

# The Agenda Formation of the Fantasy of Identity Politics in the Digital Media and its Effect towards Cohesiveness of 212 Alumni Brotherhood

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**Abstract**—The research aims to reveal the agenda formation of the fantasy of identity politics compounded in the narration of radical Islamic media digital agenda and its effect toward cohesiveness of 212 Alumni brotherhood (PA 212). The research uses mixed methods. The first step is conducting content analysis, framing analysis, and theme fantasy analysis to reveal the media agenda on identity politics. The digital media that is analyzed amounts to 13 media. The second step is performing surveys applying simple random sampling with 86 respondents. The research finds that there is a positive correlation between the agenda formation of the fantasy of identity politics in the digital media and cohesiveness formation of PA 212. Fantasy construction in the digital media produces strong cohesiveness to public agenda so that it is capable of breeding social movement. Theoretically, this research is a new development in the agenda-setting theory by introducing the existence of the fantasy construction on media agenda and public agenda. Practically, this research suggests the government release a regulation or laws about the establishment of digital media, so that the dissemination of hoax can be suppressed and monitored. Hopefully, the idea can also be a preventive manner to avoid political movements that are going to change the constitution with other various reasons and hidden interests.

**Keywords**—*cohesiveness; digital media; fantasy; identity politics*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Many mass media referred to 2018-2019 as a political year. However, amid the political year, there was a new phenomenon, i.e., the rise of “identity politics” based on religious narratives and commodification of religion to gain power. Identity politics in Indonesia is more related to the issues of ethnicity, religion, ideology, and local interests that are generally represented by the elites through their articulations, and the most striking one is the use of Islam as a basis of identity politics [1]. The driving groups of this identity politics are radical or transnational Islam groups, such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Islamic People Forum (FUI), Indonesian Muslim Council (MMI), and Tarbiyah. They joined for a movement called the National Movement of MUI Fatwa Defenders and became an

essential element driving The Great Reunion 212 (Reuni Akbar 212) [2].

Initially, identity politics is peripheral commodification in the middle of an established plurality order. The concrete form and practice of identity politics began in the governor election of DKI Jakarta. Instead of decreasing, however, identity politics is precisely stretching and expanding after the election. It is illustrated by the criminalization of ulama, economic disparity, replacing the president, and the attempt to establish the Khilafah system.

The configuration of identity politics in the political year has created a political dichotomy such as “God party versus Satanic party”. God party is a coalition of Islamic groups that are opposed to the Satanic party which is identified as the supporter of the ruling government. Another form of the dichotomy is the Medina axis (Islamic coalition) against the Beijing axis (government coalition). They also have an epithet taken from animal names to call their rival: Islamic coalition calls the government coalition as “Kecebondong” (tadpole) which is described as a fool and stupid animal; while the government coalition calls the Islamic coalition as “Kampret” (bat) which is described as a nocturnal and kleptomaniac animal.

The rise of identity politics cannot be separated from the role of mass media. Digital media and social media have made it easier to access any information and to communicate with anyone so that anyone is free to produce any information and form an opinion. Consider Ahok’s blasphemy case as an example; the Islamic conservative group, through digital media and social media, can manipulate a public opinion that Ahok has insulted Islam that is able to drive thousands of Muslims to perform a social movement called “Aksi Bela Islam 212”.

A lot of digital media has sprung up like mushroom growth in the rainy season. Pers Council has conducted a verification, and only have 74 digital media passed the verification because they were considered to have complied with the ethical code of journalism and produced reliable pieces of information. The rest can be said as unreliable media—there are even media that are intentionally made to produce hoax and misinformation. Therefore, The Ministry of Communication and Information

(Menkominfo) has banned 22 websites, and the Cyber Team of Executive Council of Nahdhatul Ulama has also released that there are more than 100 media that spread radical Islamic understanding.

Therefore, it is important to study the formation and framing of issues and phantasy offered by digital media affiliated with conservative Islamic groups. The reason is that those groups always spread hate speeches, intolerant voices, and undemocratic ideas that can breed group cohesiveness and, eventually, a social movement.

The object of this study is the 212 Alumni Brotherhood. There are several reasons for choosing that object. Firstly, the members of 212 Alumni Brotherhood are mostly from conservative Islamic groups such as HTI, Salafi, and FPI. Secondly, “Aksi Bela Tauhid” or “Reuni Akbar 212” conducted on 2th of December 2018 was claimed to be greater than “Aksi Bela Islam” in 2016.

Based on the assumption above, this study will test the relationship between the fantastical agenda formation of identity politics conducted by the digital media of conservative Islamic groups and the group cohesiveness of the social movement of the Brotherhood of 212 Alumni. Therefore, this study theoretically implicates the agenda-setting theory. In other words, it creates a new theoretical concept in agenda-setting theory that media not only highlight a particular issue and attribute but also possess an ability to form a fantasy affecting the group cohesiveness.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Political Identity Fantasy

So far, not much research has examined the relationship between identity politics and social movement. Generally, previous studies have presented more conceptual issues than field research. However, several studies carried out field research. For example, M. Diani’s study that examines the role of network in social movement [3], W. Bennet’s study that examines social change which is mediated by digital media network [4], and Sulistyanto’s study on social media and moral movement that raises the cases relating to the eradication of corruption [5].

Conceptually, identity politics is a political mobilization of a group to achieve recognition and oppose historical oppression by putting pressure on group identity [6]. Several studies focus on the movement of identity politics carried out by transnational Islamic group. For example, a study that proposes a thesis that identity politics is a radical movement with the Islamic veil [1]. Another study regards identity politics as an attempt to restore identity and social movement as opposed to multiple identities [7]. 212 Action and 212 Reunion as the labels of identity politics phenomena are not static and take a role in the political government of Indonesia [8]. Similarly, mass mobilization in 412 and 212 Action and 212 Reunion is a capitalization of religion featuring religious identity called as a post-truth political reality. By exploiting ethnic and religious sentiment, this movement has made a politicization of faith-based on populist discourses that utilize some distortive

information and argumentation about religion for the sake of political interest [9].

Based on the review of the previous studies, it has been shown that identity politics carried out by transnational Islamic group is only described as an assertion of group identity in the form of mass mobilization. Those studies have not examined the contents of mass media, especially digital media that figure as cohesiveness and effectively affect mass mobilization.

Therefore, to fill the gap in the previous studies, this study aims to scrutinize mass mobilization conducted in virtual reality through digital media. This mobilization utilized cyberspace as a site to consolidate the bigger mass. This study focuses on the issues which are featured by transnational Islamic groups in their identity politics. Those issues had impacted to a social movement which is known as “Reuni Akbar 212” on the 2nd of December 2018. Therefore, objects studied are the contents of digital media that accentuate, attribute, and construct identity politics so that a fantasy intending to accentuate group cohesiveness and driving mass mobilization can be made.

### B. Level Agenda Setting

Agenda setting is firstly introduced by Mc Comb. It identifies specific elements in explaining issues in the media and their influences on the formation of public opinion [10]. The first study on agenda setting was conducted in 1972 when McCombs & Shaw wrote his report on the presidential election in the United State 1986. This study shows that there is a strong relationship between the campaign topics highlighted by the media and the voter's perception of the campaign topics [10]. The media do not always succeed in “telling people what to think”; but media will have more opportunities to “tell them what to think about” [11].

This theory has evolved by introducing the importance of attribute as a component of the agenda-setting process and agenda-development [12]. In the determination of the research of agenda's attribute, according to McCombs, there are two vital dimensions to explain an issue, namely the importance of the issues in media and affective dimension as the accentuated attribute which is described by the media in the positive, neutral, and negative forms [10]. The assumption is that media are able to manipulate a certain public perspective on the news provided. Consequently, that perspective influences the public opinion of such events. Media do not only provide “what to think about” but also “how to think about”. In this stage, framing becomes an important part of media coverage. The use of framing in studying the contents of media coverage is called the second level agenda-setting theory. For instance, a study on the perceptions of Mexican voters settling in the United State toward newspaper coverage concerning Mexico during United State presidential election in 1996 [13]; a study reporting forest pollution in Canada and Sweden [14]; a study on Twitter during political debate in Italy [15].

Agenda-setting studies progressed to the third level when Lei Guo introduces his study departing from the development of big data caused by industrial revolution 4.0 and social network [16]. By using social network analysis, this study examines various social media and public responses [16-18]. In

its application, Guo examines agenda-setting based on network analysis and provides a configuration for comparative analysis of Iraq War news coverage in the United States, China, Taiwan, dan Poland [19]. Similarly, a study on the media coverage in Hongkong about national anti-education movement applied a similar idea.

Agenda-setting studies did not stop merely on the third level but also developed with the various theoretical and methodological application. Zhou et al. concludes that agenda-setting studies do not end on social network analysis like the third level agenda-setting, but evolve in various ways [20]. The result founds on studying agenda-setting research in China or Korea with various issues, theories, and methodologies [20].

This study, besides discerning the importance of issue and attribute, will also regard the fantasy of identity politics provided by digital media. The assumption is that digital media emphasize not only the importance of the issue and attribute giving but also fantasy formation having an impact on human action, namely mass mobilization and social movement. This fantasy formation introduces Boorman's symbolic convergence theory demonstrating that members of a group share fantasies as a part of building a cohesive relation [21]. A fantasy theme is a message that is capable of dramatizing the character of an event in the group environment involved in communication [21]. There are many studies using theme fantasy analysis, including the political study of cartoons in Clinton and Lewinsky case [22] and theme fantasy analysis of Pistorius's case after the shooting in 2013 [23].

Fantasy theme application, either theoretically or methodologically, is a new variant of agenda-setting study. By having a fantasy theme, communication effect does not only stop on cognitive (importance) and effective (attribute) aspects but also continues on behavior (act). "Reuni Akbar 212" on 2nd of December 2018 is the representative evidence. The fantasy theme is a way for group members to express ideas to the group and make it as a collective understanding called rhetorical vision [21].

Based on the theoretical frame explained above, the hypothesis and research questions of the first, second, and third (fantasy) level agenda-setting could be formulated as follows:

- H1: Is there a significant relationship between the importance of presenting identity politics issues in digital media and the brotherhood of 212 alumni perception?
- H2: Is there a significant relationship between the framing of the attribute of identity politics in digital media and attributes provided by the brotherhood of 212 alumni?
- H3: Is there a significant relationship between the fantasy of identity politics issues in digital media and a fantasy formed in the brotherhood of 212 alumni?
- RQ1: How is theme fantasy offered by digital media capable in manipulating the cohesiveness of the brotherhood of 212 alumni in mobilizing mass?

### III. RESEARCH METHOD

There are two methodological phases in the research. The first phase is an examination on media agenda, ranging from comprehending (a) the significance of identity politics issues, (b) the emerging attributes in the identity politics issue, and (c) fantasies constructed by digital media. There are 13 digital media which are studied for over two months from November 1, 2018, to December 31, 2018. The time selection is mostly influenced by the plans and executions of the grand reunion of the 212 alumni brotherhood that was held at December 2, 2018, in Indonesian National Monument (Monas).

Examination on the significance of identity politics issue applies content analysis which enables the researchers to make reproduce and valid inferences from texts and other meaningful matter [24]. The coding scheme involves three independent coders who identify every statement and result in a set of 110 coded questions (the reliability among clarified codes, which are classified by the coders. is 0,87 measured by Krippendorff's  $\alpha$ ).

Furthermore, attributes taking a vital role in agenda media is studied using framing analysis. Robert Etman defines framing as a designed process for selecting certain aspects of reality and emphasizing it by identifying problems and its causes, arguing moral appraisal, and proposing an appropriate solution [25]. Attributes in identity politics issues are acquired through content analysis concerning the importance of the issue.

Based on the significance of issue and attribute, the further step is analyzing identity politics fantasy which is constructed by digital media. Feldman develops three steps in fantasy analysis. Firstly, defining a storyline by unfolding a summary of one or two sentences from the story to reveal the basic argument of the story. Secondly, the implementation of two classical rhetorical concepts: opposition and enthymeme. Thirdly, focusing on the use of opposition. Those three phases are story production which involves enthymemes, or an incomplete syllogism or line of an argument occurring because the conclusion is passed to the audiences [26].

The second step of this research is a field survey by distributing questioners to the public and discover people opinion regarding the importance, attributes, and fantasies of the issue. This research applies a simple random sampling technique and finds 86 respondents. For collecting public responses on the importance, attributes, and fantasies of digital media, the researcher arranges the ranking of the issue randomly. After that, the respondents mark and recompile the ranking of the issues based on their interests and knowledge. Due to the limit of the respondents' memory, the researcher offers four issues. Also, the researcher uses Spearman's rank correlation coefficient to see the relationship among the priority of the significant issue, attributes and digital media fantasy with the respondents (public).



**IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**A. Agenda Media Digital**

This research examines the correlation between media setting and public agenda. Media agenda is news in digital media regarding identity politics in the 212 reunions, while public agenda is responses on the notable meaning of the issue, attributes and fantasies. Based on content analysis toward digital media agenda concerning the significance of the issue, there are four important issues. Firstly, the news about "millions of people attended 212 reunions", secondly, "the 212 grand reunion run peacefully and orderly", thirdly, "the 212 reunion was not a political campaign", and fourthly, "the 212 grand reunions proved the solidity of Indonesian Muslims."

The result of issues above which is exposed by digital media could be understood that Islamic digital media in publishing the news tried to legitimize that the reunion was supported by Muslims majority. It is attested by the massive supports from diverse elements in an agenda conducted before the 212 grand reunions, such as a group of people coming from various regions riding a bicycle to attend the 212 reunions, as well as the presence of deaf community.

Afterward, to refute radical Islamic stigma, in the issue delivery, the 212 grand reunions was portrayed as peaceful and orderly without any violence. Likewise, to reject the association of the 212 grand reunions with a political campaign, the news in Islamic digital media excerpt the statement of various religious leaders and politician who asserted that the 212 grand reunion was not political campaign to support one of the Indonesian presidential candidates. Hence, the identity politics which was attempted in the digital media news is that the 212 grand reunion as an effort to consolidate Muslims brotherhood.

In attributes framing, Islamic digital media used a framing toward identity politics which corresponded to attributes that Islam is a tolerant, anti-radicalism, not anti-Indonesia, and peaceful religion. The construction of the attributes purposes to resist widespread attached labeling, such as intolerance, transnational, exclusive and provoking noise, as shown continuously by one of their leading organization, Islamic Defender Front (FPI).

On the other hand, the constructed fantasies as rhetorical vision was "the Spirit of Islam", "Tauhid Bond", "the Unity of Muslims", and "the Muslims Brotherhood (Ukhuwah Islamiyah)". Those constructed fantasies aim to broadcast that the 212 grand reunion was a momentum to strengthen Muslims brotherhood and solidarity. The significance of the 212 grand reunions is a turning point to reconsolidate Ukhuwah Islamiyah and collective memories to create a collective identity as a group or community. The complete results regarding media setting could be read in table 1.

**TABLE I. THE SUMMARY OF DIGITAL MEDIA AGENDA**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Fantasy</b>
Millions of people attended 212 reunions	Islam is a tolerant religion	The Spirit of Islam
The 212 grand reunions run peacefully and orderly	Islam is an anti-radical	Tauhid Bonds
The 212 reunion was not a political campaign	Islam is not anti-Indonesia	The Unity of the Muslims
The 212 grand reunions proved the solidity of Muslims	Islam is pro-diversity	Muslims Brotherhood

**B. Public Agenda Fantasy**

This research demonstrates public responses toward the importance, attributes, and fantasies of the issue of identity politics news. On the significance of the issue, the results of the calculation of a simple correlation coefficient between X1 and Y are obtained by the value  $r = 0.574$  with a probability value amounts to 0.002, and because  $0.002 < 0.05$ , therefore, the relationship of the critical priority issue (X) with the public response is valuable. The research also shows that there is a correlation between the significance of digital media and public responses with correlation coefficient value at 57,4%. It implies that the more effective the digital media broadcast the significance of the issue, the better the response toward the 212 alumni brotherhood. The strong correlation indicates that the members of the 212 Alumni Brotherhood always utilize digital media in fulfilling the information needs, exactly about the Islamic religion.

The members of the 212 Alumni Brotherhood give strong responses regarding the attributes testing resulted from media framing. Based on the calculation results of a simple correlation coefficient between the attributes framed by digital media and the attributes appraisal by the 212 Alumni Brotherhood members, the value  $r = 0,584$  is collected with a probability value account for 0.003, and because of  $0,003 < 0,05$ , accordingly, the correlation between digital media attributes and the 212 Alumni Brotherhood appraisal are valuable. The research states that there is a correlation between digital media attributes and the 212 Alumni Brotherhood appraisal with correlation coefficient value amounts to 58,4%. It implies that the better the attributes of digital media, the better the attributes appraisal obtained by the 212 Alumni Brotherhood.

The results above show that the framing done by digital media toward identity politics attributes is quite successful. The causes responsible for the strong correlation are firstly, barely do the mainstream media present Islamic issues, and secondly, there is a need for information to strengthen the attitudes and configure the Muslim self-concept. Based on the number of viewers, Islamic digital media could compete with mainstream digital media. The observation demonstrates that from 13 observed digital there are around 2.500 to 3000 daily viewers in each of the digital media. As regards the fantasy construction, the calculation of a simple correlation coefficient between fantasies construction of digital media and the fantasies acceptance of the 212 Alumni Brotherhood amounts to value  $r = 0,655$  with a probability value accounts for 0.000, and because of  $0,000 < 0,05$ , so that, the correlation between the fantasies of digital media and the fantasies of the 212

Alumni Brotherhood are valuable. Furthermore, there is a correlation between digital media fantasy and 212 alumni fantasy with correlation coefficient is 65,5%. This result indicates that the better the fantasies constructed by digital media, the better fantasies is accepted by the 212 Alumni Brotherhood. The intense fantasies of the 212 Alumni Brotherhood on a grand reunion on December 2th 2018 were exhibited by the existence of the massive mass in National Monument.

The constructed fantasy themes, such as the Spirit of Islam, Tauhid Bonds, the Unity of Muslims, and Muslims Brotherhood, could be a collective narration in affirming identity. The crystallization of fantasy themes which construct the cohesion of the 212 is not shaped instantly. Creating a group cohesion needs a long process because understanding the similarity and evolving the comfortable condition emerges step by step and process from the critical group that must be survived [27]. The success of the "Islamic Defend Action" (Aksi Bela Islam) at December 2, 2018, on religion blasphemy case and done by imprisonment of ex-governor of Jakarta Basuki Tjahya Purnama (Ahok) was the early affirmation of their identity. Subsequently, the other sequence actions came, such as Aksi Bela Islam (411) and Aksi Bela Islam (212). Those two movements were parts of the process in shaping the group cohesion. Indeed, after Aksi Bela Islam, the Islamic groups retained their actions through digital media with various constructed fantasies. Besides, the fantasy themes which were constructed by digital media became a topical discussion in the virtual public sphere via social media network. As a result, each of the individuals involved owned the same basic understanding. The virtual public sphere does not only become a tool of communication but also as a space to remember. A virtual space, therefore, should be individual or collective, textual or visual, for maintaining the memory to appear invariably [28].

The success of Aksi Bela Islam conducted by the 212 Alumni Brotherhood become a role model for another transnational Islamic group to mobilize the mass or social movements, be a successful collective memory in upholding the identity, and be a tool to press the rulers (government). It is similar to the existence of Meltdown G20 protest on April 1, 2009, a day before all G20 leaders met in the Excel Centre, Docklands London. One of the arguments behind the emergence of this mobilization is world economic depression. It had united all the mass who cares about various social problems. The protest of G20 in London in 2009 was the case study of collective memory [29].

## V. CONCLUSION

In presenting identity politics in digital media, Islam is visualized as a religion of tolerance, peace, and anti-violence. In the aspect of nationality, Islam supported Indonesian unitary state and upheld diversity. Concerning public responses (the 212 Alumni Brotherhood group), this research describes that there is a positive relationship between the significance of the digital media issue about identity politics and the responses of the 212 Alumni Brotherhood. The correlation applies to attributes framing done by digital media, as well as fantasy

formation, obtain positive responses and appraisals from the 212 Alumni Brotherhood group.

The chief discovery in the research is the existence of the fantasy construction presented by digital media that shapes strong cohesion on public agenda; as a result, it creates a social movement. Narration about humiliation, discrimination, and being unjust toward Islam are visualized through the news in the digital media which slowly construct strong cohesion in upholding their identity. Therefore, when there is an issue that seemingly discriminates Islam, the massive mobilization goes fast and a social movement is created, as realized by the 212 grand reunions on December 2, 2018.

Theoretically, this research is a new development in the agenda-setting theory by introducing the existence of the fantasy construction on media agenda and public agenda. By revealing the fantasy exposed by digital media, the hidden values, ways of life and interests can be disclosed.

Practically, this research suggests the government release a regulation or laws about the establishment of digital media so that the dissemination of hoax can be suppressed and monitored. Hopefully, the idea can also be a preventive manner to avoid political movements that are going to change the state system with various reasons and hidden interests.

## VI. LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The invention in this research stimulates another research in the future. In this research, the constructed cohesion is linearity among the result of the fantasy construction of digital media. The development of recent communication technology, such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp, contributes different effects toward the construction of group cohesion. Hence, future research needs to involve social media network in order to find the prominent role of social media. Consequently, social network analysis is hugely demanded to analyze the fantasy caused by groups interaction through social media.

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