

KEYNOTE'S SPEECH

Religion in the Post-Truth Society

Achmad Charris Zubair
ICMI DIY, Universitas Gadjah Mada



Prologue

In Mahabaratha epic story, Durna—a commander in Baratha Yudha war from Kurawa side—was able to break the Pandawa's defensive forces. This led to Krishna's fear that if Durna continued to be in the side of Kurawas, Pandawa will soon lose the battle.

Yet, Krishna got the key of Durna's weakness—that he is too in love with his son Aswathama. Krishna used the Durna's weakness to build the strategy to break his power. First, Arjuna was asked to create fake news about the death of Aswathama, so Durna will be in deep misery and he will lose all his power. For sure, Arjuna refused to do that. Even though he opposed Durna, he did not want to create fake news as he also considered Durna as his teacher so he paid respect to him.

In other battle, Bima was commanded to kill the elephant troop in war, named Istithama. Istithama had similar rhyme with Aswathama. When finally the elephant was killed, Pandawa had announced that Istithama the elephant has died in the hand of Bima. The death of Istithama was heard among Kurawa troop. However, as 'Istithama' has the same rhyme with 'Aswathama', some Kurawans heard that 'Aswathama' who was killed in the battle with Bima.

Soon the information that heard was 'Aswathama' (not 'Istithama') who killed in the battle. At the end, the news had finally been heard by Durna. Durna decided to ask to one of his student, that known for his honest reputation, named Yudhistira. He answered the question—with his mumbled voice, "Yes, Isti was killed in the battle".

Yudhistira, of course, told the truth. However, he talked with low voice so it was heard unclearly. Unfortunately, Durna heard 'Istithama' as 'Asthatama'. As Durna was confused and worried, he was too shocked and broken hearted to accept the death of Aswathama. He gave up to be a warrior and lived as an ascetic. Living in his grief, he had no resistance when Drestajumena killed himself.

From the excerpt of the scene of epic story "Mahabharata" above, even the ones that considered as the most honest groups, which is Pandawa, used 'hoax' as part of strategies to win the battle.

Who are they in this recent modern world situation?

Post-Truth Era

'Post-Truth' is a terminology that currently has been widely used in global world. Post-truth era has been defined as the era when disinformation that exist has created public confusion to understand fact and reality. In post truth era most of the time, people find more difficult to differ between truth and hoax or fake news.

As hoax has often been accepted as truth, some people in the society have created and crafted hoax and disinformation to raise their own interest and gain their own benefit.

When hoax and disinformation have been received as norms, the real, true or honest information will be covered and disbelief to the true information might be soaring up.

At worse, the society will be more admitting hoax as the truth than the truth itself. Apparently, this situation is the most prone and dangerous above all the fact the hoax has been spreading among our society. When people are mixing up the lies and hoax with the truth, and considered the truth—together with its evidence, as things that are socially-crafted and modified.

I highlight and argue that the hoax and disinformation are probably a token of a certain time and generation, which is ‘post-truth’ era. However, the practice of hoax and disinformation happen across time, across culture, and across generation. Hoax and disinformation have already been existed since long time before. Besides, the practice of hoax and disinformation can also be found in our everyday life. It can be found inside relationship, among family, among society, among nation and country.

The universal norms and morality has indicated that ‘honesty’ is one of the important values in our humanity. We should work the value of honesty out and teach it as a universal value to our younger generations. However, in fact, morality is not always a fixed terminology when it comes to the certain urgent situations. Although at glance, it seems it is contra morality, but apparently, to some extent, relativity in seeing morality can be allowed and applied in some specific situations.

There are 3 (three) types of morality relativism;

(1) Normative relativism.

Human have often involved in the situation that need commitment to keep confidentiality of the matters due to the protection to something or someone, for instance, state’s confidential documents, etc. It needs strong ethical commitment to keep things in high level of confidentiality and it is framed in the dimension of professional ethics, job ethics, etc.

(2) Cultural relativism.

Every culture has its own ways to see things. The dimension of correctness can various among societies and cultures, and it is all valid in this sense. To impose one way of life as more correct or more valid than others can lead to bigger conflict and social disintegration among society.

(3) Metaethics relativism

Metaethics relativism is ethic relativism as the result of similarity and commonness among social groups or communities. It is probably contra with the universal ethical values, but accepted as ethical in certain groups that has the same values. The situation can be tricky when hoax and disinformation has been received as a truth when it has been shared by somebody or some people that has something in common (can be religions, spiritualities, and ideologies) with their audiences.

‘The post-truth’ era that we know now is inseparable with the growing of knowledge and technologies, particularly digital and information technologies. One of the signs that can be found in our society is the usage of social media in every aspect of our life, ranging from economy, social, politics, cultural changes, and even our nations. The way we communicate each other has already been changed, from more conventional, physical based into digitalized through the newest communication features in social media.

As consequences of the growing of digital communication, the wave of information is also growing huge and massive. Digital communication is based on freedom of the users, which directly and indirectly has created the blurred borderlines between out private and public life.

On one side, we cannot ignore that social media has contributed to what so-called economic-sharing resources, such as the rapid growing of start-up businesses, e-commerce, and online on-demand services, such as Go-jek and Grab.

On the other hand, the usage of social media can be contra-productive when hoax and disinformation are dominating these free spaces. Hoax, fake news, false news are more common and bring the destructive effects when it spread hate speech, hatred, or politics of identity, especially when this kind of news are becoming viral among social media users. Thus, the 'post-truth' phenomenon need to be anticipated before it can be growing as a tool to disintegrate and polarize groups and even trigger bigger conflict among societies.

The growing of identity politics, especially that using the religious, ethnic, and specific groups sentiments can potentially lead to the damage of social cohesion in our living as one nation. We must aware that the political events such as general election that has been done earlier this year in our country had created conflict and contestation among groups of supporter, and it is a relief that the elections can finally be successfully held in peaceful and in democratic manners.

The post-truth phenomena can be very disturbing when news and information are played by certain groups to frame their own narration and public opinion. Their narration has been crafted by the rampant using of fake news and hoax that can de-graduate and even destroy the meaning of truth and honesty. Thus 'post-truth' has more aims to find the justification rather to find the real truth and correctness.

Post-Truth, Religion, and Ideology

Religion is one of human foundations to raise their humanity. Universal morality value of truth, kindness, compassion and justice are in the highly valued in religion. Post-truth can possibly be prevented with values inside religion. However, religion is also depend on the behavior of its adherences, as they are practicing both practical and interpretation aspects of their religions.

Interpretation of religions is also inseparable with the interest of the religion adherences. No wonder, religion has often been employed in order to justify certain actions and behavior. The post-truth phenomenon using the blanket of religion can dangerously bring bad impact to our humanity, as it ignited conflict using the emotional sentiment of religious identity.

The beliefs that their religious streams as the most valid and in the same time pointing out other adherences as invalid can build conflict and distrust inside the believer of the religion.

In more specific relation between post-truth, religion, and identity, there are two important considerations in order to relate them with post-truth era. *First*, there is people who are deliberately spread hoax for their own benefit and interest and disregard truth as the foundational basis to cultivate healthy society. *Second*, there is groups of people as receivers of information or audiences that emotionally and irrationally accept news as the news are confirming their own beliefs and values, and even as simple as their just own perceptions. The collaboration between news maker and news receiver or audience are together creating fake news or hoax is becoming more 'acceptable' in the society.

Hoax and fake news makers have often used the easiest and most effective ways to drive the emotion of audiences which are religions and ideology sentiments. Religions and ideologies have been used to justify the information, even though it is just 'framing' and 'narrating' the news based on their views and perceptions.

For instance, how polling or survey that claimed as academics that in fact not using the logics of academic, yet, only claimed the legitimacy and justify the actions of certain

groups. In recent times, there are many works that claimed as the result of study, however, it did not use the correct academic logics, rightful methodologies and studies that contain academics premises and conclusions. This shallow studies later accepted as correctness when it massively shared in social medias.

The hoax and fake news with the religious or ideology framings and narrations can provoke the identity politics that bring potent to social disintegration among society. To the bigger extent, it can lead to the degradation of humanity. Humanity that supposedly lead by universal values of moralities.

In Indonesia, disintegration by religious issues has become norms in our multicultural society. We should reflect the situation in many other countries, that the religious conflict has become the weapon to kill their own brothers in a country.

Religious values are not supposed to be interpreted in the formal and textual fashion. However, it should be interpreted in its values as the foundation of human spirituality, neither in its material nor formality aspects.

Post-truth phenomenon basically is a reflection and manifestation of mean-ends materiality that goes beyond the dimension of humanistic value and spirituality of the religions. In this context, it is worth to posit religions as important factor to revoke the values of humanities.

Epilogue

Truth and lies are fact and reality in life. The choice to speak lie or to speak true is free-willing. That so with accepting and believing whether a thing is true or wrong is basically a conscious choice.

With any reasons, post-truth in principle is a betrayal to the universal value of truth as the reality is located in the perceptions or in the point of views of the messengers. In fact, post-truth has also no ethnic and morality roots as its references. These basic assumption has led as to believe that post-truth—in fake news or hoax is unethical and immoral, and furthermore contra-productive to our humanity.

Human has tendency to always seek the truth and stay in the path of moral and principle of truth itself. When we are looking for the truth we must find the facts, evidences, reality and data on the way we find it.

Post-truth is existing in a way human are looking for the short-terms and mundane fulfilment of life; such as physical desire, material possession, political power, social economics status, etc.

In general, post-truth can be eliminated with the literacy campaign among our society. Philosophy as holistic and radical knowledge can actually take position to build literacy awareness. It also means that we always think twice or even more before we accept and spread information.