

Google, Facebook, And China: Internet Supremacy and Digital Sovereignty

Sofi Mubarok, Rudi Candra

Universitas Darussalam Gontor

sofimubarok@unida.gontor.ac.id

Abstract

The relationship between the internet and the state has become a interesting topic lately, especially after the United States' rejection of the Huawei technology company, which allegedly used its technology as a spy in 2019. This paper will dissect this phenomenon using George Orwell's perspective on how to fight against oppressive rulers with the power of information technology and Jack Pinkowski who on the contrary sees the potential for a harmonious relationship between the state and information technology that will be able to create a balance of power between society and the state. Using books, scientific journal articles, and statistical data from several leading websites, this paper will describe the power relations and internet data in several countries and about the achievements of world information technology companies. The findings of this paper show that only three entities (two companies and one country) controlled the Internet (temporarily) until 2019: Google, Facebook, and China. This power makes every country in the world try to build domestic capabilities to control the internet, at least for local consumption as China did.

Keywords: *China, Facebook, Google, Internet Supremacy, Power, State*

INTRODUCTION

This paper will specifically discuss on how the internet phenomenon is addressed by the government. In what manner then technology companies become a great power that challenges state domination. This paper takes a major point from the United States' rejection of Huawei in 2019, before the covid nineteen pandemic, which was suspected of immersing spies in their technology. Especially after 5G technology was massively developed by Huawei, which has extremely fast data transfer capabilities compared to previous technologies.

This article describes the latest condition of internet technology and its relationship with power or the state before the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. As is known, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the world of internet technology is growing extremely fast. People are forced to move into the world of the internet, work from home, study from home, shop from home through technological devices. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the discourse of 4.0 industrial revolution run drastically. Therefore, the data in this article takes place before 2019. This research is a preliminary study for an ongoing study of the relationship between the internet and the state in the pandemic era and then post-pandemic.

The digital revolution 4.0 has become a reality in today's world. The internet has penetrated all lines of life, from social, economic, political, to cultural life. Societal relations that used to be limited by distance and time are now boundless. Anyone can communicate whenever they want. The technology is in their hands, every day, every time. The Internet has become a new communication culture, because it is fast and efficient. Almost everyone in this world, today, interacts directly with this new medium. Young or old, rich, or poor. This increasingly cheap technology has finally become a reality that cannot be avoided by modern world society. Since this media positively encourages the world to be more open. No more barriers limiting information. Anytime, anywhere, anything.

On the other hand, disclosure of information poses the danger of data theft and other forms of cybercrime. Since of this openness, government control over society will be taken over by digital companies. This control can occur because this technology collects people data massively, day by day and even second by second. All neatly recorded in the data bank they have. Which certainly has the potential to be used for evil, although it also has potential for good and usefulness. In line with the prediction of George Orwell (1961), in his 1984 novel, he made in 1961 about the future of the world of electronic communication. He stated in the book that, in 1984, the community would be fully controlled through electronic communication media by the “big brother” or the government. The government will be mighty and pressing because all community activities are always monitoring 24 hours 7 days. With the proficiency in information technology, the government will be able to control behaviors, attitudes, opinions, actions, political views, and religious beliefs. The digital footprint will suppress the government directory, which can use to pressure anyone.

This condition will certainly make people lose their freedom and rights as a complete human being. It will be undoubtedly harmful if it happens. This condition, according to him,

will make countries with no knowledge of information technology collapse, and there will only be three giants left, all of which are in the West. According to Orwell, this happened in 1984. However, everyone knows the results. The development of information technology is indeed high-speed, but his predictions about the collapse of countries are not proven. It occurs as the country is even more numerous than in the era of 1961. Likewise, Orwell's thesis on government power, the stronger also rejected by Jack Pinkowski (2006) in his article entitled "Globalization and Information and Communications Technology Influences on Democratic Governance".

In his paper, Pinkowski proved the opposite of what Orwell predicted. In economics, for example, the virtual economy will lead to more open government (not as oppressive as Orwell claims) because the flow of ideas, capital, and production allows traditional barriers. This freedom is a balance between the power of society and government. Open discussions in an online space that can be easily accessed by anyone makes the public directly communicate with the government, without any obstacles. This situation does allow the community to participate in policy making. This optimism is the basis and inspiration for policy makers. Some heads of state are even regularly active on social media, such as Donald Trump on twitter. It was this direct interaction that Pinkowski later envisioned.

At that time, Pinkowski's opinion did not seem to be clearly proven, but it should also be noted that this article was published in 2006, where the internet was not as sophisticated and fast as it is today. In addition, the use of social media has not been widespread enough to trigger demonstrations such as the Arab Spring in the 2010s. At that time, the use of smartphones was still limited to certain circles, unlike today where most people already use them. The technological sophistication of that time compared to today is clearly far away. The speed of data transmission is increasing rapidly. At that time, many gadgets were still using the first-generation technology, namely analog systems with low rates and sound as the main object. Currently, the third generation no longer uses analog systems. This technology can transfer data at high speed and multimedia applications for broadband. Even now, 5G technology has developed rapidly. Which of course is more sophisticated and faster.

This study will use two perspectives from two thinkers Orwell and Pinkowski to analyze how the internet stands, especially digital companies in relation to the country or more broadly its role in the international world. Will it create a capacity that only a handful of powers have, or will it make the world more open and fairer to society as Pinkowski

envisions. This paper will discuss two main things, first about Internet Power or in other words the extent to which Internet power affects countries: and second, analyzing the impact of the struggle for control or authority over the internet between digital companies and governments.

METHODS

This study used qualitative research methods. Qualitative methods help study questions in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being overwhelmed by predefined analytical categories contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of the qualitative analysis. Qualitative methods, on the other hand, demand the use of patterned measures so that different points of view and experiences of people can access a number of pre-determined categories of responses in which numbers are provided. (Patton 2002, 4)

One approach in qualitative research, which will be used in this study, is a case study. In this approach, one interesting case is chosen. This case is observed regularly in a certain period. The focus of this research is on the process. Research questions focus on what can be learned from this case. Intrinsic case studies are conducted because I want a better understanding of a particular case, not because it represents another case or describes a particular trait. For data collection, we investigated relevant information about companies and states that have enormous power in the world of internet. The data gathered from any relevant books, scientific journals, magazines, newspapers as well as data from the internet especially from worldometer.com. Prior to the documentary study, a careful literature review was conducted through intensive library investigations. Especially data related to the biggest online media companies, Google, Facebook, and Chinese companies. The data analysis technique used in this research is interactive model analysis. According to Miles and Huberman (1984), there are three components of analysis in this data model, namely data reduction, data model and conclusions that are presented in an interactive form between the cyclical data collection process.

For data reduction, this article conducts activities to summarize and select the main sources by focusing on valuable information so that the reduced data will provide a clearer picture and make it easier for me to do further data collection and look for it if needed. Then the data display which is a set of structured information that gives the possibility of drawing conclusions and acting. The form used in this study is a narrative text. Thus, I can see what is

happening and can well describe the conclusions that are justified or move to the next stage of analysis. Eventually the initial conclusions presented by me are still temporary and will change if substantial evidence is found that supports the next stage of data collection. But if the conclusions put forward at the beginning stage are supported by valid and consistent evidence when I return to the field, then the conclusions put forward are credible conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Internet, Power, and The State

Different from years ago, today, the internet is no longer seen as a separate element. 62.5% inhabitants of the earth enjoy internet services, directly or indirectly. The debates of internet utilization are still always there, about how to use, cybersecurity, adverse impact, and the threat to the country. It cannot separate from the vast capacity of the internet, which is even able to reach even remote corners of the world. There are theories of land power and sea power in geopolitics. In this digital era, Internet power can be the most dominant factor in how to rule the world is. Almost.

In the Cambridge dictionary, the internet defines as “the large system of connected computers around the world that allows people to share information and communicate with each other” (“Internet | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary” n.d.). This media means having the main task of sharing information and communication, good and bad, invitations and threats, and praise and scolding. All this information can be easily spread and consumed by all internet users around the world with very extraordinary speed. Therefore, it has become the most crucial technology of the century. It can be seen from its development, starting from the discovery of 5G technology that get faster and more efficient, the Internet of Things together with Artificial Intelligence.

This development certainly affected the individual as well as the state as the highest institution in global politics. According to international law, a state defines as being based on the 1933 Montevideo Convention. According to Article 1 of the Convention, the country as a person of international law should have the following qualifications: 1. permanent population; 2. defined territory; 3. government; 4. capacity to enter into relations with the other states. (Klabbers 2016) To sum up, one of the characteristics of the country is a definite territory. It related to the sovereignty of a nation. Therefore, the internet, with its reach across national

borders, certainly worries the state as the holder of the highest freedom in the international system.

Today, the internet is not only the medium of society and government, as suggested by Pinkowski rather a nightmare for some countries. The nightmare began in 2010, which was marred by an extraordinary global uproar. The commotion was due to the emergence of various secret documents by Wikileaks. WikiLeaks or Wikileaks is an international mass media that discloses state and company confidential documents to the public through its website. (“WikiLeaks” n.d.) This organization is based on Stockholm, Sweden. (Haddow 2010) The WikiLeaks site was officially launched in December 2006 by Chinese political dissidents, journalists, mathematicians, and technology experts from the United States, Taiwan, Europe, Australia, and South Africa.

In July 2010, this site attracted controversy because of the leaking of war documents in Afghanistan (Afghanistan war logs: the unvarnished picture, 2010). Furthermore, in October 2010, nearly 400,000 Iraqi war documents were leaked by this site. (Nick Davies 2010) In November 2010, WikiLeaks began releasing US diplomatic cables. Overall, 97,080 documents classified as highly classified were distributed by WikiLeaks. (Leigh 2010) Various responses came, some defended for reasons of openness, others blasphemed for purposes of betrayal. It certainly was a significant blow to the United States after the 9/11 attacks and posed a serious threat to other countries. In 2010, the danger of the internet became more apparent.

Aside from America, which is politically open, China which is renowned for being closed in its domestic affairs, also experienced similar tapping. On November 23, 2019, secret documents about the Uighur “concentration camp” in Xinjiang leaked by an International Investigative Journalist Consortium (ICIJ) in collaboration with seventeen media from 14 countries. In the document, Experts say, more than 1 million Uighurs and members of other, mostly Muslim minority groups detain in Xinjiang. (Palmer 2019) It was indeed a pressure for China which has been extremely aggressive in building its network of economic cooperation with many countries, including Muslim countries. Although the Chinese government rejected this allegation, the leak of this document certainly worried many parties, especially cybersecurity.

In addition to external dangers of cybersecurity, the internet is also used to mobilize the masses and to overthrow the ruling government. Internet is the most effective tool in

spreading ideas and invitations to conduct political actions. One idea can spread quickly and be seen by millions of people in a brief time. Aside from domestic, these ideas spread across territorial borders, which in turn inspires other communities to do the same. Just concerning “Arab Spring”, how social media, especially Facebook, can mobilize that much mass, spreading quickly from Tunis, Egypt, Libya, to Syria. One by one, the regime collapsed, and the country also became weak and suffering from a prolonged crisis to date. This condition certainly makes other countries cautious especially in managing information technology-based policies, so they do not get the same exposure.

The internet either threatens through movements or specific groups of people or countries, especially country with advanced information technology, as happened between China and the United States. In the aftermath of the trade war between the two and long-standing concerns about the potential spying by Huawei and other national security threats, in May 2019, President Donald Trump issued an executive order banning US companies from using information and communication technology from whom it is also considered a national security threat and declares a national emergency regarding the problem. This step is broadly aimed at Huawei of course. On the same day, the Department of Commerce placed Huawei and its 70 affiliates on the “Entity List”, which is a trade blacklist that prohibits anyone from buying components and components from US companies without government approval. In reaction, several US companies began to withdraw from their business with Huawei. (Stewart 2019).

Based on the case of Huawei, proficiency in state technology can be a serious threat to other countries. Balancing power is certainly an unavoidable reality. This threat certainly makes the function of information technology not only as a communication tool but also a dangerous form of secret weapon. No doubt this is not only a trade war but also a cyber and technology war between the United States and China. Between US companies and Chinese companies. The atmosphere of the Cold War began to appear, with the race for the development of sophisticated technology. The internet, with the above evidence, can be confirmed to be a serious threat to the survival of the country, just as predicted by Orwell. On the other hand, the internet still used to encourage openness and balance of power between people and nations, as stated by Pinkowski. However, Orwell is right. That this technology will only be mastered by a few countries (in Orwell’s words) or if interpreted today, information technology only controlled by a few groups. The next discussion will explore the power struggle over information technology. Although of course, his power is not as massive

as what Orwell described. The discussion that follows will explore the struggle for power over information technology. Between several actors, state, and non-state.

THE DOMINATION OF GOOGLE, FACEBOOK, AND CHINA

At the beginning of 2018, the largest social media site in the world, Facebook received attention from various groups. As many as fifty million user data was leaked and used by Cambridge Analytica, Donald Trump's political consultant, for the benefit of the US presidential election campaign. This phenomenon is undoubtedly a concern for internet users around the world as their data are used and may even trade illegally. However, what is even more astonishing is that companies like Facebook may have more accurate data about the personal information of each worldwide than any other country. Hence, it shows the extent of the real power of online companies.

According to Orwell, the community will be fully controlled through electronic communication media by the "big brother" or the government. The government will be compelling and pressing because all community activities are monitor 24 hours 7 days. With the mastery of information technology, the government will be able to control behaviors, attitudes, opinions, actions, political views, and religious beliefs. The digital footprint will suppress the government directory, which can be used at any time to pressure anyone. This situation happens today, digital traces and personal data of internet users are neatly compiled by the government and online companies which might use at any time for specific purposes, such as the case of Facebook and Harvard Analytica above. Digital companies like Google, Facebook or Alibaba have long recognized the data as a valuable asset. (Fisher 2009) Collected data rigorously since their beginning (Neil M. Richards and H 2014), and got results in them not only becoming powerful monopolies but also contributing to a centralization of the world wide web and directly influencing politics.

If Orwell says that there will only be three remaining rulers of information technology, today the claim may be real, even though the actor is not only the state. From several online surveys about internet usage, there are at least three major companies that control the online world today: Google, Facebook, and China. Why should be China, not WeChat or Alibaba? The Chinese government has full control over technology companies in China, and it is

different from Google and Facebook, which are purely private companies. It once again can also explain why the United States' concerns to Huawei.

What is happening in China, regarding how far the state controls the rights of individuals, including of course private companies, is completely different from what happened in Europe and the United States. In the European Union, the firm stance on the protection of individual privacy and restrictions on mass surveillance is clearly stated in clear rules. In the European Union and the United States, there are strong intellectual property protection regimes. On the other hand, according to Kadri Kaska, Henrik Beckvard and Tomáš Minárik, in China the situation is different, "Chinese national policy – and the consequent legal environment – clearly favors state interests over private ones." The power of the state really has a strong influence on the actions of individuals and companies. (Kaska, Beckvard, and Minárik 2019, 11).

From data compiled by Datareportal (see table.1), that internet users per January 2019 amounted to 4,388 billion people worldwide from 7,676 billion of the world's total population. It means that 57% or more than half of the world's population are internet users. 3,484 or 45.3% (of the total population) are active social media users. These data show the potential power possessed by online companies, especially social media. From this data, it is expecting to increase in the future. The online empire has indeed become the most asset. Big data is a struggle for many parties. This issue is certainly not just a figment; many countries are now competing to make regulations on internet regulation in their respective countries to avoid the dangers that may arise.

For example, a few years ago, we would only find restrictions or media blocks in closed countries like China, North Korea, and Iran. But today, similar actions have begun to be implemented in democracies, although they are still limited to specific issues. The latest is, for example, how the internet shouted down amid protests that took place in Hong Kong, a state known as democratic. Similar blockages occur in India, one of the largest democracies in the world. Since large-scale demonstrations demanding the repeal of amendments to citizenship laws that are detrimental to Muslims. In Indonesia, a democratic country with the world's largest Muslim population, the government blocked several social media and slowing down internet access during a demonstration in the 2018 presidential election. Moreover, in the case of riots in Papua, the Indonesian government also implemented the same thing.



Table. 1 Digital Around the World in 2019 (Kemp 2019)

The internet is a struggle for global actors, between multinational online companies and countries. Or sometimes the state and the company also jointly do it. In certain countries, private companies are structurally supervised and controlled by the state. This condition is influenced by changes in global geopolitics, in the past the principle was whoever rules the waves rules the world. Now that conditions are changing, whoever can control the Internet can control the world. Interestingly, of the many internet platforms that exist, only a few dominate the internet world. On the table. 2, shows how Facebook still occupies the first position with 2.271 billion users followed by YouTube, a Google-owned company, with a total of 1,900 billion users. It did outperform the population of any country. Although of course the population on the internet cannot also be compared with the real population in the country. However, for comparison, according to a report released by *worldometer*, China as the most populous country in the world only has a total population of 1.3 billion, (“Countries in the World by Population” 2019) half of Facebook's population and five hundred million less than YouTube's population. These two entities -state and global internet companies- have something in common, they both control population data, even though the company does not have population 'nationalism'. Still, the data collected by these companies can influence the choices and activities of their followers.

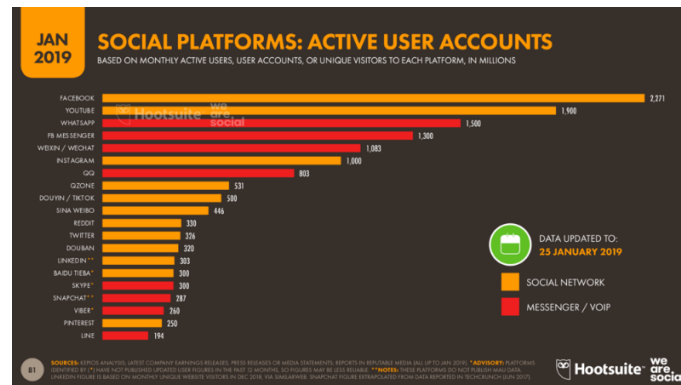


Table. 2 Social Platforms: Active User Accounts (Kemp, 2019)

Aside from Facebook and YouTube, social media with the most users is addressing to WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. The fifth is following by Chinese social media, WeChat with a total of 1,083 billion users. From the information above, it is the top five social media with the most users. There are only three leading players holding control over social media and at the same time becoming the most significant data holder of the world’s population, namely Google, Facebook, and China.

Furthermore, other data released by *Datareportal*, regarding websites with the most visitors in 2019, Google is still the first website with the most visits followed by YouTube which still belongs to Google, Facebook, Baidu, a search engine from China and wikipedia.org. From table 3 above, Google, Facebook, and China still dominate the internet power. Thus, it is not surprising if the countries begin to worry about their existence and to initiate or implement laws on information and technology. The state, as an international relations actor, is still compelling even though it should deal with large companies.

It indicates how the reaction of the United States Congress to Facebook was due to the Harvard Analytical case. Yes, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg was requested to clarify various matters related to data leakage and to protect the privacy of facebook users better. It can also be observed from the case of Huawei versus the United States, as previously mentioned. In Indonesia, Google’s tax is pursuing by Minister of Finance Sri Mulyani. In front of the US Ambassador in Indonesia, Sri Mulyani openly said that Google had to obey the tax rules in Indonesia if it still wanted to survive (Riva Dessthania Suastha 2019). Consequently, many countries have begun to think like China, blocking these critical applications and building alternative applications made in the country.

#	WEBSITE	CATEGORY	TIME PER VISIT	#	WEBSITE	CATEGORY	TIME PER VISIT
01	GOOGLE.COM	SEARCH	09M 12S	11	AMAZON.COM	SHOPPING	06M 18S
02	YOUTUBE.COM	VIDEO	21M 36S	12	XVIDEOS.COM	ADULT	12M 34S
03	FACEBOOK.COM	SOCIAL	11M 44S	13	XNXX.COM	ADULT	14M 39S
04	BAIDU.COM	SEARCH	06M 33S	14	AMPROJECT.ORG	NEWS	03M 53S
05	WIKIPEDIA.ORG	REFERENCE	03M 45S	15	LIVE.COM	EMAIL	07M 15S
06	YAHOO.COM	PORTAL	06M 26S	16	VK.COM	SOCIAL	16M 50S
07	TWITTER.COM	SOCIAL	09M 14S	17	NETFLIX.COM	VIDEO	09M 14S
08	PORNHUB.COM	ADULT	10M 16S	18	QQ.COM	PORTAL	04M 00S
09	YANDEX.RU	SEARCH	10M 43S	19	MAIL.RU	PORTAL	07M 38S
10	INSTAGRAM.COM	SOCIAL	06M 25S	20	REDDIT.COM	SOCIAL	09M 13S

Table. 3 World’s Most Visited Websites (Similarweb) (Kemp 2019)

From the above explanation, the conclusion is that the struggle for internet power is still ongoing. Today’s internet rulers: Google, Facebook, and China, will again face dangerous challenges in the future. Digital world competition is very dynamic, and it proves from the history of how Yahoo in the 1990s until the early 2000s has to close down. It means that race to dominate the internet will proceed. In this era, digital war will become an everyday phenomenon as well as economic and military competition occurred in the past. Struggle for the fittest.

In fact, this power was not to the extent that Orwell imagined. The dynamics of change in the internet world are so fast and massive. This fact does not necessarily conclude that Pinkowski's ideas are wrong. In fact, with the uncertain circumstances, the openness between the state and its people has begun to be seen in several countries. Many heads of state and companies CEO and other leaders participate and interact directly with their constituents, with their members. Although, they also trapped in the community that has been created by the big digital power earlier: Google, Facebook, and China. Power is limited, not eternal, it is always adjusting and changing. What is certain, change and power will not occur without the will of the Almighty, “And Allah grants His kingdom to whom He wills. And Allah is All-Sufficient for His creatures’ needs, All-Knower.” (Al-Hilali and M 2018).

CONCLUSION

The internet has become an integral part of the modern world. It marked the digital revolution 4.0 in the 1970s. The internet has become a significant power, which is not only seen as a medium of information and communication. The internet has turned into an asset or a

weapon, and anyone can master it. Anything can occur with the internet. Influential leaders of Middle Eastern countries such as Hosni Mubarak from Egypt and Moammar Qadhafi from Libya, who might be extremely far to overthrow, fell due to the power of the internet and social media.

Similarly, the internet also triggered a trade war between China and the United States resulting in the global economic decline. Therefore, the internet is not only an international issue, but more than that the internet has become a force itself, which is contested for power by the state, companies, or cooperation between the state and companies. The three primary forces of the internet today are Google, Facebook and China, control almost half of the world's population. It certainly worries many parties, especially the state as the main actor in global politics.

The three powers of the internet world seem to agree with Orwell's thesis in 1961. He defined that that one day there will only be three forces left. The strength of the three even exceeds the country. It testifies from Facebook, which is trying in parliament due to the case of data leakage. Nothing can deny. Google in Indonesia, which is difficult to pay taxes, although it is finally successful. From these conditions, there is no other choice for the state to optimize its domestic potential for the development of digital products through local technology companies. Because, in the future, if a country does not expand its technology capabilities directly, it will be hazardous for the survival of the country as predicted by Orwell.

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