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Hoax, Media, and Public Policy

(The case study of the discourse of cigarettes price rising in
Tribunnews.com)

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Abstract

On mid-August 2016, the discourse of cigarettes price raise to Rp. 50.000, - shocked the public in Indonesia. This issue became a trending topic both in real world and also in media as well as social media. People were divided into two major groups; they were those who supported the discourse and those of which against it. The emergence of pro and con in regard of this issue is a common situation. The interesting idea in this issue is the debate on the price raise of cigarette which was initiated from the inaccurate news in several online medias. This research will use the semiotic analysis of Jean Baudrillard. This research observed some articles in tribunnews.com. According to rank website Alexa.com (update of August 2016), tribunnews.com which is the subsidiary of Kompas Gramedia group, placed second in the news category in Indonesia. This research found that a neutral position to be taken by mass media in responding to any controversial phenomenon is utopist. Another conclusion, hoax is capable of becoming a powerful instrument to smoothen the public policy planning which previously possessed the potential of causing controversial issue.

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1. Introduction

On mid-August 2016, the discourse of cigarettes price raise to Rp. 50.000, - shocked the public in Indonesia. This issue became a trending topic both in real world and also in media as well as social media. People were divided into two major groups; they were those who supported the discourse and those of which against it.

The emergence of pro and con in regard of this issue is a common situation. Referring to the Data and Information Center of Indonesian Health Ministry, up to 2013 the number of Indonesian smoker that is above 10 years old reached 48.4 million. According to the Ministry of Health, the number is equal to two third of Indonesian population.

The interesting idea in this issue is the debate on the price raise of cigarette which was initiated from the inaccurate news in several online medias. The news referred to the survey result of *Center for Health Economics and Policy Studies*, Community Health Faculty (Fakultas Kesehatan Masyarakat= FKM) of University of Indonesia. The survey reported that there were 76% of total smoking respondents will quit smoking if the price of cigarette increase to Rp. 50.000, - or more.

Plenty mass media have broadcasted the issue with different headline and point of view. Some of the headlines implied that the government has agreed to raise the cigarette in near future. Whereas in the complete news, there was no single statement from the government justified the price increase.

After being broadcasted, the news was then distributed through social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Since the headlines were made as if the government was increasing the cigarette price, the links toward related news were shared by many social media users. Consequently, for those who did not read the article completely— those who only read the headline— would directly assume that the cigarette price was really going to be raised.

There was numerous discourse developed in the society causing different main stream mass media started to be entangled and gone with the flow. Some of those media have followed it up by publishing news as if confirming the cigarette price raise. In fact, the government themselves has declared that they have not planned to proceed the discourse yet. Even there were a number of statements from politicians and government official that support or is against the discourse, that could not necessarily be considered as the official statement of the government for it is not based on the related policy.

The phenomenon shows that the mass media cannot be free from the hoax that were already widely spread in the society. Instead of clarifying the spread information and issue, more mass media that even support the hoax which resulting it to transform into an information based on true fact.

In the current media industry, the circulation of untrue information cannot be regarded as coincidental event or merely a human error result that involved the media people. This is due to the fact that some information are produced and distributed to the society merely to support certain interests.

According to Vincent Mosco (1996) in *The Political Economy of Communication*, the communication resource like mass media is closely related to the power relation. In this understanding, the information production and distribution by the media is always supported by economical reasons and other interests to influence the choice, way of thinking and the society behaviour. Beside that, according to Holiday (2012) in *Trust Me I'm Lying: The Tactics and Confessions of a Media Manipulator*, the information manipulation is a common conduct in the online media (blog, social media and news portal) to achieve and pursue certain interest.

Based on the certain scepticism, the emergence of hoax on the raise of cigarette price to Rp. 50.000, - cannot be considered as fortuitous event. Especially after the debate began to subside, on September 30, 2016 the government through the Ministry of Finance issued the Decree of Indonesian Finance Ministry Number 147/PMK.010/2016 on the Third Change of Decree of Finance Ministry Number 179/PKM.011/2012. The decree declares that starting from January 1, 2016 the government will enact the new tax regulation regarding the latest amount of the tax.

Based on the regulation it is stated that the custom tax should not be lower than the prevailing tax and also the retail price should not be lower than the minimum retail price per cigarette or per applicable gram. Based on the given calculation, the tax increase will reach 11 to 15 percent. However, although a number of media have reported the issue, yet the public excitement was not as enormous as the initial broadcast regarding the price increase of cigarette which might reach Rp. 50.000, -

Yet, whether or not the discourse of cigarette price to Rp. 50.000,- was deliberately emerged to smoothen the actual price raise discourse is not the main concern of this research.

Based on the aforementioned description, this research focuses on how a fake information process being produced and distributed through various channels to raise a public discourse, and how it then transformed as if it was a real fact in order to affect the process of public policy making.

The research focused on news portal, Tribunnews.com. It was chosen for based on the rating agency website, alexa.com, this site is the number one in Indonesia for the category of news site. Beside that, this site also owns regional network that makes the visit and information rate shared higher. In other word, the more networks possesses by Tribunnews.com in various regions, the more a discourse is able to develop into a public opinion which on the next stage will affect the government in enacting a decision.

The object of this research is news related to the increase of cigarette price to Rp. 50.000, - which were produced and distributed by Tribunnew.com during August to September 2016.

2. Hyperreality

The growth of a hoax into a public discourse shows the symptom of hyperreality. Jean Baudillard (1983) described hyperreality as a condition of current society where there is only a slight and even no difference between the real and imaginary fact. The thought is based on the contemporary society which is no longer dominated by product yet by media which persistently present various distorted contents that feel more real than the reality itself.

To describe about hyperreality, Baudrillard imposes the term simulation and simulacrum. Simulation is the duplication of processes and systems cooperation in real life. In other word, simulation is the removal of boundary between the real ones and the fake, or the real ones with the imaginary. Whereas simulacrum is the copies which do not poses their original forms.

The cyberspace defines everything in the form of codes. According to Baudrillard in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, the codes have provided the opportunity of an ideal reproduction of a certain object. In other word, codes are able to remove any real thing and create a new reality which is more real than the reality itself.

In the context of cigarette price increase that reached Rp. 50.000, - per pack, there was a simulation process occur. When the *Center for Health Economics and Policy Studies*, Community Health Faculty of University of Indonesia reported the survey result that 76% of smoking respondents will quit smoking if the price reaches Rp. 50.000, - or more, the report was counterfeited through a headline that was not based on the fact which created a perception that the government was really indeed going to raise the cigarette price to Rp.50.000,-. The simulation became more complete and convincing when the society acquired links from social media to get through the news merely by reading the headline without accessing the link and read the complete news. Nevertheless, the article did not actually convey any statement from the government in relation with their policy to raise the cigarette price to Rp. 50.000, -

When the information was massively widespread through social media, the wider scope of society emerged a perception that the government was indeed going to raise the cigarette price. Yet this perception was not fully supported with the massive news in the mass media to counter the information . Instead, the media captured that negative rumour and helped the spreading of public opinion, both pro and cons toward the discourse. Therefore, the society started to shape a new reality that the cigarette price would going to increase in near future. This reality is not the actual one which matches to be called as hyperreality.

3. Research Methodology

Ibrahim and Akhmad (2014) cited several sociologist statements about media significant functions in the socio-cultural environment. The functions take role as the former, reflector, representative, teacher, ritual and as God.

In relation with this study, the researcher believes that the main function of media viewed from the growth of public discourse on the cigarette price raise to Rp. 50.000, - is the constructor and representative. According to Weber (2002) the constructor function makes the media to own the ability to create a social construction. In other word, Weber consider the media as the agent of social change that takes place within the society.

While functioning the representative, the broadcasted news is considered as the cultural product. When a particular news is viewed as a cultural product, it is very significant to see how the media produces and exchanges the meaning through Language practice. Although the media conduct an exchange of meaning during a news preparation, but when it is already broadcasted, the media is no longer poses the authority to direct how people make sense of the news.

When the readers have absolute authority to interpret the news, the role of language has become very significant as the media in which a meaning is produced. Language acts as the symbol to represent meaning by which the agent attempts to deliver. According to Stuart Hall (1997) language has function as a symbol to represent the concept, idea and feeling which enable people to interpret the meaning.

In this study, the researcher consider the Tribunnews owns a massive power to facilitate social construction and representation processes. There are two reasons: First, during the emergence of cigarette price raise to Rp.50.000, -, the Tribunnews.com occupied the third position of the most visited news website in Indonesia according to rating agency, alexa.com With that position, quantitatively the Tribunnews posses a great power to lead public opinion. Second, the Tribunnews.com owns 30 networks in different regions. These networks not only supply the most popular and interesting news from various area but also own a potential to attract as many visitors as possible. With a broad network, the high quality news are able to be spread to wide society within short time.

During August 2016, the Tribunnews.com broadcasted 14 news related to the cigarette price raise discourse which might reach the amount of Rp.50.000,- news were included in the topic of "The Cigarette Price Raised" With all those news being put in a particular topic, each time the readers click a news, they would be directed to read .other news which included in the topic of "The Cigarette Price Raised",

That 14 news would then be analysed employing semiotic analysis of Roland Barthes. This analysis was used due to the fact that news broadcast or the first reality packaging which was an empiric fact had become

the second reality (news) contained a complicated philosophy that behind every story there is often some mysterious fact. That is what this research tried to investigate.

Technique used in the semiotic analysis is the syntagmatic technique. The syntagmatic technique is achieved by historically dissecting news broadcasted by the Tribunnews.com which included in the topic of "The Cigarette Price Raised" and broadcasted during August 19, 2016 to August 25, 2016. Syntagmatic technique is able to reveal the possibility of Tribunnews.com in concealing the fact that the price increase to Rp. 50.000, - is merely a hoax.

4. Data Analysis

During August 19, 2016 to August 25, 2016 the Tribunnews.com published 14 articles in a similar topic entitled "The Cigarette Price Raised". The topic was chosen to ease the readers in tracing the complete news related to the discourse. The article's titles will be shown in the Table number one in the next page.

In the first title *The Cigarette Price is Planned to Raise Reaching Rp. 50.000, - per Pack, Smoker Fear of Becoming Poor* that was broadcasted on August 19, 2016, linguistically, the title in the passive form seems to cover the fact that the raise to Rp.50.000, - was only a hoax. The title does not imply the source of the discourse, whether it was from the government, society or netizen. In the contrary, the clause of *Smoker Fear of Becoming Poor* sounds very hyperbolic and exaggerating as if the price rising will directly have impact on the poverty increase in the society. In other word, the title creates a perception that the society is afraid of the discourse whereas the news source was not clear, inaccurate and not credible.

The reason behind the title looks more clearly when the readers read the complete article. On the first page, out of seven pages of the article, there is no statement referring the official source as the basis to increase the cigarette price to Rp.50.000, - The information can be found only on the later pages. With the news presentation in which the content is divided into several parts, the effect is it is possible that readers do not read the complete article, this can be due to the reader himself and the external factor. The internal factor might be the hesitance to click the next pages, while the external factors might be in the form of internet connection problem and others. If the readers do not read the article completely, their understanding toward the article must be different from the real fact.

The diction employed in this title use the readers experience which previously have been exposed to the price raise discourse on cigarette broadcasted in social media. Based on that experience, the chance for readers to click the information is getting bigger. This is in line with Roland Barthes (1972) who emphasizes the interaction between text and personal as well as cultural experience of the users.

Table I**Articles Title with Topic “The Cigarette Price Raised” Uploaded by Online Media, Tribunnews.com**

Titles	Broadcast Date
The Cigarette Price is Planned to Raise Reaching Rp. 50.000, - per Pack, Smoker Fear of Becoming Poor	August 19 th , 2016
Shocking News! Cigarette Price Tag Showing Rp. 134.000, - per Pack	August 20 th , 2016
Misbakhun Suspected Foreign Interest on Cigarette Price Raise to Rp.50.000, -	August 20 th , 2016
Splash! the Cigarette Price Raise up to Rp. 50.000, - in September 2016 Started From These	August 20 th , 2016
Widely Spread on Messenger Group, The Latest Cigarette Price per September 2016! Terrifying	August 20 th , 2016
YLKI: Cigarette Price Is Raising, Poverty Is Dropping	August 22 nd , 2016
When President Jokowi, Minister Susi and Cak Lontong Became the “Victim” of Netizen	August 22 nd , 2016
The Cigarette Price Raise Creates New Business Chances	August 22 nd , 2016
Tribunnews Polling: Do You Agree on the Cigarette Price Reaching Rp.50.000, -? Netter Answers	August 24 th , 2016
Are you Sure Cigarette Price Reaching Rp.50.000, - Will Initiate Mass Employment Termination? See the Tribunnew Polling	August 24 th , 2016
Cigarette Price Reaches Rp.50.000, -, See 11 Countries with the Most Expensive Cigarette Price	August 25 th , 2016
61 Million People Are Restless Due to Cigarette Price Reaching Rp.50.000, -	Agustus 25, 2016
500 Thousands of Tobacco Farmer to be Unemployed Upon Cigarette Price Reaching Rp.50.000, -	Agustus 25, 2016
58% Tribunnews Polling Respondents Believe that Cigarette Price Raise to Rp.50.000,- Will Help to Overcome the Poverty	Agustus 25, 2016

Similar with the first article, the second article entitled *Shocking News! Cigarette Price Tag Showing Rp. 134.000, - per Pack*, there is an attempt to lead the readers into a perception that the cigarette price raise is a true and accurate information. This is marked firstly with the word choices in the title which makes it sounds very bias. The price tag of cigarette showing the amount of Rp.134.000, - per pack shows that the price is indeed going to increase yet it does not imply that the price will remain. With all these words of choice, the writer as if placed himself as an individual that did not know that the discourse of raising the cigarette price to

Rp 50.000, - was a total hoax. Whereas in journalism, journalist must provide real fact, instead of speculative and inaccurate information.

Beside the title, the speculative information given was also in the form of supporting images as presented in figure 1 below.

Figure 1
Supporting image for a news entitled
Shocking News! Cigarette Price Tag Showing Rp. 134.000, - per Pack



Source :Tribunnews.com

This supporting image by Tribunnews.com was taken from Facebook. Although it was stated that the image was taken from Facebook, the website did not mention the account owner who uploaded the image. One thing for sure, it is very common that information shared through social media is not always accurate. On the other hand, the writer also convinced that the image was made through an editing process.

Viewed from journalism work ethic, the information shared in the news cannot be fully blamed since the object taken in the photo is a social media phenomenon which had become a trending topic. Yet, that is contradicted with the regulation stated on Press Regulation Number 40 Year 1999. On article 6-part c it is stated that the Indonesian press play the role to develop public opinion based on real and accurate information. Thus, when the developed discourse originated from a source which cannot be guaranteed its accuracy, it can be assumed there is a violation occurred.

Next, in the third article entitled *Misbakhun Suspected Foreign Interest on Cigarette Price Raise to Rp.50.000, -* shows the impartiality of a member of the Commission XI of the Indonesian House of Representatives, Misbakhun, from election area East Java 2 toward the discourse of the high increase of

cigarette price. His disagreement was presented through a statement “ suspected foreign interest on cigarette price raise to Rp.50.000,-

The article shows that media has given a room to be used as image formation place. This image formation at least can be found in the citation of the source person:” *There is political path for me except to fight for the tobacco farmer and labours for cigarette industry within my election area. As the citizen, they deserve of a better living which must be protected and guarantee by this country in equal way,*” he ensured.

The citation brought in the news created a perception that Misbakhun is a hero that is ready to do anything for the interest of tobacco farmers. The perception disparaged the fact that the price raise to Rp.50.000, - is not accountable. Therefore, it shows that a fake information yet getting lots of attention from the media can be used for certain interests.

After several attempts to cover the fact that the discourse of raising the cigarette price to Rp.50.000, - was a hoax, from the fourth article entitled “Splash ! the Cigarette Price Raise up to Rp. 50.000, - in September 2016 Started Now,” that the Tribunnews.com started to reveal the real fact of the discourse. In the article, the Tribunnews.com tried to reveal a good news regarding the raise in cigarette price was initiated from the activity agenda entitled *3rd Indonesian Health Economics Association (InaHEA) Congress* which took place on July 28, 2016 in Jogjakarta. From the agenda, online media Kompas.com published a news entitled *What If the Cigarette Cost More Than Rp.50.000, -?* This broadcast had become a viral and the reference of bloggers. Further they broadcasted the information with different title, which give an impression that the raise of cigarette price on September 2016 is unavoidable.

Yet this explanation had become irrelevant after few hours later on the same day, the Tribunnews broadcasted their fifth article entitled” *Widely Spread on Messenger Group, The Latest Cigarette Price per September 2016! Terrifying*” Again in the broadcast the title used create a perception that the price raise on September 2016 is for sure. This occurred especially because the article did not mention the credibility of the information source regarding the raise on cigarette price by September 2016. That was greatly supported by the line on first paragraph saying that: *The latest cigarette price that has become information chain in messenger group made the smokers worry. Even there some of them planning to purchase cigarette as whole seller, Saturday (20/8/2016).* The diction employed in first paragraph did not contain any signifier to show that the discourse to raise the cigarette price to Rp.50.000,- cannot be proven the originality. Instead, the sentence emphasizing the perception that the raise on cigarette price to Rp.50.000, - on September 2016 cannot be avoided anymore.

Other similar news broadcasting as already presented in the first five articles which already being examined were to continue the use of this diction and method, some of them are *YLKI: Cigarette Price Is*

Raising, Poverty Is Dropping (August 22nd, 2016), When President Jokowi, Minister Susi and Cak Lontong Became the “Victim” of Netizen (August 22nd, 2016), The Cigarette Price Raise Creates New Business Chances (August 22nd, 2016), Tribunnews Polling: Do You Agree on the Cigarette Price Reaching Rp.50.000, -? Netter Answers (August 24th, 2016), Are you Sure Cigarette Price Reaching Rp.50.000, - Will Initiate Mass Employment Termination? See the Tribunnew Polling (August 24th, 2016), Cigarette Price Reaches Rp.50.000, -, See 11 Countries with the Most Expensive Cigarette Price (August 25th. 2016), 61 Million People Are Restless Due to Cigarette Price Reaching Rp.50.000, - (August 25th, 2016), and 500 Thousands of Tobacco Farmer to be Unemployed Upon Cigarette Price Reaching Rp.50.000, - (August 25th, 2016), and 58% Tribunnews Polling Respondents Believe that Cigarette Price Raise to Rp.50.000,- Will Help to Overcome the Poverty. Those titles employed for the articles mostly contain absurd meaning yet as if try to lead the opinion and perception that the cigarette price will definitely increase started from September 2016.

With such way titles, eventually the society perception had been formed that the raise of cigarette price is undeniable and unavoidable fact. Meanwhile the fact that such information was hoax could barely see in the society. Although other articles of Tribunnews.com stated that the plan was not real, but the statement was not mention clearly on the title. Whereas in cyber society culture nowadays has emerged the tendency of society to draw personal conclusion merely based on the news titles without even reading it completely. That way, eventually the emerged reality in the society is no longer the real one yet things that are made by the media.

5. Hoax and Public Policy

Since the reformation era, Indonesian press has undergone a major change. The growth of mass media has been greatly increasing compared to new order era. Beside the increase of the internet use in the society, media growth is also due to the issuance of Law Number 40 Year 1999 on the Press which provides the freedom to preach all events without any worry of intimidation and banishment from the ruling regime.

The warrant has caused mass media become more active in publishing variety of events and facts. Although most of the time the information published is inaccurate yet it still draws public interest, that way the media will put great effort to make it adequate enough to present to the public. This what makes the public opinion is not always drawn based on true fact.

According to Ashadi Siregar (1999) public opinion is defined as pro and con reactions toward the actual public issues. In respond to those different reactions, mass media should stand on a neutral side to achieve a social consensus. According to Cobb and Elder (1981), social consensus is the acceptance based on common sense and rationality on a certain public discourse. This public consensus then became the principle of public policy which is implemented in the form of regulation or other public officials.

In the context of pro and cons in responding to the cigarette price increase to Rp. 50.000,- the Tribunnews.com as an online media put itself in the neutral zone for all related contents published merely only reflected the on-going discourse within the society. Nevertheless, this neutrality has then become questioned when their publication seemed to be exaggerating and tend to be based on irrelevant sources. On the contrary, that fact shows that in the press release dealing with the pro and cons on the cigarette price increase, the Tribunnews has built an alignment toward the economic interest. In other word, the news coverage intensity occurs due to the awareness of media on the sensitivity issue of cigarette considering that Indonesia has a high rate of smoker. Therefore, when cigarette price increase to Rp. 50.000,- became a worth issue of selling, the media had become more intense in broadcasting the news despite of the violation toward journalism ethic codes.

The argument gained its strength more when eventually the government issued a policy to raise the custom tax which started on January 1, 2016. The policy is implemented in the Decree of Indonesian Ministry of Finance Number 147/PMK.010/2016 on the Third Change of Finance Ministry Decree Number 179/MK/011/2012 that states starting from January 1, 2017 the government will enact the latest cigarette custom tax. This increase will affect the cigarette price. It is estimated that the price will reach 11 to 15 percent.

In fact, when the regulation was being released, the Tribunnews.com did not conduct massive publication as they did on the initial discourse of cigarette price raise which was said to be doubled to Rp. 50.000, -. The only publication they made in response to the regulation was an article entitle: *Cigarette Price Reaches Rp. 50.000, -? Meet the Real Fact*. The news was broadcasted on October 2, 2016 but was not included in the previous topic made namely The Increase of Cigarette Price.

The actual cigarette price increase issued by the government through the Decree of Indonesian Finance Ministry Number 147/PMK.010/2016 was not massively announced like the previous related issue. One of the possible causes was that the public would not over reacting as a response considering the price increase is very low compared to the discourse previously published. The media would not be able to earn more profit as previous issue due to the prediction that people would not over reacting on the later issue. The profit refers to the high rate of visitor that visit the website.

On the other hand, when the Tribunnews is no longer able to achieve high profit from their visitor, the government benefited due to the regulation issued through the Decree of Indonesian Finance Ministry Number 147/PMK.010/2016 did not receive counter excessive response. This benefit can be achieved after they took advantage over previous profit, that is when the public was greatly involved with the cigarette price issue drawn by the media which said it might reach Rp. 50.000, -.

6. Conclusion

From the above discussion the researcher drew several conclusions. First, a neutral position to be taken by mass media in responding to any controversial phenomena is a utopian. This was caused due to the fact that although the broadcast seemed to give enough space to all parties but basically it took side for its own benefit. For the online media, the benefit can be presented in the form of the high rate of incoming visitor to a certain news being broadcasted.

To create the opportunity to achieve the benefit, media uses sensitive issues in the society and process it in the form of bombastic title and content. That does not take too much effort especially in the era of social media like nowadays which enable the press to employ it as the public sphere to deliver opinion and idea. By observing the current issues which become the trending topic in social media, they can determine which information to publish in order to receive great response from the reader.

The second, hoax is capable of becoming a powerful instrument to smoothen the public policy planning which previously possessed the potential of causing controversial issue. Since previous discourse on cigarette price reaching to Rp. 50.000, - has preoccupied the society, the society and businessmen are no longer against the policy when the government announce the real discourse on cigarette price, that is to raise it by January 1, 2017. Nevertheless, to employ hoax as public policy implementation, one necessary condition is that the public must first share the perception that the it is actually a reality. In other word, a hoax must first be built and shaped to resemble a real fact which possibly is even more real that the reality itself.

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