

The Impact of Social Media on Intercultural Communication in Indonesia

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Abstract.In the present age of digital communication, time has been compressed by reducing the distance between different points in space, and the sense of space has led people to feel that local, national, and global space becomes obsolete. All these innovations in digital media, in form of social media, have changed and continue to change the way we think, act, and live. Emerging topical areas in this line of research mainly include three categories: the impact of national/ethnic culture on the development of social media, the impact of social media on cultural/social identity, and the impact of social media on different aspects of intercultural communication. This study uses qualitative research methods with data collection technique using observation, interview, and study documents and descriptive data analysis techniques. This study examines the trend of research on the relationship between social media and intercultural communication. The results indicate that the relationship between social media and intercultural communication in Indonesia. It is argued that social media not only provides a space in which people of different cultures can freely express their opinions and establish relationships, but may also challenge the existence of human communication in intracultural and intercultural contexts because of its specific characteristics that are significantly dissimilar to traditional media.

Keywords: Social Media, Social media, Intercultural Communication.

Introduction

In the present age of digital communication, time has been compressed by reducing the distance between different points in space, and the sense of space has led people to feel that local, national, and global space becomes obsolete (Harvey, 1990). In addition, the reachability of digital media nowadays can extend to all people, instead of a limited audience. This is significant because without the confinement of time and space, the control of message production and dissemination is no longer a privilege possessed only by church,

state, and government, but instead, equally shared by all individuals.

All these innovations in digital media, or so-called social media, have changed and continue to change the way we think, act, and live. For example, digitalization, as a hybridization of print and electronic media in a binary code, converts analog to digital that requires a completely different mode of production and distribution. As Chen (2007) indicated, the impact of digital or social media on human society is demonstrated in the aspects of cognition, social effect, and a new form of aesthetics. Cognitively, social media demands a

nonlinear nature and the creation of expectations for content, which directly influences the way people use media. Socially, the most manifested impact of social media is the effect of demassification, which denotes that the traditional design for a large, homogeneous audience is disappearing and being replaced by a specific and individual appeal, allowing the audience to access and create the message they wish to produce (Olason & Pollard, 2004). Visually, social media brings forth a new digital aesthetic view, which refers to, for example, "interactivity, manipulation, the repurposing and repurposing of content across media, deliberate creation of virtual experience, and sampling as a means of generating new content" (Chen, 2007).

Social media is also the main force accelerating the trend of globalization in human society. The globalization trend has led to the transformation of almost all aspects of human society. For instance, socially and culturally, globalization has changed the perception about what a community is, redefined the meaning of cultural identity and civic society, and demanded a new way of intercultural interaction. Economically, global competition has enormously intensified. In order to succeed in global business, a company is required to not only understand the local markets in order to meet their global clients' needs, but they must also seek out open markets globally, and foster effective management in global business transactions. In sum, due to the thrust of social media, the global trend creates new social networks and activities, redefines political, cultural, economic, geographical and other boundaries of human society, expands and stretches social relations, intensifies and accelerates social exchanges, and involves both the micro-structures of personhood and macro-structures of community (Steger, 2009).

Research Focus

The focus of this research is to examine the trend of the research on the relationship between social media and intercultural communication.

Methods

This study uses qualitative research methods with data collection technique using observation, interview, and study documents and descriptive data analysis techniques, with research informants and the relevant officials.

The Theory about Media

From the scholarly perspective, unfortunately, traditional studies seldom connected well or integrated the two concepts of "media" and "globalization" (Rantanen, 2006). Three established academic fields on the study of the concepts include communication studies, media and cultural studies, and globalization studies. Communication studies began after World War II and become an academic field during the 1950s in the United States. began with early studies focusing on international communication and speech communication and continuing on to recently developed intercultural communication, communication studies as an academic field tends to ignore the relationship between people and media, or how people use media in different cultural contexts, and how that closely related to the globalization of human society.

The field of media and cultural studies emerged in the 1970s in Britain on the basis of resisting the dominance of communication studies in the United States, which was more oriented towards the empirical or discovery paradigm. Yet, most British media studies focus on the role media institutions play in the process of globalization. Many scholars in this area tend to take globalization for granted, by not making an effort to theorize the concept (Sparks, 1998; Thussu, 2000). As for cultural studies, originated from the Frankfurt School in Germany, the field suffers from the lack of concern about the impact media has on people. The problems that exist in media studies and cultural studies are like those that appear between the studies of international communication and intercultural communication. As Servaes (2008) pointed out, cultural studies in Europe and in the United States mainly pay attention to cultural issues instead of media issues.

The study of globalization began in the early 1990s, a time when the trend of

globalization significantly increased its impact on human society in terms of scope and scale. Nevertheless, although scholars from different disciplines are involved in the study of globalization (Waters, 1995), and most agreed that without media and communication globalization will not emerge as such a great impetus of the transformation of human society, the role of media and communication in the theorization of the concept of globalization remains vague and less specified. Surprisingly, according to Rantanen (2006), the contribution of scholars from the field of media and communication to globalization theories is far less than scholars from other disciplines such as anthropology and sociology.

The Impact of Social Media on Intercultural Communication

With its distinctive features, social media has brought human society to a highly interconnected and complex level, but at the same time, it challenges the very existence of human communication in the traditional sense. Social media not only influences the form and content of information/messages, but it also affects how people understand each other in the process of human communication, especially for those from different cultural or ethnic groups. On the one hand, intrinsically, the new culture hatched from social media creates a continuity gap between traditions and innovations within a culture. Before the emergence of social media, according to Bagdasaryan (2011), traditions and innovations in human society co-existed in a dynamically synchronized way, but the speed and impact of the social media resulted in the inability of traditional values to keep pace with the new cultural values produced by social media. This cultural gap has caused difficulty in understanding, communication between generations and among people in the same culture.

Social media also extrinsically breeds communication gaps between different cultural and ethnic groups. The fragmented nature of social media has switched traditional cultural grammar, cultural themes, or cultural maps to a new pattern, resulting in the loss of traditional

cultural logic. The rearrangement or restructuring of cultural patterns, or worldview, demands that members of a culture realign their communication behaviors within their own community, and to learn a new way of interaction with people from differing cultures. Social media fosters a new culture in human society, in which the degree of ambiguity and uncertainty has been reshuffled and has reached its highest point, especially in the process of intercultural communication. How to readjust to this new situation and smoothly achieve the goal of mutual understanding for people from different cultural groups in this chaotic stage of cultural change becomes a great challenge for the practical need of interaction in daily life and research in the scholarly community. It is under this circumstance that we see more and more scholars are becoming involved in the investigation of the relationship between social media and intercultural communication (Allwood 2000).

After examining the extant literature, we found that emerging topical areas in this line of research mainly include three categories: (1) the impact of national/ethnic culture on the development of social media, (2) the impact of social media on cultural/social identity, and (3) the impact of social media on different aspects of intercultural interaction (e.g., intercultural relationship, intercultural dialogue, and intercultural conflict)

Results and Discussions

The convergence of social media and globalization brings about at least six new experiences for human beings, including new textual experiences, new ways of representing the world, new relationships between users and social media technologies, new conceptions of the biological body's relationship to technological media, and new patterns of organization and production. These experiences will inevitably challenge the traditional formation and definition of social or cultural identity. In other words, the use of social media is shaking the root of cultural identity by weakening or strengthening the intensity of the relationship between people and community. The time and space compression caused by the convergence of social media and

globalization creates a universal cyberspace in which new cultural identity is emerging in different virtual communities.

The new cultural identity formed by social media may not change the traditional meaning of cultural identity as a unique product through interaction in a specific group context, which gives members a sense of belonging to the group, but it will directly challenge the traditional attributes of cultural identity, namely, temporality, territoriality, contrastivity, interactivity, and multiplicity.

More specifically, cultural identity fostered by social media is no longer a product of historical development, confined in an avowed process of people in a geographical place. It may still be a distinct collective consciousness based on the members' sense-making process. The virtual community is characterized by a higher degree of heterogeneity and a lower level of interconnection. In addition, social interaction as the foundation of developing cultural identity remains unchanged in the age of social media, but the nature of interpersonal and group relationships via social interaction in the virtual community is unlike those constructed from traditional face-to-face interaction. Finally, it is still unknown if the new cultural identity formed by social media will continue to be a multi-faceted concept or practice, which can contrast with the six facets of traditional cultural identity indicated by Belay (1996), including sociological identities, occupational identities, geobasic identities, national identities, co-cultural identities, and ethnic identities. In sum, social media continues to establish different kinds of new communities without the limit of time and space, which makes cultural identity more dynamic, fluid, and relativized, and imposes austere challenges to the autonomy and stability of cultural identity.

Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram, have enabled people from every corner of the world to represent themselves in a particular way and stay connected in cyberspace. It is obvious that the flexibility of information presented and shared in the social media will directly affect, either positively or negatively, the development of intercultural relationships in the virtual

community through the creation of a network of personal connection. Moreover, in foreign language and study abroad contexts, the using of facebook not only showed a positive effect on the development of intercultural relationships, but also increased the degree of participants' intercultural communication competence. In addition to intercultural relationships on a personal level, social media also helps to establish international business relationships. Nevertheless, social media may also produce a negative impact on intercultural communication. For example, Qian and Scott (2007) found that revealing too much personal information in blogs, especially negative information about one's friends, employer, and others, tends to jeopardize or cause problems in establishing constructive human relationships intraculturally and interculturally. Computer-mediated communication can promote and develop virtual cosmopolitanism and virtual third cultures. The authors indicated that through the construction of third culture space, a new, hybrid culture is created, in which interactants from differing cultures are able to gather cultural and social information, build online communities, and form intercultural relationships.

Because social media enables individuals across the globe to exchange messages for the purpose of understanding people from different cultures, it has become popular for sojourners or immigrants to use social media to communicate with their friends, classmates, and relatives or family members in both their native and host country in their learning process or daily life. The longer immigrants reside in the host country, the more they communicate with the host nationals via social media, but the frequency of surfing their original country's websites is decreasing. The use of social media shows a significant impact on the process of immigrants' intercultural adaptation. In other words, the social interaction conducted through social media by immigrants proves to be a critical element that can determine whether they can successfully adjust to the host country.

International students in Indonesia using social media that affects intercultural adaptation with provides an environment to connect with people in both their home and host countries, which in turn helps them strengthen personal

relationships and fosters a sense of belonging to the host culture. The use of social media obviously helps international students cope with cultural barriers in the process of intercultural adaptation. Due to the influence of culture shock, they tend to rely more on social media in the initial stage of arriving in the host country, to keep connected with those people they know in their home country in order to gain a sense of comfort in the new environment. As time moves on, the use of social media was switched to interacting with the host nationals to help them better integrate into the new culture.

Social media provides people and governments with a powerful tool to construct their own image, to define and redefine the meanings of messages, to set the media agenda, or to frame the news or messages. However, cultural dissimilarities result in different ways in media representation on the individual or governmental level. Because the underlying order, perspectives and practical limitations of the media in any society are based on their cultural value orientations, the different forms of media representation tend to reflect the asymmetry of intercultural communication and inevitably lead to the problem of intercultural confrontation or conflict in interpersonal, group, and national levels.

Conclusion

It is argued that social media not only provides a space in which people of different cultures can freely express their opinions and establish relationships, but may also challenge the existence of human communication in intracultural and intercultural contexts because of its specific characteristics that are significantly dissimilar to traditional media. With its focus on intercultural interaction, this paper explicates the impact of cultural values on social media, the impact of social media on cultural identity, and the impact of social media on three aspects of intercultural interaction, namely, intercultural relationships, intercultural dialogue, and intercultural conflict. Two implications can be made based on the delineation of this study.

First, this paper only deals with the directional influence of cultural values on social media, social media on cultural identity, and

social media on intercultural interaction in Indonesia. It is plausible that the relationship of social media and other variables discussed in this paper can be mutual. In other words, for future research scholars can examine, for example, the possible impact of social media on the formation of new cultural values, the transformation of or rendering obsolete old cultural values, and the impact of cultural identity on the use of social media. Moreover, in addition to the three categories examined in this paper, the scope of the relationship between social media and intercultural communication can be expanded to other themes, such as the investigation of co-cultural variations in the use of social media to communication within and across cultures, the impact of social media on intercultural dialogue, and the potential use of social media to resolve intercultural conflicts.

Second and finally, because the impact of social media on human society is still in its initial stages, the possible effect of social media on human communication mentioned in the first part of this paper remains dynamic and still lacks systematic studies from scholars. Hence, the impact of social media on intercultural communication discussed in this paper is largely confined to the old model of media functions. How to unlock this limitation and shift from the context of traditional media to social media remains a great challenge for scholars to observe in this line of research.

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