

Creating Community through Design: The Case of Go-Jek Online

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ABSTRACT

The Internet has changed the social patterns and the behavior of Indonesian society. It provides business and employment opportunities, as well as a wide range of information on economic, social, political, and cultural issues. The problem is that the Internet also diminishes real relationships. This has occurred in the community of motorcycle taxis (known in Indonesia as ojek). Formerly, ojek drivers form a community and a physical gathering place. With the development of online technology in the form of an app called Go-Jek, an online transportation service for motorcycle taxi, drivers no longer meet face to face or come together in one community. The question is thus how Go-Jek drivers interact and relate to each other. The aim of this study is to see the effect of the online application on the community that previously had social relations at its base and were found on every street corner. This is a qualitative research using a phenomenological approach. The findings showed that Go-Jek online terminated access to a real relationship among the drivers and replaced it with an imagined community. Using the analytical perspective of Imagined Communities by Ben Anderson, we find that there is still a sense of solidarity, fraternity, and comradeship among Go-Jek drivers, who are united by design. The green color on the attributes of the jacket and helmet not only makes Go-Jek a real and formal corporation, but also creates a sense of trust and safety. For the driver, the green color has the power to bring solidarity that unites the community of Go-Jek drivers in an imagined community.

Keywords: Imagined community, Design, Go-Jek

1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet changes the social patterns and behaviors of Indonesian society. Conventional linguistic practices keep changing. Over the past two or three decades people have become more interested in human to human interaction via computer networks, and the new medium has attracted much attention (Kwok, 2005). From an economic perspective, because Indonesia uses this aspect as a basis for calculating its level of welfare measure, individual economic improvement occurs more frequently when the internet reaches the public. On the adoption of e-commerce indicators at the state level, for example, in income and education levels, as well as the penetration of internet users, Indonesia is showing across the board increases. Data from internetworldstat indicate that the penetration of internet users in Indonesia was 12.3% with a rise in the number of users of 1400%, from 2 million users to 30 million users during the 2000-2009 period (Internet World Stats, 2015). In 2015, 93.4 million people accessed the internet in Indonesia (Statista, 2016). This figure is projected to grow to 123 million in 2018, making Indonesia one of the biggest online markets. Mobile internet usage is undergoing double-digit growth rates and currently stands at close to 30 percent of the population (Statista, 2016).

With the increasing number of internet users, services and goods providers through online media are also increasing. The Internet thus provides business and employment opportunities. The Internet also offers a wide range of information about economic, social, political, and cultural issues. New communications technology has become a medium that is provocative and offers civil society groups and activists new opportunities to communicate, expand, and mobilize through digital channels and participate in public discourse unmediated by either the state or large capitalist-controlled media channels (Grossmann,

1995; Foundations, 2014). People, companies, and institutions feel the depth of change and are often overwhelmed by the technology, but they ignore its effects (Castells, 2013).

Efficiency is an important element in the widespread use of the internet network. Activities within the network enable individuals to learn more about the world. On one hand, the impact of an increasingly open internet access is primarily used for economic exchanges. In addition to sales of goods, in recent years, internet access has also reshaped the transportation field. The common motorcycle taxi, called *ojek* in Indonesia, is now offered through the internet via an app called Go-Jek that provides *ojek* services.

Despite its advantages, the internet can also diminish real relationships. With the spread of mobile technology, it is much easier for people to maintain constant contact with their social networks online (Hampton, 2015). This has occurred in the community of motorcycle taxis (hereinafter referred to as *ojek*). Formerly, *ojeks* had a base (*pangkalan*) in the community which was a gathering place for drivers. With the arrival of Go-Jek, they no longer need to meet face to face or come together as a community. The question in this study is how Go-Jek drivers interact and relate to one another.

Go-Jek has become an interesting phenomenon in Indonesian society. There are many motorcycle taxi apps in Indonesia, including Grabbike, Ojesy, Jeger Taxi, Limobike, Blu-jek, and Ladyjek. Among these, we choose Go-Jek because Go-Jek is the first online *ojek* service in Indonesia, and is the largest motor taxi company with the most motorcycle drivers. Many studies have compared Go-Jek to other motorcycle taxi apps. This shows how Go-Jek is the center of attention in the society, among researchers, and in the government. Among the many studies of Go-jek, no research has analyzed the relationships among Go-jek drivers. We are

interested to understand how they interact when they do not have a real-world gathering place.

This study explores the effect of the app Go-jek on the real-world communities ojek drivers had previously formed and how drivers developed a new community over the internet. We explore the new communities of ojek drivers from the aspect of design and supporting media.

2. FROM OJEK PANGKALAN TO GO-JEK ONLINE

2.1 The Origin of Ojek

In Indonesia, traffic congestion has become a huge problem, and many people have chosen to ride motorcycles. This has offered a business opportunity for some to become ojek drivers.

Ojek is general public transport that use a *pangkalan* (a base) as a gathering place (Figure 1). Such bases are usually set up on the street corners of residential areas in lower class areas of towns away from the city centers, but which have direct access to the main roads of the city. Traditionally, ojek drivers wait for passengers at the base. These drivers interact with each other as they spend the day waiting for passengers. Through these meetings and interactions, the ojek drivers come to know each other and organize their community.



Figure 1. Traditional ojek drivers gather at their base, mostly at the street corners of residential areas, waiting for passengers
Source: Pos Sore, 2015

The ojek stay at the base is very time consuming. According to Go-Jek CEO, Nadiem Makarim, more than 70 percent of the work time of motorcycle taxi drivers is just waiting for customers, plus traffic congestion in Jakarta (Abas, 2015). For passengers, the efficiency of motorcycles lies in their ability to slip through traffic jams. Ojeks thus remain a cheap mode of transportation. However, an ojek can carry one passenger only.

Identification of an ojek can be seen when customers come to the base. The ojek drivers line up in a row holding their helmets. Ojek drivers use serial numbers in their service process in order to avoid stealing passengers from one another and use a bidding process for the consumer that is without any standard price per kilometer. The habits that determine the ojek cost have been formed over decades. Increased travel costs occur if the government raises fuel prices, but usually the calculation is not considered a burden to the consumers. Identity as an ojek is not of primary importance to the drivers. For the drivers who provide these services, the important thing is the service in accordance with the passenger demand, and the business of attracting passengers to use ojek services regularly. Thus, the basis of this motorcycle taxi service is a norm of mutual trust.

2.2 The Transformation to Online Service

Mobile phones enable ojek drivers to be called to pick up passengers. Moreover, many firms have organized ojek drivers in a corporation. The first of these to become important was Go-jek, established by Abdul Makarim in 2011. The popularity of Go-Jek has soared since it launched Android and iOS apps in January of 2015 (Freischlad, 2015; The Jakarta Post, 2016). In about ten months, they claim to have had about 6.1 million downloads of the Gojek app. The current number of Go-jek drivers is roughly two hundred thousand, with one hundred thousand in and around Jakarta (CNNIndonesia.com, 2015). Go-Jek partners with ojek drivers around the area to deliver people and goods. It covers the Greater Jakarta area¹, as well as Bandung, Bali, Surabaya,

¹ The Greater Jakarta area (also known as Jabodetabek) is the urban area surrounding Indonesia's capital of Jakarta with an area of 6,392 km² and a population of over 28 million. The area includes Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi.

and Yogyakarta. These days Go-Jek has services which include transport (go-ride), instant courier (go-send), food delivery (go-food), shopping (go-mart), cargo (go-box), cleaning service (go-clean), beauty service (go-glam), and massage (go-massage) (Go-Jek, 2016).

By leveraging the motorcycle owners who are willing to become a member of the community, Go-Jek is a rival for traditional ojek drivers who refused to join the Go-Jek community. This is evident in the driving gear that uses a special design worn by each Go-Jek driver. Go-Jek design is a differentiator and identifier for every Go-Jek driver. Through gear such as helmets and jackets, Go-Jek drivers form new values of transport culture (Figure 2). The novelty that arises from the impact of the establishment of the Go-Jek community is that the design is employed as a means to identify members of the community who do not know each other in the real world.



Figure 2. A special design of driving gear differentiates Go-Jek drivers from the traditional ojek drivers
Source: Tempo, 2015

3. METHODS

This is a qualitative research using a phenomenological approach. What appears in the consciousness is the phenomenon. An incident that occurs in a community, and which affects its social, economic, political, and cultural identities and processes, is a phenomenon. These events can provide a special experience for the subject. A phenomenon can be the early beginning of interest in a research, the opportunity to conduct

a verification and determine validation. This is because what appears is not necessarily what we perceive (Husserl, 1931). Phenomenology deconstructs interesting events in the community, making everything brighter and more visible, enabling understanding of what is happening in front of us (Heidegger, 1977).

The phenomenological approach used in this research was conducted by following the approach of Moustakas (1994). First, we formulated topics and research questions. We then reviewed documents both offline and online, with credit references. This research used textual analysis. The data in this study were collected from online and offline media related to Go-Jek, from 2011 when Go-Jek was established, until June 2016. In the third step, we created a set of criteria to determine the location and informants and developed a series of formal and informal questions and topics to guide the interview process. We conducted in-depth interviews with three Go-jek drivers in Surabaya. The aim of the interviews was to explore data in the field and to support the textual data by asking the following questions: (1) daily activities of Go-Jek drivers; (2) how Go-Jek drivers interacted; (3) the role of design, especially the jackets and helmets they wore, in the establishment of relationships between Go-Jek drivers; and (4) how Go-Jek drivers formed and organized communities, especially in the light of recent issues (discussed below). In the final phase, we organized and analyzed the data from the texts and in-depth interviews.

In analyzing those phenomena, we use the analytical perspective of Imagined Communities by Ben Anderson. Ben Anderson (1991) explores the formation of imagined community through various phenomena such as printing technology that allows the creation of a sense of nationalism as the root of the formation of a sense of nationhood. "The convergence of capitalism and the print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic

morphology set the stage for the modern nation” (Anderson, 1991, p. 47). An imagined community can be triggered by the advent of printing technology, the use of a mother tongue, religion, colonialism, and the geographical boundaries of the region, mass media, color and other phenomena (Anderson, 1991). We also believe that sense of “nationalism” (shared/imagined community) can be generated through certain objects such as designs that contain meaning. The design aspect is thus able to open a space of articulation of community and create a sense of belonging.

4. VIRTUAL, REALITY, AND DESIGN

Modern life offers communications technologies that bridge the limitations of space and time. These give new meanings to interpersonal relations. The presence of the communication device fosters a rearticulation of the social and cultural significance of the individual self. Indeed, many individuals become agitated when they are not holding a communications device. The meaning of communication changes. It no longer requires the presence of the body, but takes place in a virtual reality that brings the body in the form of an avatar in a virtual world.

The largest impact of the new technologies is in the economic field. A virtual economic relationship can change the socio-cultural activities of individuals in ways that appear to reduce costs and save time. Since, in general, the calculation of the cost is the primary way of implementing the process of economic activities, the virtual world can accommodate the interests of the economic movement of society.

In Indonesia, the virtual world is a trending topic, since it is attempting to co-opt the traditional transport culture of Indonesia, the ojek or the motorcycle taxi. Go-Jek has grown with the spread of internet access. Through network connections, Go-Jek is using communication formats with larger public space, without the limits of space and time.

Easy internet access provides convenience and enables Go-Jek services to improve the quality of transportation services. This simplicity is directly proportional to the presence of an efficient transportation demand. Both of these aspects then rearticulate how a transportation service that is initially considered uncomfortable, may be needed by many people. Motorcycle taxis can only carry one passenger and only limited baggage, yet have become one of the backbones of public transport. This is also made easier by the presence of a smooth internet connection, as well as the exclusive property of Go-Jek application that provides convenience to passengers to find transportation.

Virtual reality is able to sustain the needs of everyday life. Although in certain aspects, it has the ability to create a negative activity, but in the context of transportation, Go-Jek is able to provide quality service that is convenient and secure. It arises from the use of the app structure in the network which can find consumers, define the process of transportation, and even give warnings when things disrupt the service process.

The structure of services in online network management and real offices and staff workers is in some ways quite similar. The major difference is that the service submission process can be done more quickly. For example, in a taxi transportation service, in order to book a taxi, a passenger should call the office that serves as the manager of the service provider. Then, the operator receiving the call from consumers will coordinate with taxi drivers who are on the road through radio communication devices. The closest driver will receive a message and pick up the customers. It takes more time to process the reservation, and there are costs incurred as a substitute for the expense of phone calls.

In the process of using internet services, consumers with operators and drivers do not need to

engage in conversation. All is done through applications installed on the communications device. Simply put, by clicking a few buttons, consumers can know, how much they should pay and receive a forecast of how many minutes they must wait for the driver.

Go-Jek applies network efficiency to transport culture. Go-Jek also enables the drivers, who come largely from the lower middle class, to master the advanced tools and participate in the network. Simply put, this community invites the driver to use the internet network. A person who has mastered these technologies can dominate the market. With the use of online applications, Go-Jek drivers can perform other activities without wasting their time waiting for passengers. Because of this convenience, many of the Go-Jek drivers not only work as drivers for motorcycles but also have other professions either as main or sideline professions, such as student, debt collector, trader, private sector employee, private driver, photographer, event organizer or housewife (Abas, 2015). Education levels may include high school, or university and post-graduate degrees. Technology makes it possible for people to live multiple lives, and to assume and live out multiple identities (Sinha, 2005). Go-Jek thus offers economic and social mobility in society. Through Go-Jek, the social value of this motor transport experiences increased status. The socio-economic status and the level of education of drivers and passengers increases. Many of the students at prestigious universities use Go-Jek for their everyday transportation needs, observed Driver C in the interview.

However, the Go-Jek platform did not immediately attract traditional motorcycle drivers to join Go-Jek. They said that they do not like to use smartphones, that smartphones must be paid for in installments, that they like to bargain with customers, and that they wanted to be paid immediately. A non-cash transaction system re-

mains a major consideration for the motorcycle taxi drivers (Liputan 6.com, 2015). On-demand motorcycle taxis also met resistance from some traditional drivers, who are finding it hard to adapt to the modernization of their business (Freischlad, 2015). Conventional ojek must have a base, and engage in bargaining processes which are considered inefficient in modern society. Instead, they are forced to accept competitors using advanced modern technology. Conventional ojek must wait to service users in one place, in space and time, which is difficult to abandon. The Internet solves this problem with easy and more efficient access. Go-Jek drivers no longer need to wait at the base. They can wait in other places, doing other jobs. In addition, they are also able to determine independently when they will pick up passengers, and when they should return. This is different from the working hours of factory workers that have strict and repressive duration. The real Go-Jek base is virtual: communication devices and internet access.

The virtual world has stimulated the ojek to become more efficient. Rearticulation of the virtual is not only being recalled in conventional form, but has become a more modern community. Many Go-Jek communities have developed in online media, such as the Facebook communities of Go-Jek Indonesia, Surabaya, Bandung, and Jakarta, and also in the community forums such as the community of Go-Jek Kaskus (Facebook, 2016; Kaskus, 2011). This perspective then makes the Go-Jek motorcycle community identify themselves as a community, and together create a dividing line between the driver who receives a novelty, and the driver who survives in the conventional structure. The most decisive phenomenon in changing the transport culture is that Go-Jek enforces the use of safe driving equipment. Because of this safety equipment, Go-Jek gives an identity to each Go-Jek driver. The design embedded in the road safety equipment

is becoming a visual advertisement which provides its own social and cultural values and creates its own social and cultural values for transportation services.

5. DESIGN IS MORE THAN A SIGN

Jackets and helmets of Go-Jek's exclusive designs offer unique identities in the community and at the same time give identity to the driver. From the perspective of the user/consumer, the design of the driver's gear, his jackets and helmets, enables immediate recognition of the driver. "I sometimes reverse my jacket where I put the black color outside, the passenger often ask my identity as a Go-Jek driver, after I show them the green color inside then they believe me and use my services" (Driver C). Design thus functions as a differentiator and identity provider. In the everyday practice and daily process of Go-Jek community, most community members do not know each other (Harianterbit.com, 2015; hello-pet.com, 2015). The process of becoming a member of the community only goes in two directions, between the service provider and the individual driver. Meanwhile, the relations between individual drivers are not always intertwined. Since most drivers are only looking for a job or extra money, in the beginning there is no basic interest in the relationship and communication among them.

The design of jackets and helmets as corporate identity is a sign that replaces verbal activity. On seeing the green color of the jackets and helmets, people know that the driver is Go-jek driver (Gojak-Gojek, 2014), without having to ask. This situation is different from ojek, because passengers have to ask drivers whether they are ojek drivers. This driving equipment supplies a sign that replaces verbal communication between passengers and drivers.

The unique design later became an ideological binder for drivers, who identify themselves as

members of the Go-Jek community. Without this design, Go-Jek drivers appear as members of society in general. Design unites them as members of a community. As long as they wear their green jacket with the Go-Jek identity, Go-Jek drivers will greet each other by giving certain signs such as hand waving, head nodding, or honking even when they do not know each other. "I can immediately recognize my Go-Jek colleague through this green jackets and helmets. We greet though not know each other" (Driver A). Design thus becomes a major sign of creating silent space relationships which are visually limited. The most important thing that emerged in the early phases of being Go-Jek driver is the partnership work. The activity of viewing is replaced by intersubjective relations which do not have a verbal element. Indeed, not all Go-Jek drivers do this, because in some ways, they have been conducting a relationship long before they become members of the community.

Design creates space for individuals who do not have an intersubjective relationship to feel part of a community. Design builds relationships that chain visual constructs enthused by individuals who feel a part of it. Go-Jek is famous for its green helmet and jacket. With Go-Jek, the design is made eye catching, making it easier for community members to identify their colleagues from a distance. "People can easily spot Go-Jek drivers who dress in green jackets and helmets" (The Jakarta Post, 2016), an observation echoed by all three interviewees. The green color has a universal meaning: it invites the community to "go green". According to the owner of Go-Jek, the use of green as a corporate identity is meant to follow the "go green" trend. Green has a positive meaning, symbolizing growth and awakening, stability and resilience, yet may also be interpreted as welfare and abundance. This is in line with the mission of Go-Jek to bring a positive influence to the surrounding environment (gojekpedia, 2015). The green color can also cause different associations when associated with a

motor vehicle which causes vehicle pollution and danger, but it appears to have a different meaning when associated with Go-Jek. “Previously people were afraid to use ojek, but now passengers of Go-Jek are increasing even though both use the motorcycle that pollutes with the same accident risk” (Driver A). Go-Jek’s use of green may generate new and different meanings for the color. Jackets as body armor and helmets as protective headgear are important. By using the green color for go green, the colors reverse the association of motor vehicle pollution and danger, instead suggesting safety and uniformity reflecting a professional organization that is reliable, noted all three interviewees. Furthermore, the green color used by Go-Jek has a high level of visibility, visible from a distance. “A driver need not doubt that another driver is a Go-Jek driver” stated Driver B. The other two drivers agreed. This cursory introduction is influential for fellow Go-Jek drivers.

6. DESIGN FOR IMAGINED COMMUNITY

The technology enables entirely new forms of social action for traditional motorcycle taxi drivers. Some of the events, especially in Jakarta, use media such as WhatsApp to bring Go-Jek drivers for assembled into a large mass that could reach 500 people, to show solidarity, as occurred at a fundraising event (Harianterbit.com, 2015; hello-pet.com, 2015; *Republika.co.id*, 2013). Through conversations on Twitter, Go-Jek drivers can raise funds and send a prayer as an expression of caring (iberita.com, 2016). Many important events brought Go-Jek drivers together even when they did not know each other, as when the masses of Go-Jek “greened” the street of Warung Buncit Raya, South Jakarta because they were mourning the death of their colleagues in a traffic accident. According to one Go-Jek driver, they did not know the victim, but their presence was a form of solidarity (Harianterbit.com, 2015; hello-pet.com, 2015). When the Go-Jek drivers in Jakarta and surrounding areas planned to protest

because of changes in tariff reduction and bonus policy, they mobilized the masses by sweeping up drivers who wore Go-Jek uniforms (*Republika.co.id*, 2013; *CNNIndonesia.com*, 2015b; iberita.com, 2016).

As Go-jek grew, demonstrations against it also grew (*fokusjabar.com*, 2015; *sindonews.com*, 2016). For the Go-Jek drivers, the demonstration which was originally intended to seek justice in economic efforts, became redundant. A consolidation movement arose among Go-Jek drivers who felt victimized by injustice. One way of Go-Jek community consolidation was through the use of the design, the design inherent in driving safety equipment such as jackets and helmets. The equipment with an exclusive design was then used as a unifier for individuals who felt they were Go-Jek community members (Harianterbit.com, 2015; hello-pet.com, 2015). Design of corporate identity became a major part of the formation of a sense of community. The main design was a sign, binding each individual to empathize with the community. This effect was later developed into a solidarity to survive and maintain the existence of the community (Harianterbit.com, 2015; hello-pet.com, 2015; *Republika.co.id*, 2013). Thus, the main effect was the emergence of a sense of shared destiny and responsibility. The desire for this feeling then consolidated the individual drivers to gather and unite themselves into a real community. At first, they formed small groups of communities, which then integrated themselves into a larger groups of communities.

Design of corporate identity—with the support of online platforms, communication, and media—arouses community life for one purpose, namely to promote unity and form a network of relationships between individuals. This relationship is an imagined community. The demonstrations above led to a counter-demonstration. The Go-Jek community consolidated against acts that threatened the members of the community. They retaliated against the protesters. Physical clashes then involved three groups, officials, demonstra-

tors against Go-jek, and the Go-Jek community. The difference between them is the gear the drivers used. The design used by Go-Jek made Go-jek drivers identifiable to each other, while the masses who did not use the design as a primary sign split into small uncoordinated groups.

7. CONCLUSION

The Go-jek app has become the virtual base for Go-Jek drivers. This virtual base has developed into a real base in different contexts. The Internet did not eliminate the relationships among Go-Jek drivers. Instead, it led to new relationships. The combined effect of online communities in other platforms, including Twitter and WhatsApp, helped create a sense of community among Go-Jek drivers. This new relation is strengthened by design.

Design can become the primary sign that can evoke community passion. This passion, as stated by Benedict Anderson, transforms disparate individuals into an imagined community by binding people who can feel as if they were part of the community to make relationships. Design has become a major sign for Go-Jek drivers, enabling individuals to reconstruct their identity. We find that there is still a sense of solidarity, fraternity, and comradeship among Go-Jek drivers which is united by design. The green on the jackets and helmets makes Go-Jek a real and formal corporation, and creates a sense of trust and safety. For the driver, green has the power to bring solidarity that unites the community of Go-Jek into an imagined community.

In the concept of imagined community, a totem that can unite people in a common ground and togetherness is necessary. Design is able to present people with a series of signs that can engage the desire to form a community. In sum, design can act in the ideological arena to form a basis for an imagined community.

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