

Interest as a mode of reality: Answering the crisis of digital society

Kepentingan sebagai mode realitas: Menjawab krisis masyarakat digital

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Abstract

Currently, society is entering a new crisis in the historical phase of society namely post-truth reality. The crisis arises when the mixing of real and fake information is reproduced through social media by the digital actors. It has put new problems of social analysis particularly to understand the meaning and direction of social actions. This article aims at answering the crisis of the digital society with the elaboration of theoretical discourse of interest. Social scientists from various schools have placed interest as the basic concept to analyze social life. However, the sociological elaboration of the theory of interest stops among the great edifices of all schools of social theory. Therefore, this article is a proposal for developing a theory of interest to track the mode of reality, particularly in the digital society. The research method of this study is an eclectic literature review of interest theories and participative observation in Indonesia's digital society during 2019-2021. This study finds that digital actors produce and reproduce symbolic language on social media by confounding true and false information or post-truth in the dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic policy. The symbolic language of digital actors does not only mean violating the rules in a digital society, but also expresses certain social interests including certain needs or aspirations.

Keywords: interest theory; knowledge concept; mode of reality; symbolic language

Abstrak

Saat ini masyarakat sedang memasuki krisis baru dalam fase sejarah yaitu realitas post-truth. Krisis muncul ketika pencampuran informasi nyata dan palsu direproduksi melalui media sosial oleh aktor-aktor digital. Hal ini menambah masalah baru dalam analisis sosial terutama untuk memahami makna dan arah tindakan sosial. Artikel ini bertujuan menjawab krisis fase digital melalui elaborasi diskursus teori kepentingan. Ilmuwan sosial dari berbagai sekolah telah menempatkan kepentingan sebagai konsep dasar secara fundamental. Namun, elaborasi sosiologi terhadap teori kepentingan berhenti diantara bangunan-bangunan besar dari semua aliran teori sosial. Oleh karena itu, artikel ini merupakan usulan mengembangkan teori kepentingan untuk melacak mode realitas khususnya dalam masyarakat digital. Metode studi ini adalah kajian literatur eklektis teori-teori kepentingan dan observasi partisipatif dalam masyarakat digital Indonesia selama tahun 2019-2021. Studi ini menemukan bahwa aktor-aktor digital memproduksi dan mereproduksi bahasa simbolik di media sosial dengan membaurkan antara informasi benar dan salah atau post-truth dalam dinamika kebijakan pandemi COVID-19. Bahasa simbolik aktor-aktor digital tidak hanya bermakna pelanggaran peraturan dalam masyarakat digital, namun mengekspresikan kepentingan tertentu secara sosial termasuk keinginan atau aspirasi tertentu.

Kata Kunci: teori kepentingan; cadangan pengetahuan; mode realitas; bahasa simbolik

Introduction

The challenge of sociology at its inception was to provide an analysis of social reality. Every socio-history phase is marked, for one, by the crisis of the life world, both economic, political and cultural. Philosophers and social scientists developed theories under the circumstance of certain historical phase. One of the important keys for social scientists is sensitivity to the crisis of the historical phase. Recently, the social theories, sociology, resulted from different historical phase are consist of four main traditions namely positivism, humanism, eclecticism and postmodernism—post-structuralism (Susan 2019). The socio history phase of digital society provides a crisis in the form of a post-truth reality in social world. Reality is no longer a projection of knowledge based on genuine empirical experience, nor an extension of the meaning of reality (hyperreality) but a projection of knowledge based on the mingling of real and fake information. The mingling creates a post-truth reality that digital actors do not mind, neither reject

the mixing of real and fake (Keyes 2004, Ball 2017, McIntyre 2018, Chinn et al. 2021). On the other hand, digital society produces and reproduces post-truth reality through various symbolic languages.

Post-truth as a reality both globally and especially in Indonesia, grows up through the internet network, especially social media in many social arenas such as religion, politics and health (Salman et al. 2019, Arifin & Fuad 2020, Mofferz 2020, Malcolm 2021, Muqsit & Pratomo 2021, Das & Ahmed 2022). In the health arena, the COVID-19 pandemic has become a historical phase that clarifies how post-truth is part of the production and reproduction of social action in the world community. Taylor Shelton, in the article *A post-truth pandemic?*, argues that, in the context of America "... it's evident that coronavirus has revealed not only the general inadequacy of our data infrastructures and assemblages, but also the more general shift towards a "post-truth" disposition in contemporary social life..." (Shelton 2020:2).

Some social scientists suggest a 'traditional way' by recommending war against false information (hoax) so that digital society does not create distortions of their social actions (Malcolm 2021:1064). However, these recommendations have so far failed to eliminate the post-truth reality which is characterized by the relentless development of the mixing of real and fake information in all spheres of social life. The recommendation is not wrong but also not providing new theoretical discoveries that can answer the crisis of the digital society. How to answer the crisis of digital society in the form of post-truth reality? Sociological thought has put 'interest' as the core particle, namely the driving force and major force of social reality (Swedberg 2005a). As the core particle of reality, interest provides an opportunity to answer the crisis of digital society in the form of post-truth reality. In Swedberg's (2005a) idiom the general conversation in the 17th century in Western society using the expression 'interest will not lie' can be an authentic sociological basis that interest is basically able to explain the mode of social reality in digital society.

As the core particle of reality, interest becomes very fundamental in the development of society and its change. However, the study of interests in sociology generally is still underdeveloped. Some efforts, such as the studies by Richard Swedberg (2005a) and Jack Barbalet (2012) are not yet adequate to answer, particularly, the crisis of digital society. Moreover, there is no single serious effort of developing social analysis based of the theory of interest in Indonesian's social sciences tradition. The last review on the concept of interest in sociology is from Sumarti in the article *Sosiologi kepentingan (Interest) dalam tindakan ekonomi* (2007). However, this article does not go beyond the ideas of interest theory since it is merely a summary of interest theories that have already been developed. This article aims to propose a discourse on sociological theory, especially interest theory to answer the crisis of digital society, namely post-truth reality.

Research Method

Particularly, the method of the study eclecticism was initiated and developed by Anthony Giddens to propose the concept of interest theory. The eclecticism of Giddens is an effort to compose a philosophical and theoretical thought by combining different traditions of thought. Giddens points out that "If ideas are important, what matters much more than their origin is to be able to sharpen them so as to demonstrate their usefulness. Even if within a framework which might be quite different from that which helped to engender them" (1984:xxi-xxii). While participative observation of qualitative method was undertaken by following the everyday life of the research subject (informant) activities in social media.

The author has undertaken the participative observation of the digital actors in the major social media such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter before and during the pandemic COVID-19 from March 2019-March 2021. Furthermore, the result of eclecticism about interest theory is used to analyze the gathered data.

Results and Discussion

Digital society

Malcolm, in the article *Post-Truth Society? An Eliasian Sociological knowledge in the 21st Century*, argues that "locates post-truth as the product of the interdependence of new forms of communication,

a re-structuring of social relations and a change in the modes of thinking evident in human habitus" (Malcolm 2021:1066-1067). 'Modes of thinking' is a process of knowledge of actors to define a reality, including reality in a digital society. The big issue is about how a knowledge is constructed?

Before elaborating interest as the mode of social reality, this article starts from the crisis in the contemporary historical phase in particular regarding with knowledge. Sociological questions in each crisis of socio-history revolve around why social action appears as suicide, crime, violence, disobedience to policies, political behavior and so on. In the modern era of the late 20th century, Edward S. Herman & Noam Chomsky (2008) argue that the social reality is controlled by 'manufacturing consent' which involves the interests of the state and mass media political economy. Social reality is not the result of the imagination of social actors independently because of the dominance relation through manufacturing consent. Furthermore, Jean Baudrillard (1990) sees economic capitalism as the reproduction of simulacra which causes an expansion of the meaning of reality from its originality. Simulacra is the formation of an image mixed with myths that are not real through mass media advertising. The purpose of simulacra reproduction is to create public consumption without caring about the real function of any stuff or object. Social actors are under the control of the power of simulacra, which sustains economic capitalism in creating a consumptive society.

Chomsky and Baudrillard are in the same area of thought that reality is controlled by capitalism and its structures. The theory of Chomsky and Baudrillard is a small illustration of the big world of social theories that sensitivity to crisis in the socio-history phase of world society developed a theory. The historical phase of manufacturing consent and hyperreality, according to Hui Kyong Chun (2005), was supported by the institutional development of mass media called the old media. However, now the world society is entering a different historical phase, namely the digital-based information technology revolution that creates new media. Deborah Lupton in *Digital Sociology* (2015) mentions the term digital life that grows up in all social arenas with the digital facilities, namely internet network and gadget. Digital life is a human activity in many fields of social life that utilize digital facilities, so these activities create a digital society.

Lupton argues that digital society is a phase of social history in which social interaction is facilitated by the internet—digital technology through its platforms such as blog and social media (Lupton 2015). Information is exchanged at twice as fast as in the old media era. In addition, control over reality has shifted from the mode of manufacturing consent and hyperreality to the power of social media actors. According to Malcolm (2021), dissemination of information does not need to follow strictly the requirements from normative institutions, including legal frameworks, as the mass media works on it. This means that digital actors become disseminators of information, producing and reproducing simulacra, without any significant limitations. Furthermore, digital actors in social media create different digital actions based on the speed with which information is received. Information for some digital actors is not verified through scientific screening mechanisms. It is a mode of obscuring the truth of knowledge—information by which the post-truth reality created socially.

Post-truth is a condition where the truth is blurred from the facts and institutional views of societal norms in general. Social actors do not consider, or care about information on the condition of truth (Keyes 2004, Ball 2017, McIntyre 2018). Some social scientists see post-truth as the impact of the need for speed of information as a commodification of information in the digital era. However, Baggini criticizes social scientists' attitudes who make post-truth reality with the principle of binary opposition. This attitude of blame is premature and misguided (Baggini 2017:6-7). Baggini's view is interesting to be used as the basis of providing an analysis to post-truth reality, which needs to be analyzed not blamed.

Before going any further, it is very important to read why information is being disseminated so speedily in the digital society through social media. The digital actors will have some advantages from the fast dissemination of information. Based on the author's observations in Indonesia's digital society through social media, there are three basic advantages related to the rapid dissemination of information. The first advantage is to gain 'reach' of the distributed information. 'Reach' is the total visitors who view the information distributed. The wider the reach, the greater influence on public awareness is gained. The second advantage is that, when the level of influence is high, it gives a digital social position as a 'digital influencer' (Wielki 2020) or 'social media influencer' (Lim et al. 2019).

The position of influencer is the achievement of social strata in digital society with power resources in influencing the other digital actors. The influencer position is marked by the number of followers in social media. The third advantage, is the influencer position allows for achieving material or economic profit in the form of advertisement cooperation offer, which is known with the term of endorsement.

Table 1.
Advantages of disseminating information digitally in social media

No.	Advantages	Action Form
1.	Reach/View	To share new information speedily
2.	Influencer position	To accumulate followers
3.	Economic gain	To get advertisement contract (endorsement)

Source: Author observation in Indonesia social media during 2019-2021

As explained earlier and as shown in Table 1, the consequences of disseminating information based on speed without normative institutional control has created post-truth reality in the digital society. Government and digital activism are making serious efforts to tackle the post-truth reality. The Indonesian government has issued regulations that have become formal institutional norms in the digital world through the *Undang-undang Informasi dan Transaksi Elektronik* (Information and Electronic Transaction Law) which is popularly known as ITE Law. Digital activism has carried out a digital literacy movement against hoaxes. However, both the institutional norms of the ITE Law and the movement against hoax have not been able to significantly reduce the spread of post-truth reality. This can be seen from Kominfo data (Ministry of Communication and Information), for example, between August 2018 and September 2019 there was found 3,356 hoaxes with various issues (Kominfo.go.id 2019). Meanwhile, since January to May 2020 there were 1,401 hoaxes related to COVID-19 (Yusuf 2020).

Structure of consciousness, in the phenomenological sense or social constructivism, is the formation of the world of everyday experiences of actors. Berger & Luckman (1991) argue that the experience of having face-to-face interaction is empirical and an original nature that cannot be rejected by wishful thinking. Actors receive warnings from ‘significant others,’ such as parents, clerics and local leaders, when they make mistakes in social actions. The warnings become experiences that accumulated as a stock of knowledge. Therefore, reality as knowledge that is expressed through action is real, not rejected by wishful thinking (Berger & Luckman 1991). Social reality refers to the authenticity of the world of experience. This theory was born in a historical phase when information was still under structural control, dominated by institutions with power resources such as family, religion, the political and economic power of the state and the old media. However, the digital society phase creates an experiential world process that is not only based on face-to-face physical situations but also intensive virtual experiences.

Virtual experiences shift the ‘traditional’ concept of social interaction. Anthony Giddens through structuration, the duality of structure, explains that interaction is a space of significance and power, both allocative and authoritative, working to gain legitimacy. Allocative power is related to the ability to transform economically, while authoritative power is a resource for formal norms and regulations (Giddens 1984). The definition of interaction from Giddens presupposes the ability of power that still refers to the social structure. Meanwhile, the social interaction of digital society, supported by social media, transcends the concept of power from structuration. In many cases, digital social media actors mobilize power in the form of speed of information (Lupton 2015), which is considered new, with various symbolic languages.

Symbolic languages of digital society interactions can appear in the form of humor, entertainment, sarcasm, light news and so on, which is named as ‘content.’ Each symbolic language, as Bourdieu states, has its power to control and dominate the arena (Bourdieu 1992). The symbolic languages with their various forms are uploaded and shared in every second, which means the power of symbolic languages that creates the interaction of digital society appears as the speed of information. The digital actors who share the fastest information with strong symbolic languages will have the power to transform the world of people’s experiences. Therefore, tracing the modes of social reality for Giddens (1984) and Michele Foucault (1980) is to understand power in social relations as expressed through knowledge and

language (discourse). Meanwhile, according to Manuel Castells (2010), in the era of the internet, power with its language becomes the shaper and maintainer of the network in which actors carry out political, economic and socio-cultural work.

Crisis arises when information with its symbolic languages, which is rapidly shared, has separated from the concept of real and empirical. Real information mingles with fake, and reality mingles with fantasy so that the truth is obscured. The basic issue is the indifference of some digital society toward obscuring the truth. Thus, the choice of digital society's social actions in the political, economic and socio-cultural arenas is also based on the obscuration of the truth. In this condition, the question of reality can appear radically. When the digital society does not refer to 'truth', how to trace the mode of social reality?

Knowledge and materialism

Sociologists, and social sciences scholars in general, have the associated burden of explaining mode of social reality in the digital society. At the same time, the theories that are still at work are the result from the social history phase that digital society has passed. Obviously, the crises of different phase of social history require different theories to answer the above questions. Although tough, each socio-history phase is not independently constructed.

The socio-history phase of 19th century capitalism was the foundation for the phase of 20th century capitalism and beyond (Giddens 1971). The theoretical discourse of these historical phases has philosophical roots, or creates philosophical roots, for each historical phase (Hardiman 2009). Plato offers ideas as a method to find the truth, meanwhile Aristotle refused it by offering empiricism as a path to find truth. Rene Descartes mediates, in the history of the Enlightenment in Europe, with a *logical empiricism* that combines apriori and a-posteriori. Logical-empiricism philosophy became the foundation for the birth of positivism's social science theory as the major tradition in the European Enlightenment era.

Tom Campbell (1994) explains that, in further theoretical developments in Western society, Hegel created the philosophy of dialectic that every idea meets each other as a productive conflict situation between thesis, antithesis and synthesis. On the other hand, Fuerbach's philosophy of materialism shows the impasse of the idea of religious knowledge which does not have the ability to answer real problems caused by material needs as the basis of human society's life. Hegel's philosophy of dialectic and Fuerbach's materialism became the development of Karl Marx's theoretical thought, namely dialectical materialism. Marx believed in Hegel's dialectics by replacing knowledge or ideas with Fuerbach's materialism. The activities of human society are material activities because materialism is the most basic need. Therefore, the development of society is based on material as a super structure which results means of production and mode of production in every socio-history phase.

The theoretical thought of dialectical materialism has again been challenged by the traditions of humanism or subjectivism thought from Max Weber, Alfred Schuzt to Karl Manheim (Hardiman 2009). In the modern era, the theoretical challenge is presented by the dialectic of knowledge from Peter L. Berger and Thommas Luckman, and Pierre Bourdieu about the types of capital in the reproduction of social systems. Jürgen Habermas, of the third generation Frankfurt School, with *The Theory of Communicative Actions* (1984) mediates the conflict between knowledge (ratio) and materialism. Habermas argues that knowledge is inseparable from the interests of every subject. While interests are not centered on one polar material or non-material needs but standing above (Weber 1978).

This brief review wants to show that knowledge and materialism are the nature of human society, referring to Habermas (1984), including Karl Manheim (1955), that knowledge is related to interests. Therefore, the locus of attention of social science scholars is actually interest that represents knowledge and material things. Social scientists such as Ratzenhover, Weber, Simmel, Habermas and Bourdieu have provided a theoretical basis that interest is the most fundamental element of the mode of social reality. Although, until now, both in social theories and in social-political scientific dictionaries, there is no clear definition of interest.

The theory of interest

Interest as a fundamental concept has not received further development in the sociological tradition, mainly due to the dominance of Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism (Swedberg 2005a, Barbalet 2012). Richard Swedberg thoroughly and concisely traced the concept of interest in sociology from classic to contemporary through his book entitled *Interest* (2005a) and the article *Can there be a sociological concept of interest?* (2005b). In addition, there is Jack Barbalet through the article *Self-interest and theory of action* (2012), which elaborates the concept of interest with a comparison of economic and sociological studies.

Swedberg explains that interest is a missing concept in sociological studies even though most of scholars in this field analyze interests seriously. The term from Robert K. Merton, quoted by Swedberg, interest is a 'proto-concept' (Swedberg 2005b:359-360). The early period of the concept of interest in sociology began with the thought of the Austrian sociologist Gustav Ratzenhover and his followers who saw interest as a driving force or a source of driving individual action. Furthermore, the sociological effort to analyze interests was also carried out by Max Weber, Georg Simmel and Pierre Bourdieu who saw interest as a major force or influential in individual actions. The notion of interest as a driving force sees interest as an integral part of biological nature. While the major force in social life is the belief that interests contribute fundamentally to social actions within certain limits as a result of the conditions and processes of the social world.

Gustav Ratzenhover's study of the concept of interest had an influence on subsequent developments, especially in America, such as Albion Small in *General Sociology*, E.A. Ross in *Foundation of Sociology*, and Arthur Bentley in *Process of Government*. Ratzenhover uses the term 'inborn interest' which is classified into five categories of interests, including procreative interest, physiological interest, individual interest, and transcendental interest (Swedberg 2005a:363). This term in psychological studies of interest is named intrinsic motivation (Harakiwicz & Knogler 2017:335).

The five types of inborn interest are impulses to behavior and actions in the world of social interaction. Albion Small called interest the atom as an idea in physics. The translation in this paper is the core particle of reality. In passing, Small illustrates "Every human action can be pursued from interests. We eat because there is a desire for food; but desires are governed by the physical interests of the body. We sleep because we are tired; but fatigue is a function of bodily interests... We go to the supply market for economic reasons..." (Small cited in Swedberg 2005b:364-365). Similar to Ratzenhover, Small creates categories or types of interests. However, Small rejects the biologically existing interests that are the foundation of Ratzenhover's theory. Interests also exist in social structures that can serve as opportunities or barriers for individuals. Furthermore, Ratzenhover's follower is E.A. Ross through the book *The Foundation of Sociology*. Ross tries to refine the concept of interest by emphasizing the dimension of desire (desire) with nine types. These desires encourage or shape interests. Meanwhile, Arthur Bentley, in *The Process of Government* (1908), proposed the theory of interests and groups. "There is no group without interest. Interest as a term used in this work (study, pen.), is the same as group..." (Bentle 1908 cited in Swedberg 2005a:367). Bentley views interests as the same as groups so that they can be referred to as group interests or interest groups.

Ratzenhover and his followers above see interest as the core particle in the world of interaction and social structure. However, interest studies have not found a complete theoretical concept that is described, for example, by a clear definition. Furthermore, Georg Simmel saw interest as a force or power to create social forms such as sociation and association. Different interests create different social forms. For example, economic and political interests will create social forms of domination, conflict or control and being controlled. The difference between Simmel's concept of interest and Ratzenhover with his followers is that interests will experience dissolution as social forms (Swedberg 2005b:370). That is, the actors no longer express it explicitly but still work invisible in society. The classical period of Ratzenhover, along with his followers, and Simmel have found interest as a core particle.

James Coleman is a sociologist who put interest at the top of analysis. He states "The analytical methods are based on statistical association between the behavior of interest and other characteristics of the social system as the context for that behaviour" (Coleman 1990:2). Coleman found rational choice theory

overcomes the impasse with the idea that actors with interest will "maximize utility, or the satisfaction of their needs and wants" (Ritzer 2008:445). According to Swedberg's interpretation of Coleman's interest theory that actors have an interest in objects or events but in order to achieve interests, actors must have control over resources. When actors have control over the resources of interest, there is no social action. However, in a situation where two actors have control over the resources of interest, there will be an interaction between the two actors, which is known as a social system. For example, social capital is the relationship that actors need to achieve interests. Institutional norms, in turn, for Coleman are part of a conscious human effort to realize interests (Swedberg 2005b). Coleman provides a way out the impasse of the theory of interest from Simmel and Ratzenhover through the concepts of control and resources. Fundamentally, Coleman's theory of interest is a further step for the theory sociology of interest. However, Coleman also does not provide directly a sociological definition of interest. Thus, the need for sociology to explain in detail how the process of social action and social interaction remains to be studied. Especially the development of a digital society.

Max Weber, in the book *Economy and Society* (1978), divides three regular social actions (use), social actions that have been habituated for a long time, and actions that are determined by self-interest. The social structure for Weber is not only determined by economic basis but status and politics. The social structure of Weber's model cannot be separated from the basic concept of action made by interests. Weber, in *The Economic Ethics of World Religion* affirms the theoretical proposition "not ideas but material interests and ideas, which directly regulate human behavior" (Weber cited in Swedberg 2005a:379). This concept of action based on material interests and ideals will provide an important foundation in the further development of the theory of interest in this article. After Max Weber, Pierre Bourdieu was a sociological scientist who contributed to the development of interest in social analysis as a major force. This is because Bourdieu received a fairly strong influence from Weber through the study of the sociology of religion.

So far, the development of Bourdieu's social theory by many scholars has focused on the concepts of field, habitus and types of capital. Basically, Bourdieu builds a theory of interest which explains the dynamics in the habitus and field (Bourdieu 1992:115-116). Each field has its own basic rules or fundamental law in which social actors have different opinions (distinct disposition) or habitus. Social actors will involve themselves in the arena if they have an interest in the arena such as religious, economic and political arenas. Bourdieu, therefore, gives an important warning that the concept of interest in sociology is not the same as interest in economics. This is because economics only sees one type of interest reality, whereas social reality displays many interests. Swedberg argues that Bourdieu's definition of interest can be traced to the terms *lusio*, investment, and libido. Arena can be described as a social game where only actors who enter the arena and want to be part of the game will show interest (Swedberg 2005b:382).

Anthony Giddens (1984) discusses the intentional awareness of actors who use 'structural properties' to produce and reproduce social systems. However, Giddens has left the concept of interest. Giddens's view of interests is the concept of "unconsciousness motives or cognition" which only contains individual desires. Motivation does not create continuity of action but the intention of actors with a discursive consciousness and practical consciousness create reality (Giddens 1984:6). Meanwhile, the tradition of conflict studies puts interests as one of root causes of conflict, along with power. However, both Ralf Dahrendorf in *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (1959) and Lewis Coser in *The Functions of Social Conflict* (1956), use the concept of interest without an exact definition. However, in general, conflict studies see "interests may be subject to relative scarcity, basic needs are not (for example, security for one party is reinforced by security for the other) (Ramsbotham et al. 2011:15).

Interest definition

Referring to the theoretical discourse above, it can be argued that interest is the core particle of the production and reproduction of social actions. Interest is directing the mobilization of power in the dynamics of conflict, encouraging the selection of experience into dialectic of knowledge, choosing the significance and transformation of resources in interactions, and directing the use of capital in the reproduction of social systems.

Tracing the concept of interest can be started from etymology and the theoretical discourse already explored. Based on the explanation of Etymonline.com, etymologically interest in Middle English and Anglo-French is from the word *interesse* which means ‘things of legal concern, while in Medieval Latin it means ‘compensation for loss.’ In the context of modern France, interest means ‘it is important, it makes a difference,’ and ‘profit and advantage.’ The meaning of the economy emerged at the end of the 15th century which meant ‘money paid for the use money lent.’ Meanwhile, the term interest in the Indonesian version of the KBBI is ‘need.’ Interest, sociologically, both from the etymological context of Western and Indonesian society involves meanings related to ‘important matters,’ ‘legal concerns,’ ‘material benefits,’ ‘non-material benefits’ and ‘needs.’ On the other hand, the theoretical exploration previous to this paper has placed the elements of interest such as actor, desire (want), social arena with its structure, and material and nonmaterial resources as the goal of actions. Those elements of interest are the part of interest as driving force and major force.

A theoretical proposition that can be formulated from the two concepts of interest, driving force and major force with an eclectic approach, that the elements of interest consist of (1) the subject of the actor, (2) desire or want, (3) the arena that has norms or regulations, (4) material and non-material resources as the needs, and (5) the actions of actors. The results of this eclectic approach can produce a definition of interest which can be the starting point in reading the mode of social reality. Therefore, interests based on the theoretical elaborated previously can be defined as the subjective desires of actors (want) both individually and collectively which must or not must be fulfilled by material or non-material resources through various actions in certain social arenas that have a structural (social) context.

The elements of ‘must’ and ‘not must’ are inspired by the concept of ‘intention’ (Giddens 1984:4-5) which means agency or actor awareness with the knowledge ability to produce and reproduce social actions, while the concept of intention socio-linguistically refers to the scale of action that will be realized in the norm of necessity (compulsory) or not necessity (not compulsory). In the world of everyday social life with various social relationships and interactions in specific arenas such as politics, economics and law, interests are the core particles that develop various social realities. This is the basis for the mode of social reality.

Mode of social reality

The interest particle contains sub-particles including actors, subjective desires, action intention (must or not must), material and non-material resources, and social arena or field which can be considered as the starting point for the development of more advanced interest theory. Particularly, this concept and definition can be used to track the post-truth reality. The further development of the theory of interest of this article will be supported by structuration theory. Giddens points out that structuration does not separate structure and actors (agency) but sees a dynamic relationship between social structure and agency (Giddens 1984). Therefore, briefly, it can be mentioned that interest should not be analyzed by dualism but a duality of structure. Interest is no longer seen oppositely as an actor inborn factor nor as a social product.

When interests are the actor’s subjective desires that must or not must be fulfilled by material or non-material resources, various social actions will refer to action intentions and forms of resources. Subjective desires are the nature of living things which in human social history were developed in structures containing social values and institutional norms. Thomas Hobbes’ philosophy about *homo homini lupus* or humans are wolves to other wolves is the reflection of subjective desires. According to Hobbes (Rules 1992), in order to prevent the destruction of the subjective desires of *homo homini lupus* effects, human being creates an agreement on a common organizational structure that develops formally in the form of a state. Hobbes’ thought has provided a tautological foundation under which interests become structures with normative institutions that regulate its members with various sanctions and legitimacy. Interest exists as a structure separate from space and time that control the actors, but also exists as part of a human actor experiences.

The action intention, as the sub-particle of interest, is basically the world of languages, namely the forms of action that are chosen by actors based on the reflection of subjective desires. At the same

time, action is an instrument or means by following Max Weber's theoretical concept of types of social action. How to achieve goals (zweckrational), ways to realize values (wertrational), ways to express feelings (affection), and ways to follow tradition (Campbell 1994, Ritzer 2008, Susan 2019). Therefore, language with symbolic forms is a means of dealing with subjective desires. The concept of language as a symbolic form in this theoretical study refers to the constructivism theory. Social action is based on the 'objective reality,' known as social norms, that regulate the actors action through the scale of must or not must. The notion of 'must' and 'not must' can be understood as a choice with some consequences at some certain level. Therefore, the intention of action, later on, can appear as a compromising action that illustrates the middle scale between must and not must.

The subjective desire of human actors is an important phase of the decision to scale any action intention until it becomes a manifest action. The concept of action intention was also developed in conflict action theory which categorizes avoidance, yielding, compromise, forcing (violence) and problem solving (Langton et al. 2016). The action of problem solving is more of an ideal concept—*das solen*, while the rest is real one—*das sein*. Action intentions are sub-particles of interest that are continuously produced and reproduced related to the fulfillment of subjective desires for resources. Various action intentions are manifested, as a manifest action, through certain forms of symbolic language. In turn, reading of the scale of action can be done by examining various symbolic languages. Furthermore, action intention can be realized as manifest actions if actors are able to mobilize power. In this dimension, human actors need power to turn action intention into manifest actions.

Material and non-material resources are sub-particles of interest that figures out the decision of the action intention into manifest action. Actors need resources both material and nonmaterial, to fulfill their subjective desires. The resources that have been owned by actors are used and accumulated continuously. In this sense, in a society that has developed as a structure and system, social actors who fulfill desires for resources have their respective powers. Furthermore, actors, individual and collective, produce and reproduce manifest actions through symbolic language to realize subjective desires for achieving resources. Symbolic languages, following the symbolic interactionism of Herbert Mead (Ritzer 2008:360-361) consist of vocal gestures such as words and voice intonation, and physical gestures such as body movement and images like colors, accessories and shapes of dress.

Manifest actions are actions that have been chosen with power in the form of symbolic language which always contains the subjective desires of human actors for reaching material and non-material resources with a scale of action intention—must and not must. Therefore, methodologically, symbolic language is a means to discover interests. At this stage, sociology enters into a more complex discussion of symbolic language which is presented as, with the concept of structuration and constructivism, discursive and recursive practices. Structuration theory can be very helpful in the analysis of manifest actions with its symbolic languages in the interactions of discursive and recursive consciousness.

Symbolic language of interest

The question of structuration theory is just the same as the questions of other schools of social sciences scholars such as positivism, humanism and post-structuralism about why and how social reality is produced and reproduced (mode of social reality). The structuration of Giddens (1984), in short, rejects reality as being diametrically separated between structure and actors or agencies. Reality is a duality of structure process between social structure and actors. Therefore, symbolic language of interest is a duality of structure where interest is a simultaneous dialectic between the interests of the structure and the interests of actors. Social structures are resources of power that are independent of space and time, thus ignoring and controlling social actors. The content of the social structure, 'structural properties' (Giddens 1984) is the interest of the structure in which mode of actions and interactions always exist. This also means that the social structure defines and regulates interests, and at the same time provides the elements of interest in terms of wants and resources. At the same time, actors have the freedom to define and realize subjective interests. Therefore, structural interests and subjective interests are always dialectical through symbolic language which is institutionalized as a social system. The practice of interests can be seen in the world of daily interaction as a continuous institution.

The dialectic of interests through symbolic language, in turn, is a mode of social reality or the way in which social reality is produced and reproduced. Reading the interest of using symbolic language analysis in an arena will answer the question of why and how social actions are produced and reproduced. Language becomes a representation because the structure and actions of actors are symbolized by language (Giddens 1984, Berger & Luckman 1991, Bourdieu 1992, Castells 2010). A further question related to the crisis of digital society, namely post-truth reality, is whether symbolic language analysis can be used on the languages of post-truth reality or not? The answer to this question is not yet empirical because there are not enough field studies related to this concept. However, interest as a core particle of social reality provides an opportunity for tracking interest behind the post-truth reality.

True information mixed with fake information is inevitable in a digital society that overshadows the everyday social world. Indeed, the blurring of reality, post-truth reality, is supported by symbolic languages of interests. Therefore, post-truth reality can be traced through the particles of interest, or the meaning of interest, namely how subjective desires for material and non-material resources are symbolized by language as manifest actions. Real or fake information as a symbolic language can be ignored in this regard. The task of social sciences is to track interests by making all symbolic languages, whether real or fake, as the genuine sociological data.

As a short sociological analysis case, during the COVID-19 pandemic, since early 2020, the governments around the world have created various handling policies for health and economic safety of the country. The COVID-19 pandemic is a fact because it cannot be denied by wishful thinking. However, the interaction arenas, including digital interactions through social media, are filled with various symbolic languages which are polarized into an act of acknowledging and denying the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, both acknowledging and denying the pandemic simultaneously carry out the production and reproduction of symbolic languages. Efforts to sort out fake information from true or real information is an urgent need to avoid the phenomenon of mis-led action, but efforts to examine the interest of various symbolic languages of post-truth reality are equally needed.

As an illustration, the case of spreading COVID-19 vaccination videos on social media that are considered as a hoax, such as the vaccination video causes the body to stiffen, the vaccine contains a micro chip, the vaccine causes fainting, in The Province of Nusa Tenggara Timur and so on. Those videos in the normative institutional view are a hoax information. Sociologically, as a post-truth reality, 'hoax information' videos are a symbolic languages of interest related to the subjective desires of actors that must or not must be fulfilled by material or non-material resources. In the case of the vaccine video causing the body to stiffen (Salim 2021), the symbolic languages can be studied through symbols among others words, both written and verbal, voice intonation, gestures, and images. In the video, vaccination causes a stiff body, there are gestures and images in the form of a woman being carried by an ambulance in a crying condition, her hands and feet are stiff like a spasm. The symbols of words are the sentence "habis vaksin enam hari" (six days after getting vaccinated) and the text "Vaksin Kalbar" (West Kalimantan vaccine).

The vaccine video "habis vaksin enam hari" appears in relating the context of the government's COVID-19 vaccination program which was responded by three awarenesses based on the results of various surveys, namely accepting, rejecting and not having an opinion. The average surveys show that the majority of people receive the vaccine, but the number who refuse the vaccine is not few. For example, survey data from the Ministry of Health and Indonesian Technological Advisory Group on Immunization (ITAGI) show that two-thirds of respondents or above 70% accept the COVID-19 vaccine program, while 7% refused (Rokom 2021). The rejection of the vaccination program is based on religious reasons, safety, and level of education. The symbolic language of the vaccine video makes the stiff body have a meaning related to the subjective desire of the actors, which can be related to three awarenesses related to vaccination. The language "habis vaksin enam hari" in the body gesture and the image of a woman in an ambulance with a stiff body is a condition of threat and insecurity due to vaccines. In this analysis, the interest particle of the video has the possibility of being related to the desire for non-material resources, namely a sense of safety or safety guarantee. The desire to obtain safety guarantee creates an action intention which is produced and reproduced as a manifest action of

compiling and publishing the video. However, tracing symbolic languages more deeply will provide data on particles of interest that can be more complex, such as involving the interest of social structure.

Conclusion

Interest is the subjective desire of actors that must and or not must be fulfilled by material and non-material resources in arenas with certain contextual social structures. This definition is a theoretical proposition based on the eclectic approach to the theory of interest already developed in this article. The definition of interest, as this paper proposes, does not exist yet in all fields of social science. The definition and concept of interest proposed here, will hopefully develop more advanced theory and research based on the interest perspective.

Particularly, the study of interest through symbolic languages aims at answering the crisis of post-truth reality. The analysis of social science needs to give a special portion to the particle of interest in order to answer the crisis of digital society. Various symbolic languages are means of interest, both the interests of structures and actors, through the formation of action intention and the manifest actions related to the achievement of material and non-material resources. It can be said that the analysis of mode of social reality by tracking the particle of interest is currently the most urgent theoretical project in the phase of digital society.

Post-truth reality, as the crisis of digital society, cannot be eliminated but will coexist with truth reality. Reading and analysis of interests enable the disclosure of the veil of the post-truth reality that is covered by various symbolic languages in the interaction arenas of digital society. Social reality is a process of contestation, conflict or dialectic of interests whose patterns, shifts and dynamics must be observed. This article is an early stage in the project of interest theory as a mode of social reality in the crisis of digital society. At this time, the progress of digital society with post-truth reality is a historical phase that needs to be responded to by relevant social science approaches. This article is only a small part of the big process of finding a theoretical approach to the mode of social reality in the era of digital society.

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Susan & Singgih: "Interest as a mode of reality: Answering the crisis of digital society"

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