

Strategy of Social Movement by the Community of Football Supporters amidst Pandemic Era

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Abstract. Among the government regulations towards health protocol in pandemic time that leads to the restriction of collective activities of civil society organizations, Aremania football supporters have performed more actions to insist on achieving their objectives. The objective is to remove dual managements in Arema football club in Malang city. This study aims at revealing the ongoing efforts of Aremania to maintain their social movements and some changes made to adjust the current pandemic situation. The study implements the concept of social movement and qualitative method to explore the data. The finding of this investigation unveils the more massive movements demonstrated by Aremania and it is based on several facts. First of all, Aremania performs collective actions online and offline to some parties to show the emphasis on their goal. Second, to substitute the prohibited street protest, Aremania arranges a music performance in shopping centers and then upload it to social media platforms. Lastly, Aremania takes advance of the conventional and social media to disseminate information to public in order to reach the target. These attempts are committed as a strategy to negotiate the government's policy on avoiding contact with crowd in the middle of pandemic. Aremania negotiates the policy by conducting collective action in social media and shopping mall in hope that they will not face any obstacles in accomplishing the goal from the government. The strategy has a purpose to gain attention from both Aremania and the two managements of Arema to work on the union of Arema Indonesia and Arema Football Club. To conclude, the findings of the study present the changes of social movement in terms of forms and instruments in order to reach the goal amidst the pandemic era.

Keywords: Civil Society Organizations; Collective Actions; Social Media; Arema; Aremania

1 Introduction

Social restrictions oriented as a policy to avoid crowds during pandemic COVID 19 are in fact used by the actors of social movement to perform their actions. The movement to insist on the removal of dual management of Arema Indonesia and Arema FC is proven to be higher in numbers amidst the limited social activities. The rise of the intensity has stayed in the form of protests which involve Aremania (the supporters of Arema football club) to demand for an answer from the city government of Malang. In addition, Aremania has massively displayed

posters of unification message in any crucial locations in Malang. The actions of delivering the petition have been larger in number in online platforms. Aremania exploits the use of social media in Instagram hashtag, feed or story and YouTube to resonate the wishes to fellow Aremania and also the manager of Arema Indonesia that is currently playing in the 3rd cast of competition and Arema FC that performs in the top league of Indonesian football. The policy of social restriction does not trigger any reduction in the number of crowds as expected by the policy maker.

The study of social movements taking place during the pandemic situation have evolved from the focus on the forms of social movements to the instruments used to achieve the aim. Such studies can at least be categorized into four different groups. The first group is the studies on the analysis of activities supporting solidarity and social bond in dealing with the effect of pandemic (Muqith et al., 2021; Pedrosa et al., 2020; Rodrigues et al., 2020). The second group deals with the relevance of a movement such as #stay at home and social distancing to lessen the spread of covid in the middle of pandemic (Blum et al., 2021; Bourassa et al., 2020; Geng et al., 2020). The third group of study unveils the social movements which experience transformation in the pandemic period (Guittard, 2021; Pleyers, 2020; Porta, 2021). The last group analyzes the constructive or destructive relation between civil society and the country during pandemic (Abers et al., 2021; Luis, 2020; Osiewicz, 2020). The studies illustrate how the social movements have not ceased in the pandemic. However, the adjustment to accomplish the objectives made by the pressure group has not been outlined well.

The present study is based on the arguments that the policy of social restriction does not only bring up the alternative forms and instruments in social movement, but also generate the strategies by the pressure group to deceive the set regulations. The policy has been successful in diminishing the intensity of street protest involving many people to express their claims. In addition, the regulation inspires the actors of social movements to come up with innovation in expressing their charge to the parties to fulfill their wish. The policy has, in fact, driven the activists to raise the masses to deliver the claims. Therefore, the policy remains a new challenge in the context of crowd restriction amidst pandemic situation.

The article aims at pointing out the strategies carried out by the actors of social movements in dealing with the social restriction policy in the pandemic. In addition to identifying the types of social movement by Aremania, the present article also illustrates the strategies to handle social limitation in the pandemic. The research method used to analyze both aspects aforementioned is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques of observation, interview, and documentation. The source of the data in the research is derived from the informants, mass media, social media, journal article and relevant books on Aremania and social movements. The data collected is then analyzed by the use of interactive technique: condensation, display data and drawing conclusion (Miles et al., 2014, pp. 12–14). Such data collection and processing are performed to reveal the strategies by the actors of social movements in dealing with the policy of social restriction in the pandemic time.

2 Results and Discussion

2.1 Aremania's Collective Actions to Deliver Claims during Pandemic

Aremania, especially the ones involved in the movement of Make Malang Great Again (MMGA), brings up a message to unite two football clubs called Arema in Malang city. The

objective of the unification is closely related to the existence of the same symbol used by both clubs that is Arema. Aremania wishes to have only one football club using Arema as the identity to represent the city in football competition in Indonesia. This condition leads to Aremania's anxiety of having a split in Arema community.

The demand to have only a single football club named Arema in Malang city has been going on for more than a decade. This insistence is derived from the existence of two football competitions in Indonesia in 2010. The division of the competition management at that time departed from the internal conflict of Indonesian Football Association (PSSI) which resulted in the emergence of two leagues, namely the Indonesian Super League (LSI) and the Indonesian Primer League (LPI). PSSI does not officially recognize LPI, it even implements punishments for players, officials, and coaches who join the league (Sutton, 2018, p. 28).

The existence of these two competitions is the moment of birth of new football clubs which use similar identity. The clubs performing in LPI competition recently have also used names, citizens, and logos that are similar to the ones popular in LSI. There are two names of Persebaya football clubs, Persija, PSMS Medan, and there are also Arema Indonesia and Arema FC. The home base used by the new football club is also the same as the city used by the previous clubs as a headquarter. These similarities were a problem for the football fans in the country at that time.

The issues for the football supporters have gradually diminished and disappeared. There are problems which were resolved through the legal way, market mechanisms, or by their own. Persebaya United as an example, they changed their name to Bhayangkara Surabaya United when they were under the management of the Indonesian National Police. The name was later changed a second time to Bhayangkara FC. Meanwhile, Persija, which according to the District Court had to change its name, never complied with the decision (Sutton, 2018, pp. 32, 157). There was no single solution to the dualism issue of the football clubs back then.

The only city surviving with two football clubs until 2021 as a product of dualism of LSI and LPI is Malang. There have been still two football clubs named Arema Indonesia and Arema FC for more than a decade. The difference is still ongoing today and continues to be a lively discussion for the supporters' group. It is not surprising that they urged the parties in accordance with the issue to come up with a solution to overcome this lasting situation.

The urge to create the one and only Arema team in Malang has increased recently. The demand is based on the ideal number of single identity of Malang city in the national football arena. Arema as a symbol of unity is congruent with the history of the formation of Arema Malang football club as a unifier of the youth of Malang city who at that time was divided into some village gangs (Hakim et al., 2017, p. 122). The split that occurs in the Arema football club right now is disturbing a number of Aremania. Aremania's current position can be categorized into three main groups, namely Aremania which supports Arema Indonesia, Arema FC, and the union of Arema.

Arema fans who is wishing for the unity have launched some movements since the split of the clubs took place. Even though sharing the same name of football club of Arema, the fans were also split into two different groups supporting Arema Indonesia and Arema FC. Departed from such facts, there have been movements expressing disapproval of this situation. The movements such as hanging a scarf and emptying the stadium during the matches have become a form of Aremania's protest against the dualism of the management (Wirawan, 2016, p. 20). MMGA and Arema One Fighters (PAS) are forms of dissatisfaction that also rise with the existence of two Arema clubs.

A number of Aremania in the MMGA and PAS movements demand the parties to be involved in such a split. They urged the managers of both teams, local governments, and

fellow Aremania to participate in overcoming the problem of dualism in Arema. MMGA and PAS often take actions directing the parties to work together to unite the Arema team. MMGA has lately made efforts which are more visible to the public than PAS. MMGA and PAS actions were carried out by utilizing various strategies, and these three strategies were ways they had not implemented before the pandemic stroke.

a) Escalate the Intensity of Demand Online and Offline

Aremania urges the parties to participate in the resolution of Arema dualism online and offline. The strategy involves stakeholders and is carried out online through social media, especially Instagram. This way is performed by uploading posts of images, videos, audios, or hashtags. Meanwhile, the offline strategy is carried out by spreading ideas through posters and banners. In addition, Aremania also held a demonstration in front of the mayor's office to demand that the government be involved in solving the problem as the identity of the citizens of Malang city. Both strategies were committed by Aremania to achieve their goals.

The attempts to achieve the goal to unite Arema via online platforms consist of persuasive contents. The contents of social media includes an invitation to voice the unity of Arema and Aremania, and this took place because MMGA suspected that there had been a split in Aremania so that the unity of Aremania needed to be expressed. Besides, MMGA also invited to hold an offline public discussion to talk on the dualism occurred in Arema. In fact, the invitation also includes raising the masses for collective action in the form of street demonstrations.

Collective offline actions performed by Aremania are easily found in the streets. The actions were demonstration to express the demand to the city government and were carried out at least twice during the pandemic. The protest was also completed by sticking posters and banners in some crucial locations in Malang, such as in intersections where people can see them easily. The posters and banners said Satu Arema Bermartabat, Satu Arema di Indonesia, atau Save Yayasan Arema 1987. The text variations have the same message, that is the unification of both clubs of Arema in Malang.

b) Expressing the Claims Creatively

Aremania's collective actions to hold demonstrations during the pandemic were not allowed by considering the implementation of health protocols. On November 16, 2020 Aremania was successful to hold a demonstration and collective actions in the courtyard of the Malang City Government building. At that time the Mayor of Malang, the Head of City Committee and the Head of Malang City Police accepted Aremania's aspirations through the MMGA movement to be actively involved in uniting the two Arema football clubs in Malang.

Eight days later, MMGA asked for permission to hold a demonstration called the Peace Action 2. The action was intended to collect the City Mayor's promise last November 16 which gave hope for tracking the Arema Foundation as a way out of Arema dualism. However, the actions scheduled for March 29, 30 and 31, 2021 were never held. The State Police of the Republic of Indonesia, Malang City Resort (Polres Malang Kota) did not give any permission and asked for cancellation.

MMGA then attempted another collective action at the shopping center on May 29, 2021, entitled flash mob. There, they unfurled banners containing a message of hope for Arema's unity. They packed up the three floors of the shopping center while wearing attributes and clothes identical to Arema football fans. In addition, they also sang Arema songs along with

Anto Baret, a well-known musician of Malang city. He played his acoustic guitar in the middle of the mall and was singing along with the Aremania who attended the event.

In addition to holding a flash mob at the mall, MMGA also carried out another symbolic actions. At a meeting with the city Mayor on November 16, Aremania received a promise from the leader that the issue of Arema dualism would be facilitated by tracking the management of the Arema Foundation which had been frozen. They flew dozens of paper planes with the message 'Save Arema Foundation'. They also lit flares while voicing their demands for the promises made by the Mayor. Until the action was completed, the Mayor of Malang did not appear at his residence and the promise was just ignored.

c) Public Discussion

Public discussion was held by the parties to find a way out of the problem. Mass media in Malang city was the main actor providing facilities for the open dialog to talk on the issue based on different perspectives of the involved parties. Local radio in Malang such as *Radio Chakra Bhwana* (RCB FM) and *Radio Senaputra* often conduct an open discussion for the dualism issue experienced by the Arema football club. Additionally, the discussion was also carried out through YouTube channels, such as Edan Bola channel which affiliates with RCB FM and ABM Inside (a YouTube channel of senior journalist in Malang).

Recently MMGA has also initiated a public discussion involving both parties managing the Arema football club in Malang. In the early of March 2021, MMGA invited the management of Arema Indonesia and Arema FC to decide on solution to deal with the dualism issue. The dialog also specifically addressed Iwan Budiarto as the owner of the most major share of Arema FC, Sudarmaji as the representative of Arema FC management, Novi Acub Zainal as the representative of the family founder of Arema (Lucky Acub Zainal), and Winarso as the owner of the top share of Arema Indonesia. However, the meeting has never happened because both parties ignored the invitation.

The following public discussion initiated by MMGA was in different format of event compared to the ones they had arranged before. The latest discussion took place with only a few numbers of participant, especially those who were sympathetic with the unification issue experienced by the club. The discussion was entitled "Islahaturahmi Vol 1" and the information about it was spread through MMGA and PAS Instagram accounts with a very limited information. There was only the information of time with no clue of the event venue. Aremania who intend to participate in the discussion must refer the contact person listed on the poster. Furthermore, the MMGA admin entered the contacting cellphone number into the WA application group to be given information on the location of the activity on the D-day, 2 hours before the event took place. There were 250 participants in the group, but around 300 people attended the public discussion.

The limited public discussion took place in an art studio located in Malang Regency. The MMGA movers (Andy 'Sinyo', Vandy Wijaya and Vanda 'Ambon') were present to deliver issues related to the movement they initiated. The main points they emphasize was the comparison of attitudes of the managers of Arema Indonesia and Arema FC which are opposite to each other. In addition, they also discussed the plan of the Arema FC President to acquire Arema Indonesia. They also discussed the possibility of reviving the Arema Foundation, which was currently empty, after being frozen by Muhammad Nur as the Chairman of the Foundation some time after the resignation of Darjoto Setiawan as the Trustee of the Arema Foundation. However, back then, Darjoto was considered less cooperative with the initiation of the unification of Arema initiated by MMGA. In fact, it is the

Arema Foundation that they view as having the authority to use the name of Arema with various logical consequences.

MMGA views the Arema Foundation as the key in solving this problem. MMGA wants to urge the Malang City Government to revive the Arema Foundation so that Arema, which has historical roots since 1987, can be identified. This idea became the basis for MMGA to mobilize Aremania who were present at the limited meeting to send a personal letter to Darjoto simultaneously on July 1, 2021. MMGA intends to invite Aremania to urge Darjoto to take a stand in the case of Arema dualism. Thus, if Darjoto as the representative of the Arema Foundation voices his version of truth, it is hoped that the issue of dualism will come clear.

2.2 Social Movement Strategies during Pandemic Era

The policy of crowd restriction during the pandemic forced MMGA to adjust its strategy to achieve its goals. Optimization of offline and online activities is the main alternative for them to urge the parties to participate in the efforts to unify Arema. In addition, they also use symbolic actions to convey ideas to fellow Aremania and Malang City Government. The public discussions they held were also an alternative way to spread messages and demands to unite Arema. The strategies they run are to deal with crowd restriction regulations during the pandemic.

There is an unexpected finding in this study that is relevant to the way MMGA complies with the regulations as well as circumvent them in order to achieve their expected goals. On one hand, MMGA complied with the call to cancel the 2nd *Aksi Damai* (Peace Action) recommended by the Malang City Police. On the other hand, they also continue to carry out collective actions involving many people in different locations and times. As previous research has shown, the pandemic has proven not to prevent pressure groups from delivering their demands. MMGA also continues to voice their demands during the pandemic, they are even inspired to express their hopes in attractive and symbolic ways.

The findings of this study show the tendency of social movements during the pandemic to collaborate on online and offline movements. Health protocol policies during a pandemic are often addressed by pressure groups to convey their demands by using social media (Chwat, 2021; Martinez, 2020). Social media features such as Instagram and YouTube facilitate pressure groups in disseminating their ideas to public. They also use such social media to turn messages that were originally offline into content that can be found online. The use of social media in such movements has become a trend during this pandemic situation.

The innovation of forms and strategies carried out by MMGA shows that the external factors of the pressure groups are the triggers for change. External factors of regulation are the main aspects that encourage changes in the form and strategy of social movements. Crowd restriction regulations forced MMGA actors to make adaptation by turning rallies into artistic performances and symbolic actions which were then converted into social media content. Social movements are proven to be able to adapt to regulations set by the state, but these regulations do not necessarily suppress civil society action.

The changes in strategy used by MMGA during the pandemic have similarities and uniqueness when compared to the findings in other studies. The use of social media as an instrument to promote interests is also evident in other studies in the United States, Spain, and Poland (Chwat, 2021; Guittard, 2021; Martinez, 2020). Social movements during the pandemic were used technology as the main instrument to achieve goals amidst restrictions on mobility and crowds. This means that social media occupies an important position in disseminating demands to the parties. However, the uniqueness of MMGA as a form of social

movement lies in the context of its attractive and symbolic strategy in disseminating thoughts and conveying demands.

The findings in this study also show a change in social movements in Indonesia that utilize the internet network. The use of social media by MMGA to mobilize Aremania in the offline world was different from Merlyna Lim's findings (Lim, 2013). Lim stated that social media activism is more likely to successfully mobilize mass support when its narratives are simple, associated with low-risk actions and congruent with dominant narratives. She also explained that social movements that use social media to fight the dominant narrative that is disseminated through mainstream mass media have had relatively little success. The social movement initiated by MMGA does carry a simple narrative: 'unifying Arema', but the collective action carried out during the pandemic has a big risk from the health aspect as well as regulations. The big risk of the Aremania's collective action is related to the health protocol which hopes to reduce crowds through social distancing policies. By holding activities that involve many participants, MMGA activists take the risk of contracting the Covid-19 virus when voicing their demands. In addition, MMGA activists are also at risk of getting sanctions from the government for forcing them to hold activities that involve many people in public places. These two aspects were distinguished the social movements that Lim observed from those carried out by MMGA.

The strategies undertaken by MMGA in achieving its goals depict how social movements promote their interests and have the potential to both strengthen and weaken democratization. Social movements carried out by civil society organizations in democratic countries can strengthen the democratization process if it takes place in accordance with the applicable regulations. In addition, social movements strengthen democracy when they take place in the context of controlling the state and the market. The MMGA's decision to cancel the 2nd Peace Action according to the recommendation of the Malang City Police and to supervise the use of Malang City community identity by the management of Arema Indonesia and Arema FC are examples of movements that strengthen democratization. Actions to weaken the practice of democracy take place when there is an attempt to circumvent the prevailing rules. In this context, MMGA's efforts to initiate flash mob and "Islahaturahmi" are a form of conveying interests that have such character.

Community-based sports movements have the potential to influence public policy in democracies. The sports community as a pressure group has an interest in influencing or overseeing government policies, but they do not have a goal to occupy power. Specifically, such pressure groups are part of episodic groups, namely voluntary associations that engage in politics only when their interests are threatened (Newton & Deth, 2021). Such episodic groups have the potential to strengthen in a democratic country along with the strengthening of civil society activities in cyberspace.

MMGA's activities in cyberspace provide a horizon for social movements that adapt to change. MMGA in its position as a pressure group shows adaptation to external factors as an important aspect in voicing demands. They have responded to changes in regulations by changing the form and instruments in pushing for interests. The strategy to convey urgency in an attractive and symbolic way can be an alternative in limited situations, especially during a pandemic.

3 Conclusion

The policy of crowd restriction taking place amidst pandemic era has been used by

MMGA for attractive and symbolic actions. The findings of the study reveals that the problem of restricting movements during pandemic closes opportunities for any collective for MMGA. The attempt to alternate such regulation with the movements is potential to reduce the effectiveness of government's effort to lower the amount of Covid 19 spread in the country. MMGA continues to strive their goal could be achieved even though the government implements a policy of health protocols during the pandemic.

The concept of social movement strategy discussed in this study opens up opportunities for the implementation of collective action using a combination of online and offline instruments. Such social movement strategy will increase the reach of information dissemination to gain sympathy as well as to promote interests. The social movement strategy that integrates online and offline ways can be understood by a research approach that emphasizes the sensitivity of everyday experiences and power structures as guidelines for understanding the currents and paths of cultural resistance that are influenced by the internet (Wilson, 2006, p. 307).

The study is limited to the context of analysis of the pressure groups in dealing with the policy of social restriction in pandemic situation. The government's perspective in responding to the strategy used by the social groups to negotiate their interest is crucial to be further observed. The government's effort to escalate the society obedience to the regulations of controlling health protocol is in the need of a thorough study. It is important to consider because the existence of the regulations in democratic nation is the foundation to guarantee security from Covid-19 based on the law and human rights (Lin et al., 2020, p. 271). More detailed study on how the government responds to the implementation of stricter health protocol regulations should be a challenge for other researchers in the future.

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