

## ISSUES OF TERRORISM ON THE INTERNET IN THE WAVE OF DEMOCRATIZATION OF POST-REFORM INDONESIA: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

The discourse of terrorism is a global issue but tends to be interpreted as controversial. This study sought to dismantle the controversy of meanings through the analysis of signs and meanings, with a view to explore and demonstrate the wave of democratization that took place in post-reform era in Indonesia. This study was a case study using readers' responses to terrorism issues provided by cyber media on the Internet. It also rests primarily on the semiotic theory of Peirce and the concept of democratization of Huntington. The results showed that participation, freedom of expression, and equal power relations occurred in the interactive discourse in the cyber news media in the form of a dialogue between the responders, the media, and the debate among the responders. Responders tended to argue that signs and meanings are constructed by the media and to interpret information about terrorism as "political engineering" which was expressed by means of emotive tone. Meanwhile, the media tended to construct a "political imagery" which was expressed in a confrontational way, and the resources tended to understand it as "noise level of political elite", which was expressed in a persuasive manner. Such differences occurred due to the factors of media context that tended to be "convivial" and the context of the communication situation on the Internet that tends to show "discretion". Based on these findings, this study concluded that interactive discourse in the Internet can be formulated as a democratic forum as the meaning making of the text is no longer dominated by media and the sources of information, but tend to be shared with the public. However, in terms of discourse process, interactive discourse in cyber media tends to be anarchic because the tone of interaction tends to be little, the relationship patterns tend to center on and be dominated by responders, the identities of responders tend to be anonymous, and linguistic expressions of the responders tend to be emotive.

**Keywords:** Signs, meanings, semiotics, democratization, Internet, terrorism

The study of language in the beginning of the 21st century has developed increasingly side by side with the development of technology. Herring (2004/2011), for example, has developed a model of discourse study that is mediated by computers, known as Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA). Meanwhile, Dahlberg (2006), Ceron (2015), and West (2015) developed a model of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) in relation to the concept of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the presence of new public space in the context of democratization process. More specifically, Lewis (2003, p.26) identifies the use of language in cyber media as "the birth of a new genre in language varieties, namely the written spoken language", while Crystal (2006, p.8) categorizes the use of language in the Internet as "a technospeak phenomenon promising creativity in language".

The above phenomenon has encouraged and put the studies of linguistics to be more interdisciplinary (Andor, 2014). Then, the functions of language become much broader, not only seen as a means of communication. The philosophers and

linguists then trace and show the functions of language as "an instrument of power" (Foucault, 2010), and as "a reality forming" (Fairclough 2001), even now exceeding the limits of reality, then so-called hyper-reality (van Dijk 2008/2009, Hoed 2014). In the latest development, language also has the function of protection, and it can be used as an imaging tool (Rundblad & Chen 2015). Even language is identified as a means to change the situation (Nye, 2004, Haryatmoko 2007, Hamad, 2010, Noveck & Sperber, 2004, Cutting 2008, Neuhaus 2014). In the study of language associated with the development of Internet technology and its widespread users, Hoed (2014, p.279) refers to it as a means of strengthening and expanding democratization process that encourages the changes in the structure of mentality "from the top down" to "dialogue", and van Dijk (2009, p.109) refers to it as "the phenomenon of the increasing culture of participation". Meanwhile, Feng & O'halloran (2012) categorizes it as a continuing semiotic phenomenon.

In the context of the wave of democratization in Indonesia after the reform, an important and

interesting question arises: is interactive discourse on the Internet can be an arena to promote and accelerate the realization of a more democratic nation and state order? This study views that the context of the media and communication situation in interactive discourse in cyber news media provide an arena for the process of interactive communication and more equal power relations. The problem is: What are the linguistic evidences that can be the indicators of the democratization in the Internet? Through the analysis of signs and meanings as a symbol of social phenomena and an analysis of discourse process that describe patterns of interaction and power relations, this study relied on semiotic-pragmatics theory of Peirce developed by Noth (1995) and Hoed (2011; 2014) in the format of semiotic "getok tular" (word of mouth) or chain of signification. Foucault's theory (1982) on discourse and power relations and Herring's approaches (2011) on computer-mediated discourse were also used in this study to investigate the process of interactions and relations that occur in cyber news media. Meanwhile, this study used the concepts of democratization developed by Huntington (1996, p.6) and Uhlin (1997, p.18), namely "freedom of expression" and "people rule based on popular control and political equality". In addition, in this study the concept of "culture of participation" proposed by van Dijk (2009, p.109) is defined as "freedom of expression, freedom to participate, and equality of power relations". This study used readers' responses in the cyber media reporting terrorism issues as the issue of terrorism

tends to be global and controversial (for example, Chomsky 200, Chomsky & Barsamian, 2005, Aitchison, 2003, Altheide 2007, Adi 2010, Caruso & Schneider, 2013, and Egloff 2015).

## METHODS

This study used qualitative approach using a case study of readers' responses to the issue of terrorism found in cyber media. As a result, this present study is not aimed to make some generalizations on interactive discourse in cyber media (for example Wray, Kate & Aileen 2004, Denzin & Lincoln 2009). However, several indicators found in this study are expected to be a strong foundation for further broader and deeper studies. Resting on Noth (1995), Merrell (2001) and Tienne (2015), the semiotic approach by Pierce was used as this study views language as a system of signs that represents social phenomenon and has meaning related to particular contexts.

This study used procedures of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Juliet, 1990; Wray et al, 2004) as the study attempts to reveal, trace, and show basic and relatively new phenomenon in the use of language in the Internet related to the development of media and information technology and social political changes. The procedures include four main stages: data collection, data analysis, discussion, and drawing conclusion. The research data were the responders' texts related to media texts. Table 1 showed the data collected for the study.

Table 1. Data Sources

No.	Media	Title	Total of Responders' Texts
1	Kompas.com Friday, 17 July 2009 at 14:32	<i>Bom Kuningan 2'': Presiden Beberkan Temuan Intelijen "SBY Jadi Target"</i> (Kuningan Bombing 2: The President revealed intelligence findings "SBY is targeted")	129
2	Detik.com Saturday, 18 July 2009 at 01:34	<i>Bom JW Marriott dan Ritz Carlton: Pengamat: Ada Keterkaitan Pilpres dan Unjuk Gigi Teroris</i> (JW Marriot and Ritz Carlton Bombings: Observer: There is a link between presidential election and terrorist show off)	80
3	Tempo.co Friday, 17 July 2009 at 20:16	<i>Prabowo Pastikan Calon Presiden Tak Terlibat Bom Ritz Carlton – Marriott</i> (Prabowo ensures president candidates are not related to Ritz Carlton - Marriott bombings)	22

The above media selection was based on a consideration of cyber media popularity in Indonesia according to International Survey Agency *Alexa* (Kompas.com, 2012), while the titles are considered to represent opinions of Indonesian users towards the issues of terrorism after reform era, such as Kuningan Bombing 2 on 17 July 2009. In addition, the titles are related to opinion statements from various parties, such as the authorities (the president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono/SBY),

professional/observers (former intelligent officer, AC Manulang), and politician (Prabowo Subianto).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study showed how the readers' responses towards the texts which were constructed by media in interactive discourse in the Internet played an important role in facilitating aspirations, such as debates and information spreading. This was

expected to contribute to the process of democratization in Indonesia. Figure 1 shows the variations of directions of text responses. These

variations were the indicators that encouraged democratization in the discourse process cyber news media.

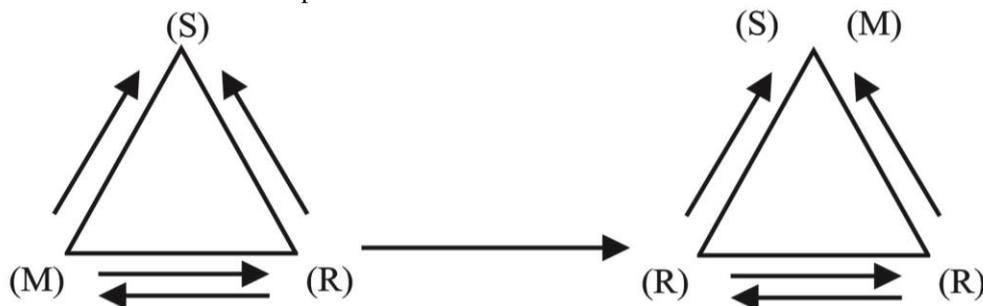


Figure 1 Discourse Process in Cyber News Media

Figure 1 showed the directions of the responses were directed to media (M), source of information (S), and responders (R). The interactions between R and S occurred in a two-ways dialogue, but in a non face-to-face way as the interactions were mediated by the media. Meanwhile, the interactions between R and M occurred in a two-ways dialogue and face-to-face, meaning that M sent a text to R, then R responded the news. The interactions stopped without any responses from M to R. In addition, the interaction between R and R occurred in multi ways in the form of debates, face-to-face, and continuous. The following examples showed the discourse process in the speech:

- 1) M: President SBY Revealed Intelligent Findings “SBY is targeted”
- 2) R1: SBY should not just talk... if he knew it, why he didn’t arrest the suspect..... you’re suck..... just to attract people’s sympathy
- 3) R2: His actions are not to attract sympathy from people... but to motivate people to against terrorism.
- 4) R3: The intelligent report should not be revealed.
- 5) R4: Kompas.com, please work better, don’t be one-sided! Why just SBY? Confirm to Prabowo?

(Kompas.com, 17 July 2009)

Utterance 1) was the news title constructed by the media and based on the source of information (President SBY), while utterance 2), 3), 4) and 5) were the readers’ responses triggered by the media utterance 1. In utterance R1, there were two propositions directed to President SBY, namely direct addressing with name, “**SBY** should not just talk” and the use of pronoun referring to SBY, “**you**’re suck”. Utterance 3 was from R3 to R2. The proposition, “His actions are not to attract sympathy from people”, was the refutation of the proposition given by R2, “just to attract people’s sympathy”. Utterance R3, “The intelligent report should not be revealed” was ambiguous. In the utterance, no signs were found to whom the utterance was directed, but it was implicitly stated that the utterance was directed to M and S because they “revealed intelligent reports” which were seen as confidential. In utterance R4, it is clear that the response was directed to M as explicitly mentioning Kompas.com.

Based on the above analysis of discourse process, it is found that dialogue occurred between responders and source of information, and between responders and media. In addition, dialogue in a form of debate also occurred between responders. Those two language phenomena could be seen as the indicators of democratization, in which public participation was encouraged in the process of discourse in cyber news media. In that context, the interactions could be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. The Factor Classification of Media Context

Code	Dimension	Category	Notes
M1	Synchronicity	Asynchronized	The messages from responders were stored in the receiver site to be read by anyone.
M2	Message transmission	Message by message, one way	Responders were not engaged simultaneously with the receiver.
M3	Transcript persistence	Long-time storage	Response texts last relatively longer in the cyber media site so that it enabled the receiver and/or other responders to participate.
M4	Message size	Unlimited	The message size in cyber media was unlimited for readers’ responses.
M5	Communication channel	Textual	There were no pictures, videos, and audios.
M6	Anonym message	More dominated by anonym messages	Most responders use anonyms.

M7	Personal message	More dominated by personal messages	Subjective opinions were directed to the topic of discussion in the media.
M8	Level of Censorship	Undetected, but intuitively relatively free	Informal typography was not edited and many insulting, mocking, and humiliating expressions indicated low level of censorship.
M9	Quotation	Referring to news text	Most responses refer to news texts.
M10	Message format	Readers' response texts are chronologically formatted.	Responders were sorted based on chronological time from hours, days, dates, and years.

In the context of communication situation, interactions occurring in the cyber media were identified in Table 3. The findings of the study, more specifically, were expected to build more equal understanding on the issue of terrorism. Thus in this study, the meanings of verbal signs on the

issue of terrorism constructed by the media were extracted to investigate the responses of the Internet users towards the opinion that was formed by various sources of information (President, observers, and politician) through cyber media informing terrorism issue related to "Kuningan Bombing 2".

Table 3. Classification of Communication Situation Context

Code	Dimension	Category	Notes
S1	The structure of participation	personal-to-public anonym unequal size of responders among media	Unlimited number of responders Anyone can participate Mostly use pseudonym The lowest number of responders is 8, the highest number of responders is 412 for one news in one media.
S2	The characteristics of participants	Ideologically various	Based on media ideology
S3	Purpose	Comment on information/opinion	Topic development related to public issues occurs.
S4	Theme/Topic	Politics/terrorism	Related to political information – Kuningan Bombing 2.
S5	Tone	Serious but relaxed, tend to be emotional	Mixed: more serious ones, less relaxed ones
	Activities	Responding to news text and debating with other responders.	Confrontative and tend to be sarcastic.
	Norms	Informal	Tend to exaggerate, rude, and insulting
	Language code	Casual	Tend to use informal language

Based on the analysis of meanings, it can be seen that the constructed propositions by the media used verbal signs which were based on the opinion of the sources of information. The results of the analysis of propositions showed that meanings that were constructed by the media on the issue of terrorism relied on the statements of official sources from the authorities (President SBY), who supposed that terror acts in "Kuningan Bombing 2" were related to those parties who were disappointed to the results of presidential election in 2009. Meanwhile, the sources of information from the intelligent observers which tended to support the statements from the authorities attempted to develop the opinion on terrorism issue by relating the issue to an Islamic movement led by Nurdin M. Top and to the US conspiracy. In addition, from politician

perspective, Prabowo Subianto considered that the allegations from President SBY and intelligent observers were directed to him, so that he attempted to develop an opinion that terror acts was not closely related to the presidential election in 2009, especially to him as one of the vice president candidates. The results of analysis on the responders' propositions showed that the responders tended to give various responses towards the opinions of the sources of information on terrorism issue developed by the media. A variety of meanings made by the responders indicated the dynamics of meaning making among the public on the issue of terrorism constructed by media based on the sources of the ruler, observers, and politician, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The Propositions of Media and Responders on the Issue of Terrorism

Media Propositions	Responder Propositions
Related to disappointment of the results of presidential election, Nurdin M. Top, Islam fundamentalist movement, Prabowo Subianto.	Political imagery, Search for public sympathy, Intelligent engineering, The US conspiracy, Create internal conflict, Scapegoating, Discrediting specific religion.

The data showed that the responders' utterances were manifested in a form of verbal signs found in the responses. Based on semiotic-pragmatic analysis, it is found that a variety of responders' propositions can be categorized into three types of utterances – those that support the meaning built by the media, those that refuted the meaning, and those that were ambiguous whether supporting or refuting meaning made by the media.

The analysis of proportions showed that verbal signs found in the responses to indicate that the issue of terrorism was related to the presidential election rested on the propositions of political imagery, seeking public sympathy, and intelligent engineering. Meanwhile, the propositions of media stating that terrorism was related to Islamist

movement tended to be responded with the propositions of creating internal conflict, scapegoating, and discrediting particular religion.

The analysis of signs showed that the interactions and relations between media and responders occurred in one stage/episode, while those among the responders occurred in several episodes. Therefore, there was no debate between media and responders, yet the debate could be found among responders. As a result, the phenomena of semiotic process of "getok tular", word of mouth or chain of signification as suggested by Hoed (2001) in his study on semiotic in advertising, can also be found in the process of discourse in the Internet as shown in Figure 3.

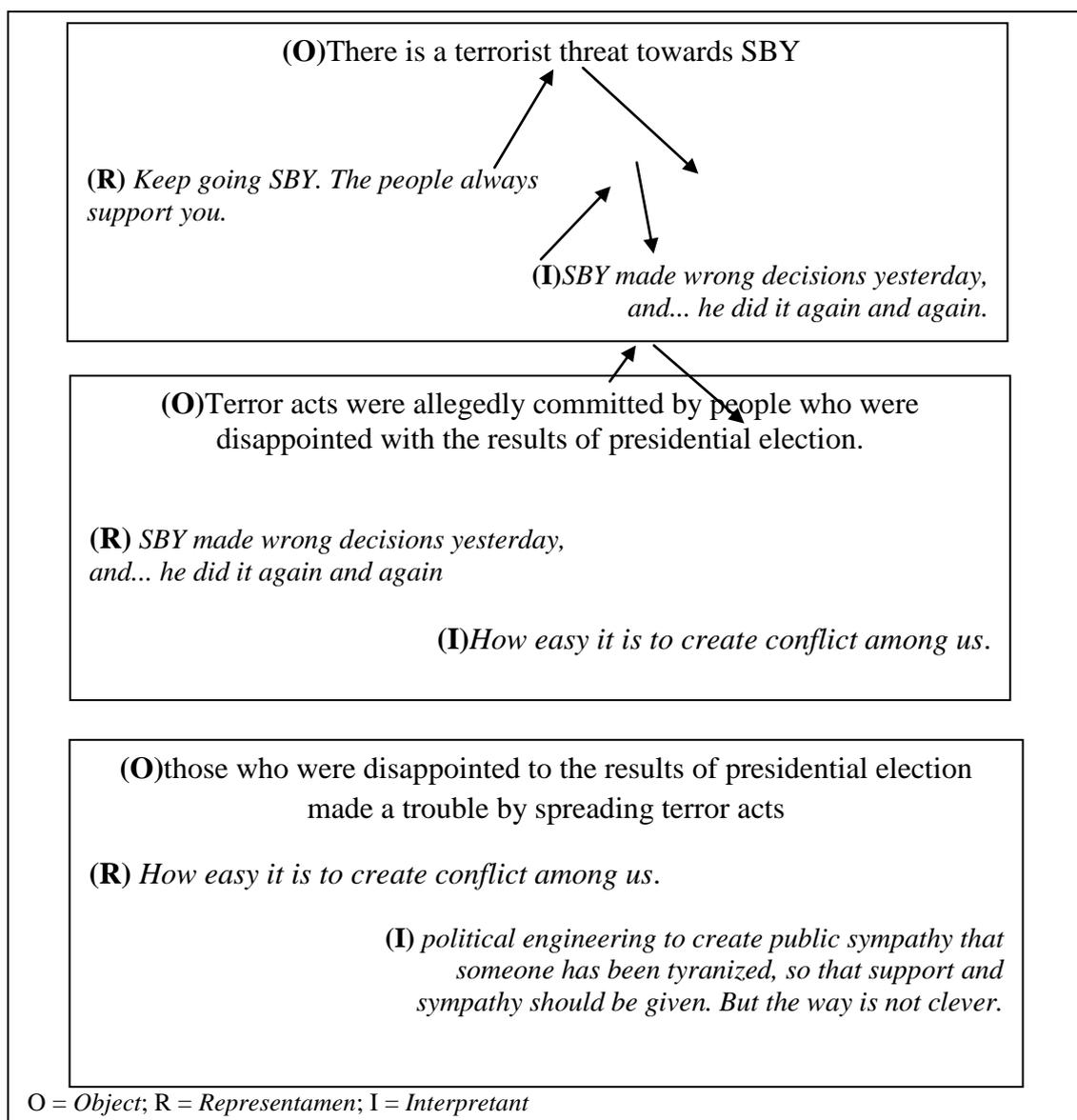


Figure 3. Semiotic Process of "Getok Tular" (word of mouth)

The results of the analysis of similarities and differences of signs and meanings also showed that responses from the Internet users were related to the

information truth and the credibility of the sources of information and the media. Responders tended to see that the level of accuracy related to the

information truth was low and doubtful. According to responders, information built by the media was based on a single source and more of “an attempt to seek sympathy” as a part of “political imagery” and “intelligence engineering”. In terms of credibility, responders tended to see that the level of credibility was low and doubtful as all sources of information had bad track record in the past.

The limitation of the present study was its insufficient results to ensure some factors that caused differences in meanings among responders and media and to reach conclusion on the important role of the Internet as a forum of democratization. In addition, there were a number of variables that were not revealed in the present study, such as variables related to social cognition and ideology. However, there were subtle cues that the characteristics of technology and media used in the process of interactive discourse in the Internet became one of the determinant factors in democratization in cyber media.

Previous research on the important role of the Internet as a forum of democratization have been conducted by several researchers (for example Lim, 2005; Dahlberg, 2006). Using sociological data related to political behavior, the research have concluded that the Internet users tended to feel more free and autonomous in expressing their ideas or opinions compared to the use of conventional media. Besides, the Internet offered a “stage” for less dominant actors to use technology without being controlled by the dominant actors. Meanwhile, Hoed’s study (2014) showed that democratization in virtual world encouraged changes in the structure from “top down” to “dialogue”.

The present study aimed to investigate a different depiction from different perspectives and specific context to find out a new hypothesis related to the role of the Internet as a forum of democratization. Apart from conviviality, discretion seemed to be a keyword to indicate one of many characteristics of technology and internet media in relation to behavior and the process of discourse in cyber media. This term indicated the state of technology and virtual media and users’ behavior that tended to be open, free, and autonomous. As developed by Huntington (1991), Uhlin (1997), and McLuhan (1998), such indicators as public participation, freedom of expression, and equal power relations were included in the concept of “formal democracy”. Meanwhile, the indicators of “substantial democracy” which covered rationality (Mc Chesney, 1998), tolerance (Diamond, 1999), and wisdom (Rahyono, 2011, 2013; Gunarwan, 2007; Franke, 2012), were not yet discovered as the results of present study showed that the responders’ ways of responding tended to be anarchic. For example, the responders’ utterances were dominated by the use of vocabulary/phrases which showed

emotional and overly expressed, rude, and humiliating meaning. As a result to this, democracy and democratization, as classically understood as “the government of the people, by the people, and for the people” and as “something that keeps developing” (Huntington, 1991), were realized formally, but not substantially in the context of language use in the Internet.

Related to Hoed (2014) and Neuhaus (2014) which pointed the changes in the structure of power relations from “top-down” to “dialogue”, this study generated different hypotheses. The changes in structure did occur in the process of democratization in virtual media, but it was not fully “top-down” to “dialogue”. The study found that the changes in the structure were in power relations from “top-down” to “bottom up”. Public was no longer the determinant of the dominating authorities, but public became a dominating party towards the authorities. The study also showed how responders freely directed their responses towards media and the sources of information, while media and the sources of information had no rooms to respond to the users’ responses. Thus, “dialogue” was absent between responders and media. On the other hand, “dialogue” occurred among responders. This phenomenon was identified as “hyperdemocracy”, meaning that the process of democratization centered on public which tended to perform anarchic behavior (Huntington, 1991; Uhlin, 1997; Diamond, 1999).

Responders were defined traditionally as the receivers or consumers of the discourse, who reacted or responded to the senders or producers of the discourse (Buhler, 1934 in Renkema, 2004). However, the results of analysis in this study showed a different definition. In the context of interactive discourse in the Internet, the role of responders shifted from consumers to consumers and producers of discourse. This was marked by the expansion of the agenda or topic related to the theme of terrorism. Terrorism is generally defined as violent acts which has political and power motivation to spread terror and fear both psychologically and physically in public (Chomsky & Barsamian, 2005, p.14). However, the readers’ responses in this study showed that terrorism had raised different speculation related to the motives of terror acts, such as “clash of civilizations” (Huntington, 1996), the phenomenon of “the death of democracy” (McChesney, 1998; Altheide, 2007), the signs of “the explosion of Islamic fundamentalist movements” (Jackson, 2005; Hodges, 2007), and even the thesis of “Blowback” and “McTerror” (Adi, 2010; Anggoro, 2011). All of them showed unintended consequences of the aggressiveness of hidden policies and the militarization process of the United States as traced and shown by Nye (2004) and Caruso and Schneider (2013).

Even though this present case study did not provide a strong basis to formulate generalization on the process of democratization in the Internet, this study offered practical implications, such as the findings of alternative media as the arena of a more democratic discourse process which accommodated public interests in the process of meaning making more equally, fairly, interactively, and jointly in the view of producer and consumer.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that virtual cyber news media in the Internet can be formulated as a forum of democratization as public participation, freedom of expression, and equal power relations occurred convivially and freely for the users. The conviviality is evident in the context of cyber media as an arena for anyone to interpret the reality constructed by the media. Meanwhile, discretion was shown in the context of communication situation in which anyone is free to respond to the news texts. On the other hand, in terms of the freedom of expression, democratization in cyber media tended to be anarchic as shown by expressions of humiliating, one way interaction pattern, anonymous responders, and emotive language use.

For testing and development of the results of the study, further research needs to be conducted, particularly related to verbal signs that emerge and unexpectedly touched by the study, but has not been analyzed further. Firstly, further study is needed to investigate verbal signs in the texts which relate to the strategies of writing news texts using direct quotations based on the sources of information and indirect speech based on media paraphrasing. The present study showed that the tendency of readers' responses was directed to media if the texts were written in indirect speech, while it was to the sources of information if the texts were written in direct quotations. The analysis of semiotic-pragmatic towards this phenomenon is interesting to be revealed and studied more deeply as it relates to how media attempt to build meanings in public: Is it to report some information or to persuade by directing public opinion to certain understanding on events, happenings, or news object?

Secondly, the study of verbal signs found in readers' responders related to politeness strategies needs further investigation. The analysis of semiotic-pragmatic of this phenomenon is also interesting to be revealed and explored further as it relates to the thematic aspects, the media context, the context of the communication situation, and the degree of autonomy (read: freedom and flexibility) that responders have to interpret events, happenings, or news objects. The questions are whether the higher level of autonomy would tend to violate the principles of politeness, or vice versa.

Thirdly, the study of verbal signs found in the readers' responses related to the tendency of the informal use of language needs further investigation, such as to what extent the language variety in the Internet create a new genre in language practice, which Crystal (2006, p.18) sees as the phenomena of *technospeak* that promotes creativity in using language. Linguistic data found in virtual space are also potential for further research using the perspective of forensic linguistics as they are rich in the language use that might be potentially impacted on law.

In conclusion, virtual space seems to provide an arena for a more democratic discourse and meaning process to take place. The development of the Internet as media and artifacts of technology has resulted in a new public space for more various debates, complaints and even smiles. The traffic of signs becomes more congested due to various interests. The history keeps going with the flow of the space and time in the social and cultural structures that are constantly changing. Some histories are recorded, while others are missed. Some people see the signs clearly, while others need to understand them by heart. All are signs and meaningful as each sign gives a meaning.

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