

Blogging and Socmed Trend in Indonesia

How internet plays a significant role in shaping the diverse nation

By Herman Saksono, Aulia Halimatussadiyah, Ong Hock Chuan. April 2011.

With 4.8 million blogs tallied so far¹ (and still counting), Indonesian bloggers show no signs of slowing down. The online landscape in this archipelago nation is rapidly expanding. Indonesian people are exploring new online outlets to have their voices heard.

While Indonesians now no longer consider blog as their only online platform, the spirit of sharing ideas and participating in lively discussions remains the same, if not more vibrant.

Take Politikana.com for an instance. It is a popular community-based political issues website where members share their opinions and have other members comment his/her article. Even though by definition it doesn't qualify as "blog", sharing ideas and discussing it online is the essence of blogging. Some bloggers are more comfortable "blogging" in Politikana because they get more audience and a more diverse opinions.

Indonesian also sees a very diverse online community expanding very recently. While in the past, blogging community is limited to regional scope, nowadays communities are also organized by interests and platforms. There are Kopro community, Twitter user group, etc; and also @fiksimini and moslem blogger community.

Some of these communities meet up regularly, have permanent base, and organizing numerous social activities. One of Jakarta's blogger community, BHI (Bunderan Hotel Indonesia) is organizing "Gerakan 1000 Buku" (1000 Books Movement), which gathers used books and donating them to village libraries by working with other local community. BHI meets up every Friday night at Bunderan HI roundabout, Jakarta.

FiksiMini, a 140-characters-fiction community, organises trauma healing for children in disaster area in Jogja by performing magic shows, games, and storytelling sessions.

Gathering and meeting up is indeed an Indonesian thing. Pesta Blogger, an annual national blogger conference has gathered 1500 blogger attendance in 2010, tripled from 500 in 2007. This event is attended by bloggers from all corners of Indonesia, and preceded by blogging workshops in 10 cities.

Last year, Pesta Blogger began to be more inclusive of other platforms hence the name change to Pesta Blogger+. This year, the committee take the concept even further by organizing a 2 day event, combines bringing together ideas and opportunities between business, technology and creative people; as well as maintaining a "pesta" for bloggers in the second day.

The growing social movement

Twitter has become a prominent platform among Indonesian onliners. Indonesia is ranked 6th for most Twitter user worldwide², and has the biggest penetration in the world (20.8% of population). The microblogging service is popular on mobile gadgets, and used for discussing something as significant as political issues, to trivial subjects like a talent show on local television network. The latter tends to hit Twitter's trending topics easily.

The ability to reach large audience quickly is the primary reason why many Indonesians jumping into Twitter bandwagon. Politicians, celebrities, and clerics are *tweeting* daily to connect with their audience. Goenawan Mohamad—founder of Tempo magazine—are known for his *kultwit* (*kuliah* twitter or twitter lecture), a long lecture on social subjects divided into small, numbered tweets.

In recent cases, Twitter is often proven instrumental for organizing online movements. During the eruption of Mount Merapi in 2010, @JalinMerapi community used Twitter to spread reliable information on the latest situations and needed aid. It is something that television networks are often unable to achieve.

Dian Paramita, an undergraduate student in Universitas Gadjah Mada used information provided by @JalinMerapi to distribute donations for Mount Merapi survivors. She and her friends raised US\$ 11,000 in just a few days. She doesn't have any legal organization. People donate funds

¹ SalingSilang Blog Directory. <http://blogdir.salingsilang.com>

² <http://www.slideshare.net/salingsilang/indonesia-social-media-landscape-saling-silang-report>

through her account because they trust her online personality on Twitter.

Other social movements like “Coins for Prita” are organized using Twitter in tandem with Facebook. Prita Mulyasari, an Indonesian homemaker, was detained in 2009 for defamation after her email to friends complaining about the inaccurate diagnosis and treatment she received from a hospital in Banten. A Facebook cause group called “Dukungan Bagi Ibu Prita Mulyasairi” reached 250,000 supports, and after mounting public pressure she was released from prison and put to city arrest.

Currently Indonesia is number 2 (after United States) for most Facebook users².

During trial, Prita was required to pay fine of Rp 240 million (US\$ 26,000). This led to another social movement called “Koin untuk Prita” (Coins for Prita) —also organized using Facebook and Twitter— which managed to raise Rp 650 million worth of coins in a short amount of time. Later in the criminal trial, she was not found guilty for defamation.

Similar movement was organized to free Bibit Rianto and Chandra Hamzah in 2009, after the two Corruption Eradication Commission deputy chairmen was wrongly accused for taking bribes. Their Facebook page “Gerakan 1,000,000 Facebookers Dukung Chandra Hamzah & Bibit Riyanto” harnessed over 1.3 million supports. On December 3rd 2009, the president was officially informed that charges against Bibit and Chandra had been dropped.

Since social media is proven to be effective to reach the masses, year 2010 sees more brands and corporations actively utilizing Twitter and Facebook to promote their products and services. None have yet sees the impact at the magnitude of Prita’s nor Bibit Chandra’s.

Challenges to Freedom of Speech

While most Indonesians believe that they are free to express their opinions, their freedom of speech is not without a threat. The half-century old criminal code (KUHP) considers defamation a penal violation, but without any defined conditions.

The newly legislated Information and Electronic Transaction Act also criminalize the creation and distribution of online information considered as hate speech, also without any firm definition when a certain speech is considered a hate speech. Legal

activists³ have shown concerns on this matter, as it creates a legal uncertainty among Indonesians.

The Freedom on the Net 2011 report, released by US-based watchdog Freedom House, gave Indonesia a score of 46 for its Internet freedom, where 100 represents the highest number of obstacles to freedom⁴.

However, this laws are not yet actively enforced among bloggers and online activists. In the last few years, these laws have been tamed down by several Constitutional Court rulings, to ensure freedom of expression while maintaining orderly society.

For an instance, in 2009, the Constitutional Court overturn the defamation code, limiting the code only for personal cases. Thus, companies and organizations may not use this code to take legal action against civilians.

The Constitutional Court also overturn the defamation code specific for President and Vice President. The court now requires a formal legal filing if the head of state wishes to pursue legal action against defamation. In the past, civilians were automatically charged for penal violation when found criticizing the government.

Recent events have shown that Indonesian onliners have a strong disposition against internet censorship. When the Communication and Information Minister drafted a ministerial decree in 2010 that requires ISPs to blocks certain contents, a major protests emerges in blogs, Twitter, and Facebook. The decree was eventually stalled.

Conclusion

It is evident that blogs and social media has shown a significant role to connect people in Indonesia and enabling them to accomplish good causes.

These platforms will also be beneficial for connecting ASEAN community to build closer relationship, mutual understanding, and cooperation among the people in the region.

To realize this goal, ASEAN youth should be empowered by collaborative effort to educate, on how to properly use blog as new media and social media as their gate to information. This will be instrumental in creating regional stability, expanding regional economy, and improving regional tourism to face the challenges in 21st century.

³ <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2008/06/18/defamation-not-a-crime-civil-society-groups-say.html>

⁴ <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/indonesias-online-world-only-partly-free-study/436412>

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