

SOCIAL MEDIA AS POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS

Achmad Herman

Communication Science Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Tadulako University, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the effectiveness of using social media for a regional election campaign in Central Sulawesi. This study used a qualitative method. The informants for this study were campaign teams and political actors involved in the use of social media in the 2018 regional election in Central Sulawesi. This study also involved people or communities who felt the effects of social media in the regional elections. Data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. In addition to in-depth interviews, spontaneous interviews were also conducted. Data were analyzed using an interactive approach covering data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study showed some benefits of social media in regional head elections in Central Sulawesi, but also weaknesses such as the widespread hoax news and hate speeches in social media. Technological developments through social media in the implementation of regional elections have become the center of attention which facilitates and make the Election Supervisory Agency work harder due to the hoax news and hate speeches by the campaign team of each candidate in Central Sulawesi. In general, social media makes it easier for the campaign team to implement political communication but during the election process, there are frictions caused by hoax news and hate speech from each campaign team.

Key Words: Social Media, General Election, Regional Head.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of communication technology has affected all aspects of life. One form of communication technology development is new media, namely social media. The presence of social media also affects political life. Studies in the United States show that social media is an effective campaign tool. Before the social media era, politicians in the United States used the internet for campaign media (Chavez, 2012; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Social media is considered effective due to its wider reach, fast message distribution, and campaign budget efficiency. The implementation of regional elections or widely known as "PILKADA" in Indonesia leads to the utilization of social media (Ridwan & Burhani, 2018). It is because of the increasingly intensive role of social media in the process of creating opinions. Besides, the Election Supervisory Agency stated that a critical point in the simultaneous PILKADA in 2018 was the widespread use of social media as a campaign tool. Thus, it is undeniable that all candidates in the regional election must register their social media accounts in order to prevent abuse of social media and the spread of hoax news.

The General Election Commission stated that each candidate of 2018 Pilkada candidate could only have five social media accounts referring to the provisions of Article 47 Paragraph (3) of the

General Election Commission Regulation Number 4 of 2017 concerning the Election Campaign for Governors and Deputy Governors, Regents and Deputy Regents, and/or Mayors and Deputy Mayors.

Black campaign on social media aims to bring down other candidates (Dodu, 2017). The use of social media in the DKI Jakarta election tends to be harsh and contains racial elements (Budiyono, 2016). The use of social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and others has changed the passive role of individuals to become active. Community participation or active internet users are increasing in the context of a variety of information or high responsiveness in a fast time. Through the friendship channel, the concept of disseminating information can be enjoyed by various groups.

The 2018 regional election in Central Sulawesi was held in three regions namely Donggala, Parigi Moutong, and Morowali Districts. These three regions utilized social media as an effective campaign tool due to some reasons. The first is considering the print media which faces circulation, number, and public access problems including reading interest. Morowali District is very far from the provincial capital and it has hilly contours. The second is the ineffective use of electronic media such as radio and television due to the relay station factor. This is the epicenter of the phenomenon of using social media as an effective campaign tool. In other words, social media is used as a political tool to gain public sympathy. Social media can be used both positively and negatively to convey information about competing candidates.

Based on the elaboration above, this study focuses on the effectiveness of using social media as a campaigning tool in the regional election in Central Sulawesi.

2. METHOD

This study used the qualitative method due to many considerations such as finding the meaning of what is being studied. A qualitative study does not generalize so that the results obtained are more specific. This study focuses on the utilization of social media in regional elections. The informants were campaign teams and political actors involved in the use of social media in the 2018 regional election in Central Sulawesi. This study also involved people or communities who felt the effects of social media in the regional elections. Besides, a literature study is needed to help with the limitations of this study. Data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. In addition to in-depth interviews, spontaneous interviews were also conducted as suggested by Suyanto & Sutinah (2005). Then, data were analyzed based on Miles & Huberman (1992) covering data reduction based on the selected data and disaggregated data, data presentation in the form of narrative texts, and data verification or drawing conclusions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 2018 regional election in Central Sulawesi Province was conducted in three districts, namely Morowali, Parigi Moutong, and Donggala. In this regional election event, two districts were included in the category of moderate vulnerability, namely Morowali District (2.13) and Donggala District (2.54). Parigi Moutong District has the lowest hazard category (1.94). Vulnerability index data show that Donggala District is included in the moderately vulnerable category with an index value of 2.54. The highest vulnerability is in the implementation dimension (3.31), which is supported by the variable integrity of the operator. Ethical sanctions related to the neutrality of the organizers in the regional elections have previously been provided. Even, there was a corruption

of regional election funds by the chairman and treasurer of the regional General Election Commission (KPU). Meanwhile, from the contestation dimension (2.03), candidate variables (3.80) and campaign variables (2.33) are potentially vulnerable. At the previous election stage, candidates were disqualified due to not meeting the requirements and disputes. At the campaign stage, money politics practices were carried out by one of the campaign team which was later found guilty by the court with a prison sentence of 4 (four) months (Bawaslu RI, 2018).

Meanwhile, on the participation dimension (2.39), local characteristic variables (3.00) need to be anticipated as Pimembani sub-district still runs the elections using 'noken' system like in Papua. The choices are determined by customary heads and the voting process is also represented so that the participation rate for 2014 Legislative and Presidential Elections reached 100 percent with uniform choices. Morowali District is at a moderate vulnerability level (2.13). The implementation dimension contributes to the level of vulnerability at an index value of 2.69. The implementation dimension is supported by the integrity of the organizer (3.00) and the professionalism of the organizer (3.40). Based on the data obtained, there was a DKPP decision in the form of permanent dismissal of Regional KPU members in the previous election due to their negligence which led to a re-voting at some polling stations (TPS). Meanwhile, on the contestation dimension (1.77), the potential for vulnerability is in the kinship variable (3.00). Based on the information obtained, the younger sibling of the current regent was predicted to be a strong candidate for the next regent candidate. Meanwhile, on the participation dimension (2.00), the vulnerability is estimated as related to data on 12 thousand voters who are employees in companies in which in the previous election, they could not vote because they did not get permission from the company. The absence of supervisory agencies to monitor election also contributes to potential vulnerabilities.

Based on the index, Parigi Moutong District is in the low-hazard category (1.94). Of the three contributing dimensions, the highest vulnerability is in the implementation dimension (2.91). One of the variables that contribute to the vulnerability of the organization dimension is the integrity of the organizer variable (3.00). The researcher noted that there was a temporary dismissal decision by the DKPP for election organizers due to ballot issues. Besides, regarding the professionalism aspect of the organizers, there were delays in oversight budgeting agreements which are potentially vulnerable to the professionalism of the organizer variable (3.40).

Moreover, for the contestation dimension (1.60), the possibility of an incumbent rejoining in the 2018 regional election has the potential to create insecurity if there is no good election supervision. This potential vulnerability is related to the neutrality of civil servants and the use of state facilities at the campaign stage. Then, in the participation dimension (1.44), the potential for vulnerability occurs in the right-to-vote variable (2.33). Around 60 thousand voters were not recorded their e-KTP. Besides, no monitoring and advocacy report from monitoring institutions contribute to potential vulnerabilities in the 2018 regional election.

The campaign stage became a concern for the organizers of the 2018 regional elections in Central Sulawesi in which social media became a tool for disseminating information, including election campaigns. Social media has great potential for many hoaxes which can lead to vulnerability in the implementation of regional elections in Central Sulawesi. The events that occurred due to social media in the regional election provided significant changes to political life in Indonesia, including in Central Sulawesi.

The transformation of political communication and marketing as a consequence of technological advances can be understood. This transformation cannot be avoided considering the astonishing rate of development of social media in Indonesia in the last decade. Changes in communication patterns become the initial momentum for candidates or politicians to be separated from political parties. To get wider coverage from the media, politicians change their communication strategy. Ignoring the function of the party, politicians are aggressively using political consultants to simplify messages as well as dramatize their presence in the media.

Social media and cyberspace play important roles in spreading disinformation during campaigns (Iannone, 2022). Social media including WhatsApp and Instagram are the central media for sharing information. Excessive examples of the role of social media as the main campaign tool on the political stage in the 2008 United States Presidential Election received attention from around the world. Obama's win in the election becomes a decisive turning point in the modernization of the political campaign in which his opponents still use the power of the mainstream media to gain public sympathy. Obama and his campaign team successfully used the internet and social media to raise funds, organize citizens, and mobilize voters (Iannone, 2022). Besides, the results of studies in America show that social media is an effective campaign tool (Anshari, 2013).

Social media is not only used to convey messages but also become a tool for the public, especially the young generation to form groups that spread campaign messages more effectively. Social media, such as Facebook, tends to be related to friendship issues at first. However, currently, social media start to enter the political field of government or state power. Ruben stressed that the development of communication technology had a positive effect on the political process. The advancement of digital communication by e-mail will lead to a new spirit of democracy. From the perspective of political communication, communicating politics without real political action has been done by anyone. Therefore, it is not uncommon for someone to call Political Communication a neologism, namely science which is not more than a mere term (Wilhelm, 2003). In practice, political communication is thick in daily life. There is no single human being who does not communicate in daily life, and when a person or group of people discuss the phenomenon of rising fuel prices (BBM), they have led to an analysis of political communication.

An example of political communication is assessments and analyzes of ordinary people who comment on the issue of rising fuel prices, regional elections, etc. Every time a regional head election is held, a lot of discussions appear on social media. Nonetheless, social media are not only used for positive things, but also as a means of defamation and blasphemy to break a person's credibility. If this phenomenon is allowed to continue, it will become a contradictory condition between the presence of social media which is expected to develop people's political communication, and problems that hinder the progress of political communication. Therefore, this study can provide an overview of the dynamics of the use of social media in political life in developing society, especially in Central Sulawesi.

Social media become an important part of political parties to provide information to the public about their political activities. Social media are used by political parties for political purposes due to their power to influence audiences (Alam, 2016). Social media has the power to influence public opinion. Raising support through social media is faster. Thus, social media has placed the democratic space in a new chapter from the perspective of political communication. As a means

of communication, social media play role in bringing people (users) to participate actively by making contributions and feedback openly, both for sharing information and responding online in a short time (Budiyono, 2016). Social media as an alternative media supported by the power of communication technology have many benefits to increase understanding of the democratization of communication towards a just and prosperous information society (Susanto, 2017). For political parties, the utilization of social media can build political communication with political groups or organizations and their supporters.

4. CONCLUSION

Social media become a tool for disseminating information, including in regional elections. In the implementation of regional elections in Central Sulawesi, social media play an important role in the political campaign process. The results of this study show some benefits of social media, but also their weaknesses such as the widespread hoax news and hate speeches. Technological developments through social media in the implementation of regional elections facilitate and require the election supervisory to work harder due to hoax news and hate speeches spread by the campaign team of each candidate. The existence of social media makes it easier for the campaign team to implement political communication. Indeed, during the election process, there were various frictions caused by hoax news and hate speeches from the campaign team of each candidate.

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