

langitselatan as Astronomy Communicator in Indonesia

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Abstract. In the middle of information era, the needs of information of astronomy also arise. The sky phenomenon and sky events raise curiosity among public. False information and misconception also arise along with the increasing number of blogs and media. To fulfill the needs of astronomy information and education for public, we build an online site named langitselatan as an educational service for public. Aside of online media, langitselatan also serve as community builder and event organizer for educational events.

Keywords. langitselatan, astronomy, education, media, public, Indonesia

1. Introduction

Back to the year 2003, the needs of astronomy information started to arise along with the Mars Conjunction event. At that time, many false information spread among public and raise the curiosity of the public on certain sky event. Seeing this phenomenon, in 2005, five young astronomer gathered and start an astronomy media as a source for astronomy news and basic knowledge. As a result was a magazine name Centaurus (Centaurus) in the form of printed and electronic media. Unfortunately, this magazine failed in the market and discontinued.

Later on, we changed our service to a blog along with the development of the web 2.0 era. The blog then named as langitselatan (Fig. 1), a term for southern sky in Indonesian language. Langit means sky and selatan means southern. In fact there are not much differences with the printed media. Basically, public need to know fundamental concept and the latest news in astronomy. Internet becomes the first choice for rapid information on something.



Figure 1. langitselatan. Astronomy Education and Popularization media.

2. Background and Vision of langitselatan

On March 2007, langitselatan started its service as an astronomy education and popularization media for Indonesian public. The main reason we changed to langitselatan simply because the centre of astronomy and langitselatan itself located in Bandung, which lay under the southern sky.

langitselatan is needed because there is a lack of astronomy information and media in Indonesian language. Current sites are private and institutional (Nataresmi et al. 2005). The lack of astronomy fundamental knowledge in public also became another reason for this media. Curiosity on certain events, false information, false conception and current issues become the need for the public, for the sake to fulfill their curiosity. Aside of all that, the question from public on the relation between astronomy and daily life also arise and need to be fulfilled.

langitselatan as an astronomy media, also act as an astronomy educator for students and public to build astronomy awareness, and introducing astronomy as a fun subject. Through online media, langitselatan also build its own community and collaborative networks with other astronomy societies and club.

3. langitselatan activities

To fulfill the need of the public, langitselatan always give a new information and news along with fundamental knowledge on each story. In this cyber world, langitselatan build its own community and deliver its new article through many web 2.0 application for its reader. langitselatan also use social network to share the knowledge and build community. (Fig. 2)



Figure 2. langitselatan website and community site

As an online media, langitselatan shares recent news and fundamental knowledge in astronomy. Through our online community, we build an online discussion with our readers and forum member. This gives us a glimpse of information on our reader background and interest on astronomy. Here in online media, we also clarify misconception among public and become astronomy references and resources for laypeople.

As an impact from the online media, langitselatan also serve the public through offline

activities such as star party at schools and public places based on special events, science camp, astronomical gathering and discussion session, hands on activities, water rocket competition, sidewalk activities, astronomy workshop and telescope training. In all activities, the main purposes are to build astronomy awareness, teach fundamental astronomy concept, and to give a glimpse of astronomy to the public as a fun and exciting subject.



Figure 3. Planetarium and observation session with elementary school students



Figure 4. Sun observation with sun glasses

Aside of public service, langitselatan also conduct a research on several topics in archaeoastronomy field, starlore, and extrasolar planet.

Right now, langitselatan also builds a collaborative network with Global Hands on Universe, Sidewalk Astronomy and Astronomy Without Border. langitselatan also actively involved in IYA2009 activities to promote astronomy and to engage people with astronomy.



Figure 5. astronomy session with elementary school students



Figure 6. Observing the Moon in 100HA

4. Results and Challenges

In our three years of service, we heard many interesting thought from people about astronomy, from something simple to a complex one. One phenomenon that we face over three years, Indonesia public always make a relationship of certain sky events with their belief. Interesting but sometimes, they make a mistake in their conclusion because of the lack of their fundamental knowledge on astronomy. Here we play a big role on providing astronomy information as well as to educate them on basic knowledge of astronomy. In Indonesia, astronomy is also the most searched topic on internet for recent issues and false exposition on some particular events, e.g global warming, 2012 issues, extrasolar planet, solar and moon eclipses, meteor shower, Moon landing issues or conundrum of heliocentric/geocentric, which are still hot topics until recent time. Especially for the year of 2009, the year of 2012 issues become famous and get the highest rating on search topic.

langitselatan as a media has clarified misconception and hoax (heliocentric vs geocentric, mars hoax, moon hoax), become a reference and resource of astronomy news and public education to the people and astronomy beginners (Yamani et al. 2008).



Figure 7. langitselatan team during 100HA

In our service time, we also faced many challenges like funding, human resources, and finding the best way to share the knowledge. But with dedicated crew and limited instrumentation, the information and knowledge of astronomy could be widely distributed to give a glimpse of astronomy to laypeople in Indonesia.

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