DIGITAL ETHICS IN SOCIAL MEDIA TO MAINTAIN AND STRENGTHEN THE NATION'S SOCIO-CULTURAL VALUES

ETIKA DIGITAL DALAM MEDIA SOSIAL UNTUK MEMELIHARA DAN MEMPERKUAT NILAI SOSIAL BUDAYA BANGSA

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Abstract

Social interaction that occurs on social media serves not only as a means of social interaction but also as a primary platform for information dissemination and public opinion formation. However, the ease of access and interactivity of social media also pose serious challenges regarding the application of digital ethics. Freedom in social media is not limitless freedom. Digital ethics involves principles and norms that govern user behavior in creating, producing, and distributing content with full responsibility. The 2020 Digital Civility Index (DCI) report regarding changes in community behavior in social media usage and forms of communication interaction places Indonesia at the lowest rank in the civility index. Incivility in social media conduct by the community results in significant vulnerability and threats of division, unrest, and conflict within society. Digital ethics involves principles and norms that govern user behavior in creating, producing, and distributing content with full responsibility. Ethics and morals have an attachment to one another.

Keywords : Digital Ethics, social media, values, socio-cultural.

Abstrak

Interaksi sosial yang terjadi di media sosial tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sarana interaksi sosial tetapi juga sebagai wadah utama untuk penyebaran informasi dan pembentukan opini publik. Namun, kemudahan akses dan interaktivitas media sosial juga menimbulkan tantangan serius terkait penerapan etika digital. Kebebasan di media sosial bukanlah kebebasan tanpa batas. Etika digital melibatkan prinsip dan norma yang mengatur perilaku pengguna dalam membuat, memproduksi, dan mendistribusikan konten dengan penuh tanggung jawab. Laporan Digital Civility Index (DCI) tahun 2020 mengenai perubahan perilaku masyarakat dalam penggunaan media sosial dan bentuk interaksi komunikasi menempatkan Indonesia pada peringkat terendah dalam indeks kesopanan tersebut. Ketidaksopanan masyarakat dalam bermedia sosial mengakibatkan kerentanan yang signifikan serta ancaman perpecahan, keresahan, dan konflik di tengah masyarakat. Etika digital melibatkan prinsip dan norma yang mengatur perilaku pengguna dalam membuat, memproduksi, dan mendistribusikan konten dengan penuh tanggung jawab. Etika dan moral memiliki keterikatan satu sama lain.

Kata Kunci : Etika Digital, media sosial, nilai, sosial budaya.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital transformation has fundamentally changed the way society interacts and communicates. Current digital transformation has birthed many multi-platforms, resulting in an overflow of information to the public. The existence of digital transformation encourages the birth of media freedom and literacy for society without limits. With direct and rapid penetration, disseminated news can also provide a threat, because the 'gatekeeper' function, where conventional media uses it as a news filtering function, is not performed on social media. With the immediate nature of digital transformation, this 'gatekeeper' function has disappeared. This becomes a threat because the news received by the public is not necessarily true and accurate; sometimes, such news is even without valid sources. Conditions like this have the potential to cause disinformation amidst society, especially given the level of digital media literacy in society that is still low.

According to Marwick and boyd (2014), social media is not only a communication tool but also a vessel that forms identity, social, and digital culture. If not balanced with good digital literacy knowledge, social media has the potential to threaten the order of national and state life, and potentially spread negative values such as intolerance, discrimination, and social conflict. Nugroho (2019) also reveals that social media can accelerate socio-cultural changes in society, both in positive and negative contexts. Digital ethics involves principles and norms that govern user behavior in creating, producing, and distributing content with full responsibility. Ethics and morals have an attachment to one another (Irma, 2024).

The 2020 Digital Civility Index (DCI) report regarding changes in community behavior in social media usage and forms of communication interaction places Indonesia at the lowest rank in the civility index. This serves as a major blow to the Indonesian nation, because thus far, Indonesia is known to the world as a nation with a society that is virtuous and possesses good etiquette and values of social life. However, the behavior of the community when using digital technology (social media) in communicating fails to reflect behavior as an Indonesian society that is cultured and civilized. Incivility in social media conduct by the community results in significant vulnerability and threats of division, unrest, and conflict within society. In the context of nation and state, this is quite vulnerable because it provides a bad image for Indonesia in the international world.

Therefore, it is very important to improve digital ethics. Social media has a significant influence on behavioral changes in society. Digital ethics, if utilized well, will realize inclusive communication and strengthen socio-cultural values. In a communication perspective, the challenge faced by society is not limited to content dissemination but also how the communication process exists in society, which ultimately births sufficiently complex social dynamics.

A number of challenges in digital communication are: first, the multitude of anonymous accounts, where social media users are free to interact without using their real identities; these anonymous accounts often spread negative things such as hate speech, hoaxes, and provocations that damage socio-cultural values in society. Second, the prevalence of

disinformation and hoaxes, where when social media disseminates information, the information conveyed does not have a valid source. Disinformation and hoaxes that are widespread in society will trigger distrust, opposition, unrest, and conflict amidst society.

McQuail, in the perspective of mass communication (McQuail, 2010), states that social media as a platform born from technological transformation possesses great interactive power and the ability to form public opinion. Therefore, strong digital ethics are required so that the public opinion formed in society is good, positive, and constructive towards harmony in social life. Third, social fragmentation and polarization; social media tends to gather and form groups of users with the same interests and views. This phenomenon forms divisions amidst society, thereby causing social fragmentation and polarization, thus damaging kinship relations in the social environment and weakening national values. This phenomenon of fragmentation and polarization becomes an obstacle in the social space for dialogue, both individually and between groups, so that a collective agreement is not achieved amidst society (Castells, 2010).

Fourth, the lack of digital literacy and ethical awareness; currently, when nearly the entire society uses various social media platforms, the high number of social media users is not directly proportional to the community's digital literacy ability. Many social media users do not yet understand the consequences of the news content they spread, such as when they spread negative content or content that violates others' privacy. Fifth, the imbalance of regulation and law enforcement; regulations binding social media platforms currently are the ITE Law and the PDP Law, but in the implementation stage, these laws still encounter obstacles. Law enforcement and the lack of socialization regarding the formation of laws become a problem that should be resolvable, but the reality is that the formed regulations are ineffective in regulating behavior and digital ethics in society. McQuail says that regulation is an external social norm or ethic that regulates social interaction. Various such conditions have an impact on the declining socio-cultural values in society. Therefore, an increase in the role of digital ethics in social media usage is needed.

Based on the background previously outlined, the problem formulation proposed is: "How to improve the Role of Digital Ethics in Social Media to Maintain and Strengthen the Nation's Socio-Cultural Values." (1) How is the role of digital ethics in social media currently? (2) What are the challenges of the role of digital ethics in social media to maintain and strengthen the nation's socio-cultural values? (3) What are the strategic efforts to improve the role of digital ethics in social media?.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This writing uses a qualitative or descriptive analysis method with the collection of secondary data and primary data, using a communication perspective. This research also uses a qualitative descriptive type aimed at identifying problems, gathering information, as well as making comparisons, making evaluations, establishing plans, and determining what will be done in the future (Moleong, 2009). The theoretical framework used employs Mass Communication Theory and Interpersonal Communication Theory. Denis McQuail is one of

the main figures in mass communication studies. In his book McQuail's Mass Communication Theory (2010), McQuail outlines mass communication theory comprehensively, covering the definition, function, and effects of mass media in modern society. Mass communication is the process of disseminating messages from one source to a large number of people dispersed geographically and socially, through organized media and communication technologies (McQuail, 2010). Mass media functions as a communication channel reaching a broad and heterogeneous audience.

The main functions of mass media in society are: the information function, where media provides relevant news and information so that society can make informed decisions; the education function, where mass media has a role in spreading cultural values; the entertainment function, namely providing entertainment to improve psychological well-being; the mobilization function, namely media moves society to take action, for example, when society conducts a campaign; the social surveillance function, namely media provides oversight of power to be more responsible; and the social integration function, namely helping to build and strengthen social cohesion and shared identity.

According to McQuail, mass media also has cognitive effects, namely providing changes in society's knowledge and attitudes; affective effects, namely changes in feelings and emotions; and behavioral effects, namely changes in society's actions and habits.

According to Littlejohn & Foss (2009), interpersonal communication is a process of message exchange between two or more individuals interacting directly and personally to build a common goal. Several models in interpersonal communication are: the linear model, which is the simplest model where communication occurring is one-way communication from sender to receiver; this model does not depict the complicated dynamics of interpersonal communication.

The interactional model is a two-way communication model because within the communication interaction there is a feedback or reciprocal element. This model emphasizes the role of context and time in communication. The transactional model is communication carried out as a simultaneous process where receiver and sender act together. This model emphasizes dynamic interaction that can influence the meaning of the message (Barnlund, 2008). The main concepts in this theory are context, perception, feedback, relationship, and communication ethics.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The development of information and communication technology, particularly social media, has significantly changed the landscape of public communication. Social interactions that occur on social media serve not only as a means of social interaction but also as a primary platform for information dissemination and public opinion formation. However, the ease of access and interactivity of social media also pose serious challenges regarding the application of digital ethics.

Freedom in social media is not limitless freedom. Conversely, it is necessary to continue observing values, norms, and humanitarian rules just as one interacts in the real world (Besley, 1992). Speaking of ethics is not merely about speech or sentences written, but also reflects good intentions through patience and empathy in communication, thereby creating harmonious communication, mutual support, and respect among fellow media users (Mutiah, 2019). Communication ethics cannot be separated from the manner of language delivery as a symbol of verbal message conveyance.

In the Indonesian context, the phenomenon of spreading hoaxes, hate speech, and social conflicts based on SARA (ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations) on social media has become a very crucial issue. Therefore, this analysis uses two main communication theories, namely McQuail's mass media theory and interpersonal communication theory, to understand the role of digital ethics in social media today.

Several studies show low digital ethical awareness in Indonesia. Kurniawan & Sari (2021) found that low digital literacy contributes to the spread of hoaxes and hate speech. Nugroho (2019) highlights the negative impact of social media on socio-cultural values, such as a decline in tolerance. The Microsoft Digital Civility Index (2020) places Indonesia in a low position in terms of digital civility, indicating the need for an improvement in digital ethics nationally.

In encouraging public ethics in social media usage, the government has prepared a number of strategic steps to improve digital literacy. One of them is through the 'National Digital Literacy Movement (GNLD)' program. Additionally, the government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud-Ristek), has included 'digital literacy' in the national curriculum at the elementary, secondary, and higher education levels. Furthermore, the government also participates in improving the digital capacity of Indonesian society from upstream to downstream. The programs undertaken are intended to support the implementation of national digital transformation. Castells (2010) explains that digital culture shapes new ways of interacting which must be balanced with the strengthening of socio-cultural values to prevent social disintegration.

Information technology gives birth to social media multi-platforms possesses a nature and working mechanism different from conventional media, where social media has the power to disseminate information with broad penetration, in many directions, and is immediate. The speed of this information dissemination causes a significant amount of disinformation because no time is required for the message to reach the public. The speed of messages and the direct form of information that can be accessed easily lead to disinformation; this becomes one of the causes of disharmony in society.

In the digital era, society often ignores ethics and morals in interacting. The challenges encountered today include social media users lacking understanding of various digital ethical contexts related to many aspects, for example, in the context of time, age, message content, language use, the context of respecting others, and control over content. Social media users

lose politeness and responsibility in media usage, so false information such as hoaxes and hate speech circulates widely on social media.

Similarly, figures who become role models or idols on social media often display a lack of exemplary behavior; for example, quite a number of influencers produce content that is not educative. The government has also attempted to provide learning to the entire community through various digital literacy initiatives, but the challenge of differing knowledge and understanding within society becomes one of the difficulties for digital literacy to operate maximally.

The negative impact of all this is the loss of socio-cultural values such as mutual cooperation (gotong royong), tolerance, mutual respect, politeness, and community harmony. Instead, increasing social conflict is growing in the current digital era. The digital literacy programs conducted by the government are not yet massive enough, so they do not have a sufficiently large impact on increasing the community's literacy capacity. Furthermore, various digital literacy programs tend not to be continuous.

In social media in Indonesia, a number of trusted pieces of disinformation are still widely found among the public. In addition, other problems often arise, such as hate speech, doxing, cyberbullying, and others. In fact, in the records of the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kemenkominfo RI), throughout the years 2018-2023, there were 12,547 hoax contents circulating on social media. The categories of content and information widely found are health, fraud, government, politics, international affairs, and others.

Manuel Castells, through his book titled The Rise of the Network Society, explains that digital technology has enhanced global networks that change ways of interacting, working, and communicating, thereby forming a new culture, namely digital culture. To overcome various digital challenges assessed to occur, capacity building and strengthening the understanding of digital culture are required.

Digital ethics strategies can be implemented through several means but must be carried out in a massive and structured manner. Stakeholder involvement is the most critical aspect to accelerate the strengthening of digital ethics in society. Increasing digital literacy can be achieved by integrating socio-cultural values into the education curriculum, starting from the elementary level to the upper level. This also involves the engagement of campuses and civil society in providing socialization to the community, especially communities in regional areas or those with lagging education.

The development of digital culture is also carried out by involving community participation and collaboration with influencers to produce content that possesses entertainment, information, and educational value. Social media content screening is conducted through the collaboration of civil society, the government, and law enforcement to ensure the conformity of socio-cultural values within digital ethics. This screening also aims to ensure the optimization of the Personal Data Protection Law (UU PDP) and the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE) in preventing the loss of ethical values in social media.

Furthermore, deeper learning regarding ethics becomes mandatory for journalists, with the demand that journalism must be more critical in examining data and facts.

The government and society need to build further strategies by applying the pillars of digital literacy, such as digital skills, digital culture, digital ethics, and digital safety. If knowledge about this digital literacy is interpreted deeply by every digital actor, it is highly likely that digital life will become more civilized. The concepts and socio-cultural values of the Indonesian nation are important to apply in digital life, such as to "respect others," "educate yourself," and "protect yourself" through civic literacy (Randiawan, 2025).

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the actualization of digital ethics is not merely a normative appeal, but a fundamental urgency to safeguard the nation's socio-cultural values in the era of information disruption. The analysis reveals that the absence of the traditional 'gatekeeper' function on social media, coupled with the freedom of anonymity, has exacerbated the spread of disinformation, hate speech, and social fragmentation. This condition confirms that the rapid advancement of digital infrastructure in Indonesia has not been fully matched by the ethical readiness of its society, as evidenced by the low ranking in the Digital Civility Index.

Consequently, to mitigate these challenges, this study emphasizes that relying solely on legal enforcement or the ITE Law is insufficient. A transformative and multi-stakeholder strategy is required, involving a synergy between the government, educational institutions, civil society, and influencers. Efforts must focus on massively strengthening digital literacy by integrating its four main pillars—digital skills, culture, ethics, and safety—into the national curriculum and public discourse. Ultimately, building a civilized digital space requires a collective consciousness to treat social media not as a lawless zone, but as a public sphere that demands the same ethical responsibility as the real world. This integration is vital to ensure that technological progress reinforces, rather than erodes, Indonesia's noble values of tolerance and mutual cooperation (gotong royong).

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