



Behind The Scene of Social Media Political Campaign (The Study of Political Campaign in Social Media Service Provider)

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Abstract

Political communication has entered its fourth era, which has technology advancement as its main feature. Indonesia has also entered the same phase, and social media has been a part of its political communication. This research focuses on social media use in political campaign in Indonesia. The result, PT S has using social media as its tool to run business in political campaign. E-wom is used to create a natural message. The work is dynamic, they do it professionally, and they have to be aware of the issue around their client, which was one of the candidate of regional election in 2017.

Keywords: Political communication; hypermedia campaign; digital campaign; social media; spin-doctor

Introduction

Digital technology development is rapidly becoming the core of life, work, culture, and identity in Indonesia. As a relatively young country, and the average population aged 28 and is a part of an increasingly urban middle class, people in Indonesia use digital technology in ways that make the world pay attention to it (Jurriens & Tapsell, 2017).

Based on the 2017 survey, out of 262 million of Indonesian total population, internet penetrates to 143.26 million people, or 54.68% of the population. The main services accessed were *chat* (89.35 %) and *social media* (87.13%) (APJII, 2017). The data shows that the internet, as part of digital technology, comes in and absorbs significantly fast in every aspect of Indonesian.

The development of internet usage in Indonesia is growing rapidly. Based on WeAreSocial.net and Hootsuite 2017 data, within one year, its growth reached 51%. Indonesia ranks second in the largest number of internet users in the world (katadata.co.id, 2018).



Politically, the current digital platform is used to organize the masses, along with electoral oversight, and in general provides a place for broader freedom of speech, and expression on more diverse issues, also contributes in small amounts to wildly democratic and uncontrollable democracy. Everyone who has a political organization today should consider engaging in the world of online campaigning, specifically by being present in social media (Jurriens & Tapsell, 2017).

According to Semetko and Tworzecki, political communication has entered its fourth era. The main feature of the fourth era of political communication is the advancement of technology and its usefulness in campaigning and elections, which has also been a major differentiator of political communications in the three previous eras. There are three main concerns in the fourth era of political communication, which are the birth of big data, the rise of social media trends, and globalization (Fisher, et al., 2018).

Indonesia has entered the same phase related to political communication, especially related to the campaign for the general election, although it is not comprehensive yet. Big data that has a big impact on how targeting is done, the rise of social media trends including the numbers and activities of its users, and the existence of globalization, make Indonesia can easily imitate the style of political campaigns that have been done by other countries, causing changes in the map of political communication in Indonesia.

In this study, the main concern is the use of social media related political campaigns in Indonesia. Previous research has been conducted by Muninggar Sri Saraswati under the title *Social Media and The Political Campaign Industry in Indonesia* which highlights the use of social media in election campaigns. According to Sarawasti, the use of social media in political campaigns in Indonesia is shaped by market pressure, which is represented by the increasing number of social media users and political culture in the context of postauthoritarian states. In addition there is a process of commodification of social media in the formation of content related to election campaign (Saraswati, 2018).

This research aims to look beyond the process of commodification that runs on social media related to the election campaign, more specifically how a group of people use social media to organize political campaign. The object of his research is a company, PT S, which was, on the local elections in 2017, offering campaign management services in the social media. The author tries to describe how they worked and how they managed campaigns in social media, as well as their role in managing campaigns on social media.

Literature Review

Political Communication

Political communication, according to Semetko & Tworzecki in Fisher et al (2018), has now entered its fourth era. The main feature of the fourth era of political



communication is the advancement of technology and its usefulness in campaigning and elections, which has also been a major differentiator of political communications in the three previous eras.

Referring to the case in the United States, the first era of political communications lasted for a century, and ended around the 1950s, including the era of partisan newspapers, radio broadcasts, and decentralized campaign operations. The second era occurred around the 1950s until the 1980s, with the typical parties and candidates are invited to the event on television news. Another characteristic of this second era is a more professional and centralized campaign, and took more time and money. While the third era, from the 1980s until the late 1990s, a period in which the message was delivered more specifically leads to the target audience, either in the form of advertising or other messages, as well as decentralized.

In the fourth era, according to Semetko & Tworzecki, the fact that the campaign was professional, expensive, and permanent, did not change. However, technological innovation is a big part of this evolutionary story, and involves new tools, techniques, and campaign capabilities. There are three main concerns in the fourth era of political communication, which are the birth of big data, the rise of social media trends, and globalization (Fisher, et al., 2018).

Digital Campaign

Talking about the fourth era of political communication, it can't be separated by the use of digital technology in political campaigns. The distinction of this era with the previous era according to Ward et.al is the end of the pyramid model in political communication, in which the audience only becomes the recipient of the message. The existence of the Internet makes interpersonal communication public, where it is now very easy to communicate, as well as creating great potential space for the community.

A key feature of this 21st century political campaign is to electronically target the audience. Technology brings a great opportunity to identify swing voters and create campaign messages that specifically target them. The second is the decentralization of messages, so that the message will be more local and personal. Third is the interactivity possible due to the new media technology (Fisher, et al., 2018)

According to Ward et.al, internet may generate solution on the issues of the declining of community satisfaction on politic. Technology allows the mobilization of society due to factors such as lower costs for building attachment, increasing political information stimulus, increased ability to build networks because of the Internet, enabling self-expression and creativity, increasing the ability to target certain groups, and possibilities of a shift in the generation of voters because new voters are generally familiar with the internet.

The presence of digital technology has stimulated voter growth and increased the ability of a person to participate in politics without first having to go through their



collective organization. The real winners of this era are those who are more flexible, less hierarchical, and have networks (Fisher, et al., 2018).

Digital campaigns utilizing Internet technology have the advantage that they no longer have space and time limits. The cost of producing the content becomes not too high compared with other forms of campaigns. In addition, campaign forms can be more creative by utilizing paid social media advertising or using word-of-mouth strategies by relying on free social media, by acting as a general user (Croteau, Hoynes, & Milan, 2012)

Hypermedia Campaign

After the United States election in year 2000, it was revealed that a third of the voters have used the internet to learn about the campaign. After the 2004 election, the survey results show that half of the candidates have searched for information online about the campaign. But what they do not realize is that they have been fed with things that have been personalized according to their interests and interests by the campaigners (Howard, 2006).

Information technology has long been used in campaign organizations, the adoption of such technology becomes imperative for political organizations about the last 10 years counted from Howard's writings that appeared in 2006. The restructuring is what Howard says to produce a hypermedia campaign, in which campaign organizers adopt innovations on digital technology to express their political goals.

In order to explain *hypermedia campaign*, Lilleker, et.al defines that hypermedia campaign style is done by integrating between old and new campaign tools, as well as new and old communication platforms. No limitations in any related campaign organizations are played and not, all must be controlled by the campaign's organizers (Lilleker, Tenscher, & Štětka, 2014)

Social Media

Social media is a computer-mediated device that enables one to create, share, or exchange information, ideas, and images or videos within a virtual community and network (Quesenberry, 2016). Social media is about creating and sharing information and ideas, and as more people do that, the more content available on social media. According to Quesenberry, social media is rising in terms of numbers and attention, changing the publication of content that was centered on publishers or publisher-centric to user-centric. This means that users have greater control, choice, and flexibility with their needs, wants, and limitations.

Serious threats from social media in relation to political communication and democracy in Indonesia according to Nurhayati and Suryadi is the development of hoax in social media. This has become possible because of the nature of the anonymity of



social media, which makes everyone can create an account as much as possible, and deploy whatever they want control. Content dissemination, especially *hoaxes* in social media, can also affect public perception broadly, due to its viral content. Though the truth is unknown (Nurhayati & Suryadi, 2017).

Research Methodology

This is a descriptive qualitative research, in which the researcher engages and communicates directly with the research resource, and produces non numerical data, also attempts to provide a detailed picture of a specific situation, social situation, or relationship (Neuman, 2014).

Data collection techniques were conducted using open interviews and literature review as a data collection technique. Unfortunately, the observations at the time of the implementation can not be done because the electoral election handled by PT S has passed in 2017. Interview conducted with the leader of PT S, Mr. A, as well as one of his social media team personnel, Ms. E, both of which are carried out separately. To Mr. A, posed more strategic questions related to management and management of the company. While to Ms. E, asked more deeply related to the implementation process in the field.

Furthermore, the data is then processed by coding techniques introduced by Strauss, ie open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, to find the category code of the data obtained (Neuman, 2014). Furthermore, using the code categories that have been found, thematic analysis techniques will be used, which is the process of encoding the qualitative information (Boyatzis, 1998).

Result

Informant Background

In this research, there are two key informants, which are:

1. Mr. A, the leader of PT S. Before joining PT S, Mr. A already has an interest in social media, especially Twitter. He has Twitter since 2008, then in 2015 his account was *suspended* by Twitter. He returned to Twitter in 2016, and still exists to this day. He joined PT S in December 2016.

2. Ms. E, employee at PT S. She was recruited in December 2016. The recruitment process is not common. First, everyone recruited personally invited by others, then they are invited into the Whatsapp Group, then PT S done the background checking by asked all of them to write all of their social media accounts. After going through this stage, they are invited to meet and and their task was explained directly. Ms. E has a slightly different task from the others, because beside the ability to provide



the social media content such as text and images, she must also be able to create memes with humorous approaches able to flick the emotions of its readers.

Findings

The background of the establishment of this company according to Mr. A, was the high number of social media users in Indonesia that he realized is a promising business. The high number of social media users make management of opinions in social media being necessary. In line with that thought, Ms. E also added that the services offered by the company, campaigning through social media, is still very much needed by the people, because it is increasingly felt that public opinion at this time can be greatly influenced by social media.

When the elections of 2017 took place, PT S became one of the consultants who participated in the game to mobilize opinions in social media related to one of the candidates who competed at the time. They were not part of the candidate's success-team, so they did not specifically voice the vision and the mission, but at that time they played a role in contranarating against those who attacked their candidate. The company was hired for three months during the campaign period.

No special messaging strategy is played by this company. They move situationally, depending on the issue that bustling that very day. Beside monitoring the mass media, they also continue to monitor the issues that develop in social media, such as Twitter.

"How they on Twitter see an issue, usually we spin from it," -Ms. E

Even so, Ms. E as the executor admits that they rarely play negative issues. This is in line with what Mr. A says that they do not accept orders to spread negative or black campaign.

Related to content production process, Ms. E describes the technicalities they do everyday. It always starts with monitoring the internet, be it a search engine like Google, news media, and social media. From there, content will be tailored to the current issue.

The content produced varies, from text, video, photos, to memes. However, the most often they do were actually producing the content to respond to the growing news. Issues played are very situational, usually they will play where there is a commotion, because where people get noisy, they will be more easily burned when nudged and opinions will be more well-formed according to Ms. E.

Especially about the meme, Ms. E usually starts by looking for news that matches the topic she picks up, then put in an existing template, given a not too long comment, so people do not lazy to read it. Which is also important when meme production is that she will add funny pictures that can evoke emotions from readers.

In spreading the content that was created earlier, they play about 100 social media accounts spread across Twitter and Facebook. One person can hold up to 10 content spreaders account. Of the 100 accounts, not all use false identities. Some also use the original identity, but only a few.



Usually the original account is used by those who play the role of influencers, has many followers and friends with other key opinion leaders in social media. What is clear, those who use this personal account will play very carefully, and should not be known if they work for PT S.

In doing the sharing, they will not forget to use hashtags to create trending topic because usually their achievement is seen whether they succeeded in making an issue become trending topic or not. They will also tag the influencers who have many followers to reach more people.

Regarding the rhythm of work in PT S, they do not have a target on how much post in a day, it was very dynamic depending on the circumstances of the day. Everybody have normal working hours, 8 hours, divided into 2 shifts. At the end of the work-hours, they must submit a report regarding the content they have shared and what issues have been played that day.

The social media approach used by PT S is an organic approach, meaning that they act like ordinary people, not using bots because the impression is going to be rigid and inflexible according to Mr. A. The same is said by Ms. E, they act like ordinary people, because the goal is to build public opinion.

"By using an ordinary account so as to be more 'grounded' rather than a special account share, because there is a 2-way interaction in it." -Ms. E

Evaluation of success is done informally, both from internal side of company and from client. From these evaluations, there will usually be changes that can make their work more effective. In the evaluation will also be seen whether the target is determined as having to create a trending topic successfully performed by the team. Later the results of their work will also be seen from a special analysis engine subscribed to see the sentiments, impressions, and engagement that was created.

Problems that are often experienced by the team in performing its duties are blocked by the social media, so it can not do the spread again. In addition, quarreling with opposition teams in social media has also become a daily activity and they should do. Because that's where the opinion war actually happens, and they get paid for it.

About risks, Mr. A always reminds his team to play within applicable limits such as the UU ITE as well as ensuring the security of the personal identity of the worker. Yet not infrequently they feel afraid to be arrested or taken away by the authorities for example, said Ms. E. However, when communicating it with Mr. A, she will return to calm because as long as they do not violate the existing rules then there is no need to fear such risks.

Discussion

If associated with the theory, then what is done by PT S is one form of implementation of political communication of the 4th era, using hypermedia campaign techniques, especially in digital media, by utilizing social media. With a



carefulness in exploiting opportunities derived from his pleasure using social media, PT S managed to make social media as their business land.

The form of hypermedia campaign that is run by PT S is by using many types of media, such as text, pictures, photos, and video. The campaign was then disseminated through pre-prepared social media channels.

It is interesting to discuss the organic approach used by PT S in spreading its content. This is perceived in line with the *word-of-mouth* concept, in which opinions circulating in social media, which affect public opinion, are propagated by an approximation like ordinary human beings, making it seem more real. According to Quesenberry, *word-of-mouth* is the oldest marketing technique, when someone talks about a product, service, or promotion to a friend or relative. Although old, this technique proved successful because people tend to believe more in WOM than to advertising.

Along with the development of the era, the definition of 'friends' growing, it can be friends in social media that the number can be very high. WOM also has its digital adaptation form, which is E-WOM or *electronic-word-of-mouth*. This makes a big difference. According to Nielsen's data, 90% of online customers believe the recommendations of people they know, and 70% even trust unauthorized online user recommendations more than traditional advertising (Quesenberry, 2016)

This data can support and show why political communication such as what PT S done becomes more effective in conveying the message. They act like people in general who argue in social media, with a planned message that is certainly in line with the interests of the client.

Massive scattered content, which was using 100 spreaders account, in which there are also influencer accounts, make their voice can be heard in the social media and affect the opinion running there. But need to be underlined, they are not the only players who play this kind of thing. As Ms. said. E, they must be ready to fight opinions with opponents in social media, indicating players of any stronghold is actively playing the issue aswell.

Ms. E also said that they should be able to identify certain issues that were hype at the moment and spin there. Spin according to Croteau et al is a form of propaganda that involves the formation and diffusion of the interpretation of an event, campaign, policy, with the aim of creating consensus and public support. People who deal with it are often called spin-doctors. In the case of PT S, then they are actually a collection of spin-doctors who are assigned to play the issue with a specific purpose, of course for the benefit of the client.

By stating that they are not part of a success-team, it appears that they are actually working professionally. Outside of work, they may not think the same as what they sounded at work, but they should be able to get rid of it and submit to their clients' wishes while working.



As mentioned earlier, there is a fear that they may be caught for the content they are deploying. However, type complies with the regulations, then they can be safe from the pursuit of the UU ITE that is ready to be used to report them. In addition, because there is only an UU ITE that limits these *spindoctor* to work, the researchers see it can be an opportunity, because it means that the limits are not too many and there are still many loopholes that can be utilized by them.

Conclusion

PT S utilizes social media as its business field to do political communication in the form of political campaigns on social media. The *e-wom* approach becomes the way in which they appear as natural as possible in conveying their political messages on social media. Even so, the frequent intensity and the massive amount, managing about 100 accounts, makes them have a voice in social media.

Content generated by PT S is the result of the dynamics of the monitoring of conventional media and social media, which it deems necessary to respond to in order to change public opinion. Therefore, every day they have to do monitoring to see what issues should be spread on that day. Therefore, no special messaging strategy is made per day, because the world of media let alone social media is very dynamic.

They work professionally to spin the growing issues related to their clients, which is one of the candidates of local election participants in 2017. Successful achievement of the issues can be seen from whether or not they create trending topics in social media.

Despite the great risks, PT S believes that this business has sustainability, as social media gets bigger, and the more it needs management. In addition, they are adhering to the prevailing regulations and acting cautiously so as not to violate the rules.

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