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## Actor Network and Cohort Cultures in the Business of Political Buzzer

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**Abstract**

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(1) describe the work process of a buzzer, based on The Actor Network Theory by Michael Callon and Bruno Latour; and (2) describe their role in the inter-cohort cultures of the employer and the young voters. The research is a case study descriptive qualitative research. Data was collected through interview with political buzzers, the employer, and observation of the buzzer's Twitter account in 2018. This study concludes that the focal actor recruits, supplies information and pay the commercial buzzers, while the buzzers provide network, flowing information and persuasion to their cohort. The translation phase is in the moment of

problematization occurs when focal actors send short messages offering the opportunity a commercial political buzzer, to the moment of mobilization when the buzzers created 15 accounts with different pseudo-identities. This research also found that commercial political buzzers functions as the inter-cohort culture bridge, between the X cohort political actors and the millennial cohort voters.

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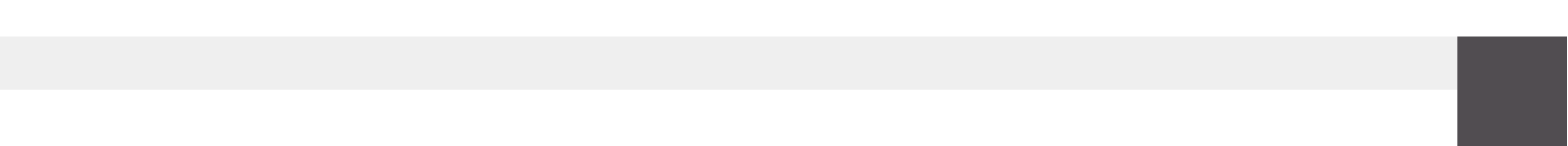
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# Actor Network and Cohort Cultures in the Business of Political Buzzer

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*Abstract— During the 2014 presidential election, commercial buzzers began to disseminate information and persuasion in the Indonesian political arena. The role of these buzzers was crucial, given differences cohort cultures between political actors and the young voters. This study aims to (1) describe the work process of a buzzer, based on The Actor Network Theory by Michael Callon and Bruno Latour; and (2) describe their role in the inter-cohort cultures of the employer and the young voters. The research is a case study descriptive qualitative research. Data was collected through interview with political buzzers, the employer, and observation of the buzzer's Twitter account in 2018. This study concludes that the focal actor recruits, supplies information and pay the commercial buzzers, while the buzzers provide network, flowing information and persuasion to their cohort. The translation phase is in the moment of problematization occurs when focal actors send short messages offering the opportunity to be a commercial political buzzer, to the moment of mobilization when the buzzers created 15 accounts with different pseudo-identities. This research also found that commercial political buzzers functions as the inter-cohort culture bridge, between the X cohort political actors and the millennial cohort voters.*

*Keywords: Actor Network Theory, cohort culture, Business of Political Buzzer*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2018, active social media users in Indonesia reaching the number of 130 million, they spend the average of 3 hours 23 minutes per day connected to various social media [1]. These fantastic numbers were very attractive to the businesspeople and politicians, which is reflected in the emergence of buzzers.

Buzzer is a relatively new term for most Indonesian people. Although there is no formal definition of buzzer, in the context of contemporary communication, this term is often used to refer to those who have capability to influence others in the social media, enliven conversations in the online world through their tweets, voice their interest, and get paid for their tweets [2].

Originally, buzzers used to promote certain products with or without payment. In 2014, during the first

election by the people implemented in Indonesia, buzzers begun to enter the political arena. This phenomenon is growing in the 2017 governor elections, as well as in the legislative and presidential elections in 2019.

There are at least two categories of buzzer: voluntarily and commercial. The commercial buzzer appealed by political actors to win the provincial, legislative, and presidential elections [3]. Commercial buzzer raises a new form of business in the politics arena. Political actors invest some amount of funds and information to the buzzers, who in return provide network for information distribution and persuasion services to the internet users.

Usually social media buzzers are celebrities who has at least 2,000 followers. However, the case in Indonesia, is quite different. According to Reuters article, the buzzer in Indonesia not only celebrities, but also "ordinary people" or community members [4].

In this study, the phenomenon of buzzer will be analyzed using the Actor Network Theory by Michael Callon and Bruno Latour. This theory explains that in building network, the social and technical aspects run side by side, or in other words, there is a relationship between human and non-human elements, including the use of information technology, the people, organizations, software, computers, communication hardware, and infrastructure standards [5]. The analysis in this study will focus on the human and non-human elements involved in implementing a professional political buzzer network on social media.

Callon et. al. explained that the Actor Network Theory looks at how the world of actors is constructed through the definition of the relationship between identity, role, characteristics, its reach and history. This construction can be detected throughout the translation process. Translation is the process when actors join a network or move from one status to another to equalize or unite attraction. Translation consists of four stages: (1) moment of problematization, when a focal actor presents an issue to potential actors and proposes a solution; (2) moment of interestment, when the focal actor assures that the network is able to provide benefits for the solution to

the issue.; (3) moment of enrollment, when potential actors were initiated to enter networks in the cyberspace; and (4) moment of mobilization, when the network of actors in cyberspace has been formed steadily [6].

The formation of a political buzzer network on social media involves various parties, including those who coordinate the tasks that should be carried out by commercial political buzzers. In the Actor Network Theory, these parties are referred to focal actors.

This study also aims to find focal actors, parties who present an issue to actors who are considered potential and offer networks as a solution, until the formation of a stable network. In other words, focal actors is the actors who capture potential actors from the very beginning to form certain networks in the cyberspace. This research will also determine moments that occur during the translation phase according to Actor Network Theory.

The political actor and the young voters come from different year of born or cohort group. Cohort as group of persons that having a common statistical characteristic [7], they are formed by events or phases of life, members that occupy at that time [8]. Furthermore, each cohort reflects perceived membership, common beliefs and behavior, and common location in history [9]. Thus, each cohort has its own culture.

Based on the assumption that every cohort has its own characteristics, the cohort culture of political actors is different from the cohort culture of young voters, it can be hypnotized that the buzzer has a specific role beyond the informative and persuasive tasks of those who employ them. For that reason, this research also seeks to describe the role of buzzers among political actors and the beginner voters based on the perspective of intercultural communication.

**II. METHOD**

This study held with qualitative approach. As a descriptive case study method, this research aimed to find information that can be obtained through cases or problems that being researched. The phenomenon of the emergence of commercial political buzzers on social media in conducting political campaign activities is also a contemporary phenomenon that can be explored in order to enrich the insight of the public.

Data collection were obtained through observation, and interviews. The subjects in this study were commercial buzzers on Twitter's social media, volunteer buzzer, and political actors that employ those buzzers. While the objects in this study are tweets by voluntary and commercial buzzers.

Data analysis was conducted by applying the process of coding by Strauss and Corbin model through (1) open coding, (2) axial coding, and (3) selective coding [10]. The validity of research is checked through triangulation of data collection technique, and data sources, in this case a social media expert.

**III. RESULTS**

Most of the account were following the account of the political actor/employer, fellow buzzers, and accounts that would support the identity of pseudo-personification created by the commercial buzzers, as mentioned by the buzzer: "I mostly retweet, so it's like being told to follow accounts, just when it's done, you're told to follow the required accounts that you have to follow, usually the official account of the campaign, the party account .. Like people who become spokespersons, people who like to be their defenders."

Table 1 represents several examples of twitter account that are characterized by pseudo- personification of the political buzzers.

Table 1. Several Twitter Accounts of a Political Buzzer with Different Pseudo-Identity

Account	Description
@COA	@COA is an account created as a pseudo-drummer. Some account that followed by @COA are accounts that support the pseudo-identity such as Drum Magazine (@DrumMagazine), Drum Corps International (@DCT), and DrumChannel.com (@Drumchannel)
@BP	@BP is an account of a pseudo-fan of Barcelona soccer clubs. This can be seen from the background of the Twitter account as a Fan Club of Barcelona Spain National Football
@MO	@MO is created as a pseudo-fan of rock music. Some of the accounts followed by this account are rock band accounts such as The Rolling Stones, Queen, and Disturbed.
@YO	@YO is a Twitter account as a pseudo-fan of world car racing or F1. As it is stated at the background of this Twitter account as well as several car racing accounts that were
@RT	@RT Twitter account is as if the account of a beautiful female. The pseudo-identity of the account owner describe "herself" as aesthetic girl.

### 3.1. *Focal Actor in The Network of Political Buzzer*

According to the commercial buzzer, there was an actor who organizes and coordinates the commercial buzzer work process. In Actor Network Theory this figure labeled as the focal actors [6]. In this research, the focal actor was an official members of the political candidate's campaign team. All activities related to commercial buzzers carried out by the focal actor, from spreading information about the opportunity to become a commercial buzzer; recruitment process; managed information for the buzzers; arrange specific timing and place for assignments; and payment for the buzzers. The focal actor coordinated the team of commercial buzzer through social media, in this case, the WhatsApp group.

On the other hand, the activities of the volunteer buzzer, took place without a focal actor. The volunteer buzzer formed a group discussion, set up a collaboration team that consist of buzzers who search and gather information with other potential actors in a social media group, in this case it is also WhatsApp group. In this volunteer group, all buzzers took part as actors that contribute to information sharing in the discussion to set their social media content.

The relationship between focal actors and buzzers actor reflects the exchange between employers and the buzzer as service provider, as if in any other business management. But the focal actor preferred to label them as team of social media. While the voluntary actor buzzer does not question any labeling, the commercial buzzer realizes their service as paid political buzzer.

During the triangulation process, late social media expert, Nukman Luthfie, differentiated the use of social media team from buzzer team. According to Luthfie, the social media team formally manages official accounts belonging to political parties or actors, while the buzzers do their job outside the official account.

Based on several library research, initially, buzzers on social media were only used as promoters of commercial goods, at that time social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter had no features for advertisements. Meanwhile, in politics, buzzers worked for two purposes: framing and amplifying certain political issues in the interests of political parties, political figures, or personal ideologies. Regarding their motives, a buzzer can be paid or based on voluntary decisions driven by ideological reasons and satisfaction. Today, buzzer is not a single player, but rather as a part of the industry of communication strategy, used for promotion by corporations as well as by political parties or political figures.

Compare to research by Kate Lamb about the activities of a political buzzer in Indonesia, there is a similarity of result. According to Lamb's research, some of the activities of a political campaign buzzer were to create 11

fake accounts, create daily content with certain hashtags for promotion, and coordinated in the WhatsApp group. The pseudo account that was created must be as if it wasn't anonymous by presenting photo profile of "friends" or famous artists. According to Lamb, Indonesia, as the top five users of Twitter and Facebook in the world, these special forces are known as the buzzer team. Groups that strengthen messages and create buzz on social media. Although not all buzzer teams use pseudo accounts, some of buzzers generated them. In her article, Lamb mentioned that based on the research conducted by the Center for Innovation Policy and Governance (CIPG), all candidates for governor elections in 2017 use the service of buzzer team [11].

Based on the literatures above and data collected in this study, it is more appropriate to conclude that the buzzer and the social media team have different tasks. The social media team managed the official account of the party or the political candidate that employed them, while the buzzer team focused on their job outside the official account, particularly in social media accounts that they generated.

The focal actor in this research, did not differentiate the characteristics of the social media team and buzzer activities.

### 3.2. *Potential Actors in the Network of Political Buzzer*

Potential actors are those who accept issues from focal actors and then initiated to join in to form a stable network in cyberspace. Thus, potential actors are those who have been netted to be involved in promoting an issue by a focal actor. There was a difference in capturing volunteer buzzers and commercial buzzers. In capturing volunteer buzzer, the process was open to the public, as long as the individual has a good Twitter timeline. A good Twitter timeline in a sense, that the Twitter account that content is considered in corresponded with the interests of the candidate. When the Twitter account timeline considered to be in accordance with the interest of the party or the political candidate, then the focal actor would make a contact with the potential actor.

Unlike the volunteer buzzer, potential actors who are netted as commercial buzzers only consist of university students, for the purpose of reaching the millennial groups directly. The selection of students as potential actors also based on the consideration of similar age as millennials, due to assumption for better understanding of fidelity information on social media and the appropriateness of usage among fellow millennials.

### 3.3. *Translation Stages in Recruiting the Potential Actor as Political Buzzer*



According to Actor Network Theory, capturing potential actors held through a translation process, the process when actors join a network or move from one status to another to equalize or unite attraction. Translation consists of four stages: the moment of problematization, moment of interestment, moment of enrollment, and moment of mobilization [6].

Moment of problematization is when a focal actor presents an issue to potential actors and proposed for a solution. In this research, the moment of problematization occurred when one university student spread around a short message in their cohort group. The message contained an invitation to respond to social, political, and economic issues that had recently occurred in Indonesia, and were given rewards or allowance for 'pocket money'. The short message was distributed through a cohort group of 120 students. At the initial stage, the focal actor only sent short message, with limited explanation about the future tasks. The focal actor only offered the potential actor to join and respond to political, social, and economic issues and offered a sum of "pocket money".

The moment of interestment happened when the focal actor assures that the network can provide benefits for the solution to the issue. Moments of interestment occur when a political buzzer make a contact to the focal actors over the telephone and then convinced to join the network. The moment of interestment of the informant of this research, four of 120 students' members of the cohort group were interested in joining the commercial political buzzer network on social media.

The moment of enrollment happened when potential actors were initiated to enter networks in the cyberspace. At this stage, the process completed when a commercial political buzzer agreed to join a with certain motivation (actant).

The moment of mobilization occurred when actor networks had been formed steadily in the cyberspace. This can be discovered when a commercial political buzzer had produced several accounts with different pseudo-identities on social media, usually fifteen Twitter accounts, to distribute the campaign messages as directed by the focal actor.

Every potential actor that join in a network had his/her self-motivation. In the Actor Network Theory, the motivation is called "actant"[6]. The motivation or actant that underlies the commercial political buzzer in this research, are time and money motive. Time means simply to fill spare time, while money is to get additional income. To the commercial buzzer in this research, spreading campaign messages was not because of ideological motivation.

Whereas for volunteer buzzers, the selection of actors occurred after the campaign team had evaluated the Twitter timeline, then they invited the potential volunteer

to join through twitter direct message. Volunteer buzzers were willingly to create an anonymous account to reply to tweets that attack the candidate that they supported.

After the network had been formed, the focal actor will continue to coordinate and control the buzzer performance. However, there were shortcomings of those who controlled the buzzer's performance, what matters the most were high retweet numbers for their narrative campaign, as mentioned by one of the commercial buzzers in the following statement: "At that time, ... it was like doing something fun, being a buzzer like that, money is actually easy, the actual work were not really being checked, get money every month. For three months, it can be three times, once a month, during the campaign period."

The stages of actor network translation from moment of problematization to moment of mobilization in this research, summarized in following table 2.

Table 2. Stages of Actor Network Translation in The Business of Political Buzzer

Stages	Definition	Stages of Actor Network in The Business
Moment of Problematization	Focal actor presents an issue to potential actors and proposed	University student invited their cohort group to respond to a social, political, and
Moment of Interestment	Focal actor assures that the network can	Potential buzzer actor made a contact to the focal actor, who then try to convince the
Moment of Enrollment	Potential actors were initiated to enter networks	Potential buzzer actor agreed to join the social media network with the motivation of
Moment of Mobilization	Actor networks had been formed steadily in the	Commercial political buzzer had produced several active accounts with different pseudo-



### 3.4. *Human dan Non-Human Elements of Political Buzzer's CyberNetwork*

Actor Network Theory also explained about the emergence of harmony between human elements or human elements and non-human elements or non-human elements in forming networks in cyberspace. In this research, human element in the activities of buzzer political campaign on social media are both volunteers and commercials, the general public, and university students who act as potential actors or actors in the political buzzer network.

While the most common non-human elements are the cellphones and laptops. Other non-human elements are the social media Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, although political buzzer activity is mostly done only on Twitter socialmedia.

The buzzer also used the TweetDeck application as a non-human element in supporting the activities in cyberspace networks. According to the Twitter website, TweetDeck is a tool for real-time tracking, organizing, and engagement. This tool offers a Twitter experience by letting its user to view multiple timelines in one easy interface. It includes management of multiple Twitter accounts, schedule Tweets for posting in the future, build Tweet collections, and more.

In this research, through the TweetDeck application, these political buzzers can retweet a similar tweet simultaneously on all accounts that they have created. However, this TweetDeck application may not be used to write the same tweet on all accounts, only for the purpose of retweeting. Twitter's speed in spreading issues and the existence of trending topics on Twitter are some of the reasons many political buzzer networks are created in cyberspace, especially Twitter.

To do their political network activities on social media, these potential actors got the freedom to choose their workplace: in the basecamp provided by the campaign team, completed with computer facilities and internet networks, or to work at home. As the following explanation by a focal actor: "We briefed all at the beginning, all of them could work at home. If they want to come to the post, we facilitate it, and all kinds, then the rest of them can do their work remotely from home ..."

### 3.5. *Bridging of Cohort Cultures in the Business of Political Buzzer*

The cohort difference between political actors and prospective voters does not only show different ages but also different cultures. In the study of communication between contemporary cultures, the word culture has a very broad and complex meaning. Among others, contemporary

intercultural communication focused on the issue of identity. According to Tajfel & Turner, individuals keep and accentuate the identity that link them to special desired groups. While McKinley, Mastro, & Warber, stated that during communicating at the intergroup level, people accentuate distinctiveness in favors of their in-groups and when the distinctiveness (i.e. identity) of a special group becomes salient, the group members' attitudes and behaviors are affected by this identity. Culture consist of a set of shared meanings, symbols, and norms. The level to which one is the core member of a culture is the level to which one understands the symbols of the culture and follows the norms. [12].

As stated earlier, the cohorts of political actors and young voters differ from each other. In this study, political actors were born in the late 60s, they are now in their 50s, while the buzzers and their cohort network were born in the 90s, they are in their early 20s. There are various versions about the generation group categorization. Based on Strauss's theory, the political actors in this study belong to the X generation group, while the buzzers and their cohorts belong to the millennial generation group [8].

In Indonesia, 20% of the population is X generation, they amount around 53 million people. Generation X grew to witness various political upheavals and global conflicts such as cold war, Vietnam war, and the collapse of the Berlin wall. This generation also grew in the early days of the development of information technology [14] [15]. X generation also experience the Indonesian 1998 transformation movement. 89% of Indonesia's X generation have been married, this is reasonable considering their average age is already over 40 years. Many of these generations still use conventional media such as books, newspapers and television. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics shows that 77.2% of this generation use cell phones. 20.35% of the X generation is connected to the internet. This generation tends to take risk and well-informed decision making, as a result of parenting from previous generations [13].

Millennial Generation is a generation that is technology literate, and cannot be separated from technology, especially the internet, which has become a basic need for this generation [14]. Indonesian millennials numbered around 64 million, or about 24% of the population. In general, this group is divided into two sub-groups: senior and junior millennial. Millennial seniors aged between 28 and 35 years. In general, they are just entering a married life. They are usually active on social media such as Instagram, Facebook and others. Other subgroups, millennial junior

generation, are between 20 and 27 years old. They are generally still in college or just start working. They use social media like Instagram and LINE. Millennial is not only limited by age, but also culture. Research conducted by IDN TIMES on 1400 millennials showed that the junior millennial group mostly avoid political affairs. This group is generally addicted to the internet, grows with technology, and its life is supported by the internet. Most (45%) of Indonesian millennials are classified as heavy internet users. They consume internet for 4 to 6 hours every day. [15]. Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics' research revealed that 91.62% of the millennial generation used cell phones, and 56.42% of the total millennials access the internet [13].

Research conducted by the Alva Research Center shows some characteristics of urban millennials in Indonesia. They are creative, confident and connected to each other, especially through social media. They develop specific characteristics of behaviors and values that are unique, open, individualistic (at the same time connected) and multicultural. These characteristics mark the emergence of new cultures, that among others appears in the simultaneous pattern of face-to-face and mediated communication; narcissistic cultures, supported by smartphone with the superiority of camera that connected to the social media; and the diminishing of traditional cultural identity to the urban community that place the monoculture community into a multicultural society. [14]. One of the prominent characteristics of the millennial cohorts is the fear of missing out (fomo) on information than their cohort friends, which is why 83% of them sleep with their mobile phones, so they can immediately update information on social media once they wake up [16]

X and Millennial Generation see the world differently. While X Generation are loyal workers who pursue their careers from the bottom to the top positions in the same company, for Millennials, the measure of success is when they can move from one company to another, as a proof that they are demanded in the labor market. Urban society middle- class millennials tend to be individualistic and value materials above everything, that they could become secular and shifted from cultural to individualistic religious generation. Since the internet of religious knowledge references becoming more open, for the open mind and rational urban middle-class, internet becoming an alternative source of knowledge. [14].

Table 3. Cultural Differences Among Indonesian X and Millennial Generation

Generation X	Millennial Generation
Media differentiation	Simultaneous
Work loyalty	Work infidelity
Careful and sophisticated	Fear of missing out

The difference can be an obstacle in conveying messages from political actors to the millennial group. For this obstacle, political actors assign their media teams - which then act as focal actors - to recruit members of the millennial group, particularly students, who are expected to become bridges between cohort cultures, as stated by the following focal actor: "... we are recruiting students from several campuses, to grab millennial groups ... those who are dealing with smartphones every day, make for millennials like their partners, right ... we are only recruited universities, because it is indeed the age ... millennial, they also understand that it is really necessary that what is done is indeed something that involves information, ensuring that it generates it also accepts this message ... all (being recruited are) university students."

The focal actors' statement shows that communication that occurs within the network of political candidate actors with young voting actors is a cohort intercultural communication characterized by differences in the characteristics of each cohort. In this context, the recruitment of political buzzers is not merely a messenger, but also functions as a bridge between the culture of the X cohort and the millennial cohort, as summarized in Figure 1.

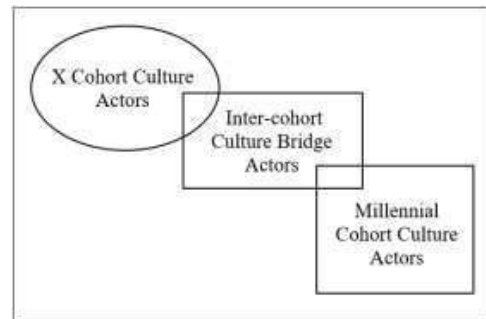


Figure 1. Inter-cohort Culture Bridge of Actors' Network

#### IV. CONCLUSION

There are focal actors in a professional political buzzer network or buzzer with certain rewards on social media. Whereas, for volunteer buzzers, there are no focal actors. Even so, there are still other professional parties who make advertisements on the buzzer volunteer team.

The moments in the translation phase begin with a moment of problematization which is marked by the event when another student spreads a short message in the cohort group. Moments of withdrawal occur when a professional political buzzer recalls focal actors over the telephone and is then convinced to join the network. The moment of enrollment occurs when a professional political buzzer agrees to join a certain actant in this study. The intended actant is the reward offered and to fill in free time, up to the moment of mobilization that is when a professional political buzzer has made several anonymous accounts on social media, that is as many as 15 Twitter accounts to channel campaign messages.

Human element in the buzzer activity of political campaigns on social media both volunteers and with certain rewards, is the general public and students who act as potential actors and actors in the political buzzer network on social media. While the non-human elements used are cellphones and laptops.

Buzzer recruitment is more than merely to transfer messages from the X cohort political actors to young voters' millennial cohort, but also as a function of inter-cohort cultural bridge.

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