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Institutionalizing self of microcelebrity; new social control mechanism by the new form of civil power

Romdhi Fatkhur Rozi.

Film and Television Department, Faculty of Humanities, University of Jember

romdhifr.sastra@unej.ac.id

Rachmah Ida

Social Science, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Airlangga University

rachmah.ida@fisip.unair.ac.id

Budi Irawanto

Media and Cultural Studies, Graduate School of Gadjah Mada University

birawanto@ugm.ac.id

Abstract. This article will investigate how a microcelebrity YouTuber named Rius Vernandes became a symbol for the birth of civil power in a digital society. His criticism vlog for Garuda Indonesia's business class services has drawn criticism from the airline, which has led to a legal case. Through the power of social media networks and YouTube, Rius Vernandes did what came to be called self-institutionalizing, by then breaking down the limits of social control through a new force; I am a YouTuber. This article uses an exploratory approach to the development of the case to the conclusion that the case was stopped reporting by related parties. Through a theoretical study of the technique of self-representation, this paper examines how the cultural logic of the celebrification process of Rius Vernandes, led to the "victory" of civil power. The phenomenon of micro-celebrity in this paper is assumed as the construction of identity and self image in front of peer-users, to get public sympathy and attention for the freedom of criticism. The exploration is emphasized on how the strategic steps taken by Rius Viernandes by placing themselves as part of a critical digital community. The case has become one of the contemporary phenomena of the revolutionary power of criticism, breaking the border of social control by the new form of civil power through the internet in the era of digital media.

Keywords. Microcelebrity, Civil Power, Institutionalizing Self, Social Control, YouTube

1. Introduction

YouTube is launched for the first time in 2005 and soon became the most popular site for video content creators around the world. By using the aggregator method, YouTube uses videos created by its users as a massive collection of alternative video shows via television. Burgess and Green state that YouTube is one of the most visited sites globally. Admiring the popularity of this site, more and more content creators are interested in uploading production videos according to the different types of content. One of the most created content is vlogging (video blogging) (Burgess & Green, 2009). With the evolution of computer-mediated communication and the arrival of the new virtual environments, there are potential implications for how the self may be conceptualized (Evans, 2012). Commentators in both the technology press and the popular media recognized it as something important and communication researchers soon follow (Soukup, 2014). The content creators who use the blogging video method are involved in grassroots communities in various parts of the world. This creator content network is also known as YouTubers, whose network seems like cross-country television networks. In social life, YouTube is often used to spread messages and information quickly on a large scale to their loyal fans at a relatively low cost (Purwatiningsih, 2022). They who are in the YouTubers network subscribe each other, visit (view/play) each other, and comment on each other. Their behaviour becomes a culture of digital literacy consumption as well as the largest participatory on an international scale.

The activities of the YouTubers in creating this content not only become a new form of contemporary entertainment, but also enable individuals to engage in narrative and identity formation practices. Chang refers to Beck considers the second modern stage of modernity, on the one hand, the radical proliferation of knowledge and its determinants and consequences, of social relations, institutional requisites, material interest, power structure, and religious/cultural identities, ironically incapacitates the reflective potential of individuals, group and organizations (Chang, 2017). When they documented their daily lives, as well as present themselves in front of the camera, YouTubers are involved in a process of building and presenting their identities via online. They also build dialogue and collaboration with fellow members of their community as well as the YouTube audiences. With an easy access to the technology and a very broad range of networks, these content creators indirectly have the opportunity to project themselves differently and their representation becomes a powerful new force to challenge social values and norms and encourage others to do so. Poletti and Rak in the *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online* explores the manners in which identity is constructed on the digital media (Poletti & Rak, 2014). Meanwhile, this article will show that YouTube is not only a tool to build self-identity, but also has a greater potential to change the norms and cognitive paradigms of society. The investigation will be strengthened by the practice of deconstructing the limits of the norm of criticism from the conservative version and then transforming into a more liberal and egalitarian way between public institutions and civil society.

One of YouTuber that is quite popular in Indonesia is Rius Vernandes. He became a public discussion especially after uploading a photo of his comments on Garuda Indonesia airline business class services. Rius highlighted the use of hand-written menu on a paper, which was considered not to represent how a business class should package their service for consumers. Rius's upload on his Instagram page sparked sharp comments from Garuda. The response from the airline finally led to a report in the realm of law. Shortly after that Rius then uploaded a video on his YouTube account entitled; "What Actually Happened Behind the Garuda Business Class Handwriting Menu". This upload immediately triggered many

comments and public support. Wherever photos are found, and when taking the decision and action in society, they are much influenced on what are seen. Based upon this realm, they have already become a part of community art which forms the visual culture (Kusrini, 2015).

Rius's upload on his YouTube page, triggered many video posts from other creator content. Most of them gave comments about the case or just simply re-uploaded news that had aired on television. Many creators content that made this case as a commodity due to the controversy that arises. They act within the framework of economic motivation (looking for viewers and getting advertisements), as well as personal motivation, in the form of full support for the fair resolution of the case. The case became viral, it caused placing the Garuda airline as a reporter, in the position of 'cornered'. Many points of thought of netizen who feel that Garuda's actions are too excessive in responding to the criticism expressed by Rius Vernandes. When the case became more viral, the Garuda Workers Union finally withdrew the case report, and chose to solve it through the family route. At the conflict resolution meeting, Garuda Indonesia's Managing Director, I Gusti Ngurah Ashkara Danadiputra stated that he would provide an opportunity for Rius Vernandes to visit Garuda's facilities and give Rius a first-class flight. Garuda Director actually emphasized to hear negative reviews from Rius for the sake of service improvement (Sihombing, 2019).

As a YouTuber with more than five hundred thousand subscribers, Rius Vernandes has a considerable influence to bring the audience to a situation of open public discussion through comments and other posts on various social media pages made by netizens. The concept of micro celebrity, can be offered to explain the phenomenon of Rius Vernandes. This concept is expected to explain how the distribution of this issue has ballooned and won wide public attention. In addition, this study aims to explore how the concept of micro celebrity develops in the phenomenon of youth culture in Indonesia. Celebrities are known for associating with non-for-profit cause and social advocacy to bring about behavioral change (Abdurrahaman et.al, 2021). The researchers will also prove how the identity of grassroots micro-celebrities is formed and manifested as resistance to the establishment of celebrity media such as television in the midst of the convergence era. Besides, this research is also directed to diagnose the changing landscape of media use in the most contemporary era, and its influence on socio-cultural change in Indonesia.

The study in this research builds and expands the modality theory developed by Pierre Bourdieu. In his writings *The Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu stated several forms of capital namely, cultural capital, social capital, and economic capital (conversions). The modality theory is expected to be able to explain how YouTuber's strength in the media convergence discourses in Indonesia. The findings in this study also do not rule out the possibility of criticizing Bourdieu's views that are considered obsolete or inappropriate when dealing with changing times in the context of the development of information technology. Especially, because these three capitals actually are closely related to the context of power and the presence of the internet, change the process of controlling capital.

The theoretical benefit in this research is to develop, expand, and criticize studies that have developed in the field of media convergence, as well as expose the intersection between youth culture and contemporary media. While the practical benefits of this research are to develop and apply studies that are relevant to cultural changes in the use of media. In addition, this research is also expected to provide benefits in the form of an increase in media literature and communication studies in general.

The explanation of the background of the research is the starting point of this study, so that researchers will connect between the battle of power discourse in the era of media

convergence and how it influences the context of media use. The search will try to answer some of the problem formulations as follows: (1) how does YouTube build its micro-celebrity identity? (2) how is the discourse of the struggle for micro-celebrity power in the midst of industrial conglomerate contestation and media convergence in Indonesia? (3) How does micro-celebrity as part of youth culture give a change to Indonesia's socio-cultural landscape?

2. Methodology

This article will explore digital activism from an Indonesian YouTuber named Rius Vernandez. The approach used in this study is a virtual ethnography developed by Christine Hine, namely by following someone (via their digital account on YouTube), viewing dialogs in the discussion tab and the comments column, connectivity, and narratives that show from the videos produced by the content creator (Hine, 2012). The use of literature review and previous research is emphasized in the literature that can support explaining the problem of cultural studies on the phenomenon of youth culture and micro celebrity YouTubers of Indonesia: YouTuber's resistance against mainstream mass media capitalism in the contestation of media convergence; the use of click bait, hashtags, and other techniques to build, execute and optimize the acquisition of views on the YouTube page, increase the number of subscribers, and some issues and cultural studies that are relevant to this research.

This research uses a qualitative approach with explorative research methods. The concept of microcelebrity YouTuber is expected to be able to reach a broader conceptual map of youth culture. This explorative research is a preliminary study with the aim of getting an overview for other research topics that will be explored in more depth. With this explorative research model, researchers can explore the main problem in detail and can develop hypotheses.

The data collection to be carried out in this study uses in-depth observations and literature reviews through a review of various sources of books, journals, and other academic texts. Virtual ethnography with video content, comments and other aspects investigation on the YouTube page as a basis for searching media convergence studies and reading of changes in the socio-cultural community. To get as much data and information as possible the researcher will compile and combine primary and secondary data in order to complement each other.

3. Discussion

This study departs from the text of Ross Tapsell's journal entitled: Platform Convergence in Indonesia - Challenge and Opportunities For Media Freedom. In his writings Tapsell highlighted the challenges and opportunities for media freedom in Indonesia in the era of media convergence. Some of the results of his interviews suggest that the media in Indonesia are actually ready to change the new landscape of the information distribution channel. But the context of media convergence in Indonesia has not been separated from the snares of the conglomeration of the mass media industry. This happens because the owners of large media still control the popular information channels, which were originally printed and electronic TV / Radio, now also including the internet. Even the strength of private capital is also moving ahead of the government in the sector of providing infrastructure for internet access in areas other than Java-Sumatra (Tapsell, 2015).

But there is an interesting statement in Tapsell's writings made by Ignatius Haryanto. In the article, Haryanto expressed his unrest and hopes about the space for community-based media that can survive the era of convergence, primarily to create media independence and new political forces outside the dominant mass media conglomeration which is in fact simultaneously owned by national politicians. Haryanto's statement brought researchers to the

idea of discussing the dynamics of groups of content creators on content aggregator pages such as YouTube and how their resistance is amidst the current phenomenon of media convergence (Tapsell, 2015).

On YouTube, there are currently several young Indonesian circles that routinely produce audio-visual content. Google through YouTube issued funds (salary for YouTuber) millions of billions of rupiah for the content created by them. These funds are issued according to the advertisements that appear on each content that has been released. As a very fluid group, the YouTubers are actually connected to each other. This can be seen from some viral contents on YouTube, then commented on each other with the new content (which is also viral), and so on. In some of their video releases, they also present other YouTubers by inviting and creating content together (collaboration). Their channel has millions of subscribers, most of their subscribers are a combination of millennial generation (generation Y), and especially those born after the 2000s, generation Z (alpha generation).

The growing circle of Indonesian YouTubers is actually dominated by some quite popular content creators. They have a special approach / certain characters (genre) in the content that is displayed. Example vloggers (daily life), gamers, talk shows, information (news - citizen journalist or reupload and news modification and other informative shows), music videos / song covers, reviews of products and services, various life skill tutorials / life practice and others. In the widest and most general sense, thinking through the meaning of the various affective trajectories that emerge from this system we can call celebrity ecologies underlines that the projection of the self – the actual construction of persona – identifies the power of a kind of individualization / anthropomorphization that allows ideas / movements / issues to migrate through cultures (David Marshall, 2013). Some of the content creators also ‘seemed’ trying to do social climbing by participating in commenting on content that video is currently viral.

When this is examined, the phenomenon that occurs among YouTuber is like what happened in the television industry. When there is a show with a high rating, television stations then compete to participate in discussing / producing similar shows. In the context of the internet, trending topic is attached. With millions of loyal viewers (subscriber), a YouTuber has enormous influence, at least in the context of alternative viewing besides television. The term influent is also inherent in those content creators who have hundreds of thousands of subscribers.

Indonesian YouTuber currently also produces the content of its shows very seriously. They do not work alone, but in small or medium teams consisting of 2-10 people. They involve individuals who serve as cameramen, art directors, script writers, soundmen and others like a large production house. Although the income earned is quite decent, but the capital they spend is also not small. Some of them even offer special effects, animation, and green screen techniques, including lighting and very serious shooting techniques. This creativity certainly cannot be ruled out, given that most Indonesian YouTubers are not graduates of formal audio-visual vocational schools. They are the generation who are actively learning independently to develop their technical abilities from video tutorials that are widely spread on YouTube and internet literacy in general.

A lot of YouTubers are now becoming very popular, and television is picking it up in some of the shows they produce. Invite them to talk shows, or cover them in the news. What was viral on YouTube was followed by popularity on television. "YouTube, more than TV", is an aphorism which is quite unique among the audience of this site. This does not necessarily make you a celebrity on screen. Even now, celebrities who were initially popular on television also began routinely creating content on YouTube. The motivation must be further investigated.

Is it material gain (income from advertising), or maintaining popularity on a path that is very close to contemporary generations (internet via YouTube, social media, and others). Some celebrities in Indonesia are quite famous as YouTuber for example; Manji (Anji), Deddy Corbuzier, Jessica Iskandar, Nia Ramadhani and others.

This rapid change in the landscape of media use and selection is quite unique. In the future generation Z will take over the world from generation Y. Generation Z as the latest generation is now around 20 years old. The era of technology information has made them versatile, entrepreneurial minded, very individual but also at the same time global. This can happen because access to technology and information is extremely fast. In addition, the character of generation Z is not constrained by the paradigm of thinking of the previous generation as happened in the dynamics of relations between generations X and Y in the previous period. The generation Z creativity paradigm in the mass media certainly also influences the ways they using and choosing media in the future. This means that there is a social structure that drives changes in information consumption patterns. The post-television community is increasingly familiar with the choices of shows available on the internet, because it gives them the flexibility to choose what type of information they want. The level of public taste and trust in a particular source of information becomes very fluid, no longer fixated on the construction of large conservative and formal media institutions.

The latest generation resistance amid the phenomenon of media convergence is very interesting to study. Tapsell in his writing is still struggling with the conglomeration of mainstream media and political affiliations of investors. While on the other hand, apparently the presence of generation Z gives a new color in the power struggle for the struggle for the public. Dialectics between community-based media such as YouTube and mainstream mass media with the power of large investors, becomes a small explosion about the phenomenon of grassroots social power. In the case of Rius Vernandes, we can see a paradigm shift (shifting paradigm) on criticism and comments delivered through informal channels, changing the landscape of formal criticism that has been impressed conservative, slow and often not on target.

Making a vlog is actually like making a contemporary autobiography that puts individuals into the process of documenting their daily lives. This documentation later became their identity building in cyberspace. Rius Vernandes in most of his vlogs produced content about airplane travel reviews to various destinations both local or international route. He told his experience of going to various places with the emphasis on how the services of various airlines in each trip. Although the purpose of the vlog is to review how the performance of airline services, the presence of Rius Vernandes in the videos uploaded is closely related to the facts of self-disclosure and construction, a process of self-representation.

Self-construction is carried out by describing that Rius Vernandes is a traveler who often travels to various destinations and enjoys several privileges that may not be accessible to many parties. This preference includes access to business classes on various airlines. With this description, the construction of Rius Vernandes is a classy traveler of course easily formed. Scarcity of access to business class services makes his comments something that has been eagerly awaited by the lay audience. It cannot be denied through various shooting techniques and editing processes, Rius Vernandes can easily show the audience how he wants to be seen. Such is the process of self-representation that is very multi-dimensional because it no longer only presents itself, but they also visually construct concepts about themselves in front of the camera. His comments and criticisms lead to the representation that a Rius Vernandes is an observer, critic, as well as a window for the public to see and assess the services of an airline.

The construction of the YouTube vlogger identity can be interpreted as what Robert Ezra Park and Erving Goffman said as the construction and performance of the mask. In his *Race and Culture* (1950), Park stated that the purpose of the word person itself means to mask. Goffman also reinforced this argument in his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Goffman said that the mask is "who we are truer, the self we want". YouTubers as content creators are actually in the process of building their masks, namely the conception of themselves that they really want through performance on their content, or through visual transformation done through the camera. They are communicating the desired identity, in a full and planned awareness (Goffman, 1956).

Most studies on identity have explored how online and offline identities are created, formed, chosen, discovered by individuals or authors / producers / content creators. This means that a self-representation is basically constructed (Bridger, 2009). The process of documenting or communicating the self is what form identity (Bourdieu, 1986) (Richardson, 2018), as a process, including writing, making films, and posting, bringing subjects or themselves into a certain figure. An individual content creator manifests his identity through audio visual performance and through the process consciously. Park and Goffman argue that we are all involved in the performance process and manifest ourselves through the roles we play in society. In the context of digital society, the role in this society is reflected in how we deliver, presenting our role in the environment of digital society.

The space where creative content constructs itself in front of the camera is very important because digital technology like YouTube invites self-exploration. The concept of Networked Digital Media according to Meikle and Young (2012) invites multiplicity, heterogeneity, and fragmentation in identity performance (Turkle, 1997). The technology becomes an opportunity to define, as well as redefine the concept of self, because the technology allows one to present himself with more multi-mediation, using audio-visual and text components (Papacharissi, 2002). YouTube, in particular, allows individuals to experiment with themselves, and document ongoing (self) transformation, through audio visual. Many studies have described the ongoing process of constructing identity online using the "mirror" metaphor (Raun, 2015).

Tobias Raun (2015) introduces the concept of 'mirror' in his study of transgender vlogs on YouTube (Raun, 2015). Raun described vlogging activities as "transformative media for working, producing and exploring themselves". Raun argues that vlogs act as mirrors that allow an individual to try out and assume various identities. He wrote, the mirroring function of the vlog "invites YouTuber to choose the desired form of identity / representation, constantly assumes and evaluates himself as a dish (commodity), and continues to try to find a variety of different styles (Butler, 1990), both pose or appearance". In his study of transgender vlogs, Raun writes that "vlogs seem to serve an important function in the transition process, and are an important part of the process of self-discovery, functioning as a testing ground for experiments and manifestations of (new) identity". The mirror (vlog) gives individuals a place / space to build and construct their masks (identity), and opportunities to see reflections and look for masks (identities) as appropriate.

The main point of a vlog as a mirror is the fact that the content on YouTube is more or less like a conventional mirror with a reflective surface. On the YouTube site, vlogs always engage audiences, where they not only watch collections of videos that have been uploaded, but also respond. Goffman asserted that there is always an audience involved in every performance construction of self-identity. Raun believes that on YouTube "the need to bring out one's identity is in line with the need to connect and communicate". YouTube as a digital media

network whose collection of videos comes from users (user generated content), inherently socially. They open themselves to participation (Sauter, 2014), form a community and through that community interact through likes, subscribe, and comment. Michael Strangelove refers to YouTube as a social space, "as a domain of self-expression, community, and a space of public recognition" (Strangelove, 2010).

The presence of the audience and the existence of the community are very important in the process of identity and representation construction, because they provide feedback and stimulus, while legitimizing the identity presented. According to Raun, a vlog is an opportunity "to see one's experiences and thoughts reflected through others". Raun identified that, when there was an audience watching their vlog, the presence of the audience was enough to confirm their identity. There is recognition from the audience about their presence, which is evidenced by the interest in watching uploads of a show. Raun writes that a vlog can be "an act of validating an individual and social action to get recognition ". Not only that, study of vlogs criticized by Rius Vernandes in this article embodying and projecting everyday life which collectively challenges social norms in the method of criticism.

Bourdieu in *The Forms of Capital* states three forms of capital namely, cultural capital, social capital, and economic capital. The modality theory is closely related to the context of power especially through the presence of the internet. The grassroots community that controls the modality can deconstruct social order. Their criticism when supported by cultural capital, social capital, and economic capital in the most contemporary form is able to gain power over social control.

To dissect about the discourse over the power of micro celebrity amid the contestation of industrial conglomerations and media convergence in Indonesia, it is appropriate to refer to Michael Foucault's thoughts about power and will. Foucault highlighted aspects of power that were born from a relationship. He stated that power can be everywhere and is owned by anyone, not only the people in power. In the current era of information technology, ownership of access is very open, making opportunities for power distributed to anyone. In Foucault's thought when access to power can be owned by anyone, it should be the basis of awareness to place oneself in the middle of the power map.

The new strength in the landscape of the map of social control power that Rius Vernandes built was a form of resistance to a conservative social system that was fairly slow and often not on target. The conservative social system, for example, provides space for input and criticism from airline users through suggestion boxes that can be accessed on Garuda airline services. This also applies to other public service systems. Such a mechanism, however, does not put the customer in full control of how the criticism will be acted upon. Especially, because the impact that arise from such a mechanism is hidden in a closed system.

Through open spaces such as YouTube and broad social media, criticism can roll, develop and get an open response from the digital media user community. Opportunities that were not had in the previous era, made the post-television community a free place to express their aspirations. The YouTuber network that commented on each other, chimed in with new video uploads related to the Rius case became a new institution of public service control mechanisms. Rius did what in this study referred to as institutionalizing self, which is to make he together with other YouTuber networks as an institution that holds the role of social control. Actions can change boundaries in social control mechanisms. The criticism delivered by Rius became a portrait of the victory of civil power. When a micro-celebrity individual gets access to technology and digital space widely, he holds social control, breaking the boundaries of conservative criticism.

This research also takes place as research that can be perfected. When the power over freedom of information has been seized - marked by changes in the selection and use of media, it means that power over culture has also been owned by groups outside the mainstream mass media. In this context it means that the strength of youth culture is part of a large paradigm in the development of media convergence. Further research on this study can take the theory of subculture released by sociologists from Chicago University in Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) to explain how the process of cultural change occurs. At least through these three theoretical perspectives on youth culture studies, namely functionalism, Marxist new-subcultural theory, and postmodernism. The postmodernism perspective states that social behavior is no longer shaped by class, gender, ethnic and other social differences. The search for youth culture theories in this postmodernist perspective will intersect with the thoughts of Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard and others who are closely attached to post-structuralist thought groups. So that subsequent research will of course also be related to discourse analysis studies as well as critical discourse analysis within the framework of cultural studies.

4. Conclusion

Criticism carried out by Rius Vernandes, shows that users use YouTube as a transformative tool and mirror to document, create, and present their identities online. Through online media Rius Vernandes can change and shape the desired identity about him, and this movement reaffirms the "artificial" image of the real and authentic self, and challenges the conception that the "artificial" image is "fake" and not authentic. Finally, this case study explores the role of creator content on YouTube as individuals who can, build and present their identities and play a critical role in their social environment. YouTube becomes a vehicle in which people can build their own identity, and thus at the same time create a community that can work together to challenge social norms critically and openly.

Institutionalizing self in this study, takes the position of understanding social control by individuals involved in the YouTube network. This is done through the optimization of YouTube features, to act like a new institution of public service control mechanisms. This action changes the boundaries in conservative social control mechanisms that are slow, less massive and often not on target. In this study, researchers formulated several hypotheses, including; (1) there is a very close relationship between the emergence of micro-celebrity phenomena in youth culture in Indonesia and the changing landscape of media mastery in the era of convergence. (2) The identity built by micro celebrity on YouTube is an identity that emerges from the grassroots, not formed due to the role of industry conservative mass media such as television (3) the presence of micro celebrity has an impact on social change, especially on cultural issues, and ways to use and choose media.

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