

'Annoying' friends on social media may save our future

Iunfriended some of my connections because their posts are annoying to me". This was posted by one of my Facebook friends on her status update a few years ago. I found it interesting, as I saw similar posts by several people in the same period.

So I asked my friend for an explanation. She was disturbed by the fact that some of her online friends had criticized her opinions about one of the Jakarta gubernatorial candidates and were very aggressive in voicing their opinions. Hence, she decided to "shut them up".

Many of us may think that this is a logical decision – she has the right to do so, as it is her own social media account. However, I myself doubt it is a smart decision for her and for us who might have faced similar problems. Because by doing so, we are, perhaps unconsciously, isolating ourselves intellectually.

Internet activist Eli Pariser explains this phenomenon as a filter bubble. Should this filter bubble persist around us, it may eventually lead us to an echo chamber, where we will only hear information and opinions from likeminded people. We might not question the truth anymore, since all we hear and see is in agreement with our opinions. To put it simply, we might not be aware if we are walking toward a dark valley because everyone is going in the same direction.

It is undeniable that most of us are active social media users who heavily rely on our feeds to get news and information about many things, from food and fashion to education and politics. Whether we realize it or not, our life choices now are quite strongly influenced by social media.

Therefore, it is certainly important for us to ensure that we are connected to the "right" people or sources of information. This applies not only for those who are still underage to certain contents, but also for adults, so they can optimally benefit from their online activities.

Many will agree that our interests in one particular area should not alienate us from what happens in the rest of the world. It is usually possible, if not normal, for us to follow and like various posts uploaded by our friends on varied platforms. Unfortunately, it is not the case when it comes to political views and choices.

As we know, since the 2014 presidential election, Indonesian netizens have been divided according to their respective political choices. Many refused to make up with their friends who were



Antara/Muhammad Iqbal

May the best win: Candidates for South Tangerang mayor and deputy mayor sign an integrity pact on Thursday. Voters in 270 regions across the country will elect their leaders simultaneously on Dec. 9.



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considered opponents of their personal political views and decided to stay away from them. In fact, there are people that were initially good friends long before social media was created, who now became estranged or even enemies after previously arguing on social media about their champion in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election.

The trend of withdrawing from friends with different political opinions on social networking platforms also continued during the 2019 presidential election and has even been carried over to date, when people have different opinions about how the government should handle the pandemic.

It is ironic if social media, initially created to connect people, lately causes quite the opposite.

As a matter of fact, it separates those who were previously good friends because of different political views that were shown on their accounts. It is even worse when the information available on social media feeds can no longer enlighten us.

It may provide incomplete information because it only displays what and who we want or are used to read and listen to. Social media algorithm does not care whether the news and people

shown on our feed are correct or not. It only looks at our usage behavior and history and the filters that we create ourselves when removing or unfollowing friends we find annoying.

Being trapped in an echo chamber will result in overexposure only to the narratives that we like or agree with. We will see too much of one side and become biased. This would be troublesome for us, particularly in the days leading to the upcoming regional elections, which, despite the pandemic, will be held on Dec. 9.

General Elections Commission (KPU) Regulation No. 10/2020 limits campaigns in the form of face-to-face meetings both in terms of frequency and number of participants. The candidates are encouraged to organize online campaigns and are allowed to use social media. Thus, our computer screens or smartphones will play a bigger role than ever before in supplying information regarding the candidates we will vote for.

We do not need to stay away from friends who we think are annoying because they have different political opinions. We actually need them to get enough of other options. From them, we may even come to know the true track record of regional election

candidates. We should not be afraid of fake news or hoaxes that our friends may share; prominent media outlets may also potentially make the same mistakes. Maybe our friends are just tricked by other sources.

The information age has provided us with an ever-increasing amount of information. We are constantly overflooded with various contents. We should not take lightly the possible impact of hoaxes, but we can still stay calm, because the key to not getting caught in the fake news and hoax trap is to always be critical and have the willingness to continuously verify the facts of all the information we receive.

Barring no unforeseen changes, the campaign period is about to begin. The pandemic will force the contesting candidates to utilize online platforms, including social networks more intensively. Our maturity in democracy and using social media will be tested here. Our critical thinking skills will also be exercised.

Are we ready to be open-minded and challenge the decisions we are going to make? Remember, our vote will determine the future of our provinces, cities and districts for the next five years. Let us not vote for the wrong people.

For this, we need to make a conscious effort to follow people with opposing views on our social networking platforms as a reality check. There is so much we can learn from other people's perspectives, including from our "annoying" online friends.