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January 2020

## THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF DIGITAL MULTIMEDIA TECHNOLOGY AND CREATION OF POLITICAL HYPER-REALITIES IN INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA


Basa Alim Tuelaka

*Wjaya Kusuma University*, [Obasa.executive@gmail.com](mailto:Obasa.executive@gmail.com)

Burhan Bungin

*Ciputra University*, [deridaa@yahoo.com](mailto:deridaa@yahoo.com)

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Tuelaka, Basa Alim and Bungin, Burhan, "THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF DIGITAL MULTIMEDIA TECHNOLOGY AND CREATION OF POLITICAL HYPER-REALITIES IN INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA" (2020). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 3547.  
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/3547>

# THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF DIGITAL MULTIMEDIA TECHNOLOGY AND CREATION OF POLITICAL HYPER-REALITIES IN INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA

Basa Alim Tualeka  
Obasa.executive@gmail.com  
Wijaya Kusuma University

Burhan Bungin  
deridaa@yahoo.com  
Ciputra University

## **Abstract**

*The development of media technology nowadays displays rapid progress, particularly the mainstream media that is developing towards digital media, which makes the social construction power even more flawless. This progress is very beneficial to the development of society, but it can also be used by political interests for control over powers. Against their political opponents, political parties can use this advanced mass media technology to attack and block off counterattacks through social construction or deconstruction. This study uses a narrative qualitative approach and interview method, by interviewing the informants to explore the understanding of the social construction of media in Indonesia and Malaysia, and its practice by Indonesian and Malaysian political parties through the role of mass media.*

**Keywords:** *Social Construction, Communication Media, Multimedia Technology, Political Hyper-Realities*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Media technologies that have given birth to many digital multimedia communications in this era are developing robustly. The society is drowning in a euphoria of this technology; economy is growing, taking many advantages from commercial multimedia technology. Yet, in politics, some rulers of countries in the Middle East like Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen are collapsing, with several

others expected to follow. The influence of digital multimedia technology and its spectrum are like Ebola, which endemically ruins the social and political order and destroys the social order and political relations through freedom of thought, freedom of speech, human rights, information transparency and ‘misunderstood’ democracy.

Then, what about Indonesia and Malaysia, the two neighbourhood nations of that share one cluster, one culture, one core of Language, yet different history in the past? In 1998, Indonesia underwent a terrible experience in the life of a nation, as a result of ‘the freedom of press’ allowed by Soeharto, through the ‘backfire’ policy during that time. Soeharto fell out of power as a result of the press freedom, led by Yunus Yosfiah, the Information Minister back then. People were questioning whether there would be a second wave of ‘media storm’ engulfing Indonesia. Worriedly, we had to ‘wait and see’, because when the press freedom was given in the Soeharto Era and the spread of media technology was not as endemic as now, it was capable of destroying the nation. Then, what about Indonesia today, when Indonesia is cramped by mass media technology? I view Indonesian people as a piece of wood eaten by termites, a piece of wood that does not look rotted from the outside, yet has already been destroyed on the inside. Therefore, Indonesia is actually only waiting for its last moment before it collapses. One case is during the last election; digital multimedia technology has split Indonesia into two spheres through multimedia slandering, incitement, craftiness and impression making. Social war with the means of multimedia technology, has occurred from the elite

political level to the grassroots level; this war continues until now and is even entering the cold war stage.

Malaysia is learning much from what has happened in Indonesia. The more powerful party does not take risks of opening press freedom broadly as Indonesia had done. However, the media in Malaysia is very aggressive in launching attacks to their enemies. Malaysia is a step forward in seeing the concept of media in digital multimedia understanding, so they can see digital multimedia as a part of the cluster of media technologies, making it inseparable, one from another. Malaysia pays close attention to mainstream media, such as televisions, radios and newspapers, and maintains caution as it relates to the spread of digital multimedia like the Internet and other social media. This especially happened when the Malaysian Government learnt that Anwar Ibrahim, the opposing movement, successfully earned the people's heart through social media, so that in quantity, the Malaysian people tended to choose political parties in coalition with Anwar Ibrahim during the past election; nonetheless, in the end, Ibrahim's coalition lost the distribution of the seats in the Parliament.

Digital multimedia technology successfully influences the human cognitive side, and it builds a hyper-reality sight inside their minds regarding an ideal nation, ideal figures, ideal democracy, as well as about welfares, freedom of speech, freedom of citizenship and so on.

Represented in Table 1, many constructivists dedicated themselves for various social constructivism values, so that for the neurobiological constructivist

researcher, Gerhard Roth, it seemed undeniable that the brain is the ‘mother’ of all reality constructions. Even imaginations, self-reflections and self-conscience are constructive products of the brain, as neuro-labelism, as if the ‘image’ really happens (Roth 1996, Weber, 2002). The other three thinkers who focused on main communication, culture or media as a reality-agent that results in constructivism only developed in the variations proposed by Seigfried J. Schmidt (Weber, 2002), tried to observe all construction agents in a ‘closed circuit’, which is the human brain.

Thus, in reality, digital multimedia technology is connected to the nerves system of the humans brain. The magnetic wave in digital multimedia technology is connected with millions of nerve systems in the human brain, resulting in images that look real and alive, and are there with the human.

Some of the differences in the construction agents create different realities in social constructions:

Table 1

Constructing agent/unit	Varieties of Constructivism
Brain	Neurobiological constructivism (representative: Gerhard Roth)
'Cognitive system' 'Observer'	Constructivist bio-epistemology (representative: Humberto R. Maturana)
'Social system', Communication	Auto-poietic system theory (representatives: Niklas Luhmann, Peter Fuchs et al)
Culture	(Constructivist) Culturalism (representative: Peter Janich)
Media (individual media and mass media systems)	Media-cultural constructivism (representatives: Gebhard Rusch, Klaus Merten et.al.)
Cognition, communication, media and culture	Socio-cultural constructivism (representative: Siegfried J. Schmidt)

Source: Weber, 2002

Most of the modern constructivism varieties, especially those developed in scientific discourses in German, regard themselves as counter-position realism (either covered as naïve, moderate or even radical constructivism) that still dominates intellectual model in scientific works, way of thinking and way of speaking with the depiction of reality paradigm; this was latently or surely suggested by majority of the researchers. Henceforth, constructivists' way of thinking is to read as an antipode of a realistic terminology field.

Table 2	
Realistic terminology	Constructivist terminology
(= mimetic way of thinking) Semantic field “depiction”	(= poietic way of thought) semantic field “construction”
Depicting	Making
Representing	Constructing, generating
Copying, imitating	Planning, designing, producing, creating (re)producing
Reflecting, projecting	Embodying, producing, building (up)
Discovering (?)	Inventing (?)

Source: Weber, 2002

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research uses the narrative method to reveal the social construction of digital multimedia and creation of political hyper-realities in Indonesia and Malaysia, especially about how digital media performs the social construction of political hyper-reality in Indonesia and Malaysia. This study interviewed five people,

consisting of 2 journalists and 3 politicians, to get a real understanding of the social construction of digital multi media and the creation of political hyper-reality in Indonesia and Malaysia.

The retrieval of informants used here shows the number of informants selected for in-depth interviews. In the selection of informants for this study, the aim of the researcher was to engage in the approach intended by Marshall (1996), namely "to show representative informants from the research subject, so that the information provided could be generalised back to the population" (p. 522). Also, researchers such as Marshall (1996) and Palys (2008) agree that informants or participants in the study were not placed in the same way. According to them, some informants are more informed and articulate in terms of ideas and quality of information than another; therefore, researchers in such cases do not focus on size, but on the wealth of information or ideas that will be obtained from the informants selected in the research.

Table 3: Profile of informants

Informant 1	Senior Journalist	Female
Informant 2	Senior Politicians	Female
Informant 3	Senior Journalist	Male
Informant 4	Senior Politicians	Male



Informant 5	Senior Politicians	Male
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In this case, purposive sampling is used to describe the pattern of the Social construction of digital multimedia and creation of political hyper-realities in Indonesia and Malaysia. This method is also used because it allows researchers to get informants quickly, especially in situations where proportionality is not the main focus (Crossman, Marshall 1996; Palys, 2008). The targeted sample in this study of 2 journalists and 3 politicians was chosen because they met certain characteristics, or they matched certain goals or descriptions, and will help answer research questions (Marshall, 1996).

The five informants consisted of journalists and politicians drawn from print media (newspapers) in Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as political party politicians in Indonesia and Malaysia. This is based on the fact that a large size is not a problem in qualitative studies; and that these journalists and politicians are better placed to provide informed responses and articulate on the development model of social construction of digital multimedia and creation of political hyper-realities in Indonesia and Malaysia (Marshall, 1996; Palys, 2008).

Journalists and politicians are chosen because they are believed to be in the best position to explain what really happened and disseminate the social construction of

digital multimedia and creation of political hyper-realities in Indonesia and Malaysia (Marshall, 1996; Palys, 2008). Based on their position, these journalists and politicians determine what information items should be selected and hypothesised, as well as how they are prioritised. Therefore, they play a major role as agenda organisers, gatekeepers and intermediaries in information on the social construction of digital multimedia and creation of political hyper-realities in Indonesia and Malaysia. The purpose of choosing the five journalists and politicians is not to measure the strength of the interaction between them, but to complement each other in producing relevant data. For example, journalists will have better insight into their respective digital multimedia social construction policies, while politicians will have insight into how the creation of political hyper-reality is influenced by digital multimedia. Journalists and bureaucrats that were interviewed were taken purposively from Surabaya, Indonesia and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Like other qualitative researchers, researchers are more interested in why certain people or groups do things in certain ways, and how their attitudes are built, as well as the roles they play in dynamic processes within the organisation. Palys (2008) further argues that research participants are not always created equal. He believes that knowledgeable and articulate informants will often advance the research much better than the informants chosen randomly from the many informants.

Interviews are held between January and July 2018. Interview questions are reviewed and refined before the main interview takes place and some questions can also develop in the field. Interviews are held in private locations such as restaurants in Surabaya and in Kuala Lumpur. Conducting interviews in neutral places such as these give informants a sense of "freedom" where they feel their privacy is protected. Therefore, this study uses in-depth interviews based on the Social Construction Theory. This is done to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of journalists and bureaucrats (Kvale, 1996). To maintain the standard question method, a questionnaire that serves as a guide was developed based on Labov's narrative evaluation model (1972). A number of questions were also asked to determine what other factors influenced coverage other than the social media construction model. Considering that the informants vehemently refused to be recorded for security purposes, the researcher had to cross out their written answers. This does not change or reduce the amount of information provided by the respondent. In fact, they are very quiet, so researchers must encourage them to give reasonable answers. Transcription handwriting can be justified, given that there is no standard form of transcription of research interviews. Transcription depends more on how information makes sense and how the information is used (Kvale, 1996). Transcription is done by writing word for word whatever was said. Use of hand notes is made to ensure all words are recorded real time. Transcription is recorded and edited as soon as the interview is complete. Each interview lasts between 50 to 60 minutes. Data derived from in-depth interviews will be analysed

and presented based on the following parameters, which will include questions and other relevant issues to be dealt with in detail during the interview. Parameters (given below) will help in meeting the research objectives and are developed based on Labov's (1972) narrative evaluation model, in which questions that cause answers to interfere with the orientation of news outlets; what complicates coverage; coverage evaluation; and the results of the coverage, will all be analysed. The parameters include: 1. Institutionalisation 2. Legitimacy 3. Socialisation. These parameters are developed based on the social construction model of the bureaucracy that looks at dimensions that are expected to produce relevant information to answer research questions and meet the research objectives. Any data that is not related to one of these parameters will be analysed individually. This parameter is also analysed vis-a-vis the bureaucrat Social Construction Model.

## **THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

Social reality is a social fact that occurs in reality, where individuals interact with each other and produce social processes, resulting in culture and beliefs that become the reality of people's lives every day. Social reality is different from the hypersocial lifestyle that occurs through mass media and social media. The word Hypersocial represents a quasi-society that occurs because people interact through mass media-social media and as if they are living as in real reality. Social groups in social media, e-commerce, e-government, e-learning, e-mail and so on are real

examples of hypersocialism. Hypersocial will be further discussed in another section of this book.

According to Emil Durkheim (Ritzer and Goodman, 2004) there are two social facts, first material facts and non-material facts. Material social facts are real social facts or physical constructs, various technologies that can be seen in the social life. However, non-material facts are social facts that are not visible to the five senses, but their existence can be felt in social life, such as social norms, social awareness, collective representation, social currents and nonmaterial cultures.

In reality, Durkheim (Ritzer and Goodman, 2004) defines social facts as objective facts, because both material facts and non-material facts are real and can be in social life. Objectively, social facts exist in the social life of the community and non-material social facts are found in the minds of individuals and society. Because of that, society can only be understood by learning interactions, not just understanding the individuals.

Meanwhile Max Weber (Ritzer and Goodman, 2002) defines social facts as subjective reality. According to Weber, the function of ideal social types is to compare empirical reality. Weber also divides reality into two categories, namely reality that appears (empirical) and hidden reality as ideal types that live in social institutions. These ideal types are based on actor motivations (subjective), which do

not have to be positive, and precise (objective), which can be negative or even morally repugnant. Ideal types must be rational in themselves, so the meaning of the components must be suitable. It must be able to help the world make sense and reflect as a depiction of static and dynamic entities; furthermore, it must be a representation of a structure such as a bureaucracy or ideal type of social development.

Emiel Durkheim

Material facts	Nonmaterial facts
Real reality	Unreal reality

Max Weber

Subjective facts separate a person in his ideal types from other people in their ideal types. Collectively, ideal types also differentiate society from one another structurally. Thus, each individual or society has value, as ideal types that are different from other individuals or communities. Customs, morals, culture and so

on are the ideal types of individuals and certain societies and these factors distinguish them from other societies.

In reality, subjective facts are the basis of individual social interaction and society in general. Individuals, besides respecting objective reality, also value ideal types as subjective facts- as part of social interaction in society. Objective facts and subjective facts give great meaning to the goodness of individual social interactions, as other individuals interpret themselves and their dignity.

George Herbert Mead (Ritzer, 2014), explains that theorisation of symbolic interactionism often approves the importance of the causes of social interaction. Thus, meaning does not come from a solitary mental process, but from human interaction, where they learn to create meanings and symbols and how they learn during interaction and socialisation in particular. Humans learn symbols and meanings in social interaction. Humans respond to signs without thinking, but rather humans respond to symbols by way of thinking. Signs have their own meaning. Symbols are social objects that are used to present whatever is agreed upon by the person they will represent. Not all social objects can present something else, but social objects that can replace something else are symbols. Words, physical objects and physical actions can all be symbols to communicate something about their own characteristics.

Mead (Ritzer, 2014) symbolises facts as an important aspect that allows people to act in ways that are typical of humans. Because of the symbol, man responds passively to reality, which imposes himself to play the Symbol in general and in particular, has a number of special functions for the actor; (1) symbols allow people to face their world and the social world that allows them to say, classify and remember the objects they meet in that place; (2) symbols enhance the ability of humans to understand their environment specifically; (3) symbols enhance the ability to think in the sense that thinking is imagined as a symbolic interaction with oneself; (4) symbols enhance the ability to solve various problems, to reduce the chances of doing wrongdoing; (5) symbols allow actors to overtake their own time, space and even personal; (6) symbols allow us to imagine metaphysical realities, such as heaven and hell; 7) symbols allow people to avoid being enslaved by their environment; they can think actively, regulating themselves about what they will do. Symbolic reality allows the dignity of social interaction between individuals in society; individuals always try to show the symbols they carry as the self-dignity they have constructed so far and that they are proud of the symbol. Then expect the person, who interacts with him to understand the symbol as he understands it, but sometimes the social world does not all understand the symbols, thus, allowing symbolic interaction to be stronger between individuals within with the community. This is what makes symbolic reality develop without having to be controlled. In the interpretation of other meanings, it is said that when a text or symbol is made and



released in social interaction, the meaning of the text and the meaning of the symbol are independent of the text or symbol.

Peter Berger and Thomas Lucmann (1961) introduced the social construction of reality, based on their thinking about the intersubjective world between individual subjectivity and the subjectivity of society. The process of institutionalisation, legitimacy and socialisation that takes place in the simultaneous process of externalisation, objectivation and internalisation represent the realities that live in the intersubjective nature of the individual and his society. Intersubjectivity allows subjectivity to be super-subjective, where positivists point to it as a weakness. Subjectivity that is viewable is very personal, according to the person and cannot be generated into something that can be passed quality beyond objective through intersubjective in the view of phenomenology. In Indonesia and also anywhere else, the political reality lives in these four realities: objective reality (Durkheim in Ritzer and Goodman, 2004), subjective reality (Weber, in Ritzer and Goodman, 2004), symbolic reality (Mead in Ritzer, 2014 ) and intersubjective reality (Berger-Luckmann, 1961). Political events as social reality are material objective realities and nonmaterial realities. Material reality is understood as visible reality.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **1. Socio-Political Hyper-Reality**

In Malaysian Socio-political reality, the mass multimedia technology is used to attack ones' political opponents openly. Though it seems that the government is taking control over mainstream media, in reality political rivals are attacking each other through mass media and other multimedia. The case of Anwar Ibrahim was attacked from many aspects, especially from the moral side; the attacks toward Anwar Ibrahim constructed his image as someone who is mentally deprived for conducting sodomy, lacking abilities to organise his family and so on. Also, the attacks of Malay groups to Chinese were stated noticeably in newspapers and televisions by constructing Chinese as those being crabby.

In Indonesia, using the presidential election held couple of months ago as an example, social political hyper-reality constructions were used in all levels. The first level is the informational transformation happening between one individual and another. The multimedia, internet and social media users exchange information for data consumption amongst themselves.

The second level is the level of constructing the hyper-reality image of the figures (people) supported in the Presidential election. At this level, the socio-political hyper-reality construction is utilized to give certain images for the political figures or parties joining the election. Hence, at that particular time, Jokowi was constructed as a representative of the common people, who wear ordinary clothes, becoming a becak driver, a bicycle repairman or 'blusukan' (the term used for

going into some clump areas all over the city) and other such common roles. Meanwhile, Prabowo constructed his image along with middle-class outfits, Bung Karno's way of speech, being a member of the intellectual groups and so on. As a result, when all of the phenomena were published in only one media, and then repeated by multimedia (including mainstream media, the internet, social media), the power of the social construction folded in times.

The third level is the crime level, where in order to construct a hyper-reality image for a figure or a thing, this party intentionally invites the multimedia hackers (even from abroad) to destroy, to trespass through information media companies for the sake of 'forcing' a certain news they want to appear as the head news of the media companies and to destroy the news of their rivals or the thing, anything regarding information they want to hack. In social media, these hackers try to recruit 'false followers' to create opinions with the help of computers and machines.

## 2. The Limitation of Socio-Political\_Hyper-Reality

The Socio-Political Hyper-Reality construction has risky limitations. It means that the ability to construct reality, in a certain limit, will become a weakness that is as big as the reality construction. In the theory of mass media social construction (Burhan, 2008), the spread of social construction is determined by the power of mass media. Thus, if the digital multimedia technology constructs socio-political hyper-reality and spreads it with full power into all levels of society, the power of

social deconstruction, which can ruin all the socio-political hyper-reality construction, would also be as big.

Hence, the question would be to what point the power and limitation of the socio-political hyper-reality itself are, and the answer would be on the power of digital multimedia technology in the society itself. However, a constructivist can play the power of the construction with its authority, such as: (1) using as many as possible social construction media as his own media, or media which obviously stand on his side, (2) with his authority, trying to rule or close other media in oppose or potentially in oppose to him, (3) doing actions corresponding and in accordance with the concept of social construction that is being spread through digital multimedia, (4) switching people's attention (that are being constructed) into things which would decay the social construction time, (5) conducting repetition of socio-political hyper-reality construction particularly with his own multimedia.

Social construction that is done excessively but in fact people know the real life of the object being constructed, would therefore be very easy to deconstruct socially. To keep being consistent is usually the point where the constructivist or the object of construction become impatient, since sometimes the image does not go in line with their real lives.

### 3. The Ethics of Social Hyper-Reality Construction

The mass media social construction theory is a neutral theory, like other theories. This theory can be used to increase one's popularity yet can also be used to destroy one's political rival. Therefore, the use of this theory should follow the existing scientific ethics. First, social hyper-reality construction is a reality formed through the social construction theory of mass media, so that mainstream media contribute in taking responsibility of the spread of social construction's content, as a part related to press ethic code in general. This would be a dilemma if the spread of social construction also happens in social media. However, if it happens, the ethical responsibility is within each individual owning the particular social media. Second, this theory would be useful in one hand to increase the image of someone or something, yet in another hand, being 'riya' (overwhelmed joy and spending), being arrogant, slandering, outwitting others or even deceiving the publics can indeed happen in social construction. That is why the ethical responsibility is solely in the hands of the constructivist agents.

## **CONCLUSION**

Social hyper-reality is the reality created by digital multimedia technology media; it can be used to construct one's political image effectively today. The government can actually control this reality, but sometimes the State also builds social hyper-reality for its own interests and to attack its enemies. Both in Malaysia and in Indonesia, this condition is the same.

There are two models of hyper-reality imagery that are usually built, namely social hyper-constructs that construct the image of good (good image), namely sweet image, good image, image of a public figure or success of leader programs or a government, whereas this image will become an image of a successful leader. There is also a hyper-reality that constructs a bad image, which is the image of failure, ugliness or weakness of a public figure, leader or a government.

The two models of hyper-reality imaging are built by multimedia technology as if the image becomes a real reality in real life, that there are good and bad, that here is good and there are bad or vice versa.

The construction of socio-political hyper-reality has risky limits to be maintained, that the power of media is the limit of the power of social hyper-reality social construction. Thus, the ability of digital multimedia technology is the limit of the power of hyper-reality social construction itself. Therefore, the hyper-reality social constructor must have the ability to fulfil all the multimedia technology that is around him well and effectively.

However, as with the weaknesses of the media that always exist, then ethical considerations in using social construction of multimedia technology must be the main consideration, as well as in social life in general, that ethics must be the last tool that can control all social activities of community members, as well as

considerations. Ethics can increase the substance of the success of everyone's actions in society. ()

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