

Online Political Participation and Netizen Anonymity in Indonesia's Digital Democracy¹

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Abstract

The growth of social media in Indonesia has contributed to an increase in the public's online political participation. This phenomenon has brought forward discussion regarding the pros and cons of online political participation, as related to participants' identities. The lack of traceability regarding participants' identities has posed some challenges, including the accountability and legitimacy of opinions.

This research seeks to achieve a comprehensive understanding of anonymity in political participation. By applying the theory of online disinhibition effect, this research attempts to explain the dynamics of anonymity, its implications for political participation on social media, and the effects of anonymity on the quality of digital democracy. Using surveys, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews, this research seeks to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the issues.

The findings show that the varied degrees of anonymity employed by citizens affect their political participation. In addition, anonymity can be understood as citizens' mechanism for coping with various possible consequences, such as legal and social retribution in the personal and professional context. We argue that the option to remain anonymous on social media has increased the extent of political participation in Indonesia. However, this increase in the quantity of participation has not necessarily been followed by an increase in its quality. Such a situation, ironically, is due to the nature of anonymity itself, which is further explained through the framework of the online disinhibition effect.

Keywords: *anonymity; digital democracy; online disinhibition effect; political participation; social media*

Introduction

As internet penetration has increased in Indonesia, the number of social media users has increased. According to Kemp, who wrote

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a report on a survey conducted by We Are Social and Hootsuite in 2018, Indonesia places high—far above the global average—in certain categories of internet usage (Kemp, 2018). These categories include the number of social media account, annual growth of social media users, percentage of internet penetration, as well as hours spent on the internet.

The role of the internet and social media in political engagement—a specific type of civic engagement, through politically-oriented activities, through which people participate in and seek to influence a community on political issues, systems, and structures (Pontes, Hen, & Griffiths, 2018)—and democracy has been affirmed by several scholars (e.g. Fenton & Barassi, 2011; Loader & Mercea, 2011). The concept of political participation itself refers to ‘activities that include both making demands on and showing support for a government as well as lawful and unlawful activities’ (Bergström, 2006). Political participation also needs to be viewed as something beyond the activities directed towards the government, as most of the time it involves many other actors, including political parties, media, as well as the public.

One change that technological advancement has brought forward is the way the public congregates in what we dub the public sphere (Dahlgren, 2009), and in the manner that the internet extends and pluralizes the public sphere (Dahlgren, 2005). Predating the internet, the mass media created one-way communication that, in principle, negated the idea of democracy, i.e. citizens’ freedom and opportunity to express views and participate in the political process (Rasmussen, 2014). The major, global shift from mass media to internet dominance created new opportunities and chances for the public to be involved in open discussions about issues of public affairs and policies. Rasmussen argued that the internet bridges the divide between those who have access to information and those who do not, thus allowing more participants to potentially interact and debate within the public sphere (2014).

The internet has also become a platform of interactive media

that offers the potential to develop and modify a new variety of democracy (Hague & Loader, 1999). Some features that Hague and Loader discussed as highlights of interactive media in regards to the practice of democracy include interactivity, wherein users may communicate on a many-to-many reciprocal basis; global networks, wherein communication is not fettered by nation-state boundaries; free speech, wherein internet users may express their opinions with limited state censorship; free association, in which internet users may join virtual communities of common interest; construction and dissemination of information, wherein internet users may produce and share information that is not subject to official review or sanction; challenge to professional and official perspectives, wherein state and professional information may be challenged; and break down of nation-state identity, wherein users may begin to adopt global and local identities. These features are important, as it explains the broad impact of the internet on democracy.

Naturally, every change that affects the internet and social media—including users and users' patterns of usage—brings forward the need to revisit discussion on the subject. Hague and Loader identified two reasons for this particular interest. One, the lack of public trust in and esteem towards political institutions, actors, and practices in advanced liberal democracies. Two, the belief that the information age is synonymous with radical changes in various aspects of society that may remove political institutions, actors, and practices from their ivory towers (Hague & Loader, 1999).

In Indonesia's case, instances of how the internet and social media have changed the dynamics of public engagement in politics and democracy were explored by Hill & Sen (2000), focusing on politics in the internet; Nugroho (2008), focusing on civil society activism; and Nurhadryani, Maslow & Yamamoto (2009), focusing on the campaign and political reform process.

The role of the internet and social media in democracy is evidenced in a series of events that occurred in Indonesia. One prime example is the overthrow of the Suharto regime in 1998. At

that moment, the internet had only been introduced in Indonesia for a couple of years. Activists and students were some of the earliest adopters, who managed to find a way to utilise the internet and cyber forums as means to congregate and overthrow the authoritarian regime.

Another example is that of Prita, a housewife who was charged with defamation by a private hospital due to her email complained about the hospital's service. The case managed to involve tens of thousands of netizens in various actions, ranging from providing online support through various platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to providing Prita with financial support. This is arguably the first documented massive social networking service (SNS)-based crowdsourcing effort in Indonesia.

The significance of the internet on the dynamics of democracy in Indonesia only grew over time. Currently, with the 2019 elections are approaching, the public has become divided into separate groups based on political preferences. A number of politically driven accounts—also known as buzzers—have flourished, and have participated on the internet on behalf of certain interest groups. To a certain extent, buzzers possess the power to influence public opinion proportional to their number of followers, or to create spin to steer media highlights (Saraswati, 2018). Professional buzzers, who are paid for their biased political participation, are also known to be willing to go to the extent of executing smear campaigns (Saraswati, 2018).

A digital forensics investigation done by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology showed that, in 2017, there were some 800,000 websites and accounts that were suspected to propagate hoaxes and fake news (KEMENKOMINFO, 2017). One of the most notorious cases is that of the Saracen syndicate, members of which were indicted by the Indonesian police in 2017. The syndicate was accused of spreading provocative fake news on various social media platforms for financial profit (“Kasus Saracen”, 2017).

The situation has only become more interesting as most Indonesians are still very vulnerable to hoaxes. Research done by Eka of *dailysocial.id* revealed that only 55% of internet users perform fact checking on the information they receive, and 44% of internet users are not confident in their ability to detect hoaxes (2018).

The situation described above has lent significance to the question of legitimacy in Indonesian digital democracy, especially when anonymity is added into the equation. The fact that 2019 presidential and general election are looming ahead, fuelling political tensions in Indonesia to the extent that the government as regulatory body is preparing several countermeasures to anticipate conflict and unlawful/unethical campaigning, makes the case particularly significant to investigate.

Based on the situational context described above, this research departs from three assumptions:

First, anonymity on social media is likely to be used by netizens to convey their opinions regarding sensitive and debatable issues to avoid social, legal, or other types of retribution or backlash. Second, netizens' anonymity and political participation may vary based on the social media platforms they use, and this holds implications for their political participation. Third, in regards to the risk of social, legal, and other types of sanctions, netizens are likely to represent their political opinions indirectly on social media through other parties' statements, such as: quoting, linking, reposting, etc., rather than expressing their own opinions directly.

Understanding Social Media and Political Participation in Digital Democracy

While observing the role of the internet and social media in Indonesia, Sara Sidner, a CNN reporter, stated that "Indonesia is crazy about online social networking... but all the tweeting, texting, and typing is not just for fun. It is also being used as a tool for change"

(Lim, 2013). Similarly, Nugroho (2011) also viewed the internet and social media in a positive light. Lutfia (2010) even dubbed the internet and social media as Indonesia's fifth pillar of democracy.

Regardless of the positive statements made by scholars, some pessimistic views of the internet remain, claiming that there has not been enough evidence to assert such claims. Lim (2013) stated that the internet generated "many clicks, but little sticks", describing the fact that Indonesians have little public political participation. Lim elaborated that, although political participation on the internet may appear significant when measured by the number of comments, clicks, and likes (or unlike), these numbers do not represent actual political participation, such as the expression of aspiration through demonstrations or engagement with parliament to demand social and political change.

Perhaps it is worth mentioning that the internet itself is a multifaceted phenomenon that incorporates different methods which affect democracy (Polat, 2005). In this article, the internet will be observed based on how users interact with it, namely use it as a mean of information exchange, a means of communication, and as a virtual public sphere. Therefore, the assumption that the internet is a single, colossal technological object often leads to an oversimplification of matters. Breaking the internet down into facets will provide an analytical basis through which we can understand the dynamics of political participation in digital democracy.

Hacker and van Dijk define digital democracy as "A collection of attempts to practice democracy without the limits of time, space, and other physical conditions, using ICT or CMC instead, as an addition to, not a replacement for, traditional 'analogue' political practices" (2000). Other terms such as "electronic democracy", "teledemocracy", and "cyberdemocracy" have also been used to refer to the application of ICT in the democracy process (Hague & Loader, 1999). However, Hacker and van Dick argued that, rather than utilising ICT as an extension of analogue democracy, digital democracy is a fusion of organic and virtual reality, involving the

convergence of ICT and other media, which pretty much simulates or represents face-to-face communication (2000). Hacker and van Dijk also elaborate the concept of digital democracy as a ‘new age of democracy’ that is symbolised by direct participation, as opposed to representative democracy. Naturally, the existence of digital democracy must of course entail the presence of political participation by the public.

Tsagarousianou explained political participation as consisting of three aspects: information provision, deliberation, and participation in decision making. These three elements provide the structure of democracy that takes place within—and is facilitated by—the internet:

Information provision refers to the availability of information regarding public affairs and public policy that is published and accessible by both the public and by policymakers. It also refers to the act of seeking, gathering, sharing, and producing political information.

Deliberation is the public sphere that facilitates dialogue between the public, the government, and other parties. Deliberation affects political participation in the way the public expresses opinions, demands, debates, negotiation, and so forth.

Decision making, as an element of political participation, is related to collective action in regard to policymaking. Collective action itself is seen through two dimensions, specifically institutionalised and represented participation, and independent participation. The second dimension holds the most potential in collective action, because the model of interaction that the internet offers facilitates the public in initiating independent and autonomous participation (1999, p. 195).

Meanwhile, in explaining the contribution of political participation on social media to digital democracy, Min (2010) stated that, in the context of digital democracy, the ideal form of political participation should at least include two dimensions: the gathering of political information through online means, and public

discussion in online forums. Hacker and van Dijk (2000) argued that cyberspace should be able to accommodate differences and decentralisation. Public discussion in cyberspace must be open, respect differences, and keep a high regard for collective values, all in order to enhance the spirit of egalitarianism. As long as cyberspace is still contaminated by hate speech and the lack of participation due to fear and anxiety, the practice of digital democracy will remain unsuccessful (Hacker & Van Dijk, 2000; Papacharissi, 2004).

Papacharissi (2004) identifies many forms of netizen participation in cyberspace discussion, including reciprocal debate between two or more participants, collective expression or statement (including complaints, views, or opinions of certain issues), calls for action in response to certain issues (including online petitions), and publication of politics-related materials. Papacharissi also add another dimension, attitude, which is related to politeness and civility (or lack thereof), including stereotyping, threats, name-calling, aspersions, lies, hoaxes, hyperboles, uncooperative expressions, bullying/belittling others, offensive/vulgar expressions, sarcasm, improper use of emoticons, etc.

While political participation and digital democracy through social media have been seen positively, there remain some doubts. The lack of confidence regarding social media's contribution to the quality of democracy is strongly related to the issue of internet anonymity. The public's presence on the internet cannot always be identified as actual representation of the public, as the internet enables pseudonymity and anonymity (Kennedy, 2006; Suler, 2004; Kling, Lee, Teich, & Frankel, 1999). Such a situation creates doubt over whether the high level of social media engagement truly comes from the public, or whether it is nothing other than political engineering, as in the recent case of Saracen. The issue of participants' visibility (or invisibility) also affects the accountability and reliability of information sources regarding political subjects.

Anonymity refers to an array of understandings. Anonymity is not just a matter of un-name-ability or namelessness, but also a

form of non-identifiability or non-coordinatability (Wallace, 1999). The lack of possible visual identification, the adaptation of users to online persona, and the expression of ideas without identifiable sources, are also taken into account in understanding anonymity (Reader, 2012). Ellison, Blackwell, Lampe, & Trieu, (2016) stated that anonymity is a state that occurs when individuals deliberately hide their personal identities during social interactions. Furthermore, on social media, anonymity is a spectrum of identity expression. As a platform for interaction, social media has made it possible for users to perform “selective self-presentation”, which according to Ellison, et al. (2016) can be categorised into genuine identity (legal identity), pseudonymity (persona that may or may not related to genuine identity), and anonymity (lack of information regarding identity).

Doubts over anonymity in the internet are related to the possibility that the public may use the internet as a method of escaping the pressures of the real world. Suler (2004) dubbed this phenomenon disinhibited behaviour, or the lack of self-control due to the absence of social conventions, a situation made possible by anonymity. This behaviour may lead to misuse of internet accounts (Diakopoulous & Naaman, 2011) and communication without retribution, such as spamming, hate messages, harassment, online scamming, etc. (Kling et al., 1999). Some scholars have managed to link the problem of anonymity to the issue of internet politeness and civility, (e.g. Cho & Acquisti, 2013), name calling, stereotyping, sarcasm, etc. (Hill & Hughes, 1998).

Suller (2004) elaborated on disinhibited behaviour through online disinhibition effect theory. The theory was drawn to map the tendency of self-disclosure behaviour demonstrated by anonymous users in cyberspace. According to Suler, the disinhibition effect is “the person shifting, while online, to an intrapsychic constellation that may be, in varying degrees, dissociated from the in-person constellation, with inhibiting guilt, anxiety, and related effects as features of the in-person self but not as part of that online self”

(Suler, 2004, p. 325).

The basic premise of Suler's online disinhibition effect is that individuals act online in a different manner than in real life. The discrepancy between online and offline behaviour is due to six factors identified by Suler (2004, p. 322), namely:

Dissociative anonymity, which refers to the nature of cyberspace, which allows users to conceal or hide their identities. Through anonymity, online individuals are given the opportunity to segregate themselves from their offline personas and selves. Anonymity also serves as a shield against social criticism, bullying, and other consequences that may occur when such behaviour is practiced in real life.

Secondly, **invisibility**. This factor refers to the fact that cyberspace mediates the simultaneous exchange of messages between people who are not in the same place. In this state, the disinhibition effect may occur since a lack of eye contact and face-to-face visibility disinhibits people. Invisibility provides individuals with the courage to act more boldly than they usually do in real life interactions. This may also lead to intimidation and other practices in social media.

Third, **asynchronicity**. This factor refers to possible delay in feedback, which may cause individuals to feel as if they are not directly connected through cyberspace. This generates a disinhibition effect, as individuals may run away by going offline as soon as they leave personal, emotional, or even controversial messages. Munro referred to such cases as 'emotional hit and runs' (Munro, 2003 in Suler, 2004).

The fourth factor is **solipsistic interjection**, which is related to cyberspace allowing individuals to construct an image, which is sometimes an ideal or aspired version of themselves. The lack of visual representation of users that are interacting online may become a shortcoming, but at the same times it allows said users to represent themselves the way they want (which does not always reflect reality) through the messages they construct and send.

The fifth factor is **dissociative imagination**, which combines the concepts of escapism and self-recreation in cyberspace. Online, individuals are able to create and live the personas they create online, without the burden of responsibility. Internet users often consider their online identities and lives to be games, which they can discard or abandon as soon as they go offline.

The last factor is the **minimisation of status and authority**, which refers to the charm or appeal that often becomes the determinant of success in real-life communication. In cyberspace, charm and appeal hold little to no effect due to the lack of face-to-face interaction. Therefore, individuals who lack these traits may communicate themselves more eloquently. Regarding such case, Suler stated that “Online—with the appearances of authority minimized—people are much more willing to speak out and misbehave” (Suler, 2004).

Despite the results brought forward by some scholars through their works, the positive notion of the internet’s contributions remains. While posing problems, anonymity nevertheless provides a shield that frees individuals from the boundaries of their real-life identities and enables them to express themselves and their opinions (Kling et al., 1999). Experimental research regarding this subject also showed that anonymity eliminated the burden of discomfort and anxiety that exists in real-life interactions (Bargh, Mc Kenna, & Fitzsmons, 2002).

The polarisation of opinions toward anonymity in online political participation carries the same notion as Suler’s proposition regarding behaviours that tend to come with anonymity. In a comprehensive discussion regarding the online disinhibition effect, Suler (2004) classified the behaviours that come with anonymity into a spectrum ranging from benign disinhibition to toxic disinhibition. Benign disinhibition revolves around the fact that anonymity facilitates self-disclosure in cyberspace. Anonymity helps remove the boundaries of real-life concerns, fears, and anxieties, thereby enabling users to maximise their hidden potential. Users who

demonstrate benign disinhibition are expressive, sympathetic, and altruistic. Anonymity aids them as they explore new interests, meet new people, and enrich themselves. As such, benign disinhibition can be seen as a 'working through' process of psychodynamic theory, or self-actualization.

Toxic disinhibition is the perfect antithesis of benign disinhibition. Toxic disinhibition describes a situation where anonymity is seen as a Pandora's box that holds the worst in humanity. Users who demonstrate toxic disinhibition constantly act in a notorious manner, through curses, anger, racism, and expressions of hatred that bring forward particular disorders. Toxic disinhibition sees anonymity as a method for avoiding responsibility, which in turn promotes the darker uses of the internet such as pornography, cyberattacks, and even crime. Suler (2004) states that toxic disinhibition results from the fact that anonymity "may be a blind catharsis, a fruitless repetition compulsion, and an acting out of unsavoury needs" when users take it for granted without affirming self-control and without awareness of the need for self-improvement.

In the midst of the controversy of anonymity, as well as the lack of confidence in the role of social media in democracy, our research team has yet to find research that examines anonymity and how it affects the practice of digital democracy in Indonesia. While anonymity is a common occurrence on social media (Kling et al. 1999), and social media is a place where users find the freedom to express themselves without real-life retribution (Suler, 2004), how does anonymity affect the freedom of political expression on social media? How does it affect the practice and quality of digital democracy?

This research aims to explore and answer the questions that have arisen in discussions of internet anonymity and digital democracy. Indonesia has been chosen as the research context, as—according to 2017 Global Web Index—it is one of the countries with largest number of social media users. The empirical aspect of

research will involve Indonesian social media users who participate in political discussions and activism through their social media accounts. The specific goal of this study is to understand how anonymity on social media determines the behaviour and quality of political participation, and how it affects the quality of digital democracy in Indonesia.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Anonymous political participation: degree and motivations

This research measured the degree of anonymity through the extent to which social media users, as respondents, identify (or conceal) themselves through their accounts, i.e. if they use their genuine (legal) identities, pseudonyms, oronyms. The survey results showed that the degree of anonymity exhibited by respondents was quite high, compared to the degree of pseudonymity. Respondents stated that they preferred completely concealing their identities, rather than posing as a different persona. Interestingly, during the focus group discussion (FGD), one informant who claimed to be an active political buzzer admitted that pseudonymity is a main tool for buzzers, who alter their identities when they have to assume their roles in order to work for several 'clients' simultaneously. Further investigation through statistical cross tabulation showed a distinct preference for pseudonymity by buzzers, as opposed to ordinary participants in political discussions, who preferred to remain anonymous.

The variation of preferences shown in the previous paragraph was caused by the different requirements expected of different social media platforms, as stated by one FGD member:

"I chose Twitter because I didn't have to give up too much information about myself, unlike Facebook, which requires me to display my pictures, fill in information about myself, and makes me have to pretend to go to a certain school or live in certain location, and many other details. Twitter only asks for a picture to display as my profile and a header, and that's it [...] Facebook also has my lecturers' and friends' accounts on it... it's inconvenient" (classified FGD informant).

A detailed account of the survey results showed that respondents demonstrated different preferences regarding the elements of identity that they preferred to reveal or conceal. The consensus among all respondents was that they only provided information on their identities when absolutely required for account registration purposes. Regarding basic elements such as name and profile picture, most respondents preferred keeping them concealed, or substituting them with something less direct, such as nicknames. For other elements, such as ethnicity, marital status, religion or profession, the respondents preferred to not reveal them at all.

On the other hand, respondents showed no aversion to speaking about their interests or hobbies. This showed that, while going anonymous, they avoided giving any information that might be traced back to their legal identities. FGD informants who claimed to work as buzzers agreed that this was a 'trade secret'. At the same time, retaining certain aspects of their real-life identities was viewed by some as a method to maintain a sense of authenticity in an otherwise completely fake account. Authenticity is important for some buzzers, who need to assume the identity of an ordinary person in order to gain trust among followers. This is consistent with previous findings regarding the preference for pseudonymity among buzzers, who often manage more than one account, as it enables them to maintain the impression of 'real people' being behind these accounts.

Comparing some of the most popular social media platforms in Indonesia, it is evident that these platforms apply different levels of user authentication measures. Some social media ask for very detailed information about users' identities upon registration, while others ask only for the basic minimum information. For instance, Line uses telephone number verification, while Facebook demands its user provide very detailed information about their identities upon registration. Such measures are often related to the services provided by the social media platforms. Line, aside from being a social media platform, is primarily a mobile messenger, hence the

request for users' active telephone number. As for Facebook, the platform grew and survived over the years due to its emphasis on communal interaction. Drastic measures have been taken to prevent the use of anonymous accounts, because it hinders Facebook's core services and strengths, i.e. the extension of real-life connections and social interactions.

On the other hand, Twitter is considerably lax regarding users' identities. Due to its minimum probing of users' identities, Twitter has become the social media of choice for respondents, who use it for online political participation. Twitter enables its users to fully conceal their identities, and to avoid having their accounts traced back to their real-life selves. The statement above was supported by the survey results, which showed that Twitter was the primary social media platform of 46% of respondents.

The survey also identified the motivating factors behind the choice of anonymity. The results showed that internal factors (such as personal need for freedom of expression, in this case political opinion) trumped external factors such as fear of threats and pressure from others. Interestingly, further exploration of the reasons respondents used anonymous accounts discovered various responses, some of which ran contrary to the previous findings. These responses included avoidance of conflict with their closest friends due to political differences, protection from online threats, avoiding embarrassment, as well as avoiding professional consequences (for respondents that works as political buzzers, or as civil servants/members of the police or armed forces).

Of 43 respondents, 20 chose to participate anonymously in order to protect their real-life identities from possible threats that they may receive online. This finding is consistent with previous findings regarding the elements of identity that respondents preferred to conceal. Isolating online activity by not providing sensitive information seemed to be a definite option taken by respondents to ensure that attackers are unable to track their accounts back to their real-life identities. This finding is in accordance with Suler's online

disinhibition effect theory (Suler, 2004), which hold that anonymity allows the compartmentalisation of the online and offline selves, and protects users from the real-life consequences of their online behaviour. At the same time, it also shows the tendency for “hit and run” behaviour on social media (Munro, 2003 in Suler, 2004). This tendency was confirmed by one informant, who stated:

“Among buzzers, usually the more you hide your real identity, the more you tend to speak rudely [...] the moment I switch my commitment from one client to another, I can just delete my previous account.” (classified FGD informant)

One of the most interesting finding is the fact that only two respondents claimed to choose anonymous political participation as a way to avoid the legal consequences of their social media behaviour. This shows that, overall, respondents were aware of the legal boundaries regarding their activities on social media. At the same time, it is quite worrying that respondents continued to feel anxious about potential backlash from other users. It shows that the overall climate of online political participation in Indonesia is still less than favourable. The existence of online threats, attacks, and hostility may discourage public participation, or even prevent people from participating in online political discussions.

Anonymity and digital democracy

The descriptions of the survey results in the previous section have provided a basic idea of how social media facilitate anonymity, how respondents have chosen to apply it to various degrees, and the reason behind their decisions. Furthermore, the reason behind their choice of anonymity have been explained by the online disinhibition effect. This section will address the subsequent question posed by anonymity in online political participation, regarding how it affects the practice of digital democracy. Digital democracy, in this context, refers to an umbrella concept that comprises various forms of discussions on politics and democracy on ICT-based platforms

(Hague & Loader, 1999).

The framework used to describe the context of political participation here is Tsagarousianou's three dimensions of digital democracy: information provision, deliberation, and participation in decision making (Tsagarousianou, 1999). These elements explain the process of democracy that occurs in and facilitated by the internet, and at the same time serve as indicators of the quality of digital democracy. Tsagarousianou's three dimensions of digital democracy can be further explained as: 1) digital democracy enhances the access to and exchange of political information by the government, public administrators, public representatives, political and public organizations, as well as the public itself, 2) digital democracy facilitates public debate and the emergence of public political communities, and 3) digital democracy enhances public participation in political decision making (Tsagarousianou, 1999).

1. Information provision

Among the three elements of digital democracy, the survey results showed that respondents were most active in the dimension of information provision, with a relatively high mean score of 4.2. The activities of seeking political information and observing online political discussions scored the highest of all activities. This signifies that, if digital democracy is believed to have enhanced the access and exchange of political information, anonymity allows the public to do it stealthily. While the activity itself is considerably passive—as users merely access and exchange information provided by various sources, rather than generate it—users' activities can be recorded or tracked, and this may pose problems at times.

Information provision on social media involves such tasks as following, retweeting, or liking certain accounts or posts. These activities are recorded by social media platforms, some of which allow other users to access their records. As such, individuals' political affiliations or ideological tendencies can be tracked and

investigated by third parties. This situation puts users at risk of judgment and labelling. Using anonymous account, while judgment and labelling still pose risks, users can separate their online identities from their real-life identities.

One relevant example of the above situation was mentioned by a FGD informants, who used an anonymous account to safely follow some prominent political figures who oppose the respondent's real-life political affiliation. The informant explained this behaviour as a method to enrich their political discourse. However, the informant wanted to prevent other people—including peers who shared the same political allegiance—from learning of their behaviour, to avoid potential misunderstandings and judgments.

“On Twitter, I have several accounts. [...] One of them is an account I use to interact with my friends. I also have [redacted] account, which is a community account about learning proper Indonesian (language). But I also use it to read political tweets from both politicians and buzzers [...] for learning purposes (sarcasm). So, basically, my personal Twitter is to interact with the people I like, while the [redacted] account is for (following) the people I dislike. But since it's a community (account), I can only read tweets” (Classified FGD informant).

2. Deliberation

The survey results showed that deliberation had a lower trend compared to information provision. However, the mean score of this dimension (3.1) was still higher (albeit slightly) than neutral, which indicates tendency towards participation. Three of the highest mean scores came from responses to questions regarding participation in online discussion. Meanwhile, the lowest scores, which fell below the neutral mark, were for participation in campaigns or causes.

Interestingly, the highest score within this dimension was that of responses towards the usage of memes to participate in or respond to online political debates. The use of memes often signified passive-aggressive behaviour, or an attempt to make light of a situation. It showed a tendency towards conflict avoidance, which confirms the motivational aspect of anonymity. A consistent trend

of conflict avoidance was also shown by the low mean score (2.8) of the question regarding engagement in heated political debates online.

Complexity arises with the existence of political buzzers, people who manage and use anonymous accounts to accomplish specific political missions for a price. One buzzer who participated in the FGD admitted to managing five anonymous Facebook accounts simultaneously during the 2014 presidential campaign. For these accounts, the buzzer posed as different personas, including housewife, football enthusiast, and adolescent female, all of which were constructed without any proximity with the buzzer's real identity. The existence of such practice shows how anonymity, in the hands of political buzzers, can turn into a tool that may create false representation. Buzzers may present opinions in the name of a certain circle or group, which may differ from the true sentiments or opinions of said group. Their actions are tailored to the interests of the group(s) who hire and pay them for their activities.

We discuss (social media posts) in team meetings (of buzzers who work together). For instance, if a certain issue arises, we must respond accordingly [...] So, basically, the important points are discussed at the beginning. We (buzzers) may change things, as long as it doesn't deviate from the plan (Classified FGD informant)

3. Participation in decision making

The survey found that the element with the lowest engagement is deliberation, with most respondents claiming to rarely or never participate in activism, especially in political campaign, conveying aspirations, and reporting fake accounts or accounts that spread hoaxes and defamation. The result is consistent with the data, which shows indifference or lack of action against hoaxes, something that may be attributed to the low level of internet literacy among Indonesians. It is also consistent with the nature of anonymity itself, which denies transparency in order to protect individuals from the consequences of their actions.

Participation in online activism oftentimes involves follow-up actions or commitment, such as signing online petitions or joining offline movements. It usually requires the disclosure of personal information, as well as engagement with other activities outside the SNS (such as *change.org*) or even in real life. Such a situation may be undesirable for anonymous participants, as their accounts on activism sites may be traced back to their anonymous accounts. The lack of engagement with deliberation seems to indicate a full realisation among users of anonymous accounts that political discussion on social media is merely discourse. Or, perhaps, anonymity itself has become an obstacle for activism as a form of decision making in the political participation process—which is an interesting finding, considering that anonymity is supposed to enable participants to commit into more activities compared to when they can be identified.

The Tendency of Toxic Disinhibition

While the previous section showed dynamicity in the findings, the overall results for questions regarding online behaviours that signify toxic disinhibition are much simpler. The statistical results indicate that less than 5% of respondents admitted to toxic disinhibition effects. This is consistent with the results regarding the tendency to avoid conflict shown in the previous sections.

The only behaviour that received a moderate amount of responses was the usage of foul language and curses in responding to topics considered unpleasant. People can easily dismiss the use of foul language and curses as juvenile, instead of as an insult or attack. This type of behaviour is supposedly very common, and relatively tolerable as long as it is not used as a direct attack towards another user—a behaviour asked about in another question that received low scores, meaning participants avoided any type of behaviour that may be considered an attack on other users or accounts.

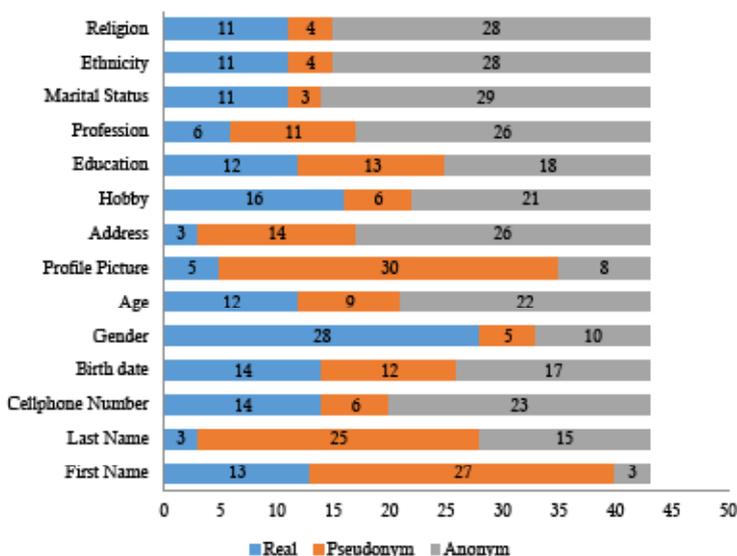
This may signify that the policing culture of Indonesian netizen

is, to some extent, quite effective at discouraging toxic behaviour. While anonymity serves as a shield from the real-life repercussions of online activities, the possibility of backlash and attacks from other users still comes into consideration. The desire to practice toxic behaviour during anonymous participation is not greater than the fear of potential consequences. Even though participants can simply abandon their accounts as soon as the situation worsens, the survey results showed that participants still avoid committing behaviour that may lead to such repercussions.

This tendency may be connected to the fact that Indonesia is a country in which people still place social harmony above personal freedom, thus creating compliance. Rather than worrying about legal consequences, respondents felt more anxious about the judgments and retributions of their peers. More positively, it may be safe to assume that anonymity does not directly encourage negative behaviours in online political participation.

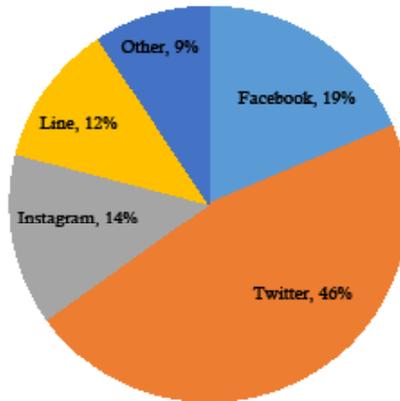
Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Degree of anonymity of various elements of identity



The figure above shows the various elements of anonymity, and how each element is reflected in respondents' social media use. From top to bottom, the elements listed are religion, ethnic background, marital status, profession, educational background, hobbies, address, profile picture, age, gender, date of birth, gender, cellular phone number, last name, and first name. The colours indicate the degree of anonymity; blue refers to respondents' real/legal identities, orange refers to pseudonymity, and grey refers to anonymity.

Figure 2. Social media platform chosen for anonymous participation



The figure above shows the social media platforms used by respondents to participate in online discussions. Twitter was the most popular platform due to its lenient position on anonymity and ease of controlling users' identities.

Table 1. Driving factors for anonymity

Internal factors:	Mean
Being anonymous is important for me	3.4
I prefer being anonymous for online political participation	3.49
Mean value of internal factors	3.57
External factors:	
I use anonymity to hide my political participation from the people I know	3.49
I use anonymity to hide my political participation from the people I don't know	3.74
I decided on anonymous political participation after seeing other people do it	3.09
Mean value of external factors	3.44

The table above shows a comparison of internal and external factors that became drivers of anonymity.

Table 2. Mean Value of Political Participation

Political Participation	Mean
Information Provision	4.5
Deliberation	3.2
Decision Making	2.7

The table above shows the decreasing trend of participation in Tsagarousianou's online political participation framework.

Conclusion

This research tried to investigate the practice (or lack thereof) of political participation on social media by Indonesian citizens. This is especially important given that hoaxes remain prevalent among internet users even as the 2019 general election comes ever closer and all involved parties grow more anxious with each passing moment.

Taking into account the results of users' motivations and reasons for anonymity, we can draw a conclusion on how anonymity enhances the information provision aspect of digital democracy. Aside from protecting users' real identities from potential threats, anonymity also serves as a means to avoid conflict and discord due to misunderstandings. Anonymity is convenient when users want harmonious social relations and the freedom of political opinion and expression.

In the end, it is easier to evaluate digital democracy by comparing it with the practice of democracy in the pre-digital era. Schuler and Day (2004) stated that one of the main attributes of modern democracy is inclusivity, wherein everyone has the equal right to participate. Within an Indonesian context, where social harmony and threats to free speech have come side by side, anonymity is one coping mechanism that separates digital democracy from pre-digital democracy.

It is too soon to determine whether anonymity has a positive effect on the quality of digital democracy. When one can conveniently hide behind an anonymous account to avoid retribution, to what extent can anonymous accounts be considered the true voice of public opinion? The existence of buzzers as political actors, and the potential risk of new problems that their unpredictable behaviour may pose, only exacerbate the difficulty of concluding whether anonymity is good or bad.

Anonymity may have increased the amount of online political participation. However, this does not necessarily mean

that the quality of digital democracy has increased accordingly. Perhaps, the true form of digital democracy can only be manifested when the public, as an entity, enjoys the freedom and assurance of safety necessary to participate in every possible form of political participation, without perceiving a need for anonymity.

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