The Interactivity of Twitwar among Social Media Influencer and Followers on Twitter

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Abstract

Social media has been used not only as an interactive media for its individual users but also for business purposes. With the intentions to persuade the followers, social media account owners are using social media influencer with different objectives. Interactions with the followers cannot be avoided with comment and other features for every post uploaded by the account holder. The study is focusing the research on Twitter and aims to describe the response of social media influencers (SMIs) to face the twitwar. SMI as an actor in social media plays a role in influencing follower through his/her social relations and tweets on Twitter. SMI activities in social media such as updating status (tweet), retweet, replying in comments, liking, or debating with followers which tends to create the twitwar between SMI and with followers.

Using a qualitative method with phenomenology approach, the researchers recruited six informants purposively who have experience in having a war on tweets (twitwar) with another user in the same platform of social media. The research viewed and analyzed the data from the perspective of phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. The results revealed that informants had various responses on how to manage the twitwar on Twitter. The response of SMIs for the public issues is not take it as personal, assume as a joke, or being silent and reduce tweets on particular topic. The response of SMIs for the personal issues is blocking the follower, change the topic of discussion, or never replying back the comments on Twitter.

Keywords: Social Media Influencer; Twitwar; Twitter; Social Media; Symbolic Interaction

Introduction

Exchange messages in Twitter has been a way to communicate in social media. The interaction may sometimes become a sort of hard discussions that is called war of tweets, known as twitwar. It is phenomena is a reality among the social media users that can be categorized as the cyber war due to a convergence of media development in the internet as cyberspace. According to tagdef.com, twitwar happens when there are exchanges of emotional statements attacking each other in Twitter between two or more people.In Indonesia, it is potential that twitwar occurs since it is encouraged and supported by the democratic rules which guarantee the freedom for its people to express their opinions in social media.

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Online communities and social media have the role of social agents and political change (Gordon, 2017). The characteristics of specific social media in a free democratic climate, such as the social media activities in Indonesia are very dynamic. The fact that netizens high activity in social media, brings the impact to the social movements and political change in Indonesia (Nugroho, 2012; Lim, 2014). According to the Ministry of Communication and Information of the Republic of Indonesia, the number of internet subscribers in Indonesia achieved 143 million out of 262 million of total Indonesian citizens, or around 54.68 percent[1]. Furthermore, in October 2018, the statistic said that there are 6,1 million of active Twitter's user account in Indonesia[2].

Social media exists as channels for relationship or exchange information in cyberspace (Gilpin, 2011: 247). The relationship among Social Media Influencers (SMI) and their followers could be bound through the activities and engagement on Twitter. The activities of SMI in social media are identified many such as updating status (tweet), retweet, replying comments, liking, and debating. SMI represents a new type of independent third party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and other social medias. SMIs also recognize the possibilities of forging alliances with other SMIs to promote a brand or organization (Freberg et al., 2010). On Twitter, SMIs play the role as an opinion leader that contributes to the virtual community and has the power to influence followers. An opinion leader always rises up along with the emergence of a new media. The SMIs may express personal statuses on social media with the topic that are usually about public issues, personal issues, confused or trivial matters. As online opinion leader, SMIs are alike offline opinion leaders because their opinions are perceived as trustworthy ones which have a strong impact to the followers' behavior and may build a strong engagement.

The SMIs on Twitter could come forth from a celebrity or a non-celebrity Twitter user. In this research, researchers have chosen the SMIs on Twitter from the users who have a lot of followers and active to update the statuses or create tweets. Every SMI has his/her own characteristic and uniqueness according to the tweets topics on the Twitter timeline.The role of an influencer, SMI has to be existed on social media to interact and maintain good relationships with followers. The existence of SMI is determined by the followers since SMI has to nurture the followers as like a virtual community (Edwin, 2012). On the other hand, the interaction between SMIs and followers are not always smooth. Some SMIs have the experience in handling twitwar with their followers. SMIs give vary responses to the followers depending on their own experience and knowledge of tweets' topic as the source of problems.In Indonesia, the twitwar between SMI and their followers has always been interesting case study since SMI has a lot of followers and performs high occurrence of activity in social media. Thus they should be aware about their self-image impression and the negative impact on their posts and credibility as influencers.

Theoretical Framework

Symbolic Interaction

This article uses the symbolic interaction perspective with the basic concept of self, mind, and society which coined by George Herbert Mead (1934). The symbolic interactions perspective seeks to understand human behavior from the subject point of view. Symbolic interactionists suggest that human conduct is to be seen as a process in which individuals shape and govern their conduct by taking into account the expectation of other with whom they interact (cited in Mulyana, 2018:108).Mead's conception of mind, self, and society are so central to symbolic interaction. Mead asserts that society is

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[1]https://kominfo.go.id/index.php/content/detail/12640/siaran-pers-no-53hmkominfo022018-tentang-jumlah-pengguna-internet-2017-
meningkat-kominfo-terus-lakukan-percepatan-pembangunan-broadband/0/siaran_pers

[2] http://wearesocial.net/

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possible because people interact in daily life whether in offline world or online world, which in turn is made possible because humans have the unique capacity to take the role of the other. Mead argues that 'the real basis of social life is found in the capacity to take the role of the other'. The essence of self: 'If you can act toward yourself as you have toward others, you possess a self', and the essence of 'mind' - which is a process and not a thing. The reflexivity is so central to Mead's conceptions of mind, self and society. Mead has the details a framework that magnifies the importance of significant symbols, communication for the internalized communication and as both the ability to take the role of the other as well as the ability of socialized people to be objects unto themselves), how social processes bestow the capacity for selfhood, and the significance of reflexive thought to both self and society (Waskul, 2008: 125).

According to George Herbert Mead (1934:140) said that the self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in the social experience. After a self emerged, it is in a certain sense provides for itself the social experiences, and so we can conceive of an absolutely solitary self. But it is impossible to conceive of self arising outside of social experience. Since the concept of identity, viewed from symbolic interactionism, rest of theories of the self, particularly George Herbert Mead's explication of self-theory is necessary at this theoretical background. Mead (1934) sees the self as the product of this process in which 'one does respond to that which he addresses to another and where that response of his own becomes a part of his conduct, where he not only hears himself but responds to himself'. The 'self-ing' of the person yields the 'I/me' couplet. This bifurcated entity exists both for itself and in itself simultaneously. The 'I' who results from the process of self-ing, then, acquires an awareness of itself as itself, at the same time that the self gains an awareness of the self as other, as the object of its own regard. Closely related to this concept is Mead's idea of reflexivity, which he (1934: 138–40) explains as follows: 'the individual experiences himself as (an object), not directly, but only indirectly from the particular standpoints of other members of the same social group.' In this sense, the self cannot be separated in experience from the 'generalized other'. For Mead, reflexivity consists of viewing oneself from the standpoint of the other, and this is the essence of the self-ing process. Further, Mead's concept of self is delineated by the 'I' and 'me' such that the creative 'I' is the individual's response to the 'me'. For Mead, the 'me' is representative of the social order or the 'generalized other' (Robinson, 2007: 95).

In symbolic interactionism asserted that the state of human nature is a social state; that society is constituted by communication, social relationship, and interaction based on sociability and sympathy; and that society is a mirror in which people see themselves (Serpe and Stryker, 2011: 226). In this research, the interactivity of twitwar among SMI and followers reflects the interrelated process of symbolic interaction where starting from the mind, self and society. According to Robinson (2007: 94) said that the symbolic interactionist framework is crucial to understanding the cyberself-ing process because the cyberself is formed and negotiated in the same manner as the offline self.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach that seeks to explain the meaning of life experiences of some people about a concept or symptom, including their own self-concept or view of life. A phenomenological research method is to form of an experience analysis. This research seeks to reveal the conscious experience of the social media influencer when experiencing interactions in the form of Twitwar with followers in social media on Twitter. Thus, phenomenological studies can be used to explore the conscious experience of buzzers to the responses taken when there is a war of tweets between users in social media.

Phenomenology analysis according to Von Eckartsberg (Moustakas, 1994:15) as follows:

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1. The problem and question formulation – the phenomenon. The researcher delineates a focus of the investigation, formulates a question in such a way that it is understandable to others.
2. The data generating situation - The protocol life text. The researcher starts with a descriptive narrative provided by subjects who are viewed as co-researchers. We query the person and engage in dialogue, or combine the two.
3. The data analysis - Explication and interpretation. Once collected, the data are read and scrutinized so as to reveal their structure, meaning configuration, coherence, and the circumstances of their occurrence and clustering. Emphasizing is on the study of the configuration of meaning, involving both the structure of meaning and how it is created.

Subject Characteristics

Six informants were recruited as resource persons and referred to:
   a) have joined twitter for at least 5 (five) years
   b) have the number of followers with minimum 10,000 accounts on twitter
   c) have dominant tweets concerning about lifestyle such as traveling, fashion, culinary, gadgets, and hedonic.
   d) have the experience to promote any brands on Twitter.

Results and Discussion

Twitwar is the war of words on Twitter categorized as the negative side of interactivity between informants and followers. Moreover, twitwar could be included as an activity related to cyber war that can be understood as a situation of the process of denial, destruction, various information modifications with intended purpose, such as attack, manipulation, counter-attack, through various cyber, psychological methods, which will affect/disturb the enemy in aspects of infrastructure and decision making (Syahputra, 2017: 459). Most of the informants admitted having experienced twitwars on Twitter. They considered it as a learning process to enhance the influencer's credibility at the front stage of followers on social media. Every informant recognized on how to respond with different behaviors to face twitwars either with the followers or non-followers. According to the in-depth interview with six informants, the conducted research is to explain and interpret about informants' response on the twitwar interactivity with followers with the following issues: (1) for public issues: not taking it as personal, assume as a joke, being silent and reduce tweets on particular topic; and (2) for personal issues: blocking the follower, changing topic of discussion, never replying back to the comments.

Not Take It as Personal

Twitter accounts are created by the owner. A status twitted by a user is published instantly at the moment to anyone. The twitwar between Twitter users will spread out to other followers and emerged on both sides' timeline. Thus, a twitwar is a public interaction or dispute, and definitely in front of many people. Informant RB has the twitwar experience on Twitter with one of follower. The condition was related to a soccer match at Football Stadium Senayan in Jakarta. He stated as following:
"I ever had an experience of twitwar with one of Persija's fan and also my follower on Twitter. It was just because my first tweet "In Senayan, there is a police who shots the gun?" My second tweet only wrote, "Oh, Persija". Wow, I was directly attacked by twitwar, I didn't know what the problem was, but I was attacked. Finally, I did not take it personally. It happened on Sunday afternoon and many netizens were angry at me on Twitter. Then, he was trying to look for me, where was I living? I frankly told him about my position, didn't try to escape. So, if I'm here if I want to come here. The other followers who know me as well were just laughing. Some of them also mentioned, "There is nothing wrong with RB's tweets"..." - (RB: 10/18/2016).

According to the statement above, RB's position was in a mall and closed to the location of the football match between Persija Jakarta Team and Persib Bandung Team. He uploaded two tweets on Twitter which subsequently became the twitwar. RB received a counterattack tweet which indicates the twitwar from one of Persija's fan accounts. RB recognized the received responses as a twitwar, however he decided not to emotionally deal with it and not to take it personally. He was aware that Twitter is not a private sphere and Twitwar is always happening in the public sphere. It means that a two-way communication occurs on Twitter can be seen and followed by other users. The Twitwar condition, in this case, is more to likely related to public issue, therefore informant cannot take it as a personal matter.

Assume as a Joke

Informants IN had has also the twitwar's experience twitwar with a follower on Twitter, IN stated as follows:

"In one occasion, I wanted my hair cut then made a tweet "Now I have the longest hair than I ever have before, what should I do with my hair?" Well, my followers commonly give the advice to cut off or keep growing. Then, one of my followers gives a comment about physical harassment. "You are very pug-nosed, mbak". It's actually normal, but I feel annoyed because he has given two comments. I still reply his tweet and assume it as a joke "Yes, it's pug-nosed; it's not been operating yet". A few days later I made the same tweet, and then he gives the comment again as the same. That means it's already the third time. I still assume it as a joke then replies it "Do you want to pay for my plastic surgery?" Well ... I am trying to build a chit chat discussion. If I feel very annoying, I close the application for a while, and I will open it again. I was not upset anymore. So even though I was upset, but still just assume as a joked". - (IN: 23/2/2016)

In this condition, the twitwar is related to the physical harassment. Informant IN considered it as a joke. The reason why he considers this way is because they never met. Although it was annoying for IN and she was resentful but still trying to reply the tweet with jokes.

Being Silent and Reduce Tweets on Particular Topic

The research informant SP has the experience about twitwar with her follower. SP stated:
"I have experience on tweeting about frog culinary since it is prohibited to my Moslem's followers. It is the forbidden food, so I have been scolded by people ... I just relax and take it as a joke, then I say it's not forbidden for me... I am trying to avoid the debate since I am a typical person who dislikes debating, event tough with my husband; I never debate him, hehehe... So, if the conversation leads to a debate, usually I will stay calm and do not talk any words. Then, I ever posted about noodles, there was someone who asked me what the noodles were forbidden foods or not, so I don't know if they were halal or forbidden. We have the twitwar in the timeline on Twitter. The said follower trying to blame me since I make people become having sin due to eating the forbidden food. I never thought too far. I said about halal or forbidden food, please check it out by yourself to ensure the food whether halal or forbidden hmm..."- (SP: 12/10/2016)

SP is an obedient Christian and has experienced a twitwar about frog as it is a forbidden food for Moslem. She argues that the twitwar happened was because Moslem users who do not like the tweets because it is a haram (forbidden) food. To handle the twitwar, SP chose not to respond and to reduce posts of forbidden food topics to respect Moslem beliefs.Informant DR also got experience on twitwar while uploading tweets about the Minerba (mineral dan batubara/minerals and coal) Rules and Regulations in October 2016. DR stated:

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"I wrote tweets about the Minerba Rules and Regulations on Twitter. Some followers give the negative comments in my timeline which tend to twitwar. I was replying the comments with valid reference and explaining the condition as well. But they still insisted me to reply their mentions in the timeline. I think if there is a crisis on social media, you should keep quiet until the topic in my timeline will be changed with other topics…" (DR: 10/14/2016).

Most of the comments come from the followers who did not really understand the issues' substance and tend to create twitwar with negative tweets. Informant thus prefered to keep silent or not giving any feedback until the topic in user's timeline changed.

Blocking the Follower

IN has experienced on how to face the twitwar with a follower on Twitter who also sent the personal e-mail her. Here is IN statement:
"I feel this is the most extreme experience I ever had. One of my followers on Twitter was trying to disturb me via social media. He is an annoyed guy, tweets me to say "Good morning Inne, please do not forget to eat!", for instance. At one moment, I posted a status food's photo to Twitter in X mall". I mentioned "Uh, it's a cozy place to have dinner here. Then, not too long after posting my tweet, then my follower said: "Until what time stay there?" Finally, I feel unpleasant to chit-chat with him and also annoying to create a twitwar, so I block him as my follower on Twitter" (IN: 23/2/2016).IN admits that her account has been already exposed in Twitter because she has never blocked anyone to follow her posts. She was having the experience with such follower, and she prefered to block him to prevent the vandalism behavior in social media including the twitwar. According to IN, she felt unsecured having a follower that she does not know at all. IN has taken an appropriate decision to blocking the follower's account.

Changing Topic of Discussion

The interactivity of Twitwar between informant and follower is usually escalate to a hot discussion. Each party is trying to be offensive in the discussion. If both could not dampen the emotion, it may worsen the situation. The informant changes the topic to face the twitwar with followers. JE stated:
"My experience when I got twitwar with an uncomfortable follower, usually I will not immediately reply, but I will think it over until I get the main idea of the tweet. Then, I try to change the topic discussion. I try to explain since my follower gets the wrong information. Although, I really don't like twitwar, hate speech, debating on Twitter."(JE: 28/1/2016).The informant's experience on dealing with followers gives benefit to influencer facing a displeasing problem with netizen. According to JE, when he got a twitwar, he was not trying to reply tweet immediately. JE always takes time to think over before replying the tweet and trying to change the topic of discussion and leaving twitwar.

Never Replying Back the Comments

Informant DS got a Twitwar from a follower who tries to expose his role as an influencer. He chose not to reply the comments from the followers. Here is the DS's statement:
"I have experience when my follower asked me to answer a question related to my role as an influencer on Twitter. The follower tried to uncover my profession as an influencer in a certain product or service. For instance, that's why this product become viral because you are the endorser or influencer. Then, he insisted to uncover me. He said I did not talk frankly about the truth of product quality, but he doesn't care about the reality on my side. He wrote the comment like as "Cieee… you are the influencer, right? So you

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said well for that product". I will answer the comments as polite as possible. If he still insists, then my response is usually never replying back to the comments..." (DS: 30/11/2016)

With the role of SMI on Twitter, DS always give the best services to his clients. He has the experience to face twitwar which is trying to uncover his profession as influencer. He feels uncomfortable when his role as endorser is mentioned on his posts promoting a product or service in his timeline. This action can be categorized as twitwar since he already answers in a polite manner. The informant DS gives response with never replying to the comments. This research found that SMIs or influencers have to be more careful to interact or communicate with followers especially when a war is started by a follower. They are easily recognized as a celebrity on social media and they have to take the respective consequences. SMIs make various efforts to preserve their identity as influencer although there are some followers who tried to create twitwar. The responses of SMIs when facing the twitwar as following: not take it as personal, assume as a joke, block the follower, change the topic of discussion, never reply back the comment.

In interactivity of twitwar, the communication between SMI and follower is a reflection of the ability to maintain self-image. Now, any kind of hate speech spread very quickly on social media and it could be triggered a twitwar. Twitwar is taking place quickly, so there is no distance (time) for netizens to correct or judge the truth. The article results show that interactivity of twitwar between SMIs and followers could be defined into some categories depending on the context faced by SMIs. On Twitter, the use of symbolic interaction theory is to reveal the response and meanings of the SMI and followers who are involved in a twitwar. Each SMI gives a different response to the twitwar situation. Based on the data of research, the twitwar on public conflict of interested could be solved through the interactive dialogue. The SMIs usually give the response as illustrated in figure 1 below.
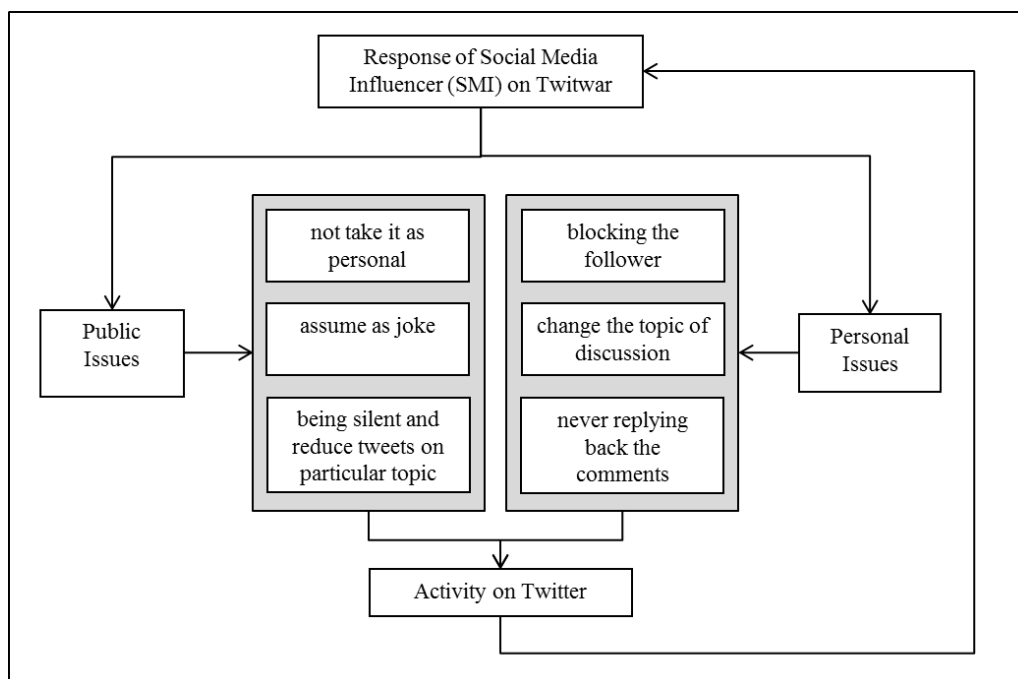

Figure 1. Model Response of Social Media Influencer on Twitwar with Followers

Most SMIs realize the online self-concept when interacting with followers in social media. SMIs positions themselves as good online communicators and they keep their online reputation in a good manner. The influencer also assumes the profile and status posted to social media are the symbols of their mind and portfolio that are assessed by the followers. Then the SMIs identify themselves based on his

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relationship with other individuals. The SMI profiles and activities carried out on social media also play an important role in shaping a personal self-identity.

Conclusion

According to the purpose of this study, which is to reveal the response of social media influencer (SMI) to face the interactivity of twitwar with followers, it can be concluded that the social media influencers (SMIs) have different responses and understanding about the twitwar interactivity. The response of SMIs can be categorized as the public issues and the personal issues. The response of SMIs for the public issues is not take it as personal, consider as a joke, or being silent and reduce tweets about particular topics. The response of SMIs for the personal issues is to blocking follower, change the topic of discussion, or never replying comments.

The SMIs understand the activity on twitwar as a reflection of virtual community as an online society on social media who should be maintained as well. Thus, the interactivity of SMIs with followers actually can be considered like a virtual community on social media, who are trying to hold back emotions while having twitwar or another kind of hate speech on Twitter.

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