

The Phenomenon of Internet Trolling and the Spreading of Hate Speech on Social Media

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Abstract--- *Over the last few years, there is a new phenomenon in social media globally called internet troll or flaming or trolling. A troll is a person who posts provocative messages and off-topic messages on the internet, either on social media or online discussion forum, with the intention of provoking other users into displaying emotional responses or disturbing the discussion process. The internet trolls always use fake usernames, profile photos, and profile descriptions. This study researches and discusses about the phenomenon of internet troll and the spreading of hate speech on social media. The purpose of this study is to understand and to analyze the troll role in spreading the hate speech on social media in Indonesia. This study uses qualitative research method. The analytical method of this research that we used is a case study analysis based on the method, the data, and the source triangulation. The result of the study is that the term internet troll is only used by those who make comments in off-topic discussion in newsgroup. However, the term troll is currently used widely by every person who uses swearing, profanity, and hate speech in some social media platforms. The internet trolls are described to have psychological personality problem because they say harsh words easily to ruin the credibility of a person on social media.*

Keywords--- *Internet Troll, Hate Speech, Social Media.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Millennium era causes the phenomenon called social media. Social media is a democratization of media and it causes the friction from face-to-face communication to mediated communication. Nowadays, every person has the opportunity to share their thoughts, opinions, and skills globally.

In the early 2019, the number of phonecell user in Indonesia has reached 355.5 million users or 133 percent of the 268.2 million total population. It means that every individual uses 1,3 cellphones because one person sometimes uses 2-3 cellphone cards. Meanwhile, Indonesia urban population has reached 55 percent of the total population. Based on the data from www.wearesocial.com, the internet users in Indonesia has reached 150 million with penetration rate around 56 percent of the population. The active social media users has reached 150 million with penetration rate around 56 percent, and active mobile social media has reached 130 million or around 48 percent of the population. (Riyanto, 2019)

Over the last few years, there is a new phenomenon in social media globally called *internet troll* or *flaming* or *trolling*. According to Marwick and Lewis, a troll is a person who posts provocative messages and off-topic messages on the internet, either on social media or online discussion forum, with the intention of provoking other users into displaying emotional responses or disturbing the discussion process [1].

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The *internet trolls* always use fake *usernames*, profile photos, and profile descriptions. Besides, they also access social media by using VPN (*Virtual Private Network*) in order to hide their Internet Protocol (IP address). The phenomenon of *internet troll* increasingly grows since the blasphemy case by Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or Ahok in 2016. Some sides tried to provoke social media users through trolling or flaming on social media by raising the issue of ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA) [2]

Buckels et. Al. stated that internet trolls were carried out by hostile and anti-social individuals, triggered by bullying that was often accepted by actors both in the real world and in cyberspace [3][4]. Further research by Cruz et al (2018) identifies the existence of other anti-social behaviors that trigger the emergence of internet trolls, such as the dominance of someone on a social media group [5]. Troll's behavior is inseparable from the anonymous nature of social media and allows one to disguise his true identity. Tracking capabilities are needed to find the real identity of an internet troll. According to Matsuda and Davies, in trolling behavior there are psychological factors that have developed since he was young[6][7] [8].

This study researches and discusses about the phenomenon of *internet troll* and the spreading of hate speech on social media. The purpose of this study is to understand and to analyze the *troll* role in spreading the hate speech on social media in Indonesia.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The word *Troll* refers to a ferocious giant creature in Scandinavian folklore. They live in deep dark caves, or underground. Their size is bigger than humans and they have strong power. Troll's appearance looks like an Ogre in English folklore. In the fantasy fiction stories or games, Troll character is always borrowed as supporting character [9].

Trolling is often described as the online version of violation, where social and ethical boundaries are ignored. Those who admit themselves as *trolls* always place themselves as the contenders of opinions or general assumptions from discussion forums which they follow on social media, in order to turn or introduce a new way of thinking. (Bishop, 2014)

However, they suddenly make an offensive or insulting opinions or *posting*. These posts cause all of the group members to make comments that will lead to a never-ending debate. The doers or the *trolls* will be removed from the group after successfully making a mess and disunity among the members of discussion group. *Trolls* can disturb the discussion in one way or another, such as spreading bad advice, throwing the issue of ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA), insulting entities or specific groups, and ruining trust among the discussion members. Basically, their intention is to cause chaos, so that the real purpose of discussion will not be achieved and changed [10]

Mentioning someone a *troll* means making assumption about the writer's motive which is unpredictable. Meanwhile, mentioning a posting as a *troll* means showing the reaction of acceptance towards a posting. To sum up, both the writer and the writing result are often called as *troll* if the content raises other people's anger [11]

The term ‘*troll*’ tends to be subjective. Some posting will be seen as *trolling* by some people, meanwhile it will be seen as meaningful contribution by the others. For example, a *troll* could make a conservative opinion on the liberal forum. An action considered as emotional overflow in an environment is often called as *troll*. Moreover, the term *troll* is often used to discredit the opposite side in an argument. This will cause *ad hominem* argumentation; a troll who has intention might defend the controversial position just because he successfully challenges the general opinion [9]

III. METHODS

The study about the phenomenon of *internet troll* in spreading hate speech in social media uses qualitative research method. The method of this research is case study, while the data collection method in this research are the library research and field research such as observation and depth interview. The informants of this study are active social media users including internet trolling activists. The data collected in this research is divided into primary data and secondary data. The primary data is taken from the observation results and profound interviews. On the other hand, the secondary data is taken from online news sites (website), communication journals, and relevant books. This study is attempted to give the description and explanation about the *internet troll* role in the spreading of hate speech in social media in Indonesia.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Formerly, the term *internet troll* was only used by those who gave off-topic comments in a newsgroup. However, nowadays the term *troll* is used widely by every person who uses swearing, profanity, and hate speech in many social media *platforms*. Facebook is a place where we could find *internet trolls* at most because Facebook does not limit the number of Fanpage members reaching hundreds or even thousands of people [12]

In the presence of persona, the definition of regime, public, and relation space is being questioned. Regime, in this media, is not seen as one body with one voice, but segregates, persona by persona. It is the same as the public segmented into unique individuals. Focus on political view changes from ideology carried by groups to images brought by a persona. Two-way communication also makes relation space between public and regime become intimate and personal. (Donath, 2002)

Although it looks ideal, an image is only a representation which has space with reality. Representation has flaw by assuming that sign and reality is equal – what the image shows is reality. Besides, an image will degrade reality in four stages: (1) it will reflect reality, (2) cover and misuse reality, (3) cover the absence of reality, and in the end (4) the image do not bear the reality and become artificial reality which is far from reality itself [13]

Artificial reality without its originality will not have place in reality, not by covering the truth, but by showing the unreal truth. In popular language, it almost has the same meaning with hoax – the falsehood disguising as truth. Hoax becomes a trending topic since the presence of television and mass consumerism as tools of propaganda. A fact covered by opinion could be a main topic on screen. Or, a reality which is on the news could excessively bury another reality at the same time. It creates a hyperreality— the reality which is more real than its reality [14].

Hyperreality becomes more complex when the process of copying and spreading could occur fast, for example, on the social media. Although there is an opportunity, only 1% of its active users produce contents, while another 9% interacts with the contents and another 90% is passive readers. This interaction overlaps between individual original contents and those coming from mass media, or the combination between those two. The process of mass media hyperreality could be enhanced through social network. Otherwise, the unverified individual contents could be quoted directly as a public opinion. Both borrow the facts from each other[15].

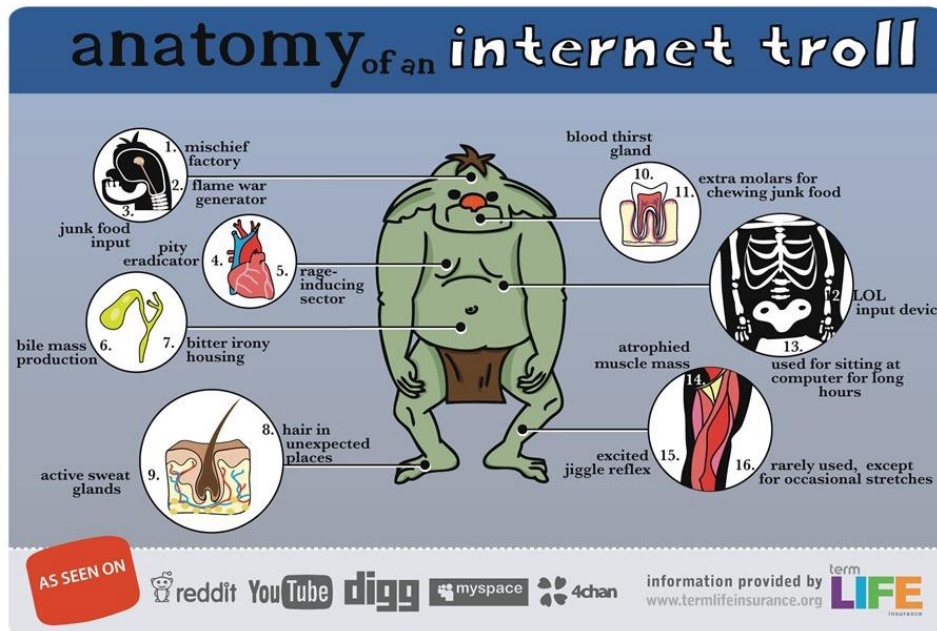


Figure 1: Anatomy of an Internet Troll (Source: embracedisruption.com)

Radovic (2013) describes the anatomy of an internet troll like the anatomy of a human body. She describes that internet troll eats garbage informations, hoaxes and lies as its main food, so their brain processes chaotic and unclear information and produce mischief news in social media. Because his brain was already chaotic, his heart was also filled with anger and rage, and looked for the target to vent his anger. He can't stand up straight and his feet are rarely used for walking because most of his time is spent trolling in social media. His body smelled of unpleasant sweat because it had never been cleaned [16].

Radovic (2013) provides an example of one aggressive troll internet post that uses inappropriate language because it is very provocative, as follows:

"This post sucks. Just use your fingers to pick your nose or just cut your fingers because they can't write properly. Just put your brain into the fridge because it doesn't work anymore. Hopefully you will have an accident and your body will be totally paralyzed because you are no longer useful to others, "

When reading provocative comments like above, it is perfectly normal for us to reply with rude sentences too, because that is what the internet troll wants, that we were provoked by his writing. But if we think clearly what is the reason for strangers to write such harsh words while we don't have any mistakes to them even we never meet in person. Finally we realize that we are dealing with an internet troll.

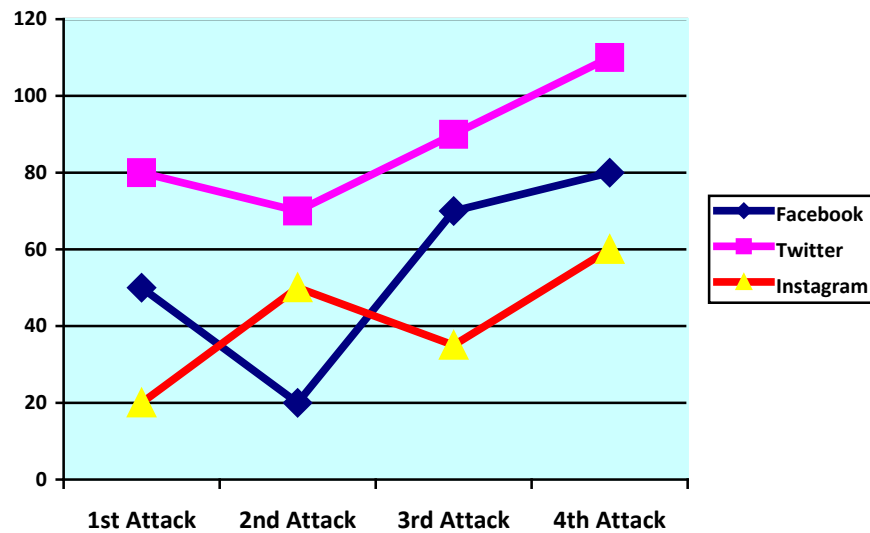


Figure 2: Internet Trolls Attack Pattern in Media Social

The chart above shows the pattern of internet troll attacks on three main social media; Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The patterns of the first to fourth attacks, there have never been simultaneous attacks on all social media. Troll attacks depend on when a post appears on social media. If the first post about one topic appears on Facebook, the attack will be directed to Facebook. If the second post with the same topic appears on Twitter, the attack will be directed to Twitter and so on. The pattern is always the same, hit and run, after making a mess on social media, they then disappear without a trace, before reappearing when new posts are made. Most troll internet attacks occur on Twitter, because Twitter is more actual and more accessible than Facebook and Instagram. Although Twitter doesn't always have the biggest impact.

After Facebook, *internet troll* spreads around another social media such as Twitter and Instagram. They are like virus which could reproduce million times in a short time. Different from a *buzzer*, a *troll* does not have to own many followers on social media, since its main mission is only ruining and disturbing by using provocative swearing which is easier to comment by other media users. Sometimes, some trolls even collaborate to make chaos on social media accounts belong to *public figures* which have a lot of followers to ruin the credibility of the account owners [17]

In some cases, *internet trolls* are found in the discussion about local elections such as 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election or simultaneous local election in June 2018. For example, on Ahok-Djarot's Facebook and Instagram, the trolls provoked other users by making hate-speech comments towards the governor candidates using harsh words beyond limits. This triggered comments from other users hence the incredible chaos happened where those trolls involved in humiliating and insulting other users. After achieving their goals, they suddenly disappeared, and their accounts were deleted or locked so that they were unable to be tracked down.

Another recent case that is often found is the war between the *trolls* claiming to be the supporters of hashtag #2019GantiPresiden and the supporters of hashtag #2019TetapJokowi. Both sides always involved in the act of

blasphemy and insult, by calling Jokowi's supporters as "*cebong*", while those who were anti-Jokowi were called "*kampret*". Therefore, it was not a surprise if a posting on social media from both sides could be commented thousands of times. However, if we looked at those comments, it only contained hate speech from one side to the others. Indeed, it is a apprehensive things if we remember the real purpose of social media usage.

Lately, the police successfully exposed a group of activists that ran a hoax and hate speech factory named Saracen and United Muslim Cyber Army (UMCA). Both groups worked by spreading hoax and hate speech as many as possible on social media. Some of them acted as *internet trolls* who were in charge to make chaos on social media accounts owned certain political figures. Usually they made hundreds or even thousands of fake accounts which could not be tracked down. Their accounts often used mainstream names with attractive profile photos.

Their modus operandi often made conflicting comments with other existed comments, for example on the post about infrastructure development in Papua. They raised an issue about mosque burning in Papua and questioned about the taking sides of government apparatus. Certainly, these comments sparked emotion of other users so that it created a never-ending debate. The *trolls* would heat up the discussion through the comment section to make it last and to arise pro and contra from other users. After the mission was done, the trolls would just disappear.

The works of *trolls* whose mission is to ruin and to disrupt may be recognized easily from the user's profile and the account's activation period. If the profile is empty and the account is new, it must be the *internet troll*. In the social media era, nowadays the threat from *internet troll* is hard to avoid. The only way is to block and delete all of their posts and comments. However, they often reappear with different usernames and profiles. Therefore, the only way is to make our social media become private or locked.

The existence of *internet troll* is used for political benefits as it is shown in the local election event which becomes a common thing to do. The *trolls* are used by the success teams to ruin and disrupt the social media accounts of the political opponents. The *internet troll* is described to have personality problem psychologically since they do not reluctant to say harsh words to ruin the credibility of a person on social media. The phenomenon of *internet troll* is still being a dreadful threat for social media activists. The authorities does not remain silent, while more groups creating hoax and hate speech are arrested and throwed in jail for breaking Law No. 11/2008 on Electronic Information and Transactions (UU ITE, 2008), sentenced them to 4-6 years in prison and a fine of Rp 100 million.

V. LIMITATIONS

Our findings must be considered given the limitations of our methods and cases. We cannot know whether the troll phenomenon will continue or get a new term. Even though our work is trying to determine how they work on social media, find out how are their strategies and how to anticipate them. We cannot determine the motivation behind the actions of the internet trolls we identified. In addition, this research is limited by the characteristics and context of social media in Indonesia in the types of practices that can be emulated from phenomena abroad. It is impossible to say whether the workings of the internet trolls we identified here will be found outside this particular context.

VI. STUDY FORWARD

The most urgent follow-up for further study is interviewing internet trolls directly and how their background to determine how they recruit and work as a team for a specific purpose. Although our work focuses on identifying how these trolls work and the impact of their actions on social media users. However, the existence of these trolls is quite disturbing to social media users because they appear on various platforms. Further qualitative research is needed to get a more comprehensive conclusion.

VII. CONCLUSION

From the result of the research, we obtain some conclusions. First, basically the term internet troll is only used by those who make comments in off-topic discussion in newsgroup. However, the term troll is currently used widely by every person who uses swearing, profanity, and hate speech in some social media platforms.

Second, their modus operandi often makes conflicted comments with the other existing comments. The *trolls* will always heat up the discussion on the comment section in order to make it last and to arise pro and contra from other users. After the mission is done, the trolls will just disappear.

Third, the existence of the *internet troll* is used for political benefit, as it is shown in the local election event which becomes a common thing to do. The *trolls* are used by the success teams to ruin and disrupt the social media accounts of the political opponents.

Fourth, the *internet trolls* are described to have personality problem psychologically because they do not reluctant to say harsh words to ruin the credibility of a person on social media.

Fifth, in this information era, the phenomenon of internet trolls still becomes a dreadful threat for social media activists. The study implementation about the phenomenon of internet troll in the spreading of hate speech is an attempt which could be done by researcher in supporting the effort to minimize the use of social media for negative purpose.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our deep gratitude to Professor Deddy Mulyana, for his patient guidance, enthusiastic encouragement and useful critiques of this research work. We would also like to thank Dr. Dadang Rahmat Hidayat, The Dean of Faculty of Communication Science Padjadjaran University for his advice in keeping our progress on schedule. Our grateful thanks are also extended to Mr. Atwar Bajari for his help and unlimited support. Finally, We wish to thank our family for their support and encouragement throughout my research.

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