

Issue: Political Communication

The Role of Twitter in Political Communication  
in Indonesia Presidential Election 2014: The Face of New Democracy or Propaganda?

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Abstraksi

Indonesian general election 2014 was the first general election that used Twitter as channel for political communication. Twitter connects elite and non-elite and open new public space for discussing political issue, producing public opinion, mobilization etc. It seemingly, support the idea internet as a new platform that support democratization. This research try to confirm optimism about the role of media sosial in Indonesia, by exploring political communication on Twitter during presidential election 2014. It analyzes text produced by 8 Twitter accounts actively produce representation of Jokowi. The result show that the political communication during the campaign dominantly applied propaganda technique.

Key words: political communication, cyberdemocracy, Twitter

I. Background of Study

Democracy is a government system applied in most countries around the world. Based on data provided by International IDEA (2008; 7), a Sweden accessing democracy institution, there are more than 60 persen countries around the world run democratic government. Democracy become alternative as it has better possibility to run the government from public perspective.

General election is a form of public sovereignty in democratic country. In developing countries like Indonesia, it is usually seen as an important event. Meanwhile, in developed countries in USA and Europe, general election is considered as a regular procedure to have a new leader. Indonesian people mention general election as 'a party for democracy' that is prepared even 2 or 3 years before the event. It is understandable as Indonesia is a new democratic country with only 5 general elections that is called as democratic election. Meanwhile, another 7 general elections were held under authoritarian regime of Soeharto during New Order era (1966-1998). Since 2004, Indonesia have been applying direct election system both for parliament and presidential election. The new system open larger opportunity for civil society to participate in the discussion of choosing their leaders.

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In the general election, political communication become an important element to bridge communication between political elite and civil society (Lilleker, 2006; 1). Political communication is a crucial factor in building civilized society in which elite and civil society are connected each other. The political communication process including horizontal communication between political elite and also vertical communication between political elite and civil society. Political communication than become important issue that would be discussed in this article.

The role of mass media in the process of political communication has relation with the idea of 'the fourth estate'. In Indonesia, Reformation Era has produce UU No 40 1999 that guarantee press freedom. A decade after the era, Indonesian press has new challenge. After the media was released from dictatorship regime, the media is now controlled by political economy interest (Nugroho, 2012; Lim, 2012; Sudibyo & Patria, 2013). In this situation, industry shape the form of political communication process. Press and media does not provide sufficient public space in which civil society discuss and criticize public policy. However, the media tend to give dominant space for political elite and market.

In the last two decades, internet enter the system of mass media industry in Indonesia. The arrival of internet is expected would influence the structure of political communication process that is usually mediated by mainstream media (television, radio, newspaper and magazine). Some new media and democracy scholars (see Dahlberg 2001a, 2001b; Dijk, 2013; Dahlberg, 2007; Papacarissi, 2003; Stagarousianou et al, 1998; Castells, 2007, 2009; Gillmor, 2004) believe that characters of internet (interactive, direct, two-way of communication, etc) has open a new unlimited public space.

Indonesian general election 2014 was the first election used internet, particularly social media as a medium for political communication process. Twitter was one of popular social media, beside Facebook, that was used massively for campaigning the candidates. Twitter provide direct communication between elite (president, parliament member, public figure) and non-elite (civil society, interest group and NGO). In this stage, internet unlikely develop new political communication practice, that usually mediated by mainstream media. Vertical political debate was replaced by horizontal debate between democratic actors.

Ideally, the characters of internet would shape better political communication process and foster democracy. However in the context of Indonesia, Twitter has problematic challenge as Twitter might not a neutral space. Twitter on the other hand open possibility for everyone – who has economic and political interest – to produce discourse based on sensitive issues such as religion and ethnicity. This article try to see how political communication

was become a medium for spreading discourse of presidential candidates by using propaganda techniques.

## II. Literature review

In the last decade, internet develop significantly. The arrival of media social and its impact on societies, attract new media researchers to investigate how political activities were related to social media particularly Facebook and Twitter. One of the big issue is social media and political campaign (see Penney, 2014; Larsson, 2014; Standberg, 2013; Vesnic, 2011; Ruiz, 2011), sosial media for empowering society that support democracy ( see Ifukor, 2010; Chiluiwa, 2012; Sreekumar & Shobha, 2013; Groshek & Ahmed, 2013; Tang, 2013); and sosial media as a tools for producing government domination over civil society (Mohd, 2013).

Penney (2014) investigate the impact of internet in the political marketing during US presidential election 2012. She focused on the circulation of political campaign vide in the internet and how duscussion over it was run. The result is deliberative discussion and civil society participation has blurring the political marketing model. Larsson (2014) saw permanent campaign in two countries including Norwegia and Sweden that has common patern of political patern. Generally, the research discussi about the using of Facebook page by politicians. The online activies were described the using of timeline, number of post per day, number of like and share per day, etc. Strandberg (2013) look at civil society respond in the political parliament campaign trough media social in Finlandia. The result explain that although candidates used internet largely and comprehensively, respond from online voter were normal. Meanwhil, Vesnic (2011) investigate the phenomena social media usage in political campaign. The research employed CDA to analyze texts written by incument parliament member though their blog. It uncover campaign strategy and dominan discourse arise in the campaign.

Meanwhile study on social media as tool for empowering citizen and fostering democracy were conducted by Ifukor (2010) who analyze language construction of discourse produced though blog and Twitter during Nigeria general election 2007 and 2009. By use CDA methode, Ifukor identify virtual community, identity, language variations and social interactions that were used by minority member as a tools of strugling. Meanwhile, Sreekumar & Shobha (2013) use Science Technology Society (STS) Theory to understand implication of political Twitterati – elite Twitter account that is monitored by its followers – during Singapore general election 2011. Although they found that there were no significant impact of social media to reformation of radical democracy, they admit that Twitter has

produce counter narration. Groshek & Ahmed (2013) analyze around 1.4 million tweets produce during US presidential election 2012. It analyze representation of Obama and Romney on Twitter. Tang (2011) investigate online political social movement. Tang found that social movement would be successfully done if it employ strong symbol of society. The result shows that it is not easy to materialize the potential of symbolic power on the internet. What the internet makes easy is to produce follow-up discourse once a powerful symbol has appeared. With the aid of supporters and their follow-up discourses, the symbol creates a symbolic network and takes roots in the society quickly and deeply. Finally, some thoughts on symbolic power in the context of China are also provided in the framework of discourse and social change.

Mohn (2013) examines the interplay of politics, religion and discourse in the representation of the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, in government-controlled news websites in Iran. It is grounded in critical discourse analysis (CDA), and Van Leeuwen's social actor network model (2008) is used as the theoretical framework to analyse the linguistic representation of the Iranian leader. In the samples analysed, Khamenei is discursively depicted by features associated with the Prophet Muhammad and the 12 infallible Imams of the Shia tradition. Such representations elevate the authority of Khamenei in texts, and naturalise the ideology of Velayat-e Faqih, which authorises a Faqih (Jurist) to assume political leadership in Iran. In this way, the texts are used to maintain and reinforce the dominance of people in positions of power

There are some researcher who conduct internet and politic research in Indonesia. Hill & Sen (2000) did one of the most comprehensive internet research in Indonesia. They investigate political practice and internet consumption in Indonesia. The main issue relating to the topic of this research is the mapping of the internet in Indonesia. It discuss about the arrival of internet in Indonesia in 1995s; the role of internet in the economic and political crisis 1997 – 98; and the role of internet during Reformation Era.

In the mid 2000s, internet research in Indonesia is dominated by issues of politic and social media such us blog and Facebook. Lim (2005) explore the role of internet of political activism in Indonesia during transition period of New Order Era to Reformation Era. Lim identify relation between internet and society of Non-Western context. Lim (2013) conducting research about the promise of social media activism by analysing the complexity and dynamics of the relationship between social media and its users. Lim said that in social media, networks are vast, content is overly abundant, attention spans are short, and conversations are parsed into diminutive sentences. For social media activism to be translated

into populist political activism, it needs to embrace the principles of the contemporary culture of consumption: light package, headline appetite and trailer vision. Social media activism is more likely to successfully mobilise mass support when its narratives are simple, associated with low risk actions and congruent with dominant meta-narratives, such as nationalism and religiosity. Success is less likely when the narrative is contested by dominant competing narratives generated in mainstream media. Based on those earlier research, this article try to explore the process of political communication by focusing respresentation of Jokowi and propaganda technique.

### III. Teoretical bacground

Political communication theories largely share a common basis that was first developed by Harold Lasswell in a US doctoral dissertation studying propaganda effects; his core question was '*who says what to whom via which channels with what effects?*' (Lasswell, 1927 in Lilleker, 2006). The four components of communication are each studied, sometimes in isolation from one another, at other times in linear fashion where all components are discussed. This text does not overtly apply this model; however, implicitly it is easy to see how discussion is guided by it. Thus we find a range of discussions on the way the source of political communication is viewed, particularly in terms of their credibility, and how the sources attempt to manage the other three parts of the chain; so managing the perception that audiences hold of them. Similarly we will discuss message construction and the way these are transmitted, necessitating discussions of the role of the independent mass media. Finally the receivers, or audiences, who in reality are centre stage in political communication, feature in terms of the way in which, if at all, they receive, process and then act upon political communication. The discussion will introduce the latest research in order to provide a rounded picture of the field of political communication at the turn of the 21st century.

There are also some definition of political communication from other researchers. McNair (1995) said that study of political communication will concentrate to a much greater extent on the nature of the interface between the allocation of public resources (revenues), official authority politicians and the media, the extent of their interaction, and the dialectic of their relationship. Denton and Woodwardv (1990, p. 14, in McNair, 1995) provide one definition of political communication as pure discussion about (who is given the power to make legal, legislative and executive decision), and official sanctions (what the state rewards or punishes). This definition includes verbal and written political rhetoric, but not symbolic

communication acts which, as we shall see in this book, are of growing significance for an understanding of the political process as a whole.

The main object of political communication in democratic countries is to bridge communication between civil society and elites. It should guarantee that civil society connected with elite in order to gain open space for expressing opinion. However, political communication is always designed with the audience in mind, the use of marketing tools, aestheticisation and emotionalisation is intended to have greater appeal, or relevance, to the audience. While it can be described as, and often is just spin or propaganda, its aim is to mobilise the audience/electorate, encourage them to participate, though in the way required by the communicator, and engage with political activity (Lilleker, 2006). This article trying to identify how propaganda emerge in the process of political communication during presidential election 2014 in Twitter. The propaganda will be identified from how Twitter represent presidential candidate, Jokowi.

Propaganda (Kallis, 2005) define that the word is usually associated with deception, lies and manipulation, particularly in 21st century. However, propaganda always have such a clearly negative meaning if it associated with what Nazi did during World War. This article see propaganda in negatif way. Kallis said that state propaganda for example, possessed sufficient legitimacy to make such choices on behalf of its citizens and then perform its function of supplying information as an expression of its *raison d'état*; in other words, apart from simply informing the public, state propaganda also became the vehicle for the promotion of communal desired objectives and of the state's own continuity. One of the leading theorists of propaganda and communication, Jacques Ellul (in Kallis, 2005) noted:

It is the emergence of mass media which makes possible the use of propaganda techniques on a societal scale. The orchestration of press, radio and television to create a continuous, lasting and total environment renders the influence of propaganda virtually unnoticed precisely because it creates a constant environment. Mass media provides the essential link between the individual and the demands of the technological society.

Propaganda arose out of a need to prioritise, organise, correlate and then transmit information to the interested public, thus making full use of the opportunities offered by technology (mass media) and modernity (aggregation of population, access to media) to that effect. By promoting a common cognitive environment for information acquisition and interpretation, as well as a constant 'cultivation' of perceptions of the world, propaganda aims to integrate the person both as an individual and a member of a social group into a

shared context of symbols, meanings and desired objectives. An article of a monthly bulletin, *Propaganda Analysis* entitled “How to Detect Propaganda” (1937 in Jowett & O’Donnell, 2012, 237) described the famous seven common “devices” of propaganda analysis”: Name-Calling, Glittering Generality, Transfer, Testimonial, Plain Folks, Card Stacking, Bandwagon. This research has aim to show how propaganda was applied in the political communication process during presidential election 2014 by using a new medium, Twitter.

Beside political communication and propaganda, this study also use concept of new democracy including cyberdemocracy, digital democracy, internet democracy, e-democracy, etc (see Dahlberg, 2007; Moyo, 2009). Basically, all of the term are used interchangeable to define a any kind of democracy model that is mediated by internet. The thought was grounded by their optimism to the role of internet in the society. Cyberdemocracy was practiced at 21st century during the arrival of phenomena of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). Hacker and van Dijk (2000: 2 in Moyo, 2009) define digital democracy as a collective aim to practice democracy in unlimited space and time and other physical condition, by using ICT. Dijk (2013) than, define digital democracy as pursuit and the practice of democracy in whatever view using digital media in online and offline political communication. This article try to show how cyber-democracy in Twitter is challenged by political communication that is dominated by political propaganda rather than practice of good democracy.

#### IV. Result and Discussion

The discussion are based on the result of discourse analysis on texts (tweets) produced by 8 Twitter accounts (@Jokowi4Me; @JKW4P; @pkspiungan; @PDI\_Perjuangan; @gerindra; @PartaiSocmed; @FCPrabowoSulsel; @TrioMacan2000) during campaign period of presidential election (13 Juni – 4 Juli 2014). The analysis is focused on the description over representation of presidential candidate, Joko Widodo. This research argue that the representation of Joko Widodo reflect the process of political communication including the propaganda technique. There were three representations of Joko Widodo containing sensitive issue or SARA (ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations) including: Jokowi a Tionghoa; Jokowi is not a good Moslem; and Jokowi is Supported by Christian. Four of the representations are identified as propaganda.

**Jokowi a Chinese Indonesians (Tionghoa).** The representation mainly produce by @TrioMacan2000 since March 2014 or 5 months before the election. @TrioMacan2000

focused the propaganda of ‘Jokowi as accomplice of Chinese businessman’ in term of dominate national economy over indigenous, particularly Javanese. However the issue was spreaded only on social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook. The issue never reach mainstream media. @pkspiyungan campaign strategy did not focus on producing the issue ‘Jokowi is a Tionghoa’. However some time @pkspiyungan calling Jokowi as Joko Owie, a name that identically with Chinese name. One of the most attractive representation and got attention from mainstream media is ‘an obituary of Jokowi’.

The obituary appeared on the social media at 7 may 2017 with a design commonly used for that of newspapers. It showed a photograph of Jokowi smiling on its upper left side as seen in picture 1.

Picture 1 The obituary of Jokowi spreaded on Twitter



The obituary described Jokowi as an Indonesian of Chinese-descent and a Christian, bearing a baptismal name of Herbertus and a Chinese name of Oey Hong Liong. The obituary said Jokowi passed away at the age of 53 on last Sunday at 3.30 p.m. and his body was laid out at the PDI-P’s headquarters in Lenteng Agung, Jakarta. The name of Jokowi’s wife, Iriana Widodo, was also mentioned along with condolences from PDI-P’s chair Megawati Soekarnoputri and Jokowi’s presidential campaign team. The obituary got attention from mainstream media including tempo.co and teraspos.com. The obituary is identified as propaganda of fear

**Jokowi is not a good Moslem.** The representation of ‘Jokowi is not a good Moslem’ was mainly produce mostly by @pkspiyungan and @TrioMacan2000. Another Twitter account produce the same representation was @FCPrabowoSulsel. Based on the theory of propaganda this technique is called ‘name calling’. It ties a person or cause to a largely



perceived negative image. Propagandists use the name-calling technique to incite fears or arouse positive prejudices with the intent that invoked or trust will encourage those that read, see or hear propaganda to construct a negative opinion, in respect to the former, or a positive opinion, with respect to the latter, about a person, group, or set of beliefs or ideas that the propagandist would wish the recipients to believe.

There were some issues produced by @pkspiyungan to construct the representation of ‘Jokowi in not a good moslem’ including: Jokowi wrongly read Al-Fatihah when he became Imam of Salat; Jokowi has close relation with Romo Beni (a pastor); Jokowi did ‘blusukan’ during Salat Al Jamaat; Jokowi wrongly did whudu; Jokowi ‘Kejawen’; Jokowi wrongly wore ihram for umrah. @FC\_PrabowoSulsel also produced the representation of ‘Jokowi is not a good Moslem’, but the intensity was not as often as @pkspiyungan. There was also picture used for producing the representation. The picture below was shared by a netizen @hamidmln and than retweeted by @pkspiyungan.

Picture 2 Jokowi launched the Esemka, a locally made car



The picture was the launching ceremony of the Kiat Esemka, a car produced by students of SMK 1 Trucuk, Central Java, in 2011. The cars made headlines after Jokowi, the Surakarta mayor, decided to use them as official vehicles for himself . Kiat Esemka’s rise to fame and many have deemed it a potential ”national car”. In the context of general election, the picture was used to produce other meaning, Jokowi follows ‘Kejawen’, a Javanese religious tradition, consisting of an amalgam of animistic, Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic,

especially Sufi, beliefs and practices. In the ceremony, Jokowi wore Javanese costume and flushed the car with water and flower. In the real context, it was an ordinary ceremony that commonly done in purpose to conserve traditional ritual.

Representation of ‘Jokowi is not a good muslim’ was also supported by discourses of ‘**Jokowi’s supporters who is Christian**’. However this issue was mainly produced by anonymous Twitter account such as @pkspyungan and @TrioMacan2000. Natural event in which support the representation were occurred when Jokowi’s supporter Wimar Witalar an outspoken supporter of presidential candidate Joko Widodo – who is Christian - uploaded the photoshopped picture featuring Prabowo and his running mate, Hatta Rajasa, to his Twitter and Facebook accounts at 15th June 2014, under the title “Gallery of Rogues.”

Gambar 2 Gallery of Rogues oleh Wimar Witalar



Also featured in the picture were Suharto, Prabowo’s former father-in-law; and Luthfi Hasan Ishaq, the former president of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), who was involved in a corruption scandal. It also included Islamic militants Rizieq Shihab of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), which support Prabowo; Abu Bakar Bashir, the spiritual represent group of Jemaah Islamiyah; the three brothers responsible for Bali bombing; and Osama bin Laden. At the bottom of the picture are the logos of all five parties in Prabowo’s coalition, as well as of several organizations, including the FPI and Muhammadiyah.

This picture attracting controversy and elicited massive criticism as if there were conflict between muslim and non-muslim ideology. This issue become one of discourses in Twitter that got largest exposure from mainstream media. It may caused by actor who produce the discourse, Wimar Witalar, who know as respected public figure; and Muhammadiyah, Indonesia’s second-largest Islamic organization, has filed a police report against Wimar.

The three issues including discussion above called 'Name Calling'. It is a propaganda technique define as giving an idea 'a bad' label and therefore rejecting and condemning it without examining the evidence (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012; 237). However, there were different approach of name calling, in term of socio cultural contenix. The Name Calling technique was combined with discourse of sensitif issue such us religion and ethnicity. Dominan discourse of religion was usually commodificated by politician to win their candidate, meanwhile discourse of minority religion were used to attack Jokowi. In the context of ethnicity, during the campaign period, political discourse in Twitter used 'Tionghoa' – a minority ethnic in Indonesia- to attack Jokowi. Relating to process of political communication and democracy, the article identify undeliberative discussion. In the level of effect of political communication, there were no adequate space of discussion about possibility of minority group to be an ideal candidate.

The article conclude that character of Twitter (interactivity, two-way communication, democratizing, active, etc) is not guarantee horizontal political communication between elite and civil seociety. In the context of political communication during presidential election 2014, Twitter was dominated by political messages from elite to civil society in which propaganda was applied.

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