

# Hoax in the Context of Infosphere: The Role of Homo Poieticus in the Information Ecosystem

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## Abstract

This article discusses the hoax phenomenon plagues this nation amid the heating up political tension approaching the simultaneous election of head of region. This situation is clearly very dangerous for the survival of a healthy nation and country. The appropriate thinking solution and strategic steps must be pursued by involving all parties. In terms of ethics, the concept of homo poieticus suggested by Luciano Floridi seems to be used as answer of this problems. This research aimed to reflect on the concept of homo poieticus understood as an ethical agent, as the creator of situation influenced by ethical appreciation. The method used was hermeneutics. The findings show that the figure of homo poieticus is a moral agent that not only focuses on the consequences (a posteriori) of the actions conducted, but highly consider the process (a priori). The figure of homo poieticus that has the poietic awareness and ability should be able to create a conducive environment and full of goodness by avoiding the increase of entrophy in the information ecosystem. Every moral agent who becomes homo poieticus will always strive in accordance with his ability and awareness to create, maintain and preserve the coolness if the information ecosystem.

**Keywords:** Homo Poieticus, Hoax, Infosphere, Level of Abstraction (LOA)

## Background

The hoax phenomenon in Indonesia is emerging amid the political temperature that heats up approaching the simultaneous election of head of region. The penetration of issue of *SARA* (ethnic, religious, racial and inter ethnic) in the hoax information adds to the heat of the political temperature in Indonesia. This situation is clearly very dangerous for the survival of a healthy nation and country. The danger of hoax that can lead to conflict social segregation certainly cannot be underestimated. Because hoax and damage the information ecosystem and deceive the social order.

The presence of Law of Information and Electronic Transaction (UU ITE) that regulates public information activities in the information environment (infosphere) does not seem to be a powerful repressive tool of the country in solving this problem. The people and state are 'rowdy' facing this 'hoax' issues and appear to have difficulties in understanding and solving the outbreak of this false information. The support of information and communication technology (ICT) adds 'energy' to the hoax to multiply and spread massively. It is clear that ICT has created digital environment (e-nvironment) that poses new challenges to our understanding of the world.

The digital revolution, the effects of rapid ICT growth, has changed the face of the world rapidly in such a way and in the scope that was untouched before. This revolution has moved the world and its inhabitants to live in an atmosphere full of information and wrestle in the process of information life cycle. Every day, information is created, processed, managed and utilized in an effort to fulfill human information needs. The world of human life becomes a world that is surrounded and constructed by information. Information becomes an integral part and very filling up the human life. Human life has been completely mediated by information and they cannot life without information. Information has changed human relationships with the universe and human relationships with other human beings both in individual and community contexts. Information has changed the way humans exist in the world and simultaneously altering human consciousness.

The fundamental change behind this revolution is about how we become inforg (information organism) within the infosphere. We become more sensitive on our status as inforg. The terminology of inforg is a neologism presented by Luciano Floridi that describing humans and other information entities as an information organism that inhabit the infosphere. In this position man has lost his privileged place in the anthropocentric world, and slowly realizes and accepts that we are inforg. Being inforg means we are not so different from other artificial intelligence artifacts, as Turing claims that machines are objects or artifacts that can think and have intelligence. In fact, artificial intelligence artifacts have one thing in common with us, both living in an informative environment, or what Floridi calls as the infosphere. Infosphere is a global space of information, which includes cyberspace as well as classic mass media such as libraries and archives. Thus, the infosphere is

the whole space that encompasses all available information, including nature that can be said to be part of the infosphere. Therefore, recognizing that intelligent human beings are in the same position as artificial intelligence artifacts, the need to reinterpret the human position in reality, ie., the human position in the infosphere arises. [Russo 2012, 65-6].

In other words, the digital revolution has changed our overall interaction with the outside world and our perspective on ourselves. Floridi argues that such thorough change questioning our status as an ethical agent, in the sense that ethical agents are agents aimed at gaining knowledge of the natural world and as agents involved in poietic activity by being creative and productive. In that context, information is the key to understanding ourselves, the world, and ourselves-in-relation-to-world. In the philosophy of Floridi, the meaning of the term "information" can be explained again in more depth. The first thing to note is that information includes not only "data." In contrast, information, according to Floridi, also includes truth; meaning that information has its own semantic dimension. [Russo 2012, 66]

This revolution brought radical and widespread changes to the human moral life. This revolution even led to the re-ontologization of the context in which the ethical problem arose, which not only change the old problem, but also invite us to explore the position of its ethical foundations. The emerging ethical problems are often complex and confusing issues. Moreover, this revolution has preceded the development of ethics, thus bringing the unanticipated problems that Moor points out [1985, 266-75] as 'policy vacuum'. We can conclude that the information revolution has changed our overall interaction with the outside world and our perspective on ourselves. These changes question our status as ethical agents, in the sense that ethical agents are agents aimed at gaining knowledge of the natural environment and as agents involved in poietic activity.

These two changes are what encourages, for example, Luciano Floridi, one of the most important figures to introduce the idea of information philosophy. According to Floridi [2013, xii], the situation of a society that entirely tied to information technology, encourages us to think of a new ontology typical of the information society, and of course this ontology will give rise to a new idea in the field of information-related ethics.

Our task is to design an ethical framework that can treat the infosphere as a new, highly moral and caring environment for humans as the inforg inhabiting it. An ethical framework that challenges must be recognized and overcome, where unknowingly emerge in a new environment. This ethic should be e-nvironmental ethics for the entire infosphere. This ethic demands a change in how we perceive ourselves and our role in reality, what we consider valuable to maintain and care, and how we can negotiate a new alliance between a natural and an artificial thing.

### **Focused Issues**

The phenomenon of 'hoax' that hit this nation has been troubling, disturbing, worrying and even resulting in horizontal conflicts that disturb the tranquility of nation and state life of this country. Slander, blasphemy, reproach, abuse, humiliation and even degrading personal dignity, groups, government, religious leaders, leaders and other parties has become the daily activities in cyberspace. Brotherhood, friendship, even business relationships damaged and destroyed because of the conflict caused by this false news. Infiltration of SARA (ethnic, religious, racial and inter ethnics) issues in the 'hoax' information adds to the heat of the political temperature in Indonesia. This situation is clearly very dangerous for the survival of a healthy nation and country life. The danger of 'hoaxes' that can lead to conflict and social segregation could not be underestimated. The people and state are being "rowdy" in facing this 'hoax' problem and appear to have difficulties understanding and overcoming the outbreak of this false information. The support of information and communication technology (ICT) adds 'energy' to the hoax to multiply and spread massively. For example, the issue of false news related to 10 Million Illegal Chinese Workers has troubled many parties including the government that has been discredited over the news. According to Ismail Fahmi [2017, 146-48] this hoax news seems to be "played" by several parties. Fahmi mentioned among others Yusril Ihza Mahendra in his tweets through Twitter on July 15, 2016, online media PostMetro which was published on October 12, 2016, and online media portal coverage of Liputan77. Still according to Fahmi, the parties involved in the effort to build a negative opinion on the government is apparently done consciously to lead the skewed opinion that the government is more concerned with foreign workers than the local workers. This hoax-related issues on Chinese worker is even not only aimed at undermining the authority of Jokowi's government but has led to provocative efforts to depose the legitimate government of Jokowi as it appears on the account of indopoints on December 18, 2016. [Fahmi, 2017: 149-150].

It is clear that the rapid access of ICT development are able to change the way and model of human interaction and also change the mental of society in relation to the world and its environment. ICT even has managed to outwit the human consciousness in the space of his life, where virtual space is considered as a virtual life that is not tied directly to real life. Even Sherry Turkle [1997, 177-86] explains that human interaction that is increasingly mediated through computers, generating a freedom to experiment with his identity. Thus, individuals can change their identify themselves in the online world, where in the real world this is impossible to do.

It then presents issues in the way society understands the social, legal and ethical problems due to ICT impacts. Philosophically, this condition leads to a change in the way a person asks questions about the ethical issues, and they surely need a way to answer and explain them in a new way.

Because it takes a new theoretical approach to overcome the moral problems that arise caused by ICT. Since ICT, according to Floridi [2013, 86], builds a new information habitat filled with all information entities, such as: information agents, properties, interactions, processes and mutual relations; is an abstract equivalent to the ecosystem. This section relies on the method described above to outline the interpretation of information ethics as an e-nvironmental ethic, or synthetic ethic, or infosphere ethics, for inforg like us [Floridi 2013, 53]. In this paper the reflection is directed at finding the figure of homo poeiticus which is expected to be used as a model in a man especially in interacting in the infosphere.

### **Methodology**

In an effort to uncover the phenomenon of hoax from the perspective of information ethics theory by Luciano Floridi, the author performed reading, meaning, and interpretation of Floridi texts and hoax phenomena in this country. To did that, the writer used hermeneutics method. A method used as an analysis in an effort to reveal the meaning contained in various discursive action (discursive action). The goal was not to seek the objective meaning of a text but the meaning of a text interpreted by the interpreter in certain situations. How the interpreter understands the text in a social, political and cultural context. The interpretation, however, was not entirely based on direct observation but through the data analysis conducted by one of the hoax experts Ismail Fahmi.

### **Analysis**

It may be that our society currently present, especially in urban areas can be categorized as part of the information society. A society that grows through the massive use of ICT and life surrounded by information. This condition in turn raises fundamental ethical problems in the society that has never been found before. Therefore, one of our most important tasks as a moral agent is to formulate an information ethic that can treat the world of data, information, and knowledge in the life cycle of information (including creation, elaboration, distribution, communication, storage, protection, use, and possible damage), as a new ecosystem, the infosphere, where humanity is expected to flourish. An information ethic that addresses and overcome the ethical challenges that arise in the infosphere [Floridi, 2008: 3]. This analysis section will describe our moral responsibility as an agent to the condition of information ecosystem that is damaged by the rise of hoax phenomenon.

### **The Conceptual Foundation of Moral Actions in the Information Ecosystem**

Luciano Floridi developed an integrated model of information ethics that focused on moral agents. From a metaethical point of view, Floridian information ethics is a naturalist and realist macroethic, an ontological feature in which the infosphere's condition leads to recipient-oriented approaches in an attempt to assess the correct or false action of the agent. Thus, the Floridian information ethics is a moral system based on the nature and strengthening of the infosphere and its moral claim is universally binding to all agents whenever and wherever [Floridi 2013, 74]. This information ethic is different from the ethic of virtue, happiness, or responsibility, a classical ethical mode whose moral center is placed on the agent. In Floridian information ethics, it is 'respect' to the recipients of action and 'attention' made by the agent. An agent cares about the recipient of the action for his actions when the behavior reinforces the possibility that the recipient will achieve whatever is good for him. Although a universal and impartial action is morally correct, such action would be morally good only if performed with care for the sake of the recipient of the action. This is a moral altruism for information ethics [Floridi 2013, 74-5].

In Floridian ethics every agent will be interested in pursuing whatever he thinks is best for him. Therefore, intuitively, the agent can meet his own information needs (information as resource) to produce other information (information as product), and thus affect his information environment (information as target). This Floridian model is called RPT Model (Resource, Product, and Target). This model is useful for explaining why any technology that changes the 'life of information' either epistemologically or ontologically will have great moral implications on each of its moral agents. Moral life is a very intensive information activity and related to ICT, by re-intologizing the context of information in which moral issues emerge, not only revealing new aspects of the old problem, but also inviting us to reconsider some key points of the reasons where our ethical position is based. Thus, this RPT model demands us to look at the phenomenon of information in all its varieties and long traditions [Floridi 2013, 20-21].

In a Floridian ethical perspective, the question posed by an agent is not a question of 'what should I become?' or 'what am I supposed to do?'. However, an agent should ask 'what should be appreciated?', because the 'what' of a being is the most valuable thing. The agent is invited to replace himself, to focus his attention on the nature and future of the recipient of the action, rather than his relationship or relevance to himself, thus developing an allocentric behavior, such as interest and respect for the infosphere and its value. However, the

general approach remains the same that we are faced with a moral dilemma and asked to make a principled, sensible, and understandable decision by choosing from the existing alternatives. In addition, information ethics also focuses on the agent's efforts in building the world, improving its nature, and shaping its development in the right way. This proactive approach treats agents as the owners of the world, designers, referees, creators of moral goodness and badness, providers, or creators. [Floridi, 2008:]

### **Ethical Judgement on Moral Action**

In Floridian information ethics the moral question proposed is what is good for an information entity and the infosphere in general?. The ethical assessment of a moral action is based on four basic universal ethical principles, namely (1) “information entropy should not be generated in the infosphere”; (2) “information entropy must be prevented in the infosphere”; (3) “information entropy must be removed from the infosphere”; and (4) “information must be enhanced by extending, improving, enriching and opening the infosphere, by ensuring the quantity, quality, variety, security, ownership, privacy, pluralism and access to information.” This principle seems similar to the principle on medical ethics both of which have the same approach which oriented in patient or recipient of an action [Floridi 2013, 71].

This basic moral principle was developed to increase the moral value and clarify what is meant by life as an agent responsible for the infosphere. This means that a moral action, on one hand, is increasingly unacceptable and the source of its agents is increasingly blamed for the low index of law number failed to be met, this can be categorized as impoverishment of infosphere. Moral mistakes may occur and entropy may increase due to the wrong evaluation of one's action. On the other hand, a process received by its source agent is commendable, if able to meet the combination of null laws on at least one law. The best moral action is the action that satisfies all four laws at the same time. Most of the actions we judge as morally good rarely able to satisfy those strict criteria and achieve only a balanced, positive moral value, even if they lead to some entropy, we know that the infosphere is in a better state after the action. Finally, a moral action that only meets the null law – the level of entropy on the infosphere does not change after action – has no moral value, namely morally irrelevant, insignificant, or marginalized, or accepted and not accepted on several different points [Floridi 2013, 71].

### **Hoax in the Perspective of Information Ecosystem**

We re-explore the phenomenon of hoax that hit the country in the perspective of the information ecosystem. The Floridian information ethic is based on a basic moral principle in which an action that causes an increase in entropy in the information ecosystem is categorized as unethical. Seeing this principle, it can be said that any action to create and spread the hoax news is immoral action. This means that any reason to create and spread false news through various media channels should not be done because it will disrupt the information ecosystem.

Each of us should take action to preserve the information ecosystem so that our humanity can flourish. In other words, we are required to provide quality information. What does quality information look like? At least according to Floridi, quality information has four parameters, namely: complete, not ambiguous (clear), meaningful and contain truth. [2014, 8]. But of course measuring the quality of information is not as easy as imagined. An information is included in the category of quality information based on the above parameters, however, for the recipient of the information may be considered not qualified because he has received other similar information before or the information received does not meet his needs. Therefore, the quality information must also meet the parameters of ‘fit for purpose’. [Illari 2014, 283-4]. Under such circumstances, initially qualified information may fall in the category of false information or disinformation due to the incompatibility in the reception of information.

Floridian ethics also deals with artificial agents who have accountability for a moral action. Thus, every moral act contains two responsibilities, ie. the fully responsible moral agency (responsibility) of moral actions he does and other agents (artificially) who also participate in the responsibility (accountability) of moral events. In this context, a system (artificial agent) that helps to spread the hoax news massively and extensively, in a Floridian perspective is charged with responsibility.

In addition, Floridian ethics also emphasizes its attention to the recipient of the action. This ethic focuses more on what happens to the recipients of actions on moral events. This means that the judgment of a moral action is no longer sees the actor (moral agent), but the center of attention is the recipient of the action (patient).

### **Level of Abstraction: Assessment Method of Agent's Responsibility**

In the phenomenon of the spread of false news, the focus of our discussion of the incident is only on the moral agent that responsible for the creation and spreading of the news and the victim (the recipient of the action). By using the Floridian abstraction level method, we can also see the role of other parties who are induced to take responsibility for the problem. The level of abstraction (LoA) is a set of observables consisting of written variables that have been interpreted. A written variable comes with a statement that contains the system properties. The abstraction level is teleological, or goal-oriented. Epistemologically, the level of abstraction



depends on the type of interaction between the identifier and the object of the study. This type of information is then defined as the teleological nature of knowledge production/acquisition.

The abstraction level consists of LoA1 which is an observable set of systems available to users and the LoA2 is an observable set that is available to system designers and LoAS (level of abstraction society), where S stands for "society". LoAS is an observable set of people available. This observable set consists of structures and social relationships that are prevalent in the function of the information society. In the LoAS, observable includes a set of variables that explain the characteristics of the entity can be affected by the software. Thus, LoAS is an observable descriptive of individuals, businesses, and governments. We argue that the addition of the LoAS to the abstraction level method is consistent with Floridi's wish to formulate "an ethical framework that treats the information ecosystem as a new environment with the value of moral concern and the immanent concern that it employs" (Floridi 2010: 19). LoAS is expected to consolidate the concerns of those working on the planting of values in design and those concerned with the effects of technology on society.

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In the context of hoax, LoAS can act as a social force that can influence technical decisions (either proactively or retroactively) of internet service providers such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram. Meaning that people can force the above service providers (LoA2) to take responsibility (accountability) for the widespread of hoax spreading in the media they manage.

### **Homo Poeticus: The 'New' Role of Agent in the Information Ecosystem**

The idea of homo poieticus was first introduced by Luciano Floridi in the context of what he called the "fourth revolution", namely the digital revolution. Previously we have known the various stigma of human positions in their interaction activity with nature. Let's say for example homo faber, here humans are positioned as users and 'squeezers' of natural resources, homo oeconomicus which puts human beings as producers, distributors, and consumers of natural resources, and homo ludens in which humans are positioned as a fun fiddler. These three human positions do not represent the human figure as a keeper and owner of ethical responsibility. While homo poieticus is a 'new' role that humans play as the 'creator' of the universe, which maintain the infosphere to protect and make it flourishing. [Floridi 2013, 175]. A human role as an ethical agent that uses ICTs as a means to create a conducive situation in the information ecosystem. Agent that aims to gain knowledge about the surroundings and be directly involved in the poietic activity, by being creative and productive.

Moral agents that based on the figure of homo poieticus, every act and behavior when interacting in the information environment will always strive to create, maintain and preserve the good of the ecosystem. Agents will always be proactive, not reactive, in every moral action and reduce their dependence on "moral luck." Agent not only focus on what to do and don'ts under certain circumstances. This means that moral behavior is not only judged as *a posteriori* (empirically) based on its values or consequences. However, moral behavior begins long before moral judgment takes place. So, there is a connection with "constructing the world, improving nature and shaping its development in the right way" [Floridi 2013, 162]. Moral behavior must be done with the poietic skills of the ethical agent and will also consider how ethical agents engage in a situation.

The poietic awareness and ability possessed by the moral agent as a homo poieticus figure should create a conducive atmosphere and full of goodness by avoiding the increase of entropy in the information ecosystem in the context of hoax phenomena. Each agent will always strive in accordance with the ability and awareness to create, maintain and preserve the coolness of the information ecosystem.

The question arises then, what kind of human being can become a homo poieticus who can handle morality issues in the infosphere, such as the phenomenon of hoaxes? According to the author's opinion, librarians, academics and journalists are figures that are at least close to homo poieticus figures. Indeed, this is reasonable because these three professions often interact with information and have the poetic capacity to be able to create, maintain and preserve the information ecosystem. Although of course each of us can develop ourselves as the creator, keeper and guardian of our information environment. We can live our new role in the framework of building our humanity.

### **Conclusion**

Homo poieticus is a figure that we should be modeling for in every interaction we have in the infosphere. A

figure that is not just a homo faber, using and exploiting natural resources or as homo oeconomicus that produces, distributes, and consumes resources without awareness of maintaining and preserving its environment. However, homo poieticus is a human figure who is able to create, maintain and preserve an information ecosystem always in good condition. A figure who is not only aware of the impact of the action and depends on moral luck, but also wisely sees the whole process of his actions in order to achieve the goodness on the information ecosystem.

So, the homo poieticus model should be pursued in every movement and human life as a moral agent responsible for the goodness and wellbeing of the information ecosystem for the future development of humanity.

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