

Critical and Analytical Thinking about Controversial Issues in Digital Historical Sources

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the ability to think critically and analytically about controversial issues in digital historical sources. History writing in the digital era is growing with the existence of digital historical sources. Digitization allows for wider access to historical information that is rarely known or even recorded in print historical sources. Through digital historical sources, the digitization ability of people from various walks of life plays an important role in improving their critical and analytical thinking skills in studying controversial issues circulating in digital historical sources. The method used in compiling this article is the literature study method where researchers obtain reference sources from libraries and mobile libraries. Historians study a historical event using various historical sources such as printed, oral, and digital sources. Each of these types of historical sources has its level of credit_worthiness. The use of digital historical sources is one of the important factors to help researchers write the narrative of a historical event. Therefore, in examining controversial issues circulating in digital history sources, the role of individuals from various circles is very important in criticizing and analyzing controversial issues that are widely circulated. Freedom in accessing information through digital allows researchers, academics, or the general public to know historical facts that are rarely known. As this study is a literature review, explicitly indicate the findings based on the reviewed literature, include identified themes based on the library research, write potential implications.

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1. INTRODUCTION

History is not straight and linear, so there will be many things that are controversial with each other. Historical facts evolve and give rise to different interpretations of the same event. This has caused controversy in history and is getting more interesting to know every time. History is studied not only by students who study in the history department but also by almost everyone in the world. Without learning history, people will lose their identity and roots.

History is divided into two, namely history as experienced events (histoire-reale) and history as told events (histoire-recit). These two types of historical events are the reason why history can be different. When

different people convey it because some experience it directly, some are only told, so that the series of events is not always intact and the same; there is a possibility of addition and subtraction. (Adam, 2007: 3).

Currently, digital literacy has advanced so rapidly that anyone can access Indonesia's national history and the histories of other nations from anywhere, at any time, with the sophistication of technology. The rapid development of digital literacy must be balanced with a critical and analytical attitude so that the information we receive is not misdirected and misleading. It is very easy to find information about history in digital information media such as YouTube, Google, and so on. It is interesting that currently YouTube channels from popular influencers discuss history, both national and world history, such as the Nadia Omara channel, Sepulang Sekolah, Nessie Judge, Nat Geo Indonesia, Rita Nuraliza, and other channels.

The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in digital media has become common. Sectors of life are not spared from the influence of this digital media, especially in the education sector. An example of the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the internet. (Neolaka, 2019: 177). In writing a historical event, reliable sources are needed to obtain accurate information. The sources used in writing history can be in physical form, such as books or other archives. In addition to physical and print sources, there are also digital sources. From the aspect of education, digital sources can be interpreted as content or information that can be obtained through digital devices, such as gadgets, laptops, mobile phones, etc. Digital sources are in the form of media in the form of images, videos, and articles uploaded on the website. Through internet access, students and other members of the general public can obtain various kinds of information.

Digitalization is very influential in the development of science. This also affects the writing of history. Historians can write history using digital media, for example, accessing archives from online libraries. For example, from the national library website or the library website belonging to the National Press Monument. However, information filtering is very necessary in writing history that uses digital historical sources. This is done as an effort to reduce the possibility of misunderstandings in historical writing.

Digital sources can be an alternative source of information to overcome the limitations of physical sources. Ease of access to digital resources is an added value of this type of resource. Historical digital resources aim to optimize the development of internet technology in the context of history education. In addition, guidance is needed for students to develop historical thinking skills and explore various aspects of historical studies. History learning resources in digital form, especially primary sources, play a central role in history research and learning. The digitization of historical sources available on the internet makes it easier for various parties, such as researchers, students, and historical observers, to access, download, and adjust information as needed. (Lee, 2002; Utami, 2020; Anis, Mardiani, & Fathurrahman, 2022: 32).

However, in searching for digital sources, a lot of false information or hoaxes are often found. Information seekers through digital sources, both students and the general public, must have high digital literacy skills to minimize the spread of fake news about a controversial issue. Digital literacy from the educational aspect is expertise in understanding, managing, and absorbing information from various digital sources effectively. This includes technical expertise in using digital devices or media, and cognitive ability to analyze, evaluate, and summarize information. The purpose of digital literacy is to help improve critical and creative thinking skills in students and the general public. This is because sometimes there are people who are not careful in reading information from a controversial issue that is not clear about the truth, then disseminate it to others, so that it has the potential to trigger chaos.

In historical science, there are five methods when conducting research, according to Priyadi (2021). They consist of topic selection, collection of sources (heuristic), verification (external criticism and internal criticism), interpretation (analysis and synthesis), and writing or historiography. The verification method is also important to understand historical writing; this method forces historical readers to check and recheck the facts in the historical writing, from which source and who the author is. Not only be accepted immediately, but you must also be critical.

Controversial history itself can be interpreted as a difference of opinion regarding facts found from the past and interpretations about characters, events, and times. (Kochhar, 2008). Controversial history has become a hot topic from time to time because it concerns the truth of history. Controversial subjects in history that are often debated by both political actors and historians include topics such as origin, territorial sovereignty, the legitimacy of power holders, the status of national heroes, the identification of enemies and victims, the role or fate of traitors and criminals, and the distinction between elites and marginalized groups.

Controversial history, according to (Kochhar, 2008), is divided into two types, namely (1) Controversial history of facts, (2) Controversial history of the significance, relevance, and interpretation of a set of facts. A controversial history of facts can occur due to a lack of data or the absurdity of an invention. History is controversial because of the problem of interpretation, as the approach taken by historians is unscientific, biased, and influenced by prejudice. Events or phenomena are sometimes studied behind closed doors because the interpretation can be wrong and cause controversy.

This article examines the critical role of analytical reasoning in engaging with contested narratives of Indonesian history within a digitally literate society. The authors will comparatively analyze traditional archival

sources and digital historical materials to reconcile divergent interpretations and establish a historically accurate synthesis.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This article uses a literature review research method. The library research method is a type of research method that is categorized based on the place or source of data collection. As stated in (Sutrisno, 1990; Harahap, 2014). The term directly refers to the location where data and research materials are stored in the library. The essence of this research is that the information used comes from reference materials such as journal articles and books.

The data sources used in this study included electronic materials such as e-books and e-journals. The researchers accessed the reference materials needed through Google or the mobile library. The study drew exclusively on digital materials digitized archives, institutional databases, open-source wikis, social media history “threads,” and scholarly e-publications (e-books and e-journals) because a systematic review of online sources best captured both recent scholarship and primary digital records relevant to contested themes in Indonesian national history. This method was justified by the study’s aim to trace evolving narratives across heterogeneous, digitally mediated repositories. To ensure credibility, we prioritized peer-reviewed articles and academic monographs indexed in Google Scholar, Scopus, or JSTOR, supplemented by verified institutional repositories and national archive digitizations; social-media threads and wiki entries were used only as contextual, non-authoritative evidence and were cross-checked against archival or peer-reviewed sources. Inclusion criteria required sources to be peer-reviewed or primary digital archives, published or digitized between 2000 and 2022 for secondary literature, or to be original primary documents regardless of date. We excluded non-scholarly blogs, opinion pieces without verifiable provenance, duplicate records, and sources we could not access in full text.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research reveals that digital history sources often contain controversial content that requires a critical and analytical approach to interpret it objectively. Critical thinking is essential for filtering information on controversial issues that are widely circulated. This is important to do so that the public is not incited by propaganda due to limited ability to use digitalization technology. Analytical skills are essential for examining the relationship between digital documents and traditional primary sources. When reconstructing historical events, historians must compile and critically evaluate relevant source materials. In the digital age, these sources increasingly include digital historical archives. Along with the development of the times, historical sources also developed. Historical sources today are not only oral sources (interviews) or document sources, but also in the form of digital platforms. Digital historical archives are accessible not only to historians but also to scholars, students, and the general public via online platforms.

Digital history sources contain historical facts that are not listed in history subject books for students, as well as other printed sources. However, digital platforms often use popular narratives or titles but lack clarity on the core of the discussion. Thus, popular narratives or titles causes misunderstandings in the absorption of information among the public. Not a few controversial issues that are widely circulated among the community eventually trigger an uproar. This research highlights the importance of historical digital literacy for academics and the general public. By combining critical thinking and analytical skills, people from different walks of life can distinguish between historical facts and distortions.

With reference to the analyzed data, the following patterns emerged:

3.1 Examples of Controversial Themes in Indonesian National History

Controversial history can be divided into two categories, namely (1) politically controversial history, and (2) controversial scientific history. Political controversy concerns the government's interest in maintaining its power. Controversial scientific history is related to the historiographical and methodological inability to construct and reconstruct the past with low subjective content and interpret the meaning of historical learning. Students of history inevitably encounter contentious historiographical debates. Consequently, maintaining rigorous critical and analytical thinking becomes imperative when navigating the proliferation of digital historical resources. (Purwanto, 2009: 2).

The first emerging patterns concerns controversial themes in the Indonesian national history. In this regards, controversial themes are related to political interest and state power, where official narratives, commemorations, and curricula were sometimes used to legitimize authority and marginalize alternative voices. There are a lot of material that is still controversial such as the material about Budi Utomo, where the public in Indonesia is widely known and even agreed upon as the first movement in Indonesia based on nationalism. However, a different opinion emerged that Sarekat Islam should be called the first movement in Indonesia based on nationalism in terms of the direction of the movement and the number of masses. Historical narratives surrounding the General Attack of 1 March 1949 remain contested, particularly regarding the relative significance of figures such as Suharto or Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX.

Similarly, interpretations of the 30 September 1965 movement are subject to intense historiographical debate concerning the event's primary instigators-whether the PKI, Sukarno, Suharto, foreign intelligence agencies like the CIA, or internal factions within the Army. The Supersemar document's provenance remains a persistent historiographical challenge, with the original manuscript's whereabouts and authenticity still undetermined. This ambiguity stems from the academic consensus that surviving versions feature substantive alterations, likely revisions, and interpolations instituted by the period's dominant political regime.

According to Anhar Gonggong (10: 9) It is natural for students at school to question their teachers about what they have learned from the internet about history, but it turns out that not everything is the same as what is explained by teachers at school, due to the breadth of information available. Digital resources today provide breadth for students and anyone to get information.

The position, function, and role of history textbooks are highly strategic because they shape all students' cognitive and affective aspects at every level of education (Syamsudin, 2000: No. 1, Vol. 1). National history is considered to have didactic-educational value for the formation of national identity and unifying based on the collective experience of the state and nation. However, using history textbooks, particularly those addressing Indonesian national history in schools, may inadvertently promote subtle forms of indoctrination aligned with governmental interests.

The nature of universities that are freer and more open in studying and studying historical materials, especially controversial history, both political and scientific controversies, is a fertile field for lecturers and students to multiply their studies using various historical sources. Academic freedom at the university level is expected to positively impact students within these institutions.

3.2 Critical and Analytical Thinking

The ability to think critically is one of the key reasoning skills in pursuing a field. In today's digital era, the ability to think critically is essential for responding to or acting on issues that arise. (Rahardhian, 2022: 88).

Critical thinking and analysis are vital in enhancing comprehension among students and community members. Freedom of thought becomes most effective when stimulated by external catalysts. To cultivate critical thinking, both educators and students should engage in regular discussions and critically evaluate diverse learning sources.

Teachers and students' ability to use digital history sources is very important in learning history. In this era, digitalization in the field of education makes it easier to access history learning resources. Teachers and students can use digital history learning resources such as e-books, videos, images, and other digital archives. This allows students to explore historical information that was previously difficult to reach. Moreover, engagement with digital historical sources actively cultivates students' analytical and critical thinking competencies.

During this period, not a few students were critical of Indonesian history. This is triggered by the discrepancy between the historical material listed in printed books and history recorded in other print sources. For example, in the material in the history book, it is written that the Dutch forced labor against the indigenous people to build the Anyer-Panarukan Highway with a distance of about 1,000 KM. The construction of the highway was carried out based on an order from Herman William Daendels, who at that time served as the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies. As a result of this forced labor, many indigenous people suffered, experienced hunger, and ended up dying. The reason is the non-payment of the wages they should have received from the results of their work to build the Anyer-Panarukan Highway.

Meanwhile, in the archives in the Netherlands, there is evidence of wage payment slips for workers in building the Anyer-Panarukan Highway. However, the wages did not reach the workers. The allocation of wage funds was corrupted by officials, especially by the regent. The narrative that Daendels did not pay the workers was wrong, but it was not included in the material in the students' history books. Integrating evidence of financial misappropriation in the Anyer-Panarukan Highway construction into the Forced Labor subsection allows students to evaluate one complex historical episode through contrasting interpretive frameworks critically.

When students have graduated from school, it has the potential to realize a more critical Indonesian Human Resources (HR). They can analyze how local officials behaved and how the Dutch colonials behaved at that time. Although it is undeniable that Daendels gave the order for the Anyer-Panarukan Highway Construction project to maintain the position of the Dutch. Plus, the thinking of the Dutch, who considered their status to be higher than that of the natives. One example of this arrogance is reflected in Daendels' attitude, which often demeans the natives; he also has no respect for the Javanese kings, and is the Governor General with a cruel attitude. (Sinaga, Pratama, Piliang, & Ningrum, 2024: 274).

Nevertheless, the financial corruption perpetrated by local officials in the Anyer-Panarukan Highway project is morally untenable. The workforce suffered compounded victimhood, experiencing both imperial brutality and administrative malfeasance. Such cases provide pedagogical opportunities for students to refine critical thinking through multi-perspectival historical assessment.

The revisionist examination of Indonesia's non-continuous 350-year colonization period serves as effective material for enhancing public analytical capabilities. Challenging this monolithic narrative requires acknowledging: (a) the logistical impossibility of uniform Dutch dominion across thousands of islands, and (b) documented variances in colonial encroachment timelines. This approach fosters critical historical literacy among heterogeneous audiences. The increasing accessibility of digital historical sources, while promoting wider historical understanding, concurrently raises concerns about veracity. Consequently, readers must cultivate a critical attitude towards such materials.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Digital historical sources are one of the important factors in writing history today. Technological developments have enabled the digitization of various documents and historical archives and expanded access to reach for people from various walks of life. With the increasing ability of digitalization, people can develop their critical and analytical thinking in interpreting a historical event. The existence of digital history sources results in faster dissemination of information. Thus, history no longer depends only on printed sources such as books, records, archives, or limited manuscripts.

Beyond enhanced accessibility, digital historical sources significantly contribute to enriching the perspectives within historical scholarship. This happens because history is often written from a certain point of view. Complex historical events require many points of view so that they can be reconstructed more objectively. With the availability of various digital historical sources, the public can obtain historical facts or information that were previously not listed in printed documents. This encourages researchers, academics, and the general public to study history from various perspectives to strengthen their understanding of past events. Therefore, the use of digital historical sources is not just an option but a need to produce more accurate, inclusive, and evidence-based historical writing.

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