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Populist Communication on Social Media (A Review of the Political Communication of the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidates)

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Abstract
This research discusses the populist communication practices of presidential and vice presidential candidates in the 2024 elections on social media, focusing on the issues of community centrality, anti-elitism, and exclusionism. Populist communication, as a form of political persuasive communication, is known to be effective in attracting attention and mobilizing political support in various countries. Overall, the findings of this study show that the populist communication patterns carried out by the presidential and vice presidential candidates for the 2024 elections emphasize issues that are central to society. Interestingly, the issue of exclusionism, which involves the separation of groups, was not used by any of the presidential and vice-presidential pairs in their campaigns on social media. The emphasis on inclusivity is considered a strategy to maintain unity and support the spirit of diversity in Indonesia. However, some presidential and vice-presidential pairs utilized the issue of anti-elitism as a tool to increase their popularity and electability.

Keywords: *Populist Communication, Political Persuasion, Social Media*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on explaining the use of populist communication strategies in Indonesia, especially in the momentum of general election politics and the digital era. According to Samuel Bennett et al. (2020), the phenomenon of populist communication became popular and massively used during election times in Europe. European political elites have used populist communication as a means of strengthening their political entities and garnering vote support. As a practice, populist communication has become a trend, but specific research studies on this topic are still limited. Therefore, the author chose to explore this topic as an effort to contribute ideas about the application of populist communication in Indonesia.

The changing landscape of political communication also follows the development of technology and presents a new paradigm in the democratic process. One of the key elements that increasingly dominates the political arena is the use of social media as the main platform for communication (Zuhdi, 2020). The digital era has changed the way people access, disseminate and respond to information. Social media, as the main platform in cyberspace, provides a new space for interaction, participation and expression of political opinions. In the context of elections, political actors often place social media not only as a channel of information, but also as a means to build images, design narratives, and engage directly with voters. Social media not only presents information, but also shapes narratives and influences public opinion. The speed of information dissemination, virality, and the ability to reach a wide audience make social media a very effective instrument in shaping perceptions of candidates and political issues.

The concept of populist communication, which emphasizes issues of centrality to society, anti-elitism, and exclusionism (separation of groups that are considered different), is becoming increasingly relevant in the context of political communication on social media, especially during elections. By adopting such communication styles, presidential candidates and vice presidential candidates can create an image that can seep into the collective consciousness of voters. In the era of social media, where direct interaction with voters can occur without barriers, populist communication models are becoming increasingly relevant because they are able to create strong engagement and resonance

among voters quickly and widely. Populist communication, by emphasizing central issues and anti-elitism, can mobilize mass support. By creating a narrative that embraces the majority and shows disapproval of the elite, candidates can win support through social media, which has become a participatory and community-based platform. While it can mobilize support, exclusionist strategies in populist communication can also potentially lead to polarization of opinion. Segregating groups and emphasizing differences can result in a divided political atmosphere in society.

Indonesia is entering a political year with simultaneous general elections scheduled for February 14, 2024. This democratic process not only includes the election of the President and Vice President, Members of the DPR, DPD, Provincial DPRD, and Regency/City DPRD, but also sets the stage for a message war and campaign that increasingly involves the digital space (social media). The 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential elections mark a significant change in the paradigm of political campaigns in Indonesia. Presidential and vice-presidential candidates, along with their campaign teams, are increasingly recognizing the power of social media as a tool to influence public opinion, build brands and gain voter support. The speed and accessibility of social media allows candidates to respond to current issues and directly communicate with potential voters with a variety of creative communications.

Based on data from We Are Social, the number of active social media users in Indonesia was 167 million people in January 2023. This number is equivalent to 60.4% of the population in the country (Widi, 2023). Such a large number of active users creates a significant interactive stage for candidates, to win the votes and hearts of the public. Of the many social media platforms, one of the most widely used in Indonesia is the Instagram platform. The number of Instagram users in Indonesia reaches 104.8 million users. This number makes Indonesia the country with the fourth most Instagram users in the world after India, the United States, and Brazil (Annur, 2023). For this reason, the author will highlight the phenomenon of using populist communication models carried out by presidential and vice presidential candidates in Indonesia in the 2024 elections on Instagram social media.

The purpose of this paper is to identify trends and patterns in the use of populist communication by presidential and vice presidential candidates in Indonesia, particularly on social media platforms. This involves understanding the preferences and communication styles that are most effective in achieving their political goals. And analyze the populist communication models used by presidential and vice presidential candidates in the 2024 elections. This involves exploring the ways in which candidates put forward central issues relevant to society, exploring anti-elitism techniques in their messages, and understanding the forms of exclusionism that may be used.

2. METHOD

This research aims to identify whether the phenomenon of populist communication trends is developing in Indonesia. Populist communication trends in Europe are often characterized by rhetoric that targets the “elite” as the main opponent of the people, the use of social media to disseminate populist messages, and a personal and emotional approach to communication. In the Indonesian context, this research will specifically capture these dynamics in the communication of presidential and vice presidential candidates in the 2024 elections. The research approach used is a literature study, which involves collecting and analyzing data from various sources, including books, scientific journals, and related documents (Habsy, 2017). The main focus is on populist communication patterns that occur on social media, which has become the main platform for presidential and vice presidential candidates to convey their vision, mission, and build relationships with voters. This research is expected to contribute to the understanding of how global trends in populist communication interact with local contexts in Indonesia, particularly in the contemporary political landscape.

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3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Populist Communication

In his article titled They Caused our Crisis! The Contents and Effects of Populist Communication: Evidence from the Netherlands, Michael Hamellers (Hamellers, 2019, pp. 77-98) mentions that despite being widely recognized, populism is still widely debated, especially about the definition and concept of populism itself. Despite the debate, there is agreement on the components of its content. This agreement implies that populism revolves around the construction of a social divide between "good" ordinary people and "evil" elites that pose a major threat to the well-being of society. This anti-elitist core can be complemented by the exclusion of various out-groups, which is a core element of right-wing populist rhetoric. So it is in populist communication.

There are three main components in populist communication:

1) People Centrality

The populist communication model that emphasizes centrality to society is based on a focus on issues that the general public considers important. Political candidates or groups that adopt this model seek to identify and articulate the issues that are most relevant and significant to the majority of voters. In this way, the messages delivered tend to be more appropriate and relatable to the target audience, creating an emotional connection with them. The centrality to the community reflects an attempt to build support from the base, reinforcing group identity and interests.

2) Anti-elitism

Anti-elitist populist communication models reject claims of superiority from elites and emphasize direct engagement with the people. Users of this model try to present themselves as supporting and representing the interests of ordinary people, opposing and denigrating elites who are perceived as not understanding or ignoring the needs of the majority/corrupt/evil. Anti-elitism is often reflected in simple language and messages that can be understood by many, emphasizing equality and common interests over differences.

3) Exclusionism

Populist communication models that emphasize exclusionism involve segregating groups that are perceived as different or not in line with the interests of the majority. In a political context, this can create an "us against them" narrative, where certain groups are identified as enemies or threats to the interests of society. Exclusionism can stimulate group identity and motivate mass support by creating feelings of solidarity among the majority group.

These three populist communication models create a powerful political narrative and can influence voters' perceptions and actions. When applied together, they form a holistic populist communication style that is effective in gaining political support. However, it is important to keep in mind that the application of exclusionism can lead to social polarization and conflict, which needs to be handled carefully to ensure democratic stability.

Social Media

Active participation in social media-based political communication is crucial for political institutions, especially in the context of election campaigns (Heryanto, 2018). Social media is considered an ideal platform and the main source of information to understand people's views on policies and political positions, as well as a tool to gain support from communities that support a politician's campaign. A number of studies have shown that politicians in various countries have

adopted social media as a means to establish connections with their constituents, interact directly with the public, and spark political discussions. The capacity of social media in creating a space for dialogue between politicians and the public, especially in attracting interest from novice voters or young voters, further emphasizes the importance of the role of social media for politicians in the current era (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012).

Social media is also an ideal tool for understanding the dynamics of public opinion on political issues (Aryantini et al., 2024). By monitoring the responses and feedback from citizens, politicians can respond quickly to current issues and adjust their campaign messages according to the needs and aspirations of the community. The ability to interact directly with voters, listen to their aspirations, and provide real-time responses provides a strong participatory dimension to the democratic process (Utomo and Irwansyah, 2023). In addition, social media also creates opportunities for politicians to build a solid community of supporters. Support from netizens can be an important leverage in political campaigns, and social media facilitates the process of building this support base through various features such as discussion groups, live streaming, and viral campaigns (Erwin et al., 2024).

Populist Communication on Social Media in the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidates

This research seeks to see whether the populist communication trends that occur in Europe as described by Michael Hamellers and Samuel Bennett also occur in Indonesia. Although specifically, what happens in Indonesia will be portrayed in the context of the communication of the presidential and vice presidential candidates in the 2024 elections. Michael Hamellers emphasizes populist communication on 3 things: communication that emphasizes the centrality of society, anti-elitism, and exclusionism. In the midst of the election political campaign period, of course we will increasingly find a variety of political communication models. Some of them (perhaps) are populist in nature, which in this paper is considered to be empowered as a political persuasion technique that is quite powerful in attracting attention and mobilizing public votes.

Such is the case with three presidential and vice presidential candidates in Indonesia in 2024: (1) Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar, (2) Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, and (3) Ganjar Pranowo and Mahfud MD. These three candidates will certainly develop their respective political communication strategies to maximize political support for them. This includes through the digital space of social media.

Here are the social media strengths of each candidate. The social media strength of candidate 1 Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar is 8.9 million followers (Anies 6.5 million and Muhaimin 2.4 million). The social media power of candidate 2 Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka is 9.5 million followers (Prabowo 7.8 million and Gibran 1.7 million).The social media power of candidate 3 Ganjar Pranowo and Mahfud MD is 7.8 million followers (Ganjar 6.5 million and Mahfud 1.3 million).

Seeing the amount of social media power they have, do the three presidential and vice presidential candidates use populist communication for their political marketing strategy? The author will try to answer this by analyzing the content published by each candidate on their Instagram platform. Content observation is carried out within the publication limit for one week (January 2-9, 2024).

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Table 1. Populist Communication of Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidates for the 2024 Election

	Centrality of Community	Anti-elitism	Exclusionism
Candidate Candidate 1 Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar	• Anies' post answered farmers' concerns about the government's current rice imports. • Anies' post about 28 welfare nodes in the cultural sector, labor, disability groups, gen z and millennials, and MSMEs. • Post of Muhaimin's visit to the market. • Muhaimin's post about ensuring affordable prices for basic necessities and cheap shopping.	• Anies' post about AMIN's expedition to Gorontalo. Bringing up the issue of the idea of changing Gorontalo City into an Agropolitan city that doesn't just sell raw commodities. • Muhaimin's post about the Change Patrol movement in Central Lampung.	(There is no visible element of populist communication that emphasizes the narrative of exclusionism).
Candidate Candidate 2 Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka	• Prabowo's post visited the residents of Cilincing and Pluit. • Gibran's post is entitled Absorbing Aspirations in Denpasar Bali with MSME and Startup actors. • Gibran's post is entitled Gibran Listens with traditional, religious and community leaders in Bali and Ambon. • Gibran's post about a visit to Cirebon MSMEs.	(not found)	(There is no visible element of populist communication that emphasizes the narrative of exclusionism)
Candidate Candidate 3 Ganjar Pranowo and Mahfud MD	• Ganjar's post is proud to be the son of a simple police officer. • Ganjar's post about the Koran Teacher Salary program. • Ganjar's post about how to solve 3 worker problems. • Ganjar's post about fishermen's difficulties. • Ganjar's post about Sulang Rembang farmers. • Ganjar's post about the Dormitory Vocational School Program Graduates and Goes to Work.	Ganjar's post about the One Village, One Health Worker and One Health Facility Program to address the lack of health services in the region.	(There is no visible element of populist communication that emphasizes the narrative of exclusionism)

	Centrality of Community	Anti-elitism	Exclusionism
	• Mahfud's post visited students in several areas.		

Source : Author, 2024

First, based on the findings above, we can see that not all candidate pairs apply all components of populist communication in their communication strategies. Interestingly, there is a finding that the three candidate pairs in the 2024 elections did not touch on issues of exclusionism (separation of groups that are considered different or not in line with the interests of the majority) in their political communication. This is interesting to explore with further research in the context of diversity/ pluralism in Indonesia.

Second, of the three components of populist communication, communication elements that emphasize issues of centrality to the community dominate the populist communication patterns carried out in the 2024 election presidential and vice presidential candidates. Of the three pairs, pair number 3 (Ganjar Prabowo-Mahfud MD) most often uses populist communication that is centrality to the community in its social media content. Although, pair number 1 (Anies Baswedan-Muhaimin Iskandar) and pair number 2 (Gibran Rakabuming Raka) also use this populist communication pattern quite intensely.

Third, not all candidates are included in populist communication that emphasizes anti-elitism issues. Of the three candidates, candidate number 1 used this issue more often in his political communication on social media. This was followed by candidate number 3. Meanwhile, candidate number 2 was not found to use this issue in his political communication on social media.

This research confirms that populist communication on social media is one of the main strategies used by presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the 2024 elections in Indonesia. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter provide a space for candidates to build populist narratives that emphasize closeness to the people, often by simplifying complex issues into emotional and easy-to-understand messages. In this context, social media serves not only as a communication tool, but also as a political arena that allows candidates to build an image and mobilize support quickly and widely. This phenomenon is in line with previous findings in Europe, where populism often uses social media to strengthen direct links between leaders and the public (Moffitt, 2016). In Indonesia, this populist communication pattern shows that social media is an effective medium to reach various segments of the electorate, especially the younger generation who dominate digital platform users. Thus, populist communication on social media not only reflects local political dynamics but also emphasizes the interconnectedness of global communication trends with the Indonesian political context.

4. CONCLUSION

Populist communication as a form of political persuasive communication that emphasizes the issue of community centrality, anti-elitism, and exclusionism also colors the character of political communication built by presidential and vice presidential candidates in the 2024 elections in the social media space. Populist communication in practice in several countries has shown to be effective in attracting attention and mobilizing political votes. Interestingly, of the three components of populist communication, political actors in Indonesia tend to use populist communication that emphasizes centralized issues in society compared to other components. In addition, populist communication patterns in Indonesia also tend to avoid issues of exclusionism. In fact, none of the presidential and vice-presidential pairs used this type of communication in their campaigns on social media. Meanwhile, the issue of anti-elitism was used by a number of

pairs to increase their popularity and electability..

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