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“Arsip Kacau”: How Messy Records Are Perceived by Indonesians in the Context of Document Disease

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Cover Page Footnote

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Introduction

As a former Dutch colony, Indonesia has inherited many aspects of Dutch culture, especially in law and state administration. One of the fields of state administration is records/archives. Although most Indonesian people still perceive the Netherlands as a colonizer, the Netherlands is widely recognized as a country whose administration is orderly, including in terms of *kearsipan* (records/archives management). The word *arsip* itself in Indonesian is an absorption word in Dutch *archieff*. All administrative archives during the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) era, or the Dutch East Indies Trade Union (established on March 20, 1602) in the archival form are still wholly and neatly stored in the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (ANRI). The archival holding in ANRI stretches back to the 17th century, but since the tragedy of mass violence between 1965 and 1966 and state censorship under the authoritarian rule of Suharto, the archival materials are much less rich than those of the colonial era (Franks & Bernier, 2018, p. 170).

The behavior of not appreciating records/archives and politicizing records/archives has colored the history of the Indonesian nation. For example, the text of the proclamation of Indonesian independence, which was proclaimed by Soekarno/Hatta on August 17, 1945, as an early marker of Indonesian independence, also has an interesting story regarding how records/archives are treated. The day before the proclamation of independence, on August 16, 1945, Sayuti Melik (November 22, 1908–February 27, 1989), as the typist of the proclamation manuscript, squeezed and threw the draft of the manuscript into the trash because he already had a neatly typed manuscript. Fortunately, B.M. Diah (April 7, 1917–June 10, 1996) took and saved the discarded draft of the manuscript so that he was recorded by history as the savior of the original text of the proclamation (Pamungkas, 2019). Likewise, the archives of the *Surat Perintah Sebelas Maret* (*Supersemar*)—the March Eleventh Order—as a marker of the change from the *Orde Lama* (Old Order, Soekarno’s regime) to *Orde Baru* (New Order, Soeharto’s regime). *Supersemar* was a document signed by President Soekarno on March 11, 1966, to Lieutenant General Suharto, acting as Commander of the Security and Order Operations Command (*Kopkamtib*), to overcome the precarious situation after the September 30 Movement. However, the existence of the original *Supersemar* archive has been still mysterious. ANRI has not yet succeeded in obtaining the original manuscript. Because they are often narrated, these two national stories about monumental archives strengthen the connotation of records/archives as something mysterious, messy, and hard to find.

The example of an overview of Indonesian history above explains the concepts of chaos and disorder, although these two concepts are more widely used in the political field. However, the term disorder or chaos in Indonesian is equally

interpreted as *kacau* too. Because the term *arsip kacau* has not been widely discussed in English, the authors try to find the right equivalent for the term messy records in English based on suggestion from Djoko Utomo as the former Head of ANRI as well as a historical actor who gave birth to the concept of *arsip kacau*. Therefore, this paper only focuses on the concept of disorder in language, without mentioning the term political and economic disorder/chaos as alluded to by Weber (2004) and Mudhoffir (2021).

This paper will not discuss the records/archives of the proclamation of Indonesian independence and *Supersemar* in particular but is more interested in the connotations of the messy records in Indonesia. Messiness in records/archival context can also be compared to a disease in the 14th century, namely *the condition of absence of ease, uneasiness, discomfort, and inconvenience* (OED). Furthermore, since 1843, messy has been used to indicate *untidy, confusion, disorder, or dirt* (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

The term *arsip kacau* (messy records) in the Indonesian context was first introduced by ANRI in 1981 with the *Circular of the Head of ANRI Number SE/01/1981 concerning handling inactive records as the implementation of transitional provisions to government regulations on records disposition*. As mentioned, the term *arsip* in Indonesian comes from the Dutch *archieff*. To be aligned with international records and archival terminology, *arsip* that agencies still use for business purposes are called *arsip dinamis* (records). In contrast, *arsip* appraised and stored in archival institutions because they have historical value are called *arsip statis* (archives). Therefore, the term *arsip* in Indonesia does not strictly distinguish between records and archives. *Arsip kacau* in the Indonesian context can indeed occur in archival institutions and records centers. However, what happens a lot and the riskiest one occurs at the *arsip dinamis inaktif* stage (inactive records), so the title of this paper uses the term records in English, although sometimes records and archives are often used interchangeably.

Returning to the Circular of the Head of ANRI above, The Circular defines messy records as a record in which a system from the record arrangement cannot be rearranged as it was at the time it was active. It connotes unorganized, unfiled, lost files, so their origin is unclear when they are transferred to a records center or archival institution. This condition is also close to the backlog, where there is a physical accumulation of records because they are not processed, left alone, causing a pile of records. The context of the 1981 Circular by the Head of ANRI still uses the old archival law, *Law Number 7 of 1971, concerning Basic Archival Provisions*. The *arsip* at that time was still defined as manuscripts, mostly recorded on paper, so the impression of paper records that often piled up was widely understood. What is interesting is the current condition, where the *Archives Law Number 43 of 2009* has defined *arsip* much more advanced, not just manuscripts, but *recordings of activities or events in various forms and media following the development of*

information and communication technology made and received by state institutions, regional governments, educational institutions, companies, political organizations, community organizations, and individuals in the implementation of social, national and state life. The derivatives of Law 43/2009, Government Regulation Number 28 of 2012, and the Regulation of the Head of ANRI regarding records/archives do not mention the term *arsip kacau* anymore. However, in practice, many records managers/archivists and the general public often refer to the term *arsip kacau* as the physical condition of records that are untidy, messy, chaotic, disorganized, and difficult to find.

This paper examines how the Indonesian people perceive and construct these messy records. Messy records as documents seem to have the power to make humans psychologically ill by becoming uneasy, discomfort, stressed, burnout, and uncomfortable, all of which are diseases. This is similar to documentality introduced by Frohmann (2012) that documents can enable, produce, encourage, permit, and influence (p. 175) people to become psychologically ill in discomfort, disorder, and stress. This paper uses a qualitative approach with data collection in the form of literature and surveys from Indonesian people. Data was also obtained from an interview with Djoko Utomo, the former Head of ANRI 2004-2009, especially regarding the history of preparing circulars on messy records.

Literature Review

Lund (2004, 2009; Skare, 2009; Buckland, 2016; Gorichanaz & Latham, 2016) asserts that all documents have three aspects: physical, mental, and social, which are complementary. In this case, it does not mean that each aspect has a certain level but can be seen simultaneously as a physical, social, and mental aspect. Lund (2004) and Skare (2009) describe that these three aspects of the document are explained as follows: 100 percent physical, 100 percent social, and 100 percent mental. From this perspective, the main issue is how these three aspects interact differently. This will depend on the context of the document.

Skare (2009) and Gorichanaz and Latham (2016) use these three complementary aspects to perform document analysis. This paper shows that the three complementary aspects of documents are not always observed separately but can be carried out in parallel or almost simultaneously. O'Connor *et al.* (2008) described the concept of a document as a system of physical structures (according to the physical aspects of the complementary theory of the Lund document) and behavioral functions (social aspects) that are interpreted by humans (mental aspects).

Buckland (2016) reviews these three aspects further and analyzes their interactions. Every document has all three aspects, and none of the three aspects can be fully understood without acknowledging the other two. Although basically,

the physical aspects of documents can be measured and treated scientifically. At the same time, the mental aspect is very situational, unstable, and subjective. So far, the literature in document theory only focuses on physical and social aspects and does not consider the active role of humans involved or, in this case, the mental aspect (Buckland, 2016; Gorichanaz & Latham, 2016).

The approach that can be taken to study the mental aspects of documents is phenomenology. Gorichanaz and Latham (2016) mention that the phenomenological perspective is critical. Edmund Husserl first formulated phenomenology. He formulated a way of understanding reality, especially emphasizing the phenomenon in which awareness of objects is always in the context of life. Kuswarno (2009) explains that the primary purpose of phenomenology is to study how phenomena are experienced in consciousness, thought, and action.

If the document theory mentioned above is related to the existence of a record, there will be two parties who will give the meaning of a record, incredibly messy records. The first is from the organization, where records management matters cannot be separated from the organization. The second is a personal meaning, which parties may give outside the organization, but can be ordinary people, non-archivists, or other professionals indirectly involved in records matters. Therefore, the survey the authors conducted in search of the meaning of messy records was not only for archivists or record managers but also for other people.

Methods

A survey study was conducted to determine Indonesians' perception of messy records (*arsip kacau*). The survey was hosted on the SurveyMonkey platform and was open from March 18 to April 1, 2022. As a result, 114 respondents filled out the questionnaire through a simple random sampling technique. The survey consists of a respondent's demographic characteristics (name, gender, last education, age, and occupation) and five questions consisting of 1) *Have you ever heard the word "messy records"?* 2) *Where did you hear the word "messy records"?* 3) *What do you think is the definition of "messy records"?* 4) *What do you think is causing the "messy records"?* and 5) *What do you think is the psychological impact of having "messy records"?*

We then analyze it by counting the frequently-occurring sentences based on a word cloud platform. The sentences entered are sentences we have cleaned and chosen based on their relevance to the questions asked.

Results

Participants were about evenly split between male ($n = 56$) and female ($n = 58$). When asked about their highest educational attainment, 11 had earned a diploma, 65 a bachelor's degree, and 38 a master's degree. The majority of participants' age category was more than 29 years ($n = 94$), and 20 people were less than 29 years old. Furthermore, we categorize the occupations that fill out our survey, namely 1) jobs as archivists totaling 53 people, and 2) jobs other than archivists totaling 61 people.

The first question, asking whether the participant had heard of the term “messy records,” was answered YES by 81 people and NO by 33 people.

The second question was: *Where did you hear the word “messy records”?* Fifteen participants answered from colleagues and employees, 12 answered from education and training, eight answered from the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia, seven from the office, seven from webinars, and six from books. Other than that, there were also five answers from archivists, five from lectures, three from media, three from seminars, three from the internet, two from employees, two from working units, two from socialization, one from news, one from International Organization for Standardization (ISO), and one from journals.

The differences between archivists and the general public in knowing the word messy records are 1) archivists recognize the term from training ($n = 12$), followed by offices, webinars, National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia, socialization, and colleagues; 2) the general public recognizes the term messy records from friends, and colleagues ($n = 10$), followed by the office environment, lectures, books, and the internet.

The third question was: *What do you think is the definition of “messy records”?* A summary of the responses is given in Table 1 below.

The perception of archivists and the general public in Indonesia in defining “messy records” is not much different. For example, as many as 25 words from archivists answered that messy records were unorganized; and as many as 30 comments from the general public answered that messy records were not managed; also, nine words responded that they were not organized.

Another difference is that archivists respond more to technical knowledge; for example, messy records do not have a list, are inactive records, do not have records classification codes, are irregular, and do not have files. While the general public prefers adjectives, messy records are records that are not good, disorganized, untidy, inappropriate, difficult to find, and rarely used.

Table 1. Indonesians' perception of the definition of "messy records"

In English	In Indonesian	Frequency of answer
unordered	<i>tidak tertata</i>	26
not managed	<i>tidak dikelola</i>	15
irregular	<i>tidak beraturan</i>	10
not neat	<i>tidak tertata rapi</i>	3
do not have a list	<i>tidak memiliki daftar</i>	3
random records	<i>arsip yang berantakan</i>	3
not good	<i>tidak baik</i>	2
in a mess	<i>dalam keadaan kacau</i>	2
not clear	<i>tidak jelas</i>	2
inactive records	<i>arsip dinamis inaktif</i>	2

The fourth question was: *What do you think is causing the "messy records"?* These responses are summarized in Table 2.

The perception of archivists and the general public in Indonesia concerning the cause of the "messy records" is that archivists emphasize the absence of a system. In contrast, many as seven comments say so, plus unclear arrangements and minimal knowledge and awareness. Meanwhile, the general public emphasizes that human resources with minimal knowledge cause messy records and the absence of a system and standard operating procedures.

The fifth question was: *What do you think is the psychological impact of having "messy records"?* The responses are summarized in Table 3. The perception of archivists and the general public in Indonesia about the psychological impact of having "messy records" is also not much different. For example, archivists ($n = 9$) and the general public ($n = 8$) said the psychological impact would appear when searching for or retrieving records/archives. In addition, they also mentioned that it would impact organizational performance and concentration at work, stress, lost and mixed files, unorganized rooms, fatigue, anxious thoughts, decision-making, and dirty organizing records.

Table 2. Indonesians' perception of the cause of "messy records"

In English	In Indonesian	Frequency of answer
no system	<i>tidak ada sistem</i>	7
no management	<i>tidak adanya pengelolaan</i>	4
no officer	<i>tidak ada petugas</i>	3
lack of knowledge of human resources	<i>minimnya pengetahuan sumber daya manusia</i>	3
no understanding in arrangement	<i>tidak ada pemahaman dalam penataan</i>	2
no classification	<i>tidak ada klasifikasi</i>	2
absence of standard operating procedures	<i>tidak adanya standar operasional prosedur</i>	2
less regularly	<i>kurang teratur</i>	2
destruction/disposal	<i>pemusnahan</i>	1
inventory	<i>inventarisasi</i>	1
lack of commitment	<i>komitmen yang kurang</i>	1
agency policy	<i>kebijakan instansi</i>	1
lazy to move to organize	<i>malas gerak untuk menata</i>	1
not grouping records	<i>tidak mengelompokkan arsip</i>	1
creator's ignorance	<i>ketidaktahuan pencipta</i>	1

Table 3. Indonesians' perception of the psychological impact of having "messy records"

In English	In Indonesian	Frequency of answer
records retrieval	<i>temu kembali arsip</i>	17
unordered	<i>tidak tertata</i>	3
records lost	<i>arsip hilang</i>	3
lead to decreased performance	<i>menyebabkan menurunnya kinerja</i>	3
stress	<i>stress</i>	2
dizzy	<i>pusing</i>	2
unorganized room	<i>ruangan tidak tertata</i>	1
not according to the retention code	<i>tidak sesuai kode retensi</i>	1
to look for evidence	<i>untuk mencari bukti</i>	1
uncomfortable view	<i>pemandangan tidak nyaman</i>	1
there is worry	<i>ada rasa khawatir</i>	1
more workload	<i>beban kerja lebih</i>	1
abandoned job	<i>pekerjaan terbengkalai</i>	1
dirty to the records	<i>jorok terhadap arsip</i>	1

Discussion

The term messy records in Indonesia is often heard by the general public and archivists whose work is related to messy records. This can be seen from the survey results showing that 81 respondents, or about 71%, said that knowing the records was messy. Information about these messy records is obtained from various

sources. Archivists get information about messy records from training, offices, webinars, ANRI, socialization, and colleagues, while the general public gets information about messy records from friends and colleagues, the environment, books, lectures, and the internet. In addition, the survey results show that archivists obtain information about messy records from matters related to their profession, while the general public obtains information about messy records from the surrounding environment.

Various information sources about the messy records affect respondents' perceptions of the messy records. Twenty-six respondents, or 23%, generally perceive messy records as unorganized. Fifteen people, or 13%, perceive unmanaged records, and ten people, or 9%, perceive irregular records. The perception of archivists and the general public about these messy records is not much different. However, what is interesting is that the archivist's perception is more technical, while the general public's perception is more of an adjective.

The perception of messy records from archivists who talk more about technical matters confirms records management as an applied discipline. The applied connotation of records management has also long been debated whether records management has a theory or not (Buckland, 1994) or criticism of archives/records being considered merely a shelving job (Roberts, 1987). However, the authors will not discuss theory or technical matters in this record management itself in this paper. Returning to the definition of messy records in SE/01/1981 above, there is an emphasis that "...system from the record arrangement cannot be rearranged as it was at the time it was active". Talking about technical matters is the same as looking at the materiality aspect of records/documents in document theory (Buckland, 2016; Gorichanaz & Latham, 2016; Lund, 2004, 2009; Skare, 2009). The physical aspect of messy records is in the form of irregular and unorganized piles of records. These aspects will affect the social and mental aspects of messy records as documents when these aspects complement each other. Lund (2004), in his article entitled "Documentation in a complementary perspective," introduced the idea of complementarity in documents concerning Niels Bohr's quantum theory. The concept of complementarity is applied to the concepts of information, communication, and documentation:

... one can see all three concepts as complementary, describing the same phenomenon in three ways, emphasizing three different, but all necessary, aspects of a message. Consequently, messages are just as much information as they are documentation or communication. (Lund, 2004, p. 95)

Lund (2004) uses these three concepts to view books as documents by producing three concepts: documentation for the physical aspect, the community for the social aspect, and information for the mental aspect. By applying the concept

of complementarity, it is found that the document has 100% physical aspects, 100% social aspects, and 100% mental aspects.

Messy records manifest as irregular, unorganized, unmanaged, no system records, etc. Naturally, this affects the social and mental aspects of the records. In addition, the physical condition of messy records can affect human psychology. As previously described, messy records cause psychological effects such as dizziness, stress, and worry, leading to decreased performance, neglected work, and discomfort.

On February 2, 2022, the authors interviewed the former head of the Indonesian National Archives for the 2004-2009 period, Djoko Utomo. The purpose of this interview is to trace the history of the term messy records in Indonesia, considering that Djoko Utomo is a living witness who helped compose the Circular of the Head of ANRI Number SE/01/1981. Djoko Utomo said that the term messy records, apart from the problem of backlogs, is also because records have lost their history of origin and arrangement since they were active. Therefore, the Circular was issued as a practical tool for record disposition. The circular was also inspired by the PIVOT (*Project Invoering Verkorting Overbrengingstermijn*) approach, which means Project for implementing the Reduction of the Transfer Period. According to Djoko Utomo, SE/01/1981 is very effective in reducing records forwarded by the national archives of the archival community in Indonesia, so the concept of messy records has become a buzzword when you see piles of documents that are not systematically arranged. When we type the term messy records in the Google search engine, an image of a mountain of documents depicts disorder or chaos.

The adjective messy is interesting to examine, considering that it connotes a disease, which, when associated with the definition of the 14th Century (OED), can indicate the absence of ease, uneasiness, or discomfort. For example, in the Indonesian thesaurus published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2008, the equivalent of the term messy is as follows.

messy a 1 chaotic, mixed up, messy, confused, dispersed, slang, blue emotion, chaotic, dark, cloudy, scattered, confused, damaged, mixed up; 2 anxious, upset, confused, rowdy, restless, uproarious, excited, frenetic, hustle, bustle, commotion, worry, tangled, frenzy, troublemaker, noisy, restless, worried, complicated, riotous, anxious.

messiness n 1 chaos, confusion, cloudiness, complexity; 2 anarchy, commotion, uproar, chaos, disorder, commotion, riot, upheaval, tempest, turbulence. (Indonesia, 2008, pp. 223-224)

The two perceptions of messy records above, both according to archivists/records managers and according to the public, show that records as documents, which manifest as physical or material, have a psychological impact on users when they are not managed with the right system, in this case, the principles of records management. Because records management is more associated with organizations, the real impact of the messiness caused by records mismanagement is on the job. Several studies related to work related to paperwork, record management, archives, or documents, in general, discuss the impact of psychological burnout (Liu 2021; McCormack & Cotter 2013).

The findings of this study imply that conceptually, messy records impact the psychology and emotions of users or consumers of records. Unfortunately, records management is more interested in how-to, done mainly by archivists or records managers, and pays less attention to users' meaning. The meaning of messy records challenges the main archival principles, namely the principle of original order and the principle of provenance, which in the context of messy records/archives in Indonesia means that in practice, there are many facts that there are more disorders or messiness of records. In practice, this implication suggests that messy records exist because of the behavior of the creators/producers and users/consumers of records who did not heed the order from the start by applying record management principles.

We all know for sure that messy records are documents in the sense that they were made as documents from the start, which Buckland (2014) calls the conventional view. In the active phase, these records are usually neatly arranged. However, after entering the inactive phase, this record undergoes a transformation, depending on how the manager or user treats the inactive record, becoming "stuff" with various negative connotations such as piles, trash, warehouses. Therefore, sometimes these messy records need to be "read" as archives with a functional view, made into documents (Buckland, 2014).

If we return to the documentality of Frohmann (2012) from documents in the form of messy records, let's stop considering stuff from messy records which are always described as something negative as mere nouns, as passive dead stuff. On the contrary, they actually *do* things. They can do agency as if challenging us to dialogue and say that "if you don't want to see me like this, and stress you out, please, keep me tidy, organized according to a records management system."

Conclusion

This study reveals that Indonesians know messy records from various sources such as colleagues and employees. However, there are differences between archivists and the general public in knowing the word messy records are 1) archivists recognize the term from training, followed by offices, webinars, National Archives

of the Republic of Indonesia, socialization, and colleagues; 2) the general public recognizes the term messy records from friends, colleagues, and colleagues, followed by the office environment, lectures, books, and the internet.

Moreover, the perception of archivists and the general public in Indonesia in defining “messy records” is not much different. For example, archivists answered that messy records were unorganized; and the general public answered that messy records were not managed and were not organized. Furthermore, the perception of archivists and the general public in Indonesia concerning the cause of the “messy records” is that archivists emphasize the absence of a system. In contrast, as many as seven comments say so, unclear arrangements and minimal knowledge and awareness. Meanwhile, the general public emphasizes that human resources with minimal knowledge cause messy records, a system, and the absence of standard operating procedures.

To sum up, the perception of archivists and the general public in Indonesia about the psychological impact of having “messy records” is also not much different. Both archivists and the general public said that the psychological impact would appear when searching for or retrieving records/archives. In addition, they also mentioned that it would impact organizational performance and concentration at work, stress, lost and mixed files, unorganized rooms, fatigue, anxious thoughts, decision-making, and dirty organizing records. This finding can be developed further to explore the impact of the causes of the emergence of messy records in archival work which causes various feelings of records/archives users ranging from messy, disordered or even trauma-informed practice in archival work.

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