

Internet and Civil Society Organisations in Indonesia – Exploring innovation in the third sector

Study on the Adoption of Internet CMC by Indonesian CSOs for Social Reform and Social Development Programmes

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Abstract

This research concerns the appropriation of the Internet CMC in Indonesia for civil society movements. Seen as the third sector after state and business, however, studies show that civil society has not been academically mature in theory and conceptualisation despite its richness in activities, concerns and issues. For civil society organisations (CSOs) appropriation means strategic, political and creative use aimed at achieving social reform and social development. While studies have shown more CSOs have easier access to the Internet, less study available on how they are using it not only in developing countries like Indonesia but also in the developed ones. Being exploratory in nature, the study gathers empirical evidence through triangulation or mixed methods comprising of survey, in-depth interviews, network mapping, focus group discussions and workshops. The initial results reveal some patterns of innovative, strategic and political use of the Internet among Indonesian CSOs and factors affecting them. It is noted that the extent to which appropriation is undertaken depends much on organisation understandings towards their own roles in the social movement. The study also shows that perceptions about technology contribute to organisational stance towards it; those who regard technology merely as an instrument are likely to be those who are being shaped by the technology – and vice versa.

Aims and Background

The research focuses on the adoption of the Internet CMC (computer-mediated communication) technology by civil society organisations (CSOs) in Indonesia. More specifically, the study looks at this adoption mainly from the perspective of innovation study where ‘innovation in civil society or third sector’ serves as framework and area where this study seeks, at its later stage, to contribute.

The centre of this research –civil society—according to the London School of Economics’ Centre for Civil Society, is defined as

“... the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. State, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy group. (CCS, 2006).

In addition to this definition, studies show that civil society has not been academically mature in theory and conceptualisation despite its richness in activities, concerns and issues (e.g. Anheier, et al., 2005). It is to this definition and position that the research refers.

In the context of CSOs, appropriation means strategic, political and creative use and adoption of the technology aimed at achieving social reform and social development (Castells, 1996, 1997). More studies have shown that some CSOs have access to the Internet, but less study available on how they are using it (Bennett, 2003; Korac-Kakabadse, et al., 2000; Riker, 2001; Surman and Reilly, 2003). Scholars have tried to portray projects undertaken by civil society, amongst which the promotion of democracy has been the major agenda item. This is done through coalition building (Diani, 1990; Lim, 2002, 2003b; Rucht, 1989) and building opposition, e.g. through establishing collaboration, publishing and campaigning, mobilization and observation like watchdog activities (Camacho, 2001; Surman and Reilly, 2003; Warkentin, 2001). It is worth-noting that the perspective of information society becomes important as information fuels social movement as networks link a multiplicity of actors. Which is necessary for, amongst other things, facilitating democratisation (Anheier, 2003; Uhlin, 2000).

Indonesia is taken as a case study for two main reasons. Firstly, because Indonesia's social movement experienced a heightened transformation and transition to democracy which heavily involved CSOs (for example see Bird, 1999 among others). Secondly, however, while various CSOs in Indonesia had started using Internet CMC to support their works, including fostering social reform (e.g. Uhlin, 2000), very few studies were systematically done in this context before, particularly which looking at Indonesian CSOs as a whole¹.

Significance and Innovation

Researching Indonesian CSOs may not sound new. Studying Indonesian NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations), the most visible subset of CSO, is also not new (for example, see Bird, 1999; Hadiwinata, 2003; Kalibonso, 1999; Prasetyantoko, 2000; Uhlin, 1997). Researching social change and social dynamics in Indonesia from the perspective of information technology has also been done in the past and this area has been in fact fertile for researchers studying how changes can be facilitated by technology (e.g. Hill, 2003; Lim, 2003a, 2003b, 2006; Uhlin, 2000; UNDP, 2004). However, this study is not aware of previous studies which particularly looked at

¹ An attempt to briefly present the socio-political dynamics of Indonesia with relation to the role and position of CSOs and their change of networks has been done in Nugroho and Tampubolon (2006a; Nugroho and Tampubolon, 2006b).

Historically, between 1970s and 1990s, although the world saw Indonesia as a politically stable state with an impressive record of economic growth, civil society was weak, depoliticised and fragmented (Hill, 2000). From the middle of the 1990s CSOs started expressing their discontent more openly. A new generation of advocacy groups, mainly pro-democracy and human rights groups, were formed and became increasingly active in anti-government protests. These groups were characterised by their attempts to unite all forms of pro-democracy movements and increase pressure against the government, including establishing alliances with peasants and workers (Uhlin, 1997) as well as women (Kalibonso, 1999), urban professional (Prasetyantoko, 2000) and students, whose activism has always played an important role in Indonesian politics (Aspinall, 1995).

After bloody transition period and getting rid of the 36-year authoritarian government in 1998, farmer organisations and trade unions became more radicalised, underground organisations came to the surface and joined hands with the newly formed CSOs in Indonesia (Hadiz, 1998; Silvey, 2003). CSOs, who have been important actors, have a wider sphere to act as a 'check-and-balance' for both government and business. They actively address various concerns and issues in order to advocate people's rights, to protect their environment and to develop their livelihoods and thus bring about social change in many aspects. Some groups try to do so by influencing governmental policies, promoting ethics and accountability, building public opinion and providing alternative media. In terms of concerns and issues, Indonesia CSOs are characterised as more diverse compared to their identity during the authoritarian regime. It is clear that the extent to which these CSOs succeed or fail in achieving their missions and goals depends not only on their own capacity to organise but also on the social and political context in which they operate (Hadiwinata, 2003).

the combination between the two, i.e. studying Indonesian CSOs from the perspective of information technology, which systematically examined Indonesian CSOs (or NGOs) as a whole unit of analysis.

The research acknowledges complexities involved in researching Indonesian CSOs and at the same time, thus, its limitations. Firstly, there is not much specific literature on Indonesia available to understand the context which is

“... difficult to know. Its languages and ethnic groups are famously heterogeneous. Indonesia has experienced “revolution, parliamentary democracy, civil war, presidential autocracy, mass murder and military rule” in its first half century; it is not a history with much coherence. For these and other reasons, including distance and language barriers, Indonesia has not generated a literature to serve the general reader interested in world affairs. In the absence of such a literature, there has been little interests in Indonesia outside specialist circles, and Indonesia is best known for being little known, even to its neighbours.” (Bresnan, 2005: 1)

Secondly, in Indonesia the term CSO and NGO have a rather complicated interpretation and understanding compared to what we may have seen in the literature. Traced back to 1970s, the term *Organisasi non-pemerintah* (ORNOP) was used as a direct translation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) but then replaced by *Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat* (LSM) which literally means ‘self-reliant community institutions’, most of which was because of fear among activists that the term ORNOP might provoke government repression. Some also proposed another term, LPSM (*Lembaga Pengembangan Swadaya Masyarakat* or self-help community support institution) which was deemed to have more resemblance with what was known as NGO, while others started using *Organisasi nir-laba* (non-profit organisation). It seems that Indonesian NGO activists never reach consensus (Hadiwinata, 2003: 6-7). Only after the-so-called *reformasi* (reform) in 1998 when the student-led social movement had succeeded in bringing the dictatorship to an end, activists started using and popularising the term *Organisasi Masyarakat Sipil* (civil society organisation) to distinctively distinguish civil- and community-initiated organisations from the ones run or initiated by military, government and business. This study uses the term CSOs to include all kind of organisations within the scope of the definitions quoted earlier.

Another significance and innovative aspect of this research is its relation with innovation study itself. Most study in innovation revolves around the idea of manufacturing or industrial innovation (for example see the classic work of Freeman and Soete, 1997) based on Schumpeter’s idea of creative destruction and the economics of technological change (Schumpeter, 1934). Innovation also matters in services, i.e. that services are important loci of innovations in their own right and they are an integral part of innovation systems in modern economies (for example see Coombs and Miles, 1999; Metcalfe and Miles, 1999). It appears obvious that innovation study is rooted very much in the commercial, profit or private sector (a.k.a. second sector). But innovation has now also been adopted in state and governmental bodies (a.k.a. first sector), mainly to improve government productivity and the effectiveness of services it provides for public and sometimes deliver democracy (see, for instance Dunleavy, 2006; Halvorsen, et al., 2005).

However, despite its richness, innovation in the third sector (i.e. non profit), particularly in civil society as the most visible subset of the third sector, appears to be understudied. It is here that this study wants to contribute to the knowledge of innovation which takes place in the third sector by exploring how various civil society organisations (in the case of Indonesia) adopt technology to meet their needs and satisfy their aims and goals. It is realised that it is useful, when conceptualising innovation, to consider whether other words suffice as many literature seemingly blurs the concept of innovation with value creation, value extraction and operational execution, mainly in the business sector. In this view, an innovation is not an innovation until someone successfully implements and makes money on an idea (for example, see Silverstein, et al., 2005)², which is very true for the private sector but not always the case with civil society sector.

The study expects to see, that being ontologically different from the business entities and government agencies, CSOs would perceive and undertake innovation in a different way. Among important different features, the study hypothesises it to be including primarily motivations and other aspects like sources, patterns of diffusion and implementation and barriers and goals of innovation. Taking the case of adoption of Internet CMC by CSOs, the study anticipates two findings. Firstly, the study posits that the extent to which innovation is undertaken depends much on organisation's own understandings towards their existence and roles in society. Or in other words, it is the *raison d'être* of the sector which characterises innovation undertakings. While this cannot but imperatively imply the study to also touch upon the discussion of the different *raison d'être* of these sectors, it is here that the study seeks to contribute to the knowledge of innovation. If innovation is conceptualised, developed, applied by and serves the interest of the private sector which is characterised by the motivation to achieve and accrue economical gain, how would innovation now be conceptualised, developed, applied by and serve the interest of other sectors which have different in nature? The study hopes that the findings would enrich the notion and the theory of innovation, particularly when considering innovation in the third sector.

Secondly, the study also speculates that an organisation's perception of technology influences the relations between them. Following the conception of social shaping of technology as critics to the technological determinism (MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1985) particularly concerning information technology (Clausen and Williams, 1997), the study expects to offer a more detailed picture of how the social shaping works in this very context. Initial findings indicate that those who view technology merely as instrument are those who are likely unaware of the shaping process of the technology; however, those who are aware that technology serves as more than a mere instrument are those who are aware of such shaping process. This research recognises that the area of social shaping of technology has been much studied and thus expects to contribute to the understanding of the process by offering further examples, again, from the perspective of civil society organisations.

² Previous studies point out that invention, i.e. the creation of new tools or the novel compilation of existing tools, is often confused with innovation. Even in the perspective of second sector, many product and service enhancements may fall more rigorously under the term improvement. Change and creativity are also words that may often be substituted for innovation. This begs question, what is innovation that makes it necessary to have a different word from these others, or is it a catch-all word, a loose synonym?

Methodology

The study is exploratory in nature and revolves around the questions: What are the roles of CSOs in social reform and social development in Indonesia? What and how should they use ICTs strategically to achieve their goals and missions? What are the potentials and challenges that are faced by CSOs in using ICTs? By understanding the dynamics in the civil society organisation, it would then be possible to comprehend why today the adoption of Internet CMC becomes important to them, what the process of adoption looks like and how it is undertaken. Here systems of innovation approach (Lundvall, 1992) serve a conceptual framework for investigation. Assuming that the CSO is in nature different to the private sector (which has been known to intensively undertake innovation), it is hypothesised that the characteristics of innovation like motivation, pattern of adoption and implementation and barriers to innovation would also be different³.

In its attempt to answer and to give explanation, the study uses triangulation methods or combined quantitative and qualitative approaches as either method is deemed to be inadequate to be deployed on its own⁴. Triangulation usually involves a complex research design with stages of research that may iterate (Danermark, et al., 2002; Gilbert, 1992), such as this case, and enable better measurement and may also reveal differences of interpretation and meaning (Olsen, 2003). The study utilises some tools to collect empirical evidence, namely (1) survey, (2) network mapping, (3) in-depth interviews, (4) workshops and (5) focus group discussions. Overall, including extensive pilots, the empirical work was done during the period of September 2005 to April 2006, remotely from the UK and on-sites in Indonesia.

Survey, which was designed to capture the nature of Indonesian CSOs (in terms of size, type of organisation, main issues and concerns and activities) and to portray their adoption of Internet CMC, was participated in by some 270 CSOs. Interviews were conducted with some 40 leaders of CSOs to get more nuanced understanding of the problems. Both survey and interview used *Bahasa Indonesia* and were extensively piloted. The respondents were allowed to give a 'no response' if the questions were too sensitive for them or made them feel insecure. Survey results have been partially analysed using Stata 9/SE (Cox, 2001) and further latent class analysis using LatentGOLD (Magidson and Vermunt, 2002; Vermunt and Magidson, 2002).

Interviews, and later workshops and focus groups, were qualitatively analysed with help of CAQDAS (in this case, Atlas.ti) particularly to organise the large data gathered from the fieldwork which includes transcripts of interviews or audio visual recording of workshops and focus groups, for example. The study is aware of the uncritical adoption of a particular set of strategies as a consequence of adopting CAQDAS (Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software) which

³ The study is aware of the personal bias given that the researcher has been arguably very active in the civil society movement in Indonesia for quite long period.

⁴ According to Creswell (1994), qualitative study is not meant to generalise findings, but aims to form a unique interpretation of events based on a holistic picture which documents detailed views of informants. Meanwhile, quantitative research is a process of inquiry into social and human problem based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with statistical procedures in order to determine whether the predictive generalisations of the theory hold true. In quantitative study, researchers should remain distant and independent of those being researched in order to maintain objectivity but on the contrary, in qualitative research, researchers interact closely with those they study and minimise the distance between themselves in order to gather detailed and subjective information (Creswell, 1994: 159).

offers a variety of useful ways of organizing data in order to search them. But coding data using software is not analysis⁵.

From the survey, in addition to the quantitative and statistical measures, social network analysis (SNA) using Pajek (Batagelj and Mrvar, 2003) was performed to provide a broad picture of the Indonesian CSOs and their networks. Later, three workshops (each attended by some 30 participants) and two focus group discussions (attended by some 25 in total) were organised as means for verification and provide opportunities for respondents to share views and collective reflection upon the issues. This empirical data gathering was done during September 2005 and April 2006, both from the UK and in Indonesia.

Questions and issues

To date, there are two aspects of the study that seeks input from the colloquium. First, it concerns the nature of (Indonesian) CSOs. Civil society movements in Indonesia (and maybe in other developing countries) have long been understood from its two distinct characteristics, i.e. advocacy and developmentalist (e.g. Holland and Henriot, 2002; Ibrahim, et al., 2003). Using cluster latent class analysis, the study has uncovered that first, this distinction becomes somewhat blurred today: more advocacy CSOs undertake developmentalist works and the other way around. Second, it also shows that more CSOs in Indonesia seem to have been networking with global CSOs and thus sharing equal concern towards various global and cosmopolitan issues. Network analysis, however, discovers a less encouraging picture of these relationships: before, during and after abrupt socio-political change in Indonesia, a kind of 'chequebook activism' is found to have characterised global civil society's role (Nugroho and Tampubolon, 2006a, 2006b). The increasing activity of Indonesian CSOs, particularly after regime change, is much more a result of the increase of their relationships with international donors rather than real participation with global CSOs. This may implicate a serious revisit of the conceptions of the role of global civil society (Anheier, 2003; Anheier, et al., 2005; Anheier and Katz, 2005) as well as global solidarity in social movement (e.g. Crossley, 2002). With all of these, substantially, it also becomes important to rethink the very reason for CSOs existence in today's social changes.

This is the first area where the study needs more input, particularly in terms of discussion on the competing perspectives when CSOs or social movement groups engage with information technology like Internet CMC.

Second, it is about innovation in civil society. Innovation has become more important since CSOs are facing more complex challenges today. Both technological and organisational innovations have been important in organisational development (Luecke and Katz, 2003; Lundvall, 1992), apparently including CSOs. The study has revealed that although most of Indonesian CSOs have access to the Internet, the majority of them only use basic CMC like email or mailing lists due to

⁵ The emerging use of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) has been evident as a subfield of expertise (Lee and Fielding, 1991). The research notes that software packages aimed at analysing qualitative data are now widespread and it is a fast-growing field. A full review of literatures and existing software has already been done elsewhere (Burgess, 1995; Tesch, 1990; Weaver and Atkinson, 1994; Weitzman and Miles, 1994).

poor communication infrastructure. Nevertheless, the technologies are effectively –and arguably innovatively—used to organise activities like networking, coalition coordination, public opinion building and even collective campaigning and in some cases are influencing state’s policies. Most of them believe that having been part of the network society has enabled them to widen their own perspective to the global level and expand their network, both with other national CSOs and global CSO partners. Overall, taking part actively in the networked society through Internet CMC has facilitated achievement of their mission and goals and thus fostered a further democratisation. This is evident from the latent class analysis performed on the survey result.

However technology is not perceived in the same way by CSOs. As indicated (in above section), although the study is yet to conclude, initial findings suggest that organisations which view technology simply as a means are likely to be less aware of how technology shapes their use. On the other hand, those who are aware that technology functions more than just *instrumentum* are more aware of such shaping process and are in the position to shape and appropriate the technology. The latter, unfortunately, is not the main face of Indonesian CSOs. From the perspective of innovation study, apparently CSOs undertake innovation differently. Technically it is centred on the modification and customisation of technologies to meet their needs. Substantially, other features are also distinct from that in the private sector, i.e. motivation, pattern of adoption and implementation and goals

This is the second area where the research seeks feedback. While social shaping of technology has been widely studied, further discussion and perspectives are not less needed to enrich this study, again, from the perspective of civil society organisations and innovation study.

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