KAWISTARA

BEYOND SIGNAL AND NOISE: ACADEMICS GOES HOAX AND HOAXTIVISM

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini adalah laporan penelitian mengenai daya paham tentang hoaks di kalangan civitas akademika Indonesia. Isu hoaks sudah ada sejak zaman dahulu, namun pada era digital saat ini ia berhasil menjadi pusat perhatian. Melihat dinamika global dan pergeseran lanskap politik internasional, tampaknya hoaks– dan istilah sejenisnya seperti "*false news*," "*alternative facts*," "*disinformation*," dan lain-lainnya – sudah menjadi bagian dari bahasa dan praktek berpolitik. Bisa jadi ini adalah bukti dari kondisi "masyarakat pasca-kebenaran" yang dikeluhkan beberapa kalangan, khususnya ketika gaungnya terasa juga dalam lanskap politik dan agama di Indonesia. Pusat perhatian artikel ini adalah pada isu hoaks secara umum dan memperkenalkan istilah "hoakstivisme" dalam rangka membingkai praktek khas yang berkisar pada produksi dan konsumsi "hoaks," sebagai penanda. Kami menaksir perbincangan tentang hoaks di kalangan akademisi dan meletakkannya dalam konteks sosial yang lebih luas. Tujuannya adalah melihat hoaks dan hoakstivisme lebih dari sekedar evaluasi moral dan rasa gelisah yang seringkali dipertontonkan dalam perbincangan publik.

Kata kunci: *Civitas akademika; Hoaks; Hoakstivisme; internet di Indonesia.*

ABSTRACT

This article is a research report on the perception of hoax among the Indonesian academic community. Hoax is ancient, but in the present digital age, it sneaks into the center stage. Reflecting upon the global trends and shifting of international political landscape, it appears that hoax and its troops, e.g. "false news," "alternative facts," "disinformation," etc. – immersed into the political language and practice. It may corroborate with the condition of "post-truth society" lamented by some scholars, in particular when it echoed in the present Indonesian political and religious landscape. The research focuses on hoax in general, and to introduce a term "hoaxtivism" in framing specific practice revolved in producing and consuming "hoax" as a signifier. We gauge the conversation on hoax within academic community, and locate it in the larger social process. The objective is to understand hoax and hoaxtivism beyond the moralistic evaluation and alarmist position, as overwhelmingly displayed in the public discussion.

Keywords: *Academic community; Hoax; Hoaxtivism; Indonesian cyberspace.*

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology development is dealing with at least two things, i.e. product and process. Digital product is the tangible and intangible aspects and outcomes of technological achievement. It is including what is called Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 technology, mobile operating system (Android, iOS, etc.), product miniaturization, social media systems, and others realizations of the technology. Handful and powerful corporations, such as Google, Twitter, Facebook, Microsoft, Apple, Intel and others are admittedly still become the main drive and hegemons behind those successes. They have strong eyes to determine the direction and orientation of the future development of technology. The challenges of the product of digital technology among others are the fast product cycle, which brought with numerous consequences, including the ever piling up electronic garbage, the pattern of technology consumption, and the burden of social stereotypes (esp. the outcome of Google Page Rank search algorithm), which once thought to be disappeared after the emergence of the technology.

Process dimension of digital technology is related to the adoption, adaptation, usage, behavior, and paradigm shift implicated by it. The impact of digital achievement, which increasingly sophisticated and subtle, the surprises and "(un-)intended" consequences were gushed out from its furnace; those were beyond prediction and the rhetoric of benevolent. It ensued new practices and possibilities, and along with it, produced the praised *digital dividends*, but on the other hand heightened the *digital divide* and *digital ills*. Come with new mode of communication, there is also cyberbullying, hoaxing, conspiracy theory making, fake information and hate speech production, online scamming, and the implementation of iron fist regulation.

The Great Indonesian Dictionary (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*), the Fifth Edition (2016), just recently included the word entry "*hoaks*" into its word inventory, underscored its importance in the formal and informal language practice. It reflected the condition when hoax has been an unwarranted valuable media in 2016 and 2017, in which it immediately became the number one public enemy. It triggered the anti-hoax alarm ensued by the government and non-government subjects to different level of the public. Numerous practical material has been produced and campaigns accelerated on dealing with it, such as Turn Back Hoax, including those conducted by local and regional governments (e,g. Mulyadi, 2017).

Currently, producing and consuming hoax apparently become a part of democratic practice such as in the United States' presidential elections in 2008, 2012 and 2016. Freedom House reported that disinformation – including hoax – circled around in general and presidential elections in at least 17 countries (Freedom House, 2017: 1). Obviously similar mood and tendency spread out during the Indonesian Presidential race 2014, Jakarta Gubernatorial election in 2012 and the early 2017 (cf. Hosen, 2016).

The present day popularity of hoax and its associated terms such as fake information, disinformation, misinformation, and others may relate to a number of social shifts and changes. The emergence of participatory society, which revolved on the social media practice, digital transparency, digital democracy, along with the politics of identity, religion deprivatization, the emergence politics of "populist-transactionalism" and religious conservatism, and the concern on "post-truth" society (Keyes, 2004; Tapsell, 2017), might give gravity for understanding the center staging of "hoax" in public space, notably via the digital realm.

The above two conditions of digital technology development, i.e. product and process, are overlapping and intermingling, but for the sake of analysis, it is important to discuss those in different course of thinking. The present article is an exploration of the process side of digital technology and a response to the emergence of hoax in the Indonesian public discourse. It is, however, sought to move beyond the simple negative

evaluation of hoax and alarmism, as it is believed tells us more on the shift in Indonesian social landscape.

As part of the research entitled "Value-Driven University: An Exploration and Mainstreaming an Ethical Attitude for Academic Community, from the Intergenerational and Cultural Perspective," the present undertaking directs the attention at the academic community. While other academic and educational institutions were taking into consideration, the particular focus was directed at higher education institutions. To this engagement, two questions are to put forward: what is the perception of the academic community on this issue? Moreover, how the perception might reveal the (in-)congruence of social practice and political/ideological/religious standing, notably within the context of instrumentalized and maximum performativity of communication technology such as on the internet?

The importance of those questions lays on the prestigious position of academic institution against other types of social institutions, and perception of it as moral pillars in society. In Indonesian context this position might be in relationship with the national ideology of Pancasila, ethical, and religious values (cf. e.g. Kamajaya & Soekarno, 1966; Daulay, 2014). Academic institution is often considered as the conscience of the society and moral bastion, which in it a system of decency is maintained. Hence the breakout of hoax might be a litmus test whether the academic community members still become the torch bearers in the dark night, or … otherwise.

Hoax and hoaxtivism often spelled in the single breath with other considered as digital ills, such as hate speech, cyberbully, conspiracy theory, phising, shaming, trolling, digital radicalism, and others. Hence it is an interesting observation when in a conference on nationalism, which was organized by a private university in Yogyakarta on July 2017, one of the speakers puzzled that religious radicalism could flourish in universities. He alluded that in academic setting, the

critical thinking and rationalism should prevail against emotional and religious stature displayed by radicalism.

On the other occasion, in her speech, the rector of a prominent state university in Yogyakarta reiterated that in executing the mandate of the three pillars of academics (*tri dharma perguruan tinggi*) – i.e. academic and research activities, and societal engagement – the university upholding "*etika dan moral*" (ethics and morality). She further remarked that ethics is a code of conduct that originated from morality and it is provided a noble cause. Scientific ethics, which inseparable from academic integrity is the code of conduct for the academic community (*civitas academica*), [because] it provided orientation in dealing with research activities, in shaping the science and technology, and its applications. … [The university] is concerned and upholding this ethics … Hence, from time to time a number of regulation and (regulative) system, code of conduct is re-examined, developed, strengthened, and institutionalized, [to be implemented] upon the students, lecturers, educational resources, and the whole academic community in [the university] (our Indonesian translation, Rektor UGM, 2016: 76–77).

In similar vein, three rectorate officers from two private universities and a dean in a state university rendered same ideal in three interviews that universities upheld ethical core values through the producing code of conducts. One of them emphasis four core values which embraced ethics and religious values, i.e. obedience to God, walking in integrity, striving for excellence, and service to the world. A prominent university in the country even issued code of conduct on "make an appointment with your lecturer [*dosen*]" via digital communication (Ramdhani, 2017). However, to the latter, there is a confusion between the notions of "ethics" (*etika*) and "etiquette" (*etiket*) in this respect, which conduct equates with moral exposure. This discrepancy, however, underlined the self-image of academic community and the

rhetoric of university as a sacrosanct institution.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defined hoax as "to trick into believing or accepting as genuine something false and often preposterous" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2017). The tie between Indonesian and English term for "hoax" can be traced in the Google Translation. In it, the "hoax" is translated into "fake news," with the overall meaning including "*lelucon*" ("jokes," etc.), "*cerita bohong*" ("fish story," etc.), "*kenakalan*" ("mischief," etc.), and "*olokan*" ("ridicule," etc.). Obviously, hoax could be associated with many other nouns and adjectives that connoted both, the ingenuity of communicator and the gullibility of recipients. In this point alone, hoax is already burdened with moral posturing.

In this article, we employed the term "hoaxtivism" – just think of "hacktivism" – in a rather open-ended fashion. For clarification, hoaxtivism in one hand is *a practice/ activism of producing, consuming and distributing hoax, misinformation, disinformation, and other related terms, over the digital technology.* Furthermore, the practice/activism is *the outcome of the multiple effects of psychological, social and ideological processing, in which the digital technology gave a unique boost to the fulfilment of those processes and ends.* In the end, as suggested by the following discussion of theoretical framework, hoaxtivism is *an example of the condition of hybrid mediatic context, i.e. the tandem of online and offline context, the convergence of old and new media, and the logic of accessibility and virality, which framed within the socio-political and religious conditions, such as the raising networked, conservative and risky societies.* We formulate this untested term in order to catch the complexity of the issue, more than just push it within the array of misconducts, vices, and noises of communication.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In general, there are legion studies on hoax (Shermer, 2005; Birchall, 2006; Solove, 2007; Heyd, 2008; Ferdian, 2016). It is even tremendously impressive body of knowledge if it is coupled with other studies on the negative effect of digital realm, such as hate speech and cyberbully (e.g. Nilan et al., 2015; Clara et al., 2016; George, 2016). In Indonesia context, the investigation of TEMPO magazine upon hoax is helpful to map the dynamic of digital realm (TEMPO, 2017). It retreated, however, from the examination of ideological and religious motif behind the hoax producing, and focused more on *hoax as political commodity.* Furthermore, the observation by Widodo, a media and communication expert, came to conclusion that the outbreak of hoax has Balkanized social media and internet. The culprit, accordingly is the Google algorithm, which allowed such narrow minded thinking formation (Widodo, 2017; cf. Noble, 2018). Budi Raharjo displayed his concern that the epidemic of hate and hoax messages are the "destabilizing force" in Indonesian society (Raharjo, 2017: 121). Those studies agreed that digital realm, especially social media enforced the complex layers of behaviors, individualization, and groupings. Moreover, its nature complicates the notion of "truth" as it "conflates rational discourse with an instrumental rationalization" (Nunes, 2012: 163). This rationalization is close to the notion of "media logic" proposed by David Altheide and Robert Snow through which "communicator and audience are oriented toward a rational means … [i.e.] rapid dissemination of vital information at relatively low cost." This logic framed the social action which tie with their desires (Altheide & Snow, 1991: 12). All in all, in this condition, "truth" and consequently "hoax" are perspectival, interest-based and mobilized upon the instrument that exploit "access, efficiency, and maximum performance" (Nunes, 2012: 163).

Hoax as the "trick into believing" as suggested by Merriam-Webster above, in fact has so many faces and terms, which oftentimes interchangeably. In many other context, it has been used differently, especially in colloquial Indonesian that often relax and elastic. In this research, we collecting numerous related terms, some has direct connotation, many others only by implication

in certain context of speech. Some are pragmatic, straightforward such as "*digital lies*," "*faux news*," "*fake story*," "*fraud*," "*trickster*," "*scam*," "*prank*," "*kabar ambigu*," "*kabar bohong*," "*kabar muslihat*," "*fitnah*," and so on. But others are technical, such as "*low-quality information*," "*truthful hyperbole*," "*cognitive bias*," "*alternative fact*," "*illusory truth effect*," "*ghibah*," and "*namimah*."

Why people consumed hoax?

"Diplomacy is the art of telling people to go to hell in such a way that they ask for directions." The adage, often misattributed to Winston Churchill, seemed perfect to describe the condition of people consuming hoax; there is a "diplomacy" behind to lure people to the trap of hoax. The work of Stephen Greenspan, *Annals of Gullibility* (Greenspan, 2009), revealed factors that enable people so happily persuaded to go to the hell of hoax. Many examples can put forward, such as of Ponzi's scheme, Madoff's case (Markopolos, 2010), and in a more complicated scheme of "*bodong*" (scam) service upon thousands of Indonesians such as provided by First Travel company. Greenspan pointed out that being fooled through hoax is not yielded from human low intelligence, neither being less sceptical. It is more on the circumstance and the plausible context that pressing people to swallow such "scam" or "hoax." Often academic and scientific communities, let alone the public could not escape from the enticement, such as the case of Piltdown Man (1912) below.

The discovery of what was called Piltdown Man, the hybrid of primate and human in Piltdown, England thrilled the public. It was considered as "the missing link" in the Darwinian evolution theory that connected between the earlier primate and the ancestors of humankind. Many experts approved the discovery, and indeed the public enthusiastically joined the parade. It was taken as the truth for forty years until it exposed as a hoax in 1953 (Caporael, 2007: 9). This scientific confirmation became a plausible condition to usher the acceptance of the hoax by the public at large.

Secondly, according to Greenspan, people easily herded to hoax and its kind because of limit of cognition, as not much people has experience and skills to dealing with complicated issues. Thirdly, trusting people as the "source" came from the "authority" or within our circle in which we let ourselves absorbed into it.

And finally, the consumption of hoax is related to the emotional and impulsive trigger. These conditions related to the persuasiveness of the external impulse; "the diplomacy behind." People could consume hoax because of the strong persuasive force of it that clouded people's analytical capacity. Obviously, the notion has strong affinity and effect with hoax and hoaxtivism. Notably when the platform of information distribution is social media and internet: the gravity of persuasion is far greater than in the offline context. At this juncture, *clicktivism* and *clickbait* found its home: people click (to like and to love) simply because it is interesting and persuasive.

Obviously hoax and hoaxtivism tell us more than just the negative effect of human interaction. It disclosed to us the nature of human condition, social interaction and communication. The followings are some observation on the nature of hoax.

Hoax as alternative facts

The election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States sent an inexplicable message to the modern democracy. It is an interesting case in particular when mainstream American journalism continuously crucifies him for producing "fake news," which is the same phrase Trump used to assault any news not favouring him.

His chief advisor Kellyanne Conway, however, requited and created the term "alternative facts" to identify news and facts that in favor of Trump. From this little complexion we can see the gamut of connotation to come to and out from "hoax," as it depends on "who's talking about."

Fun and "Constructive" Hoax

In our backyard, the smoke of the new year fireworks yet to washed away, a pandemonium created by the new chair of Indonesian National Cyber and Encryption Agency (BSSN – *Badan Siber dan Sandi Negara*), a two-star general Djoko Setiadi after his "constructive hoax" ("*hoax yang membangun*") statement. Set aside for a while whether the statement was reflecting that he couldn't make head or tail of hoax, the way public reacted to it revealed the nuisance of bringing in the rhetoric of "good" and "bad" in the highly instrumentalized communication system such as internet and television. Larger picture of BSSN function was skipped and the public rushing to comment the seemingly trivial statement. It is because the new media provided a distributed power in the society, hence public could exploit very easily no matter small an issue was. In this circumstance, in which new media prevailed in providing "reality," the "truth" and "lie," "good", "bad," and "low-quality information" are all inhabited the same platform hence its potent is not on the substance (the message per se) but, as observed once again by Nunes, "on access, efficiency, and maximum performance" (Nunes, 2012: 163).

Other than the bleak picture initiated from Gen. Setiadi careless statement, it is on the other hand reveal minor truth on the issue. Once, there is a "less-damaging" hoax, at least in earlier times before social media age. *April Mob* is a historical hoaxtivism that can function as communal release and meant to be a fun thing rather than intentional fact twister. However, hoax could be harmful when it framed within specific political end and coupling with political gossip, conspiracy theory, and fake news, because apparently it said more than just spontaneous pulse.

Hoaxtivism as collective action

Hoaxtivism should be understood within the condition of what is Cascio called as "participatory panopticon," in which the users willingly to "opened-up" her-/himself to be watched by the world (Cascio, 2005). Other

used the term "online disinhibition effect," an effect of meditated security feeling when engaging with digital realm, which allow the users to openly disclosing themselves, as against the direct interaction with other people (Suler, 2004). Alice Warwick identified it as the practice of "lifestreaming," through which

> *Lifestreamers* must see themselves through the gaze of others, altering their behavior as needed to maintain their desired self-presentation. This constant monitoring against the backdrop of a networked audience creates anxiety and encourages jockeying for status, even as it brings forth new forms of social information (Marwick, 2013).

In the context of the individual attached to social media as her/his version of social self, virality would become a rule of thumbs; hardly it is merely a place of the narcissistic acts. Nevertheless, this "new forms of social information" could be transformed into a field of action, or even, arenas of organizing collective action (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012), and viralized forms of public communication (Postill, 2016). The present Indonesian political landscape may testify this condition (Postill & Epafras, 2018).

Since social media established numerous complicated arenas of interaction, it is no more an unpretentious public space or a kind of pure Habermasian public sphere. It is even more depressing when the state is not in impartial position anymore (Deibert et al., 2012). In Indonesian case, the implementation of Law No. 11/2008 on Information and Electronic Transaction (renowned as UU ITE) gave a sense of the complicated and partiality of the position of the state.

Hoax as a genre of communication

Lynda Walsh revealed in her analysis of scientific genre in media in the nineteenth century that there was a careful reperformation and imitation of the most salient feature of the rhetoric of science that in the end made people believe it. It was a scientific context of the age, which including the public expectation of scientific work and discovery, as "wonder-business" (Mark Twain) that en-

dorsed their consumption of the hoaxes (e.g. Walsh, 2006: 17ff.). In some cases, a more nuanced and complicated scientific proposition could later on have proofed a hoax at worst and a pseudo-science at best, all because it based on certain belief on human condition, such as the case of the aforementioned Piltdown Man.

The strongest "blow" to academic community was catapulted by Alan Sokal, and the renowned as *Sokal Affair* or *Sokal's Hoax*. As a mathematician and physicist, in 1996 Sokal deliberately submitted a non-sensical article entitled "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" to the respected journal *Social Text*. It was accepted and published by the editor at the same year. It was basically a hoax and meant to test the credibility of the prominent critical academic journal. Sokal charged the journal and the army of the "Leftist" scholars as intellectually lazy and upholding what he called as "cognitive relativism," which confused the hard fact and "interpretation" (e.g. Sokal, 2008: 171ff.; see also Walsh, 2006: 227ff.).

Reflecting on this case and Walsh's observation, Fleming and O'Carroll gave us further insight on how such "scientific" writing could fall into a version of hoax. They concluded that a hoax is *a literary genre*, faithful with literary convention, hence consumed by people like any other written and textual production, including scientific reports. Eventually it is an "artful deception, an aesthetically sophisticated act of trickery, and of mimetic artistry" (Fleming & O'Carroll, 2010: 45).

This discussion demonstrated the vulnerability of academic boundary from the "loose" practice of knowledge formation. It is also revealing that "hoax" might not necessarily produced by the "wrong side" of the fence, as it might be produced and distributed by the "credible" sources.

Hoax as weaponized information

As earlier stated, that in the case of Donald Trump, the difference between "fake information" and "alternative facts" is thin and perspectival, thus it could not be seen entirely from a normative position. The present research indicated, in Indonesian political conversation, hoax has turned out to be the "third voice," as something harmful and pushed out from the public norm without clear identity. It is obvious when hoax was perceived in almost splitting hairs between "conspiracy theory" and "conspiratorial politics," notably in the case of the Jakarta's Gubernatorial election.

According Jeffrey M. Bale, conspiratorial politics is not necessarily wrong and has to be differentiated from the bona fide "conspiracy theory" (Bale, 2007). While conspiracy theory tends to totalize the reality, identified the universal, eternal, omnipotent and omnipresent Evil Incarnate (e.g. Islamic Terrorist, Communist, Capitalist, Jews, Zionist, etc.), conspiratorial politics is a recognition of the (real) secret, behind-the-scene and covert action for certain political end. This is a common feature of political activities and initiated by any competing political entity. Contextualizing the understanding of conspiratorial politics in the clamorous pro- and anti-Ahok campaigns in the Jakarta's Gubernatorial election, hoaxtivism was probably a version of conspiratorial politics rather than merely "conspiracy theory."

While the China's connection, as one of the anti-Ahok charges and its hands upon Ahok's administration expressed in social media is a combination of hoax, dramatizing the facts, and conspiracy theory, the scandal of Bay of Jakarta's reclamation project might be an implication of conspiratorial politics, which its conflicting political interests at work. Even so, the former, regardless of its terse credibility, might reveal the recurring problems of the Chinese and non-Chinese business competition, and furthermore the problem of Chinese citizenship in Indonesian and Southeast histories (cf. Chirot & Reid, 1997). At this point, hoaxtivism in social media is merely a medium to reframe the historical burden: "the current affairs are in fact recurrent affairs" (Postill & Epafras, 2018: 10).

Fraser and Dutta further pointed out that hoaxtivism is activity conducted by "ordinary people" in order to assault the more powerful party. They called hoax as "the revenge of the amateur" (Fraser & Dutta, 2008: Ch. 12). Agree with it, Nunes observed that hoax is also subversive and celebrates the transgressive endeavour to disrupt existing power structure (Nunes, 2012: 154). Meanwhile, Solove found that the profuse of information flows is a double-edged sword, created the information openness and humanity projects, but also social pressure and the pressure toward the private spaces. The pressure unintendedly boosted the traditional practices such as gossiping, scamming, while at the same times created the sub-culture of anonymity (Solove, 2007).

The aforementioned hoaxtivism presumably is not a simple spontaneity, but also an effect of the pre-condition, preconceived belief that already current in social sites, visible or not-visible. However, the consumption of hoax is a signal of certain framework, belief system, and if it is ideologically or religiously charged, reflecting a certain social imagination. Those might emphasis the condition of "epistemic bubbles" and "echo chambers" through which both reflecting the barricading and harming potential of human perception toward the other beyond their social, political, and religious commitment (Nguyen, 2018). Those furthermore allow the creation of "personalized realities" and "enclave communication" in the political struggle (Brundidge & Rice, 2009: 150–151). For people who take ideological and religious as "sacred" matters this condition created "selective exposure" that determine their option and choice. At any rate, however, hoax became the weaponized information beyond the concerned of information and the source credibility.

Limited time of research forced us to make observation upon the meso-processing of the issue at hand. Focus on the meso-processing allowed us to see the larger pattern and general practice (macro-processing) only in limited and selected way. Even though we could not take a deeper and continuous observation either, as expected in the micro-processing, such as taken by ethnography approach, it allowed us to find interesting detail through interview and close observation toward the social media.

Data collection initially projected to a broad spectrum of resources, including the law enforcement elements, such as CyberCrime unit of the Police Force and Judiciary institution, and the suspected "hoax farmer(s)." However, we encountered some setback during the field research that hindered us to include those elements. Secondly, because the focus of the research is academic community hence we make an extensive interviews and online survey to this circle.

The research methods employed several technics, viz. literature survey, digital data collection, interview, and focus group discussions (FGD). For the digital data collection, we employed Google Alert to filter news and internet, by activating 21 keywords, such as "hoax," "fake news," "disinformation," etc. Thus far, we collected roughly 400 articles. It also involved the data hoax observation based on information pooled in "Forum Anti Fitnah, Hasut, dan Hoax" Facebook fanpage, and @MAFINDO (Masyarakat Anti Fitnah Indonesia) Twitter account.

An online survey was conducted between 13 August and 30 September 2017. After data validation the survey gathered the opinions of 114 informers out of 119. "Unfortunately," most of informers are Muslims and Christians (42% and 58%). The professions of the informers are university students (71%), lecturers (19%), researchers (5%), and academic staffs (5%). Range of age of the informers were 18 – 62 years old. Most of them are the active users of Instagram (20%) and Facebook (18%), and in term of instant messenger, of Whatsapp (24%) and LINE (18%). All of them affiliated with 33 higher education institutions in Indonesia – dominated by Universitas Gadjah Mada students – and three from abroad.

Altogether we interviewed 25 people and organized four FGDs. The participants

including lecturers, university students, digital activists, and religious leaders. Lastly, we observed in general the social media and internet sporadically, mainly from the media online outlets.

DISCUSSIONS
Findings and analysis

"Hoax is like a cancer" claimed an informer who is also a lecturer in a university in East Java. "It entered our body, grows and influenced our behavior … [it is] lethal." Thus far, it is the only statement that equates hoax with disease. Nonetheless, it might reveal important insights about the popular perception toward hoax. At least two issues standing from his statement. First, hoax and hoaxtivism is not only considered a negative deed but it may alter the people's behavior.

Hoaxing in digital realm give more amplification to certain emotional investment, since there is limited face-to-face interaction. As observed by TEMPO magazine, hoax is a commodity and a part of digital industry. In the political race, black campaigning through the production of hoax, conspiracy theory, hate speech, and other antagonistic bluster seemingly came to a new level of distaste, which mobilize public outcry to the government to take a serious measure to cope with it. This is evidently reflected in our research findings.

It can be cautiously said that most of informers and respondents, and presumably Indonesian public tend to push out hoax from normal societal interaction; it is evil of the society. "Hoax" is "*Informasi yang fals*" (skewed information) alluding another informer from Yogyakarta. Not only it charged from the strongest moral and religious position, it tended to be reified beyond historical flow. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, hardly "hoax" standing on its own feet, as it oftentimes appeared along with other digital ills such as cyberbully, hate speech, and radicalism.

It is even go further where some of respondents relates hoaxtivism with the practice of plagiarism. Plagiarism is a rampant problem of Indonesian higher education institutions, hence lump it together within the discussion of hoax is seemingly accentuated that it epitomizes all the evils of digital realm. At this point, an informer who is also a computer expert emphasized the nature of hoax as part of the structure of human mental processing and informational transmission. He further described that a message sending between two subjects implied the possible deviation and might suffer of the meaning loss and alteration of syntax. In this condition, hoax could be manifested as *misinformation*, a kind of involuntary signalling mistake made by the transmitter, or *disinformation*, a deliberate manipulation of information for a certain end; borrowed from an informer, hoax is not a natural-born lying, it a "by design" product. All things considered, hoax is an effect of social interaction and part of the complexity of the transmission of information, rather than a faceless spirit.

Hoax is a global phenomenon, but almost all informers and respondents take it personally as an Indonesian problem. When confronted with question, why Indonesian prone to hoax, many of them pointed out the inherent cultural upbringing as the source of the problem. "Indonesian is an oral culture; [and furthermore] more visual than textual," is one representational statement delivered by an informer, a "culture" of audio-visual (*pandang dengar*) explains why Indonesians barely seeking clarification for a hoax passing in her/his gadget. Furthermore, since youth populated the social media (cf. Epafras, 2016), hence emotional immaturity is also pointed out by many of informers as the reason for the spreading of hoax.

Indonesian is portrayed as communitarian, collectivist and utilitarian, in which the conformity to the group feeling is prominent. In this context as well the authority, especially community and religious authority play an important role to obstruct the critical assessment on information. In the end, it is not about personal judgment and valuation, but group and authority persuasion and framing. An informer pointed out that "hoaxing"

is a continuation of non-critical thinking and patronage system existed in the Indonesian social structure.

A condition called "spiral of silence" complicated the condition of the consumption and distribution of hoax, since "to the individual, not isolating himself is more important than his own judgement" (Noelle-Neumann, 1974: 43). If the message, the presumed hoax came from a more dominant subject, it might lead to a condition of information goes by without a hitch, as the recipient suppress her/his judgment over it. This might be one of the explanations in regards of the switch allegiance some of the former Ahok supporters after the case of religious blasphemy; the pressure was great toward the Muslims to keep distance from Ahok.

Almost unanimously, informers and respondents advised a "critical," if not "sceptical" stance toward any information passing to them, when was asked the prescription to counter hoax, distilled in the line extracted from East Java's Muhammadiyah recommendation shared by one informer, which stated "… before posting and sharing about idea in social media, you have to consider the positive and negative effects of it" (Zuhdi, 2017: 8). It further suggested that the social media user should verify the authenticity and origin of the information, which epitomized in Arabic term, *tabayyun*. Following up the tumultuous of hoax in public, Indonesia Ulema Council (MUI – Majelis Ulama Indonesia) issued a religious direction (fatwa) no. 24 (2017) on the Law and Guidance on Transaction (*muamalah*) in Social Media, which among others gives direction on sharing information in social media and internet (e.g. Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2017: 18–19). This was the outcome of cooperation among religious authorities and the Ministry of Communication and Information (Kemenkominfo – *Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informasi*), which up until the present paper is written, followed up by Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI – *Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesian*) and Bishop's Conference of Indonesia (KWI – *Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia*) reflected in

the publication of their two pocket books (PGI, 2018; Nugroho & Oetomo, 2018).

There is discrepancy between the universities ideal projection and self-definition on moral and ethics and the member of academic community in the respected institution perceived on it. All the rectorate and dean level informers pointed out the established code of conduct for the academic community, those are not felt on the community level, in particular the students. In the survey, 47.5% of respondents ticked "perhaps" option on whether their institution provides code of conducts, while 38.3% simply unaware of such regulation. However, in the survey there is an almost equal split between those who think that academic community is different from the rest of the society members in dealing with hoax, and those who do not see the difference.

As it might be expected, 90.5% of respondents accessed the survey through gadget (smartphones and tablets), and most of them (94.2%) active in Whatsapp instant messenger app. This confirmed the global trend of mobile computing and accessing, which more and more ubiquitous in public lives, in particular in Indonesia as it hosted 370-million mobile subscriptions (We Are Social, 2017). This is somewhat inadvertently posed challenges in information consumption. First of all, it meant that information access determined by the limited reading/viewing space (between 4" and 11", mostly 4" and 7"), hence it restricts the incentive to verify, clarify, and pursue the source of any information passing in the user's devices. It further confined the resilient to read long information; effectively within the two or three times scrolling down the screen. Specifically, for Indonesian case, where there were many areas depended merely on 2G mobile technology, which in the end deprived the user of doing extensive clarification of information, notably in the website mode. In this circumstance, the users most likely depended upon the existing link, information and ultimately, the pre-conceived belief and existing authority in assessing information.

Thirdly, gadget enforces the existing practice of replication (*copas* – copy/paste) of (frequently) website addres/link in the process of disseminating information; a process of entextualization are undergone. Entextualization implied the process of detextualization message and recontextualization in new context, as "an act of control and an execution of power" (cf. Bauman & Briggs, 1990: 73–76). This process is vulnerable from the message hijacking and manipulation, since the entexted message consumed in narrow space, hence prone to enforce the parochial outlook.

A research conducted by PPIM (Center for the Research of Islam and Society – *Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat*), Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University demonstrated that the accessibility to the internet correlated positively with the level of intolerance among the Muslim students, since most of them has access to the "radical" Islamic websites and "radical" teaching from social media popular teachers quite easily, hence developed distinct Islamic outlook. It further revealed that the feeling of victimized as Muslims somewhat justified the intolerance posture (PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2017). Reflecting this in social media and internet context in general, hoax then could be part of the equation. It is a shift from "collective action" to "connective action" as remarked by an expert of radicalism in an interview. This probably could explain why there are so many "radical" Islamic sites compared to non-Islamic, which a kind of mirror image with the similar tendency among the Alt-Right (alternative right) sites in the United States, which tended to be ultra-Christian, racist, anti-Muslim, and promoting the white nationalism (Atran, 2017).

Beyond the moralizing and reifying hoax as a signifier, obviously it became a weapon for ideological position, a weapon for the "weak"; it is part of ideological/religious fight. Social media became an "enabling environment" for assaulting other contending and opposing parties. In this regard, hoax has become a weaponized information. One article from an Islamic website entitled "Serigala berbulu 'Hoax'," (Wolf in hoax's clothing) (Kiblat.Net, 2017) and an anti-LGBT 'tweet' informed such condition.

> "*tweeps sempatkan setiap hari utk membully, menistakan, melecehkan perilaku LGBT, meski skedar satu twit, demi selamatkan negeri ini*" (tweeps take a time every day to bully, to insult, to harass LGBT behaviors, even if it is one twit, to save this nation) -

The last line: "even if it is one twit" apparently a modification of a hadith verse which says, "spread knowledge even if it is one verse" (*Saḥīḥ al-Bukharī*, 3461), hence conflating with religious element on this digital activism. Kiblat.net lamented that anti-hoax campaign conducted by the government positioned the anti-Jokowi force as sitting duckling.

CONCLUSION

There is perception of the "sanctity" of academic realm, as the realm of moral-laden territory, in which it has to keep distance from "practical politics." Indeed, the perception might be induced from a number of metaphors and imaginations, such as classical dichotomy of urban and hermitage, which urban perceived as the seat of power, hence prone to corruption, while hermitage to the spiritual and educational realm, beyond political order, populated by *resis* and *begawans*, *kiyais* and spiritualists, those materialized in monastery, *pesantren*, and *ashram* (see Anderson, 1990: 63ff.). This idea apparently transported to the realm of education, that the academic has safe distance from the worldly affairs. In Europe, many famous universities were outgrew from monastery or school ran by the church, which give a gravity of elitism among the illiterate society (see Lawton & Gordon, 2002). Hence, the rise of modern university also endured the burden of moral bearing.

Our present finding, sensed the similar perception of the sanctity of higher education in Indonesia. In the case of hoax and hoaxtivism, it was at least understood by the half

of the informers in the survey, and by many informers and respondents, which academic institutions should free from such practices. However, considering the other half who saw the vulnerability of academic institutions to hoaxtivism, just as other segment of societies, it concurred with the observation that digital technology ushered the challenge to the traditional authority, such as family, the state, and religious leadership; and the present academic institutions might be the representation of that kind of authority.

At the present stage of development, the discourse of hoax also stimulates a new practice to cope with such "digital ills" among the academic community, such as the development of software and application to limit hoaxtivism, the establishment of new code of conduct (or enforcing the old one), and numerous initiatives to educate public. Nonetheless, we also sensed that such measure might fall into a narrow governmentality, which more concern to etiquette rather than polish the ethical mind. All in all, higher education institutions as the center of academic community should reinvent themselves to respond to the new digital development.

Hoax serves to release the deepest fear in our society: fear of difference, fear of intrusion, fear of unconsolidated national self. The cause célèbre of Jakarta Gubernatorial election, both parties, the pro- and anti-Ahok, bemoaned the danger of hoax upon the unity of the nation. Nowadays, hoax is inhabiting the world where sensationalism, headline consumptive lifestyle, and instantaneous social practice "become the commander" – as a digital activist lamented. Hoaxtivism in this regard is an energetic activity that involved certain monological way of thinking and ideological booster. It revealed the cynical side of human affairs and the tendency to populate the country of spectacularism.

Hoax and hoaxtivism inspired a new euphoria for educating people in using internet and social media. Hoax had already disclosed the discrepancy in Indonesian society and hopefully it gave a good contribution for our improvement of social relationship in the future.

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