heath (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), pp. 643–56.

<sup>26</sup> Philip N. Howard and Malcolm R. Parks, "Social Media and Political Change: Capacity, Constraint, and Consequence", *Journal of Communication*, vol. 62, no. 2 (2012), pp. 359–62.

the public and generating social movements, as widely witnessed during the Arab spring,<sup>27</sup> British riots,<sup>28</sup> G20 summit demonstrations,<sup>29</sup> and Iranian protests.<sup>30</sup> Numerous studies on Twitter have previously been conducted involving topics such as: how information is broken down on Twitter<sup>31</sup> and brought to mainstream media;<sup>32</sup> how a tweet on Twitter is used during emergencies,<sup>33</sup> educational activities;<sup>34</sup> or how it is utilized by politician.<sup>35</sup>

In Indonesia, Twitter has the power of instigating mass rallies that

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<sup>27</sup> Zizi Papacharissi and Maria de Fatima Oliveira, “Affective News and Networked Publics: The Rhythms of News Storytelling on #Egypt”, *Journal of Communication*, vol. 62, no. 2 (2012), pp. 266–82; Marko Papic and Sean Noonan, “Social Media as a Tool for Protest”, *Stratfor* (2 Mar 2011), <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/social-media-tool-protest>, accessed 27 Jul 2018.

<sup>28</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick and Heba Afify, “For Egyptians, British Riots Are a Mix of Familiar and Peculiar”, *The New York Times* (12 Aug 2011), <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/13/world/middleeast/13egypt.html>, accessed 6 Jan 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Lindsay Ems, “Twitter Use in Iranian, Moldovan and G-20 Summit Protests Presents New Challenges for Governments”, *CHI 2010 Workshop on Microblogging: What and How Can We Learn from It?* (Atlanta, Ga: ACM, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Alex Burns and Ben Eltham, “Twitter Free Iran: an Evaluation of Twitter’s Role in Public Diplomacy and Information Operations in Iran’s 2009 Election Crisis”, presented at the Communications Policy & Research Forum 2009 (University of Technology, Sydney: Network Insight Institute, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Haewoon Kwak et al., “What is Twitter, a Social Network or a News Media?”, *Proceedings of the 19th International Conference on World Wide Web* (New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Bibi van der Zee, “Twitter Triumphs”, *Index on Censorship*, vol. 38, no. 4 (2009), pp. 97–102.

<sup>33</sup> Eric Berger, “This Sentence Easily Would Fit on Twitter: Emergency Physicians Are Learning to ‘Tweet’”, *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, vol. 54, no. 2 (2009), pp. A23–5; Amanda Lee Hughes and Leysia Palen, “Twitter Adoption and Use in Mass Convergence and Emergency Events”, *International Journal of Emergency Management*, vol. 6, nos. 3–4 (2009), pp. 248–60.

<sup>34</sup> Gabriela Grosseck and Carmen Holotescu, “Can We Use Twitter for Educational Activities?”, *In 4th International Scientific Conference* (Bucharest, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Will J. Grant, Brenda Moon, and Janie Busby Grant, “Digital Dialogue? Australian Politicians’ use of the Social Network Tool Twitter”, *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 45, no. 4 (2010), pp. 579–604.

result in political change. Referring to research conducted by Nugroho,<sup>36</sup> Lim,<sup>37</sup> and Galuh<sup>38</sup> the activities on Twitter may indeed lead to mass protests. Several mass rallies that had occurred in Indonesia were due to activities on social media including the cases of Pritta Mulyasari versus Omni International Hospital and *Cicak* versus *Buaya* (common house gecko versus crocodile).<sup>39</sup> The same can be said regarding the Action to Defend Islam that had been held seven times. With its interactive and real time features, social media is capable of instigating great mass protest.<sup>40</sup>

This is also an indication that the presence of social media and the changes it brings along are not necessarily in accordance with the development of culture, values or morals that enclose them. For some, social media may bring about hope, while for others it may bring about anxiety due to it containing various expressions of hatred. Social media activities may then lead to various social reactions in the form of excessive mass rallies. Lim<sup>41</sup> subsequently considers this as a predictable linear consequence of social media.

As suggested by the Chairman of MUI, Ma'ruf Amin, the Action to Defend Islam demanding Ahok to undergo legal procedures had turned into a large-scale recurring mass protest movement as a result of the police's slow response in following up the report filed by the community and the intensification of netizens' interrelated activities on social media.<sup>42</sup> Such interrelated netizen activity happening on social media is termed by

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<sup>36</sup> Nugroho and Syarief, *Beyond iCick-Activism?*

<sup>37</sup> Lim, "Many Clicks but Little Sticks".

<sup>38</sup> I. Gusti Agung Ayu Kade Galuh, "Media Sosial sebagai Strategi Gerakan Bali Tolak Reklamasi", *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, vol. 13 (2016), pp. 73–92.

<sup>39</sup> Lim, "Many Clicks but Little Sticks".

<sup>40</sup> Cyntia Lova, "Kasus Ahok dan Aksi Bela Islam Jadi Isu Terpopuler di Medsos 2016", *liputan6.com* (22 Dec 2016), <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/2685691/kasus-ahok-dan-aksi-bela-islam-jadi-isu-terpopuler-di-medsos-2016>, accessed 3 Jan 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Merlyna Lim, "The Internet and Everyday Life in Indonesia: A New Moral Panic?", *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia*, vol. 169, no. 1 (2013), pp. 133–47.

<sup>42</sup> Ma'ruf Amin, interview (Feb 2017).

Klein<sup>43</sup> as a ‘web like image’. The activities carried out on social media resemble a spider web, wherein within this web there are hubs (web centers) serving as the center of all social media activities. These hubs are connected by an actor who acts as the bridge. The bridging actors would then distribute contents or information to other web actors. These actors serving as a bridge are the ones who invigorate activities on social media thereby mutually stimulating the other actors.

Mutual stimulations are hence conducted among actors within an interest group with other actors conducting similar things in different groups. According to Lim,<sup>44</sup> such activities on social media generate a hidden transcript, i.e. public criticism to the authority through numerous other more limited and closed social media outlets such as the WhatsApp group. Many limited conversations initiated among acquainted group members will subsequently intensify and move into more open social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook.

Lim<sup>45</sup> argues that activities on social media may well lead to public involvement or instigate a mass rally since the content delivered via social media is simple, the rally carried out is low-risk, the discussed theme is consistent with more substantial narratives such as nationalism and religiosity, and it does not contradict the narratives promoted by mainstream mass media. These activities on social media will be linked to internet-based media power as a form of new media. This emphasizes the statement that initially social media was indeed created to personally connect individuals with their physically detached community to facilitate in exchanges of ideas and experiences. Nevertheless, social media could also stimulate its users to carry out and engage in protest rallies.<sup>46</sup>

Such rally may occur more instantaneously since activities on social media are also littered with various expressions of hatred or hate speech,

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<sup>43</sup> Donatella Della Porta, *Can Democracy be Saved? Participation, Deliberation and Social Movements* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

<sup>44</sup> Lim, “Many Clicks but Little Sticks”.

<sup>45</sup> Lim, “Seeing Spatially”.

<sup>46</sup> Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, “Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media”, *Business Horizons*, vol. 53, no. 1 (2010), pp. 59–68.

which are a form of insult.<sup>47</sup> Neu<sup>48</sup> explains that, as an insult, hate speech is also used to show superiority and dominance. Superiority and dominance in this case are not directly linked with relations of the majority and the minority. On social media, the majority group does not necessarily become superior and dominant over the minority. In Indonesia, ulama and religious institution such as MUI fall victim to various hate speeches found in numerous social media activities.

This indicates that social media has become a highly liberal public space. Such condition can even be described as a liberalization of public space in the virtual world. Issues that were previously taboo and sacred to be discussed in the real world become easier to be opened, discussed, and even berated on social media. Such liberalization of public space on social media enables anyone to express their opinion. This is made possible as the opinions they want to convey via social media are left without any control from the social realm, which would actually happen during a live conversation. Hence, social media is progressing towards a liberal democratic orientation.<sup>49</sup>

The elaboration provided by Bessiere, Kraut, and Boneva<sup>50</sup> regarding the difference in internet (social media) utilization and the impact it has upon individuals with social support and those without in their environment could shed some light on the matter. The personal interaction an individual has with others on social media who are mutually acquainted is an enabling environment which determines how the subsequent relations and reactions will be shaped.

### **C. Action to Defend Islam, between Defending Religion and Defending the State**

Action to Defend Islam as a form of protest against blasphemy

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<sup>47</sup> Nicholas Wolfson, *Hate Speech, Sex Speech, Free Speech* (Westport: Praeger, 1997).

<sup>48</sup> Jerome Neu, *Sticks and Stones: The Philosophy of Insults* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>49</sup> Ying Jiang, *Cyber-Nationalism in China. Challenging Western Media Portrayals of Internet Censorship in China* (Adeleide: University of Adelaide Press, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Katherine Bessière et al., "Effects of Internet Use and Social Resources on Changes in Depression", *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2008), pp. 47–70.

was eventually held several times because the government was deemed too slow in conducting investigation on this case. However, some group of people had regarded the Action to Defend Islam as a form of denial of the principles of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity), which has always been adhered to by the Indonesian nation. Ahok was a Governor coming from a non-Muslim group and of Chinese ethnicity, which is one of the minority ethnic groups. The conduction of the Action to Defend Islam subsequently provoked a reaction in the form of a competing rally called the *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* movement.<sup>51</sup> The emergence of the *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* movement as a response to the Action to Defend Islam would then lead to the social polarization of the Action to Defend Islam supporters to be considered as radical Islamists<sup>52</sup>, while the *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* supporters as secular nationalist.

The polarization of both groups describes at least three things, *first* it indicates that this matter is a sort of a long feud between the religious and nationalist groups that has resurfaced in a different form. The feud has been on-going since the initial period of Indonesia's independence.<sup>53</sup> In its ensuing development, the religious group underwent a process of being labelled as a radical, intolerant, separatist, and terror-mongering Islamic group for wanting to accomplish the implementation of Islamic sharia. Global geopolitics referring to the rise of terrorism has also positioned the hard line religious group as an agent of terror. According to Fealy,<sup>54</sup> the US, Singapore, and Malaysia have a number of evidences regarding the involvement of Indonesian based terrorists, they even

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<sup>51</sup> Ahmad Masaul Khoiri, "Parade *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, Aksi Masyarakat Persatuan Bangsa", *detiknews* (19 Nov 2016), <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-3349149/parade-bhinneka-tunggal-ika-aksi-masyarakat-persatuan-bangsa>, accessed 27 Dec 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Prima Gumilang, "Karpas Merah 'Islam Radikal' di Aksi Anti Ahok #212", *CNN Indonesia* (28 Nov 2016), <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/kursipanasdki/20161127204559-522-175673/karpas-merah-islam-radikal-di-aksi-anti-ahok-212>, accessed 27 Dec 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "Islamic State or State Islam? Fifty Years of State-Islam Relations in Indonesia", in *Indonesien am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Ingrid Wessel (Hamburg: Abera-Verlag, 1996); Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>54</sup> Greg Fealy, "Is Indonesia a Terrorist Base?", *Inside Indonesia* (2002), <https://www.insideindonesia.org/is-indonesia-a-terrorist-base>, accessed 15 Feb 2017."

stated that Indonesia is a hotbed for terrorists.

*Second*, a weak government unable to manage identity-based social and political activities performed by the religious and nationalist groups. The Action to Defend Islam represent the religious group while the Bhinneka Tunggal Ika represents the nationalist group, and the two groups were not treated equally. The government had been seen to have made attempts to thwart the rallies of the Action to Defend Islam group by blocking participants intending to attend the rally from all over Indonesia.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, the rallies ran smoothly and they were guarded by security forces. President Jokowi, Commander of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), the Head of the National Police, and several ministers even attended the 212 movement.<sup>56</sup> On social media, President Jokowi's attendance in the 212 movement became the talk of netizens. Yet, it still reflected the presence of polarization between the two groups, which were the religious group in support of the 212 movement and the nationalist group opposing it.

*Third*, the polarization indicates that radical Islam has undergone a change in its form into mass mobilization. During the initial period of Indonesia's independence, the movement was realized in the form of political struggle through the deliberations held by the Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence (*Badan Penyelidik Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia* – BPUPKI). Subsequently, during the New Order era notable for its immensely strong government, the state impressively repressed every radical movement. At the onset of the reform movement following the fall of Soeharto, its changing form could be observed through political movements taking place in

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<sup>55</sup> Okezone, "Rombongan Peserta Aksi 212 Dihadang Polisi di Lampung", *Okezone News* (1 Dec 2016), <https://news.okezone.com/read/2016/12/01/340/1556168/rombongan-peserta-aksi-212-dihadang-polisi-di-lampung>, accessed 17 Dec 2016; Saiful Munir, "Polisi Pursulit Peserta Aksi 212, Komitmen Kapolri Dipertanyakan", *SINDOnews.com* (1 Dec 2016), <https://nasional.sindonews.com/berita/1159639/13/polisi-persulit-peserta-aksi-212-komitmen-kapolri-dipertanyakan>, accessed 17 Dec 2016.

<sup>56</sup> Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Aksi Bela Islam: Konservatisme dan Fragmentasi Otoritas Keagamaan", *Maarif*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2016), pp. 15–29.

the parliament. According to Hosen<sup>57</sup> and Salim,<sup>58</sup> during the 2000–2001 period, the People’s Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat* – MPR) had rejected various proposals from Islamic parties to implement Islamic laws for Muslims. Despite the moderate Islam political group having obtained 15 percent of Muslim votes, the radical Islam group, which had a much smaller basis of support, had constantly proposed the implementation of Islamic law.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, during its initial phase, after the fall of the New Order, the radical Islam movement had also become more noticeable in the form of violence in various religious conflicts. This group of Islam is known to have frequently used the discourse of jihad and mobilized followers to engage in jihad in regions where interreligious conflicts occurred, such as Maluku or Poso in Central Sulawesi.<sup>60</sup>

Today, the radical Islam movement may appear and infiltrate into mass mobilization activities such as the Action to Defend Islam. This means that there is a shift of pattern or form in the radical Islam group from their struggle through political debates (such as during deliberations in BPUPKI and the parliament through Islamic parties), then their appearance in the form of militias and bombing terror, and eventually their infiltration of mass mobilization movements in a number of Action to Defend Islam. This occurred concurrently along with the moment that the government disbanded *Hizbut Tabrir Indonesia* (HTI). According to Hefner<sup>61</sup>, HTI was considered as one of the radical mass organizations capable of mobilizing the masses on an impressively large scale. The

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<sup>57</sup> Nadirsyah Hosen, *Shari’a and Constitutional Reform in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2007).

<sup>58</sup> Arskal Salim, *Challenging the Secular State: The Islamization of Law in Modern Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

<sup>59</sup> Edward Aspinall, “Elections and the Normalization of Politics in Indonesia”, *South East Asia Research*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2005), pp. 117–56; Marcus Mietzner, “Comparing Indonesia’s Party Systems of the 1950s and the Post-Suharto Era: From Centrifugal to Centripetal Inter-Party Competition”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3 (2008), pp. 431–53; Andreas Ufen, “From ‘aliran’ to Dealignment: Political Parties in Post-Suharto Indonesia”, *South East Asia Research*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2008), pp. 5–41.

<sup>60</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, “Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism in Post-Suharto Indonesia”, *South East Asia Research*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2002), pp. 117–154.

<sup>61</sup> Robert W. Hefner, “Indonesia, Islam, and the New U.S. Administration”, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2016), pp. 59–66.

momentum of HTI's disbandment leading up to the Presidential Election also served as another context which had significant effect on the Action to Defend Islam.

However, another approach is necessary to observe the various Action to Defend Islam that occurred. These movement might have been taken advantage of by radical Islamic groups like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and Majelis Muhajidin Indonesia (MMI) because they had been initiated by the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam–FPI), which is often regarded as a radical group<sup>62</sup>, yet, the rallies also went on in peace without any hint of violence, which is usually conducted by radical Islamic groups. This shows that there are new changes in various social and political activities involving diverse Islamic groups.

Upon observing the three perspectives above, it seems that Islamic radicalism appears during the state's time of crisis.<sup>63</sup> To be more specific, according to Zada<sup>64</sup> the fall of Soeharto paved the way for the rapid development of Islamic radicalism in Indonesia. The fall of Soeharto has brought Indonesia's political system to undergo changes heading towards a liberal position. Such political liberalization has not only provided opportunities for the nationalist group, but it also allows equal opportunities to the religious group. According to Barton,<sup>65</sup> change in political leadership through elections tends to bring about radical Islamic ideology. The Islamic ideology that forms this political basis, in Barton's opinion, is the starting point of contemporary Islamic radicalism.

According to Ma'ruf Amin,<sup>66</sup> the polarization between the religious groups (which often refer to a category of radical Islam due to their desire of continuing the struggle to implement Islamic law) and the nationalist groups may be regarded as a form of divide and conquer strategy, which pits and sets Islamic groups deemed to be non-nationalist against other

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan, "Islamic Radicalism and the Crisis of the Nation-State" *ISIM News Letter*, vol. 7 (2001).

<sup>64</sup> Khamami Zada, *Islam Radikal: Pergulatan Ormas-Ormas Islam Garis Keras di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Penerbit Teraju, 2002). p. 88.

<sup>65</sup> Greg Barton, "Islam, Islamism and Politics in Indonesia", in *Violence in Between: Conflict and Security in Archipelagic Southeast Asia*, ed. by Damien Kingsbury (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2005).

<sup>66</sup> Ma'ruf Amin, interview (Feb 2017).

groups that are nationalist. It seems that the Bhinneka Tunggal Ika movement was conducted with the intent of proclaiming that Indonesian Muslims holding the Action to Defend Islam are contradicting and defiling Bhinneka Tunggal Ika and are a threat to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). Muslims as the majority in Indonesia were defamed to have no nationalism. Furthermore, these Muslims were pitted against other groups bearing nationalism. The process of pitting and the two groups against one another had been mediated by the mass media and liberal social media activities.

“There are religious radical and secular radical groups. They are right and left extremists. MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council) maintains (the nation) according to the spirit of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. Our country is not a religious state, and it is not a secular one. Indonesian Muslims are defamed as a group neglecting Pancasila, destroying unity, and even threatening the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). Indonesian Muslims are perceived to be against the idea of Pancasila as the state pillars of Indonesia. This was observed upon the aspiration delivered by Muslims demanding law enforcers to carry out legal proceedings for the perpetrator of blasphemy, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama alias Ahok”.

The debate between Islam and nationalism in Indonesia has lasted for a long period of time. This debate sets Islam as a religion against Indonesia as a country with a Muslim majority. An undeniable piece of history relates to the contributions that Muslims had provided for the independence of the Republic of Indonesia during the colonial era. This fact had at times led to the idea of establishing an Islamic state after Indonesia declared its independence on August 17, 1945. Sekarmaji Marijan Kartosoewirjo, Abdul Qahhar Mudzakkar, and Tengku Muhammad Daud Beureu'eh were among the Islamic figures in Indonesia who wanted to establish an Islamic State of Indonesia. Islam was deemed appropriate as the state ideology or foundation due to the consideration of democracy's failure.<sup>67</sup>

Formerly, such debate had officially surfaced during the formulation of Pancasila as the national principle of the Republic of Indonesia in

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<sup>67</sup> Irfan S. Awwas, *Trilogi Kepemimpinan Negara Islam Indonesia: Mengungkap Perjuangan Umat Islam dan Pengkhianatan Kaum Nasionalis-Sekuler* (Yogyakarta: Uswah, 2008).

a number of BPUPKI (*Badan Penyelidik Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia* or the Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence) meetings. BPUPKI consisted of 61 individuals representing all Indonesian community groups.<sup>68</sup> The debate had even taken place between Soekarno and Muhammad Natsir in 1940 before Indonesia's independence. Soekarno as the first President of Indonesia at that time wanted Muslims to gain a new understanding regarding the relationship of religion and country. For Soekarno, the separation of religion and state would in fact save religion itself. Meanwhile, Muhammad Natsir disagreed with Soekarno's idea and argued that in Islam everything has its own rules and principles, including those in managing a country, thereby Islam is inseparable from the state.<sup>69</sup> Since the majority of Indonesians are Muslims, the Islam groups attending the BPUPKI meetings insisted that Indonesia be an Islamic state.

To resolve the prevailing polemic, it was decided that the BPUPKI assembly forms a smaller committee consisting of 9 individuals to discuss the issue regarding Indonesia's national principles. This committee was then known as *Panitia 9* (Committee 9) which succeeded in formulating a Gentlemen Agreement subsequently named *Piagam Jakarta* or the Jakarta Charter.

*Piagam Jakarta* is the result of a compromise between the Islamic group and the nationalist group that drafted the five national principles of Indonesia as set forth in Pancasila with the addition of 7 words to the first principle, i.e. *Ketuhanan dengan kewajiban menjalankan syariat Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknya* (a divinity with the obligation for adherents of the faith to carry out Islamic sharia). However, in the BPUPKI assembly, the seven words were once again contested, leading the BPUPKI meeting to become relentless. At the end of the day, the 7 words were omitted and thus the five principles of Pancasila were ultimately drafted as the national principles of the Republic of Indonesia, namely: 1) Belief in the one and only God. 2) Just and civilized humanity. 3) The unity of Indonesia. 4) Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of

<sup>68</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Islam dan Masalah Kenegaraan: Studi Tentang Percaturan dalam Konstituante* (Jakarta: Lembaga Penelitian Pendidikan dan Penerangan Ekonomi dan Sosial, 1985).

<sup>69</sup> Deliar Noer, *Gerakan Modern Islam Di Indonesia 1900-1942* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1980).

deliberations amongst representatives. 5) Social justice for all of the people of Indonesia.

The omission of those seven words in the Jakarta charter had politically been resolved during the BPUPKI meeting in 1945. However, its understanding and implementation have yet to be resolved even as of today. The polemic had resurfaced as a response to the reaction the nationalist group had shown regarding the Action to Defend Islam. The movement was subsequently deemed to represent the group wanting to establish Islam as Indonesia's national principle.

This clarifies that since the beginning of Indonesia's independence, the nationalist groups had already felt uncomfortable with the religious groups who were set to maintain Islamic law.<sup>70</sup> However, the essential spirit of the religious group had been incorporated into the religious principles contained in Pancasila. The five principles of Pancasila are believed to reflect the moral and cultural values mutually held by numerous religious and ethnic communities found in this country, including the belief in God.<sup>71</sup>

According to Ma'ruf Amin, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, in the context of Indonesian interreligious relationship, could not be enforced simply by removing the creed, belief, or identity of a group. Islam as a religion or creed is the belief of Muslims in Indonesia and they are free to practice the sharia and defend their religious teachings. However, their defense of Islam should not sacrifice or remove one's love for and defense of the country. Hence, for Ma'ruf Amin, Indonesia does not belong solely to Muslims or nationalists.

For Ma'ruf Amin,<sup>72</sup> in terms of the historical perspective on the relationship between Islam and the state, Indonesian Muslims have made two sacrifices for the sake of establishing the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. *Firstly*, regarding the form of state, in which Muslims gave in to Indonesia being a non-Islamic state. *Secondly*, regarding the omission of the "*Seven Words in the Jakarta Charter*". According to Ma'ruf Amin, the recent accusation afforded to the groups holding the

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<sup>70</sup> B.J. Bolland, *The Struggle of Islam in Modern Indonesia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971).

<sup>71</sup> Bruinessen, "Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism in Post-Suharto Indonesia".

<sup>72</sup> Ma'ruf Amin, interview (Feb 2017).

Action to Defend Islam of being noncompliant to Pancasila was not by the nationalists, but from the secular groups instead.

“I have witnessed various slanders directed towards Indonesian Muslims being spread via social media currently constitute an effort of a few group of people intending to secularize Pancasila. This effort made by the secular group should be prevented together.”

As MUI Chairman, the perspective given by Ma’ruf Amin in observing the Action to Defend Islam utilizes the natural law approach. Natural law is rooted on the concept or idea of religiosity. The concept was derived from the conservative power to protect particular assets such as religion as a capital in social relations. The aim of this idea is recognized to be the fundamental right individuals have in their social life.<sup>73</sup> In its further development, natural law is used as ideological and moral bases to justify many existing social, political, and legal systems.<sup>74</sup> This perspective is relevant for re-internalizing the noble values of religion and tolerance in various dimensions of social and political lives.

However, in current social reality, various concepts, thoughts, and ideas could be openly debated, contested and even rejected through an open discussion on social media. This condition will place all notions, thoughts, or ideas concerning the sacred, holy, and those that were previously thought to contain good values to undergo a mediation process through the participation of netizens on social media. Anyone can express their opinion on anything via social media. Hence, the activities of netizens on social media do not entail sound knowledge as a basis for the opinion they intend to express.

The presence of social media had subsequently become a power capable of organizing and mobilizing the masses. Such mass mobilization is undoubtedly different from its traditional counterpart that mobilizes the masses through the use of labor unions or political parties.<sup>75</sup> The

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<sup>73</sup> Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>74</sup> Hans Kelsen, *What is Justice?: Justice, Law and Politics in the Mirror of Science* (NJ: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2014).

<sup>75</sup> Victor Bekkers et al., “New Media, Micromobilization, and Political Agenda Setting: Crossover Effects in Political Mobilization and Media Usage”, *The Information Society*, vol. 27, no. 4 (2011), pp. 209–19.

difference in the mobilization of the Action to Defend Islam masses is that it was not an activity held by an official organization.

Mass mobilization for the purpose of driving a protest rally mediated through social media could set people in motion. This process may occur instantaneously without any instructions, command, or a sense of mutual suffering as are commonly observed when mobilizing through labor organizations or political parties. Via social media, deployment of the masses for protest rally may well be achieved by inciting massive provocations, persuasions, or dissemination of opinions.<sup>76</sup> In the Indonesian context, the use of social media for instigating protests can rapidly become widespread because social media users are scattered throughout all societal levels.<sup>77</sup>

In addition, the lack of government control over contents spreading on social media renders such information to be accessible to the public without due selection process, as observed to occur in other mass media as well.<sup>78</sup> Social media subsequently becomes a public space immune to government control.<sup>79</sup> Thus, social media has the potential of shaping public opinions and instigating protest rallies. As elaborated in the previous passages, within a brief period and in real time, fellow citizens desiring to attend the Action to Defend Islam were able to communicate with each other and exchange information promptly up to the point the demonstration was held.

#### D. Concluding Remarks

MU's perspective concerning social media activities in the case

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<sup>76</sup> Bernard Enjolras, Kari Steen-Johnsen, and Dag Wollebæk, "Social Media and Mobilization to Offline Demonstrations: Transcending Participatory Divides?", *New Media & Society*, vol. 15, no. 6 (2013), pp. 890–908; Zachary C. Steinert-Threlkeld et al., "Online Social Networks and Offline Protest", *EPJ Data Science*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2015), pp. 1–9.

<sup>77</sup> Lim, "Many Clicks but Little Sticks"; Nugroho and Syarief, *Beyond Click-Activism?*

<sup>78</sup> Jens Hoff, *Internet, Governance and Democracy: Democratic Transitions in Asia and Denmark* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2006).

<sup>79</sup> Tamara Renee Shie, "The Tangled Web: Does the Internet offer Promise or Peril for the Chinese Communist Party?", *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 13, no. 40 (2004), pp. 523–40.

of the 212 movement is a re-actualization of the debate that discusses Indonesia's national principle pertaining to religion and state. The debate reflects two groups identified as the religious radical group and the secular radical group in the BPUPKI (Indonesia Independence Preparatory Investigation Committee) assembly in 1945. The debate ended and was concluded with the establishment of Pancasila as Indonesia's national principle. In the context of social media activities during the 212 movement, MUI maintained its commitment by positioning Indonesia neither as a religious state nor a secular state.

Nonetheless, the advent of social media has currently evolved into free and open space to debate, oppose, or reject various concepts, thoughts, and ideas. Accordingly, MUI's fatwa on religious blasphemy in the 212 movement case as a product of ulemas religious deliberation was criticized and opposed on social media. The freedom of expression on social media to debate, oppose, or reject MUI's fatwa had subsequently led to defensive retaliation, which then resulted in the formation of the National Movement to Safeguard the Indonesian Ulema Council's Fatwa (*Gerakan Nasional Pembela Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia—GNPF-MUI*).

In this case, MUI's fatwa, as a text containing religious thoughts, has implications in the polarization of the existing plural community within the climate of democracy and freedom of expression via social media. Accordingly, the current study contributes to method in issuing fatwas that correlate with an already polarized political dynamics by considering the presence of social media as a specific context. The reason for this is that fatwas that initially emerge out of legal polemics or debates, may instigate new polemics and disagreements among the public within a climate allowing freedom of expression through social media.

Social media has become an open space for debating, contesting, opposing or rejecting various notions, thoughts, and ideas. Such condition places numerous notions, thoughts, or ideas concerning matters that are sacred, holy, and previously considered to have good values, to undergo a mediation process through the participation of netizens on social media. In the case of the Action to Defend Islam, MUI's fatwa as a product of ulema's religious thoughts, which may commonly be used as a reference for Indonesian Muslims in many life aspects, had lost its sanctity once it was contested and berated on social media.

Yet, the freedom of expressing one's opinion on social media, i.e. to debate, confront, oppose or reject the fatwa issued by MUI, had surprisingly brought about its own defense. This defense prompted the establishment of the National Movement to Safeguard Indonesia Ulama Councils Fatwa or *Gerakan Nasional Pembela Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (GNPF-MUI). In this case, the MUI's fatwa as a text containing religious thoughts had its implication on the polarization of a diverse society within a climate of democracy and the freedom of expression via social media. This is a new perspective ulema may well consider when issuing fatwas. A fatwa initially issued as a response to resolve legal polemic or dispute, may additionally create new conflict and polemic in the society.

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