

Democracy in the Digital Age: The Influence of Social Media on Shaping Political Behavior in Urban Communities (Case Study in Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya)

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Abstract: *In particular, the way elections and regional head elections are conducted has been profoundly altered by the rise of digital technology in Indonesia's political scene. These days, political players use social media as a tool to get support, spread their message, and improve their public image. The goals of this study are to (1) examine how political campaigns use social media to reach their audiences, (2) identify methods for influencing the political behavior of urbanites through the cultivation of socio-political networks through community leaders, and (3) examine how these messages are packaged for maximum impact. The study employs a descriptive qualitative methodology and case studies in four significant cities: Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta. Methods for data reduction, presentation, and verification were used to assess information gathered from literature reviews, documentation, in-depth interviews with community and political leaders, and other sources. According to the findings, there are three primary ways in which social media contributes to politics: digital campaigning, support mobilization, and political socialization. Choosing the right platform, crafting the right messaging, and capitalizing on local socio-political networks are all components of an effective communication strategy. On the other hand, social media may skew facts and spread false impressions, which can sway political decisions in a manipulative way. This study found that, while digital democracy does increase people's access to politics, it also highlights the need for campaign regulation and sufficient digital literacy to guarantee the quality of democracy. This discovery greatly affects the creation of evidence-based and ethical political communication techniques for the digital era.*

Keywords: Digital Democracy; Political Communication; Political Participation; Social Media.

Introduction

The use of social media to promote political involvement through electoral activities is presently highly significant for political elites, as it provides qualitative research that aims to explain democracy in the digital era (Dwitama et al., 2022; Fajri et al., 2024; Moekahar et al., 2022). Since there is no hiding place in this kind of environment, it stands to reason that all of the candidates would employ professional organizations with an in-depth knowledge of what makes a successful political campaign plan to develop and execute their respective political communication strategies. How to segment the target audience for a political campaign, then use that information to inform message composition or tracking, and how to think about the media that will be utilized to impact that audience.

Public engagement in the voting process has a strong correlation with voter behavior. When considering voting from the perspective of political participation, it is evident that voters have ample opportunities to choose trustworthy national and regional leaders by casting their ballots in both general and regional elections (Riskiyono, 2019; Yustiningrum & Ichwanuddin, 2015). A change in voter behavior in Indonesia, on a national and regional level, might be prompted by the availability of extensive chances for each voter to select certain candidates.

Elections are the means of acquiring and retaining power in contemporary democracies. Regional elections (pemilukada) at the regional level and national elections (pemilukada) at the national level both facilitate political education and recruiting as well as legitimize authority, among other political tasks (Haris, 1998). Attempts to gain, hold, and exert power are fundamental to these roles. Aspects of political strategy for winning the five-yearly political event are also present in this setting. The strategy aims to secure the election by utilizing a range of factors that influence every contest process. Under these circumstances, it is not permissible to employ illegal techniques, and no measures may be rationalized. The contending sides must reach a consensus on several game regulations. Other rules and regulations also aim to ensure fair elections. These are the guidelines that the candidates' political campaigns must adhere to.

For instance, the majority of these sitting officials have enough social, political, financial, and even economic backing to continue with the election campaign. However, incumbents may not be able to take advantage of all of these possible sources of support or influences. The inability to capitalize on the potential support was the main reason why most incumbents failed. Put simply, the current contender was unable to make use of their status as the incumbent. What this means is that being an incumbent isn't everything when it comes to success; one must also be adept at using existing political power sources in order to compete. What is the best way for a sitting politician to start campaigning for reelection? If the current leader is effective at running their country, they will have little trouble tapping into these power sources.

Here, the incumbent's track record of regional development is more of a fulcrum than a decisive element in the race for reelection. Despite the fact that these political heavy hitters are involved in a number of high-profile cases, their track records as leaders shouldn't matter as much as their political strategy and the backing of social groups and political parties. An occurrence of this kind runs counter to the principles of direct democracy. It seems reasonable that in a system based on direct democracy, the ability to keep one's position in power is affected by one's ability to develop the region, and vice versa. Because of this, voters see an incumbent who can keep their seat in office through successive elections as having done a good job of developing their area.

The public will unapologetically back the incumbent when they can deliver the best for them. Therefore, the delegitimization of authority always precedes or coincides with a protracted economic crisis that does not swiftly subside. As soon as the people see that their leader can't correct the economic catastrophe that's making them suffer, they stop supporting them. Soeharto, the country's leader at the time, experienced a crisis of legitimacy as a result of the 1998 financial crisis. Oppositely, public support will always accrue to an incumbent when they can prove their performance through prosperous regional growth or improved people's well-being.

Given the aforementioned viewpoint, it is to be expected that individuals with strong ties to the community, as measured by their goals, objectives, and policy stances, will rise to prominence in the direct election. The public can feel and see the entire process related to important public policies for community development, and they can also be assured that incumbents who have successfully developed their regions will survive and win the election.

It is less likely that citizens will have unfavorable experiences that may cause them to "wrongly" select leaders in an era of freely accessible social media, well-informed citizens, and short distances between community members and their elected representatives. Having said that, there have been instances where a ruler has been unable to advance their territory while also retaining their authority. According to this oddity, the capacity to launch one's political strategy—particularly in regard to the utilization of power sources for the contestation in the Regional Head Election—is actually more crucial than success in regional growth.

Technological advancements in the digital realm have had far-reaching effects on Indonesia's democratic process, allowing for more efficient political communication among party elites and activists, which in turn helps to organize voters at the grassroots level. Being a part of a political communication strategy to socialize ideas or convince the public via a political propaganda technique called the Bandwagon Effect, mass participation in every open campaign does more than just reinforce the political attitudes of the campaign participants (Heryanto & Ramaru, 2013).

Factors such as the actor's political communication abilities and the candidate's status as an incumbent will determine how effective the use of social-political networks is. In summary, the success of these networks is primarily determined by the agent or actor acting as an incumbent candidate and the structural components of the social-political network.

In order to better understand how people in densely populated parts of Java are using social media to get involved in politics, this research will focus on the execution of both national and provincial elections. As a result, the effects of digital democracy on election processes (such as political socialization, mobilization, and campaigning) will be shown by this study. On the other hand, we should not consider traditional forms of political engagement as incompatible with

electoral activities, including social media. That is why people become involved in politics on social media with the hope of helping the politician they're supporting with their campaign and with socializing more generally.

To that end, this study will center on digital democracy's stated aims, which are to increase citizens' engagement in government by facilitating the expression of political sympathies and support via online platforms. Some people do this by publicly stating their political leanings on social media, while others do it by posting status updates in which they demonstrate their support for particular political figures. This means that anyone may gain political traction by publicly mobilizing on social media. Anyone may advocate for and spread the word about their political preferences in this setting by participating in election events. On the highest level, social media is utilized to rally support and sway political decisions in favor of a certain political class. A voter at this level campaigns and does outreach in the hopes that other people will share their political views.

Digital technology has emerged as a new way to participate in politics, offering efficiency and effectiveness in a variety of new political processes. Time and location are two other aspects that will be impacted by its efficacy. Social media makes it simpler to reach a wide audience and engage in political discourse from a distance, facilitating constant two-way contact and the efficient exchange of ideas.

A person's electability can be improved by social media, but this bump might not be based on reality. The people will be led astray by the false impression that certain political leaders cultivate on social media. In order for one's political perspective to be impacted by the usage of digital technology, which in turn influences political engagement.

With the growth of communication flows, the contemporary political process continues to evolve. Democracy in the digital age is changing the way people communicate, which in turn affects how they get involved in politics. According to Saco's idea of digital democracy, the public's access to political involvement opportunities is far broader than it was under the previous political system. The electoral system's "wider" channels for political engagement are directly proportional to the "wider" area for political participation in the idea of digital democracy. Cyberspace has emerged as a new "space" where individuals may actively engage in politics and the process of holding elections. Cyberspace provides a platform for political engagement in the areas. Cyberspace, particularly social media, gives them a platform to voice their political hopes, opinions, and preferences.

It is to be expected that leaders who are deeply connected to the community in terms of purpose, ideology, and policy orientation would rise to prominence in the next regional head elections and direct elections, given the preceding line of reasoning. Just as the public can feel and see the entire process related to public policies important for community development, they can also be assured that incumbents who have successfully developed their regions will survive and win the election.

Negative outcomes that may cause voters to "wrongly" pick their leaders are less likely to occur in a culture where the media is already quite free, people are well-educated, and there is little to no gap between the public and their local government officials. Having said that, there have been instances where a ruler has been unable to advance their territory while also retaining their authority. This outlier reveals that successful regional growth is not the most important factor, but rather the capacity to initiate one's political strategy, particularly with regard to harnessing power sources for election campaigns.

With the advent of digital democracy has come a new phenomenon: people getting involved in politics through social media. This qualitative study seeks to investigate the connection between the two. Studying how people in different parts of the world utilize social media to become involved in politics, particularly in this age of digital democracy, is an area that might be the subject of this type of research.

Based on these issues, several research questions can be posed as follows: 1) How can social media networks be utilized as a highly effective means of political communication to influence political attitudes?; 2) How does digital technology leverage social networks by approaching community leaders to influence people's thoughts, views, and political behavior?; 3) How does he

package his political messages, determine the media to be used, and design his political communication model to influence minds, views, and even political behavior?

Methods

Research Approach and Design

This research employs a descriptive design, reflecting its qualitative nature. Using a qualitative method allowed us to delve further into the research respondents' perceptions, knowledge, and personal experiences with social media's role in politics. The researchers employed a descriptive design to provide a detailed description of the phenomena without changing variables, aiming to track the dynamics of digital democracy in urban areas.

Research Location and Subject

High internet penetration rates, social and cultural variety, and active political dynamics were seen in four main cities in Indonesia: Surabaya, Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogyakarta. Politicians (both current and former office holders), community leaders, and city dwellers who use social media for political purposes are also part of the study's topics.

Data Collection Techniques

Data was collected thru: 1) In-depth interviews with political actors, community leaders, and voters to gain perspectives on social media-based political communication strategies; 2) Literature review of books, journals, research reports, and regulations related to digital campaigns and democracy; and 3) Documentation study of campaign materials, social media posts, and news archives related to political processes at the research site.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted following the Miles and Huberman model, which includes: 1) Data reduction to select information relevant to the research focus; 2) Data presentation in the form of thematic narratives to identify patterns, relationships, and strategies used; 3) Conclusion drawing/verification to ensure findings are consistent and valid based on data source triangulation.

Results and Discussion

Politik The Use of Social Media as a Means of Political Communication

Simply put, a distinction can be made between publicity and publication, where publication aims to inform a message, while publicity aims to popularize self-image. Publication is solely or more focused on transferring a message from the communicator to the communicant, while publicity involves planning the events to be conveyed. Therefore, the basic concept of publication is impartial, while publicity is biased toward the individual or institution conducting the publicity activities. In relation to issues, publications are usually multi-issue, while publicity focuses on a few or only one issue (Heryanto & Ramaru, 2013).

In the context of media utilization, publicity is not limited to the use of mass media, but thru various means, or as Heryanto explains, "in the process of constructing an image, publicity uses various methods, not solely related to media, but also other media." (Heryanto & Ramaru, 2013). Thus, in publicity, a strategy for utilizing media will be involved to make the political communication process more effective and efficient.

Media strategy is intended as the appropriate media choices for achieving campaign goals. The use of media will be adjusted to the target audience of political communication, particularly in terms of publicity. Meanwhile, regarding the nature, character, and desires of the target audience for publicity, this can be viewed from three aspects: sociodemographic aspects, psychological profile aspects, and behavioral characteristics of the community (Cangara, 2019).

If interpersonal media is utilized as an actor to approach socio-political organizational leaders thru negotiation strategies, then the use of mass media such as digital media is intended

as an effort to broaden the reach of its political communication. Social media functions as a means of constructing reality, where social reality can be constructed according to the vision and interests of media users. As a result, the reality perceived by society is not truly social reality, but rather media reality that has been influenced by the vision and interests of its users. In Ibn Hamad's explanation, it is stated that: "when constructing reality, including political reality, which leads to the formation of an image of a political force, the selection of symbols (language function); the choice of words presented (framing strategy), and the willingness to give space (agenda setting)" (Hamad, 2004). Social media can also be used as an effort to influence the public, which has contributed significantly to the formation of public opinion. Even in political communication, social media is a major driver in influencing individual behavior toward the news they are exposed to. The impact of the message dissemination process thru mass media will reach the cognitive, affective, and even conative stages (Sandjaya, 2014).

In further explanation to the campaign team, it was revealed about the awareness and understanding of the importance of social media's role in campaigning. Therefore, one of the important tasks that must be done is to choose social media that can maximize the delivery of political campaign messages to the public. Not only that, the team also seriously managed the message content presented in the campaign, including the vision, mission, and programs, which were made to be interesting news in the mass media (Interview with Isak Soemantri, a Resident of Gedebage, Bandung City, October 22, 2022, 2022). In order to prepare for matters related to the use of social media, in addition to providing a media center as a means of communication, including placing advertisements in mass media, both electronic and print media, which is the most appropriate method currently used. The popularity and "market value" possessed have been a major consideration in the political campaign launched by Tim, packaged as a product within the political campaign, and promoted more prominently thru mass media. In the context of studying voter behavior, the candidate or program aspects offered in each political communication with the public are considered. But in this context, the team is more focused on the candidate having high market value and popularity. As can be seen in the following interview (Interview with Isak Soemantri, a Resident of Gedebage, Bandung City, October 22, 2022, 2022):

"We are very aware that popularity in society must be accompanied by capabilities that can be relied upon by the community. Based on this, it was agreed to emphasize the use of digital media as an icon to be sold to the public rather than other aspects, such as their vision, mission, or political jargon. Although we also advertize all of these things to the public.

In major cities like Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya, mass media, especially digital media, is the primary source of political information. If constituents have difficulty making political choices, digital media plays an active role in promoting political actors thru existing programs. Constituents will return to the media. Mass media as the primary source of political information. This opinion is supported by Pitoyo, who stated that out of fifteen topics presented to the public, ten were obtained from the media, and the rest from places of worship, family, friends, and schools (Interview with Pitoyo, Former General Manager of Tribun Jabar, at the Tribun Jabar Office on Jalan Soekarno Hatta, on November 21, 2022., 2022). Therefore, it's no surprise that many parties believe democracy is closely linked to public access to communication channels. Constituents who know a lot about a candidate are more likely to vote for them than a candidate they don't know. Voters generally admit to knowing more about their favored candidates thru the media. If two thousand years ago the Greeks said that a leader's success was largely determined by character and ethos, now it must be supplemented by the ability to master communication media.

The core of social media from a political party perspective is to build engagement and influence the quality of voters and the stability of political parties within the Bandung community by political figures or actors using various social media platforms. As for the perception of social media by Yogyakarta City public figure Ismail Fahmi, which resulted in its dissemination in society on social media using the concepts of Citizenship and Netizenship. Ismail Fahmi, as a public media expert, has conducted extensive data analysis on the condition of netizens in Indonesia during the pandemic and the implementation of restrictions on public activities, leading to more people

communicating on social media. The segmentation of the online world, filled with dynamic interactions, is characterized by the active expression of opinions, criticisms, and emotions shared thru public media. These online activities are aimed at evaluating the government's actions.

Ismail added that the issue of trust is more dominated by information that has been the primary dialog of netizens in the digital space. Interestingly, this very active netizen movement in public media is also touted as being effective, resulting in the realization of many collective solutions to emerging problems, especially political information that frequently appears in public media. In addition, Ismail Fahmi also emphasized that the phenomenon of netizenship in public media also reflects the existence of a democratic culture that is occurring because social media has become a platform that allows anyone to freely convey their message. However, this also led to opposition because if netizens are claimed to have gone too far, they will face consequences, such as their user accounts being suspended by Twitter. Not only that, the anonymity inherent in social media also provides an opening for the use of buzzers and bots in giving and dominating the digital space.

This view of social media and digital democracy in Indonesia has created a new public space for the government and society in Indonesia. As stated by public figure and political expert from Airlangga University Surabaya, Muhammad Saud, and Hendro Margono, the dominant political participation in this e-democracy comes from young people in their political activities. Jurgen Habermas' theory of "Public Space" is correlated with youth political participation in political issues, allowing them to learn and discuss their religion in public. People living in Indonesia are witnessing the formation of technology emerging in the world for use in political communication.

Utilizing the Socio-Political Network thru Community Leaders

The social impact of the internet thru public media always gives rise to both utopias and dystopias (Di Maggio et al., 2001:310). The terms "utopia" and "dystopia" were first conceived by Sir Thomas More in 1516, who wrote about an imaginary island with perfect legal, social, and political systems. In 1610, the term "utopia" became a reference for any perfect region. This has also been present since the original concept, where one can dream about an ideal reality. In short, utopia can be said to be a term for a place, country, or ideal condition that is perfect in terms of politics, rules, customs, and exclusive conditions. While dystopia itself was introduced by J.S. Mill when he delivered his speech to Parliament.

This latest issue of digital democracy marks a new chapter in choosing the direction of the nation's democracy, where the nation's political leaders must improve the quality of their communication thru social media. The rise of digital democracy means that "Indonesian people's politics are still irrational and tend to be emotional when faced with conflicting political views," which then leads citizens to think about politics as "the path to nirvana or the conflict between good and evil." So, in the case of Indonesia as a whole, across all regions, "When they go low, we go lower," what is polarization? Regardless of all concerns about division, disinformation, and false issues.

In modern democratic countries, maintaining and seizing power is done thru elections. Elections, both at the national and local levels - which are then referred to as regional elections (pemilukada) - serve as a means of political recruitment, political education, and power legitimacy, in addition to other political functions. These functions are essentially related to the effort to seize, maintain, and exercise power. In this context, there is also an aspect of political strategy to achieve victory in the five-yearly political event. A strategy to leverage a number of factors that influence every contestation process, so that the goal of winning the election can be achieved. In this case, unlawful methods can no longer be used, nor can any means justify the end. There are a number of rules of the game that must be agreed upon by the contesting parties. Beside other laws and regulations aimed at ensuring fair play in elections. The political strategies launched by the candidates must follow these rules.

Most of these incumbents, for example, have sufficient support, both financial, social, political, and even economic, to support the contestation process in the election. Nevertheless, not all of these potential supports or factors can be utilized by incumbents. Most of the incumbents who fail do so because they are unable to leverage these potential supports. In other words, these

incumbent candidates cannot capitalize on their position as incumbents. This means that a person's success is not solely determined by their status as an incumbent, but by their ability to utilize existing political power sources to compete. How did the incumbent manage to launch their political strategy so they could win the contest? The ability to utilize these sources of power will indeed be facilitated by the incumbent's success in managing their government.

In this case, the incumbent's success in building their region is only a supporting factor in the effort to win the election, not the sole determining factor. Even in various cases involving these political elites, political strategy factors and the support of political parties and social organizations are more decisive than the actual leadership success factors that serve as a track record for an incumbent. Such a phenomenon is contrary to the logic of direct democracy. In a system of direct democracy, the logic will prevail that the success of maintaining power is influenced by the success of building territory, or conversely, the success of building territory will determine the success of maintaining power. Thus, an incumbent who can maintain their power thru elections is one who is considered by the electorate to have successfully developed their region.

When the incumbent is able to provide the best for the people, the people will naturally support them. That's why the delegitimization of power is always preceded or accompanied by a prolonged economic crisis that is not immediately resolved. When the people withdraw their support because they believe their leader is no longer capable of resolving the economic crisis that has brought suffering to them, the ruler can no longer fulfill their leadership role. That's what happened with the 1998 monetary crisis, which led to a crisis of legitimacy against the national leader at the time, Soeharto. Conversely, when an incumbent is able to demonstrate their performance, in the form of successful regional development or improving the welfare of their people, then public support will naturally follow.

With the above-mentioned way of thinking, it is only natural that figures who are close to the community in terms of vision, mission, and policy orientation will emerge in the direct elections. Similarly, when the election involves incumbents, it can be assured that the incumbents who can survive and win the election are those who have successfully developed their regions, because all processes related to public policies important for community development can be felt and seen by the public.

Political Message Packaging and Framing

Arangruen states that political communication is nothing more than the transmission of political messages (especially those symbolized using language in a broad sense) from a source to a number of targets with a specific purpose.²² Meanwhile, Lord Windlesham viewed political communication from the perspective of purpose, stating that political communication is the deliberate delivery of political messages by a political communicator to a communicant with the aim of making the communicant behave in a certain way (Effendi, 1986).

In order to make the political communication process more effective, an analysis of the various elements present in the communication process in general is needed, namely the communicator, the communicatee, the message, feedback, and the goal itself. That's why, subsequently, the study of political communication was directed toward analyzing: the political communicator, political messages, the media of political communication, the political audience, and methods in the study of political communication (Burgoon, 1982).

Based on an interview with Prof. Maswadi Rauf, it was explained that the campaign strategy was carried out thru two dimensions: the air dimension thru social media and open campaigns, and the ground dimension thru political party networks and social organizations, as well as informal leaders such as community figures, and even direct face-to-face door-to-door if possible (Interview with Prof. Maswadi Rauf MA, a Professor of Political Science at UI, on October 22, 2022., 2022). The messages conveyed included various programs to address weaknesses as political actors or decisions made by the government, and various rebuttals to reduce the impact of negative campaigns launched by the opposition. The results are quite significant, as the actor or various government policies are still favored in terms of their friendliness, closeness to the people, and flexibility in dealing with all segments of society. As can be seen from the following interview

results (Interview with Prof. Maswadi Rauf MA, a Professor of Political Science at UI, on October 22, 2022., 2022):

"We are attacking from various sides or angles, a term we often use to describe air attacks thru social media and ground attacks thru political parties, mass organizations, and informal leaders."

In further explanation to the campaign team, it was revealed about the awareness and understanding of the importance of social media's role in campaigning. Therefore, one of the important tasks that must be done is to choose social media that can maximize the delivery of political campaign messages to the public. Not only that, the team also seriously managed the message content presented in the campaign, including the vision, mission, and programs, which were made to be interesting news in the mass media (Interview with Isak Soemantri, a Resident of Gedebage, Bandung City, October 22, 2022, 2022).

Conclusion

One of the key tools in the dynamics of digital democracy in urban Indonesia, according to this research, is social media. Activists in Indonesia's capital cities, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung, utilize social media as a platform for publication, engagement, support mobilization, and public perception of politics. Activists deliberately choose platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, and WhatsApp, taking into account target segmentation, message type, and the pace of information distribution.

According to the study's findings, political campaigns primarily use social media as follows: (1) to spread ideas about their goals, objectives, and plans for the future; (2) to rally support from social-political networks and community leaders; and (3) to package their messages with visual framing and emotional narratives that are specific to their local identities. Although this tactic helps candidates obtain more attention and support from the public, it might lead to skewed information and over-image-making, which could influence voters' judgments.

The effects of digital democracy in cities are dual. One positive aspect is that technology facilitates easier, quicker, and more widespread political engagement. However, it also introduces significant problems, including an increased risk of misinformation, political polarization, and the formation of echo chambers. Integrating digital communication tactics with real-world socio-political networks and society's level of digital literacy are two factors that determine the efficacy of digital democracy.

Therefore, this study proves that technological prowess isn't the only factor determining a political campaign's success in the digital era; honesty with facts, the capacity to connect with voters on an emotional level, and trust from the public also play a role. This research fills a gap in the existing literature by providing the first thorough examination of the interplay between socio-political networks, changes in the political behavior of urban populations, and digital communication tactics.

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