THE FORCE TO BE IN A RELATIONSHIP; HOW ACTORS PLAY THEIR ROLES ON INSTAGRAM ACCOUNTS IN SHAPING A NEGATIVE IMAGE OF SINGLE LATE MILLENNIAL IN INDONESIA

Retno Daru Dewi G. S. Putri
Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia.

darugsp@yahoo.com

Abstract

Indonesian people tend to involve themselves in other people’s business especially when it comes to their families or friends. With the influence of the New Media’s opinion on people’s relationship, this leads to the feeling of insecurity among Indonesian late millennials who are still single. The appearance of many memes and ‘cheesy’ photo captions have motivated Indonesia’s younger generations to get boyfriends or girlfriends so they can improve their self-esteem and pride by achieving something acceptable by the society standard constructed by the media. To make it worse, the impact of posting the memes and photographs on Social Network Media accounts has started the building a negative concept of relationship as an achievement for Indonesian late millennials. By applying Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory, I am motivated to break down the roles of each actor in shaping the Indonesian late millennials New Media users’ mind to be in a relationship immediately.

Keywords: Actor-Network Theory, millennials, New Media, actor.

Introduction

Having 40 million users, Instagram in Indonesia is dominated by young males and females aged 18-24 years old (NapoleonCat, 2017). This number shows the trend that is affecting late millennials in Indonesia has the possibility of being forwarded through the San Francisco origin Social Network Media. Like any medium used for sending messages, Instagram can have positive and negative effects towards its followers. Some crowd-sourced contents Instagram accounts can also represent either good or bad social phenomenon around the New Media users (Solis, 2010). This means negative effects of trends in society can be received by Indonesian millennials who actively use Instagram. One of the bad influence being spread through Instagram is the indirect force of having a relationship for young Instagram users in Indonesia.
Indonesian Culture and Millennials

Observing how easy it is for millennials in Indonesia to be influenced by the New Media should be started by going back to the root of Indonesian people culture of living. Surrounded by natural resources, Indonesian people’s main occupation is farming. This job obviously cannot be done by an individual in a brief period of time. According to Koentjaraningrat (1997), there must be a team work between farmers when they are planting or cultivating rice which has always been Indonesia’s main food resource. Therefore, the terminology gotong royong or team work can be concluded to be created by the activities of the farmers in almost every region of Indonesia in the past.

Due to the gotong royong character of Indonesian people, it is a common thing for families to be closer, and know each other more during their working process. Sometimes, the knowledge about information on other families are often too much and disturb people’s privacy. This, unfortunately, still happens today not only to families but also individuals outside the families’ home. The cause is going back to how one family work with another to improve their standard of living. Defining Family Evolution Theory and applying relations between parents and children from Freud, Koentjaraningrat discusses the motivation and the phase in human live which leads to the decision of gathering the families into one. This is commonly done by the institution of marriage (Koentjaraningrat, 1997). Marriage among Indonesian people was done not only because two families are close due to their team work when farming. Sharing their wealth, which is represented by the rice or plantation field, becomes one of the reasons as well. This is supported by a research written in 2013 which mentioned that marriage can be a suitable institution to control a business company (Bunkanwanicha, Fan, & Wiwattanakantang, 2013). The domination strategy is directly recommended to family firms that often being bond by marriage between the company’s heir and heiress.

Whether to improve their business or to be fed by the bread winner, marriage between two families are often done when the children are ready. According to Koentjaraningrat (1997), ready means the children have passed their early teen era and started puberty. The puberty itself starts when a person is between age nine to 16 (Angold, Costello, & Worthman, 1998). The readiness of getting married, however, does not happen at the early stage of puberty mentioned. In some developing countries, like Indonesia, marriage is often happened to those age of 20 years (Westoff, Blanc, & Nyblade, 1994). However, due to the higher education process which usually take four years to get a bachelor degree, most marriage starts when the bride and groom to be are at the age of 22 to 23. This trend has inspired young people start from the age of 20 to target themselves marrying someone after they graduate or get a job as a fresh graduate which indirectly forces them to have a boyfriend or girlfriend right away. The early 20s age represents the millennials generation who was born between 1982 to 2002 (Howe & Strauss, 2000).
One research agrees that the millennials has one characteristic that is obviously showed: narcissistic (Bergman, Fearrington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011). This selfish way of thinking is developed by the relation between millennials and technology. Smart phones and applications makes the millennials reduce their communication with people and trust the sources they read. Unfortunately, not all of these millennials have the capability to select valid resources. They are also easily manipulated by trend exposed on the New Media such as Instagram.

As explained previously, the highest percentage of Instagram users in Indonesia in shown at the age of 18 – 24. This represents how the late millennials can have the possibility to be influenced by negative information spread on the photograph-based media. One of the bad manipulative persuasion that is given indirectly through Instagram in Indonesia is the trend of getting in a relationship as soon as possible and probably get married after.

The Instagram Influence on Indonesian Late millennials

Having the right tools to send a message is one of the advantage of technology around us. Sophisticated application has made it easier for people to share their way of thinking online (Ruben & Stewart, 1998). Also, an effective method to send an information is considered through pictures or photographs. This is one of the excellences of Instagram application.

As an easy application to edit and post a user’s photograph, Instagram has huge influence towards its users due to the appearance of visual message (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). This statement is supported by Lester (2013) who stated that images has more effectiveness in sending a message because of the colour, object, technique of photography, and image processing that a photograph has. Therefore, it can be concluded that Instagram accounts can influence its users by the photographs posted online.

Negative influence spread on the New Media can be avoided by being selective. However, users’ self-esteem and pride are unfortunately built by the accounts they relate to (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). As an example, people follow some Instagram accounts recommended by their friends. Unless a person is being selective, these accounts can influence them with negative information if they are chosen wisely. The influence also cannot be avoided because once a person checks on his or her Instagram account, he or she can automatically see the updated information posted by the accounts he or she follows. They can stop following the accounts, but it will make not them ‘updated’ among their friends. This can lead to the loss of self-esteem and pride. On the other hand, the loss of self-esteem and pride can also occur due to following the unsupportive Instagram accounts. These accounts can be those that support specific body image, unhealthy lifestyle, and unhealthy relationship.
For Indonesian late millennials, the loss of self-esteem and pride can be happened due to the Instagram accounts they follow. The trend among Indonesian Instagram users are following accounts that promote sadness and misery. According to www.bintang.com, there are five recommended Instagram accounts that can make you feel miserable on your love life as a guilty pleasure (Frisca, 2016). This kind of publication has the possibility to add more desperate Instagram followers who can lose their self-esteem and pride just because they keep on feeling sad. However, sad and miserable accounts that is related to relationship becomes the most look for by the 18-24-year old Instagram users in Indonesia. It can be assumed that the culture discussed previously has influenced them to think about the relationship that they supposed to have. Therefore, at the middle of their 20s, the late millennials can settle down with someone and have the possibility in getting married. The phenomenon is worsened by the gotong-royong characteristic that Indonesian people have. Not only at work, but this characteristic tends to motivate people to figure out other people’s relationship condition and make a negative image for those who are still single. Moreover, with the development of technology, New Media like Instagram can be used to manipulate Indonesian late millennials’ way of thinking towards relationship.

Out of five Instagram accounts mentioned previously, here are four examples from two accessible accounts @belajardrcinta and @tumblrcinta.
The sentence in the picture says “The Eid is near. You haven’t meet the one? Look harder.” This sentence is supported by the caption that translated “Come on, mblo look harder. You know how it feels like to be asked on your love life during family gathering.” The word mblo is the short of an informal terminology jomblo which means a person who is not in a romantic relationship. However, the word jomblo represents a negative meaning due to the way people address a problem of not being in a relationship. That is why the caption of the photograph posted above using the terminology jomblo. Besides focusing on being single is a problem, the photograph shows how Indonesian culture is being exposed as negative. The moment of Eid is a religious event that people commonly spend with their family. However, it is shown that in Indonesia, this occasion becomes a competition for family members to show their achievement. One of which is being in a relationship that is expected to be led into a marriage. By showing its followers this message, about 657.000 users will think that being in a relationship is what important to be shown off to the family. Therefore, @belajardrcinta followers can avoid their family yearly questions on the reason why he or she is still single.
Besides @belajardrcinta, an account called @tumblrcnita also posted photographs with the similar characteristic. Below is an example taken from their Instagram account.

![Image of Instagram post](https://www.instagram.com/p/BTtd8u2gFg6/)

Figure 2. [https://www.instagram.com/p/BTtd8u2gFg6/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BTtd8u2gFg6/)

The second example taken from @tumblrcinta mentions “Being jomblo too long a person asks, ‘where did you get my number from’ as a reply to the automatic message from the phone company.” This shows how being single can make you become sensitive and illogical. Another possibility of lowering its 219.000 followers’ self-esteem and pride can be happened with these kinds of posts shared by @tumblrcinta.

Manipulating their 657.000 and 219.000 followers can make @belajardrcinta and @tumblrcinta repress the Indonesian late millennials Instagram users’ confident. However, public figures who have more followers have a chance to spread more negative influences. These are the examples from @ridwankamil and @radityadika.
Caption made by the Mayor of Bandung is an inspiring story of how he proposed his wife when he was not as successful as he is now. What becomes a concern of this caption is how he questions at least 6,600,000 followers whether they want the same condition or not. He answers his rhetorical question by stating *Nikahlah* or Get Married. It shows that getting married is an easy thing to do. Without any realistic plan and analyzing the different background between the followers and the owner of the account, the late millennials in Indonesia can be influenced easily to get into a relationship and get married as soon as possible by this posting.
The photograph above is another example of how a terminology (jomblo) is being a mock. Also, by the date of the posting, which is on February 14th, it can be concluded that @radityadika considers Valentine’s Day is equal to Halloween to the single late millennials. It shows that having nobody to love in an international love day is the main consideration for Raditya Dika’s 6.700.000 followers. This is another aspect that can lower the late millennials’ self-esteem and pride.

From the four examples of Instagram accounts above, we can see how the force to be in a relationship is strongly promoted by them. Therefore, it can be concluded that these four accounts play a crucial role to negatively influence Indonesian late millennials to socially involved with someone else romantically.

The Actors’ Role from Actor-Network Theory Point of View

One network has no capability in improving itself if it has lack of participation from an actor. This is mentioned by Krieger and Belliger (2014) in their book Interpreting Networks. Bruno Latour himself mentioned that network has more than one aspects in it. The aspects fulfilling the network is what is called actors. Network itself is a unite system which does not have to be followed or approved (Latour, 2005). However, if actors have no interest in following or approving the network that their surrounding has, chaos can happen.
As an example of networking rejection is when a person decided to unfollow @belajar德rcinta or @ridwankamil Instagram accounts. The can be free from the manipulating photos or caption that indirectly force them to be involved in a relationship. However, if they are not up-to-date by the latest trend, these selective Instagram users can be ignored by other users who are involved in one peer group. Another example is when a later millennial decided to focus on him or herself instead of accepting sadness and misery from a manipulative Instagram account, he or she can still receive the same attitude from his or her friends. The attitude can be a mock or tease if he or she still single and decide not to hurry to be involved in a relationship. This can lead to a small quantity of chaos in a friendship caused by the rejection of networking activity.

As an actor, the selective Instagram user mentioned previously can be considered as not following the unwritten rules that a network has. However, an actor in the case of forcing relationship through Instagram accounts is not only its active users. As a thorough process of analyzing the condition, background, time and influence of how a writing is made, hermeneutics teaches academics to be critical in interpreting a corpus (Latour, 2005). This has improved to a critical way of thinking when academics interpreting a phenomenon in a society.

Analyzing New Media phenomenon from hermeneutics point of view, we can see that Instagram is one of the actors that exists around Indonesian later millennial’s network. By applying hermeneutics critical way of thinking, we can see that besides Instagram accounts, the owners of the manipulative accounts are also one of the influencing actors. This means, the owners, who are originally Indonesian, live and are familiar with the culture of gotong-royong that has been negatively applied into people’s personal business. Unfortunately, not all Indonesian late millennials who follow these accounts have a critical way of thinking in responding to the postings on Instagram and avoiding the negative influences.

When it comes to the role of actors in the Actor-Network Theory in influencing other actors, Latour mentions the possibility of the reassembling of society (2005). This needs the actors to move from one network to another. However, it depends on the power of the other actors to be able to move or stop Indonesian late millennials in following specific Instagram accounts. Power can come from an actor whether it is a public figure or a peer group.

People aged 18-24 are commonly depend on a dominant actor or actors in the network they belong. These actors can be their family, friends, or public figure. In following Instagram accounts, the late millennials tend to choose the ones that are popular and recommended by their friends around them. This means indirectly, Indonesian late millennials have already divided themselves into networks that define their existence. To avoid chaos, these late millennials tend to follow the unwritten rules in the network they are in. The rules can be an act of following
specific Instagram accounts to understand the trend. Otherwise, as a form of chaos, they have the possibility to be excluded from the network.

Conclusion

The problem discussed previously shows how cultural background can appear as a form of actors in a network that influence other actors. In this case, the cultural actors influence actors behind some Instagram accounts that influence other actors to be involved in a relationship as soon as possible. The actors influenced are Indonesian late millennials aged 18 to 24. In order to avoid chaos, the last group of actors mentioned seems like follow the majority in following manipulative Instagram accounts. Unfortunately, this act is giving them negative impacts and force to get married soon. These young Indonesian need to think more critical and move to another network with more positive actors that can lead them to follow more empowering Instagram accounts. Therefore, their self-esteem and pride can be boosted and developed.

References


