



Counter-Propaganda on the United Liberation Movement of West Papua (ULMWP) in Internationalizing Papua Issues in Online Media Through Digital Diplomacy

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Abstract

This study aims to describe online media as a counter-propaganda medium within defense diplomacy. The research takes a case study of counter-propaganda against the ULMWP, which can effectively utilize online media to internationalize, garner support, and attract international sympathy for the Papua issue. The research uses qualitative methods with a descriptive design. Data was collected through online observations through the Free West Papua, The Guardian, and Radionz sites. Interviews were conducted with five informants from defense universities who are experts in defense diplomacy. In addition, documentation is carried out by collecting reports related to the ULMWP. The results showed the propaganda strategy by utilizing online media by ULMWP. The propaganda strategy carried out by the ULMWP must be countered with a counter-propaganda strategy by utilizing the same media within the framework of Defense diplomacy through online diplomacy.

Keywords: *ULMWP; Counter-Propaganda; Online Media*

Introduction

According to Brennan (2017), propaganda is a technique to influence the masses by manipulating the representation of a particular object. In addition, propaganda is a form of mass communication that individuals and groups often use as a medium to spread a belief (Tyali, 2020). Therefore, in propaganda, there are several components such as the intentional dissemination of messages, carried out continuously, there is a process of conveying ideas, ideas, beliefs, or doctrines, and is intended to shape perceptions, attitudes, or behavior (Torres et al., 2006). Thus, propaganda is carried out systematically, planned, and using certain media. Propaganda is a tool to strengthen diplomatic efforts carried out by state and non-state actors in international relations (Schul, 2021). Likewise, with the advancement of information technology, there has been a shift in propaganda media through the use of digital media, so the term digital diplomacy has come to be known.

Digital diplomacy is part of the development of public diplomacy by using the internet and other Information and Communication Technologies to influence perceptions, values, ideas, and behaviors that aim to increase understanding and agreement (Adesina, 2016). Therefore, digital diplomacy can benefit the wider community, such as encouraging innovation, combating extremism, regional economic development, and empowering and protecting the community (Deos, 2015). The public towards foreign policy, resulting in reduced state control in the decision-making process. In addition, digital diplomacy can also accelerate the spread of information or events that can affect issues or handle issues (Turianskyi & Wekesa, 2021). The rapid development of social media is very beneficial for international relations, especially in diplomacy. Indonesia is trying to adapt to changes in relations between countries in cyberspace. Based on Bjola (2016) research, digital diplomacy can also increase the speed and efficiency of traditional diplomatic services. In the context of this research, counter-propaganda in online media is a digital diplomacy strategy to increase the number of positive international public votes and influence the handling of the Papua issue by the Government of Indonesia.

Empirically, the use of online media as a means of propaganda in influencing perceptions, values, ideas, and behavior, as described by Deos (2015), was once carried out by Arifin (2017) by researching the use of social media Facebook by the Pro-ISIS group in recruiting candidates as well as Razaka (2017) which examines white propaganda against Donald Trump in the media of March-May 2016 in the online media BBC Indonesia. After the People's Opinion/PEPERA (Act of Free Choice) in 1969 in Papua, several Papuan community groups who disagreed chose to flee to Papua New Guinea (PNG) and made PNG the basis for the struggle for Papuan independence through diplomacy. Benny Wenda success in lobbying Westminster (Lower Assembly, House of Common) resulted in the permission of the Free Papua Movement (Organization for Free Papua called OPM) to establish a representative office in Oxford, England, on April 28, 2013, as a new milestone in the intensification of propaganda and internationalization of the Papua issue (Nainggolan, 2014). Propaganda of Benny Wenda and the Papuan diaspora group got stronger after several factions of the Papuan movement united themselves in the United Liberation Movement of West Papua (ULMWP) (LIPI, 2017).

The propaganda promoted by ULMWP is linear with young Papuan groups in the country, namely promoting Human Rights and Democratic Rights. Papuan domestic and foreign groups are increasingly carrying out propaganda using online media. The ULMWP group built a website called www.freewestpapua.org, which was used as a propaganda mouthpiece containing support for Papuan independence, accusations of violence and human rights violations, and content that discredited the Indonesian government. The use of English on the website can be considered an effort to lead international public opinion. In addition to using the www.freewestpapua.org site, ULMWP propaganda efforts are carried out through other sites.

Benny Wenda, Chair of the ULMWP, used www.theguardian.com as a vehicle for conveying an opinion and received 101 responses from international public comments. Another site used as an online media for propaganda is www.radionz.co.nz, a New Zealand news site containing 40 reports about Papua from November 2018 to January 2019. Propaganda that leads to negative international opinion against Papua can become a threat to Indonesia. For this reason, a counter-intelligence strategy is needed in the form of counter-propaganda against the internationalization of Papuan issues by the ULMWP using the same media, namely online media. The use of online media as a vehicle for counter-propaganda can be categorized as a form of diplomacy that utilizes advances in digital technology. It is then referred to as digital diplomacy, which unofficial representatives can carry out, NGOs, and the public (Adesina, 2016). This study aims to describe the use of online media as a counter-propaganda medium within the framework of defense diplomacy by taking a case study of counter-propaganda against the propaganda of the ULMWP.

Method

In describing the use of online media as a counter-propaganda medium within the framework of Defense diplomacy, this research was conducted using a qualitative approach (Tracy, 2020). The qualitative approach strategy is used through a counter-propaganda case study against the ULMWP, which can effectively utilize online media to internationalize, garner support, and attract sympathy for the Papua issue. The qualitative approach becomes a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written and spoken words of informants and observable behavior. In addition, the form of a case study in this research was conducted because it aims to provide a detailed description of the counter-propaganda against the ULMWP in the internationalization of the Papua issue in online media through digital diplomacy. Therefore, case studies focus on a case intensively and in detail. Data was collected through online observations through the Free West Papua, The Guardian, and Radionz sites.

Meanwhile, interviews were conducted with five informants from defense universities who are experts in defense diplomacy. In addition, documentation is carried out by collecting reports related to the ULMWP. Data analysis techniques are carried out by collecting data, improving data, processing data, and perfecting research results (Miles et al., 2014).

Results and Discussion

ULMWP Propaganda Maneuver

Historically, the struggle over the status of Papua as part of Indonesia has started since the Session of the Investigating Agency for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence (BPUPKI) which involved a conflict of opinion between Moh. Hatta, Moh. Yamin, and Soekarno (Bahar, 1992) (Bahar, 1992: 135-151). The long process of negotiations between Indonesia and the Netherlands to affirm the status of Papua as part of the territory of the Republic of Indonesia still leaves uncertainty even though an agreement was signed in the Round Table Conference negotiations, November 1949, which stated that the handover of Papua was postponed for one year. Strong indications that the Dutch still want to control Papua are shown by various political and military maneuvers, especially through providing support for the declaration of Papuan independence initiated by the New Guinea Council on December 1, 1961. Indonesia immediately responded to Dutch support for the declaration of independence in Papua.

On December 19, 1961, President Soekarno declared the Tri Komando Rakyat (Trikorra) and affirmed that Papua was a legal part of the Republic of Indonesia. The firm stance of the Indonesian government created tension in relations between Indonesia and the Netherlands and encouraged the intervention of the United States, so negotiations were held in New York, which resulted in the New York Agreement, August 15, 1962. The Determination of Popular Opinion/PEPERA (Act of Free Choice) in 1969 in Papua. The Act of Free Choice, which was held on July 14 until August 4, 1969, showed that most representatives with voting rights preferred to join Indonesia. Later, the United Nations ratified this result through UN General Assembly Resolution No. 2504 on November 19, 1969. Since then, Papua has been de jure and de facto recognized by the international community as part of the Republic of Indonesia.

The ULMWP is a joint organization of the West Papua National Coalition for Liberation (WPNCL), the Federal State of the Republic of West Papua, and the National Parliament of West Papua, formed in Port Vila, Vanuatu. ULMWP has close ties to Jennifer Robinson, a legal director of the Bertha Foundation, a London-based NGO. According to the data, Jennifer Robinson traces of closeness and involvement with Benny Wenda and Papua began in 2010, when she became a legal aid volunteer for the Institute for Advocacy and Human Rights Studies (Elsham). His role became even greater by accompanying Benny Wenda to several Pacific countries and the removal of Benny Wenda name from Interpol's Red Notice list. Jennifer Robinson and the Bertha Foundation have played a major role in supporting political maneuvering and funding of the ULMWP, including guesting Benny Wenda on

TEDxSydney, an Australian television talk show. ULMWP intensely raises the issue of human rights violations committed by the Indonesian government through its security forces (Kusuma et al., 2021). This human rights issue is an entry point that the United Nations will hear if 2/3 of its members state that human rights violations in Papua are intolerable, and the United Nations can intervene to exclude sovereignty (Viartasiwi, 2018). One of the sources of human rights issues processed by the ULMWP comes from the stories and experiences of Benny Wenda while living in Papua, who was shot and raped by the security forces. Later, this material was raised to seek international support and corner the Indonesian government.

Another maneuver taken by ULMWP to gain political support in the Pacific region is to make the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) a mouthpiece for international propaganda. Jacob Rumbiak, a ULMWP official on September 6, 2015, visited M.S. Dame Meg Taylor, Secretary-General of the Pacific Island Forum, to propose a Papua issue as the agenda for the meeting. According to the report of Forty-Sixth Pacific Island Forum, in the 46th Pacific countries forum in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea 8-10 September 2015, the issue of Papua was made on the agenda at points 16 and 17. Benny Wenda most recent propaganda was to infiltrate the Vanuatu delegation during a meeting with Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in January 2019, to submit a petition signed by 1.8 million Papuan representatives.

In addition to using conventional diplomacy strategies, the ULMWP also uses digital diplomacy strategies by using online media as propaganda vehicles. Propaganda through online media carried out by ULMWP can be traced, among others, to Benny Wenda's writing on www.theguardian.com entitled: "*West Papua my people need Australia's help before its too late*," which contains Benny Wenda's appeal to Australia. The propaganda carried out by Benny Wenda was then strengthened by carrying out an approach to Jeremy Corbyn, Chairman of the British Labor Party and Leader of the Opposition. This propaganda move resulted in empathy and a statement of support from Corbyn. Corbyn's statement of support, posted on theguardian.com as follows.

"Essentially what we're looking at is a group of people who did not enjoy their rights during a period of decolonisation, did not enjoy the rights bestowed to them by the UN charter and by the statutes on decolonisation. As a member of parliament, I support them, as a member of this group and as a former vice-chair of the all-party human rights group. It's about a political strategy that brings to worldwide recognition the plight of the people of West Papua, forces it onto a political agenda, forces it to the UN, forces and exposure of it and ultimately that allows the people of West Papua to make the choice of the kind of government they want and the kind of society in which they want to live."

ULMWP also carried out propaganda actions against the 2019 General Election by inviting a boycott through online media, with the tag, "*Boycott Indonesian Elections 2019*". This effort is a systematic act of inviting the international community to isolate Indonesia. In addition to cornering and attacking Indonesia, the propaganda carried out by the ULMWP and its wing groups is trying to confirm their existence. Through online media, they carried out a political campaign with the theme "Global Raising Flag for West Papua," namely an invitation to raise the Morning Star flag to the international community. Several cities in the world are suspected of accepting the invitation by raising flags, including Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch (New Zealand), Ballarat, Townsville, Cape Town, Cairns, Castlemaine, Melbourne (Australia), Honiara (Solomon Islands), Manchester, London. (England), and The Hague (Netherlands).

Analysis of ULMWP Propaganda in Online Media to Internationalize Papuan Issues

Facing the propaganda efforts and actions carried out by the ULMWP, the Government of Indonesia carried out a series of planned and measured diplomatic actions, including:

First, to the request to become a permanent member of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) by ULMWP, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs took diplomatic action at the 20th Special MSG Summit by convincing MSG leaders not to accept ULMWP membership.

Second, regarding the actions of Benny Wenda, who managed to infiltrate the Vanuatu delegation during an honorary visit to Michelle Bachelet, the Indonesian side, through the Indonesian Ambassador to the United Nations issued a press release which in essence strongly condemns Vanuatu's actions and Indonesia will continue to defend and defend the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia.

Third, against the intervention of countries in the Pacific Islands such as the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Nauru, Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, and Tonga who criticized the human rights record in Papua at the 70th UN General Assembly Session, October 2016. Indonesia firmly stated that it had violated the UN Charter by interfering with the sovereignty of other countries, violating territorial integrity, and diverting socio-political problems in their own country.

Referring to the efforts and actions of Benny Wenda, Jacob Rumbiak, and ULMWP assisted by Jennifer Robinson, it can be stated that there has been intense propaganda by the ULMWP to lead the international public opinion by using the issue of human rights violations. Using the concept of propaganda from Nurudin (2008), the issue of human rights becomes a commodity that is deliberately spread to change the attitudes and behavior of the international community and is disseminated continuously.

Apart from being published on the ULMWP website, this issue is also accommodated by the websites www.radionz.co.nz and www.theguardian.com. This propaganda aims to build a bad image of the Indonesian government in the international community's eyes. To get a stronger bargaining position in diplomatic and propaganda maneuvers, the ULMWP tried hard to get a permanent membership position of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) which was successfully thwarted by the Indonesian side. Indonesia's success in thwarting the ULMWP is a strategic action because the issue of the internationalization of Papua has been led into the issue of crimes against humanity against the Melanesian race by Indonesia, which of course, can lead to accusations of genocide, a crime against humanity. In addition to MSG, the international forum that has become a vehicle for ULMWP propaganda is the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). Online media is the most frequently used vehicle for raising support and propaganda by ULMWP. Every year leading up to December 1, the campaign to raise the Morning Star flag is increasingly intense with the theme Global Raising Flag for West Papua. Various propaganda efforts by Benny Wenda and ULMWP to shape perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of the public or international figures towards Papua are considered quite successful. Jennifer Robinson and Jeremy Corbyn are examples of individuals. Meanwhile, from the group, the Bertha Foundation is the fund supporter and partner whose organizational symbol is attached at the bottom right of the website www.freewestpapua.org.

Counter-Propaganda Analysis of the Internationalization of Papua Issues through Digital Diplomacy

ULMWP is an organized group that carries out a series of propaganda actions for the separation of Papua in a systematic manner and can make people, international figures, or countries the targets of propaganda.

The Indonesian government made counter-propaganda efforts against the steps taken by the ULMWP, namely using official diplomatic channels in international forums that were targeted by ULMWP propaganda, such as the MSG and the United Nations. Diplomacy using official channels is an act of direct refutation by refuting the opponent's accusations with arguments that are believed by the public. In addition, counter-propaganda uses online media to fight ULMWP propaganda in online media. Counter-propaganda using online media is a digital diplomacy step. Several sites created for counter-

propaganda through digital diplomacy include: www.freewestpapua.co, www.freewestpapua.co.nz, www.westpapuaupdate.com, and www.onwestpapua.com. The four sites use English to suppress and counter the spread of propaganda in the international public carried out by the ULMWP through online media, made anonymously by packaging information about Papua in a complete way.

Conclusion

To achieve its political goals, ULMWP seeks to gain international support by bringing up the issue of human rights as a strategy to invite UN intervention. From a propaganda perspective, various techniques are carried out systematically, simultaneously, and continue to garner international support by discrediting Indonesia, including through online media by building a free West Papua site. In order to carry out counter-propaganda against ULMWP propaganda in the international arena, Indonesia takes 2 (two) ways at once, namely through official diplomacy in international forums and the use of digital diplomacy. The site is trying to lead an opinion to refute the propaganda carried out by the ULMWP

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