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"TikToker" Political Campaign in the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Election

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini membahas gaya kampanye para pendukung calon presiden (capres) dan calon wakil presiden (cawapres) yang berkontestasi pada Pemilihan Umum (Pemilu) 2024. Penelitian difokuskan pada saat pelaksanaan debat capres dan cawapres yang diselenggarakan sebanyak lima kali. Pada periode debat, para pendukung capres dan cawapres melakukan amplifikasi dengan mengunggah potongan-potongan video acara debat tersebut di media sosial TikTok. Penelitian ini pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan pada periode debat capres dan cawapres berlangsung. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para "TikToker" secara kreatif menggunakan fitur-fitur khas TikTok untuk menonjolkan keunggulan pasangan capres yang didukung. Namun, di sisi lain, unggahan para "TikToker" tidak dilengkapi dengan data yang dipaparkan oleh para kandidat saat debat. Dengan model kampanya "TikToker" ini, meskipun sukse dari sisi pemasaran politik, tetapi minim edukasi politik.
Keyword: kampanye politik, Pemilu 2024, TikTok

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the campaign style of supporters of presidential candidates (capres) and vice presidential candidates (cawapres) who are contesting in the 2024 General Election (Pemilu). The research focuses on the five presidential and cawapres debates held. During the debate period, supporters of the presidential and vice presidential candidates carried out amplification by uploading video clips of the debate on TikTok. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Data was collected during the presidential and vice presidential debate period. The research results show that "TikTokers" creatively use typical TikTok features to highlight the advantages of the presidential candidate pairs they support. However, on the other hand, the TikTok user's posts were not equipped with the data presented by the candidates during the debate. With this "TikToker" campaign model, even though it is successful in terms of political marketing, it lacks political education.
Keyword: political campaign, 2024 Election, TikTok

1. Introduction

Social media has been used for quite a long time as a means of political campaigns in Indonesia. The Jakarta Post noted that the 2014 election was the "country's first ever Twitter election" (The Jakarta Post, 2014). This is in line with research by Ardha (2014) which describes the use of social media by political parties and legislative candidates and presidential and vice presidential candidates.

Since being used on a massive scale, the utilize of social media in political campaigns has transformed significantly. After the 2014 Election, social media was also used as campaign media in the 2015 Regional Election. In that year, the General Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum - KPU) also made KPU

Regulation (PKPU) No. 7 of 2015, one of which regulates campaigns on social media by requiring success teams to register official social media accounts with the regional KPU no later than the day before the campaign (Alfiani, 2018).

The creativity of participants of general election (Pemilu) and regional election (Pemilukada) is also growing. Politicians who usually only use social media as a one-way means of communication were trying to incorporate interactive and multi-directional social media features. One of them was the campaign model carried out by Ahok and Djarot in the 2017 DKI Jakarta Regional Election. They created an event called "online blusukan – online hands-on operation" with the slogan "Kepoin Pelayan Jakarta – Nosying Jakarta Servant", where they listened and answered the complaints of Jakarta residents during one long segment forty-five minutes to one hour, and broadcast live on Facebook and Instagram (Dhara et al, 2020).

Apart from the contesting parties, social media is also used by influencers who support their favorite candidate. They use this platform to promote and/or show support for one of the candidates. The aim is to increase public political participation, and form positive perceptions about candidates, which is then expected to increase positive public opinion and voter turnout when elections begin (Dhara et al, 2020).

Political activities on social media do not stop with elite circles such as politicians and influencers. At the citizen level, political support has become an inseparable part of every democratic party activity. Netizen activities occur on various social media platforms. Campaign tweets on Twitter, Facebook posts, and YouTube videos.

One of the social media that has developed very rapidly in recent years is *TikTok*. The platform allows anyone with a smartphone to create short videos that loop when finished. The most popular *TikTok* genres are Duets and Challenges. Duets are a core part of the *TikTok* experience: users can take another person's video and add themselves performing the same action, scene or choreography. Challenges are often community- created trends–even if they can also take the form of sponsored hashtags–, in which many *TikTok* users will make videos attempting to do the same action/dance/trick (Cervi, Tejedor, and Lladó, 2021).

Netizen activities on social media, from the perspective of contemporary marketing practice, is the very core of persuasive communication strategy in the digital age. Netizens' uploads on social media are not only for expressing their own views, but also actively contributing promotional labor to the campaign as part of a carefully designed viral marketing plan (Penney, 2017). This netizen's upload can be effectively used as an online/electronic word of mouth marketing strategy. Penney (2017, p. 4) further revealed that word-of-mouth political media-spreading activity has deliberately been adopted as a way of extending the reach and credibility of their persuasive messages.

The involvement of netizens in promoting their candidates in the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Elections is very massive on social media. *TikTok* is a social media with the number of users occupying the top three in Indonesia. The We Are Social report in October 2023 stated that there were 106.51 million TikTok users in Indonesia (Annur, 2023). *TikTok* users generally come from young people. Data from Business of Apps 2022 shows that *TikTok* users among those aged 18-34 years are 63.1% (Santika, 2023).

The dominance of young citizen also occur in the 2024 elections. Of the nearly 205 million permanent voters, 56.4% come from generation Z and millennials (Muhamad, 2023). That means there are around 113 million voters between the ages of 17 and 44 in the 2024 election.

From this data, *TikTok* is the most appropriate social media for competing candidates to control, including presidential and vice presidential candidates. However, according to Penney (2017), political social media participation at the citizen level has become a crisis in how activism is defined in the 21st century. There are two things that are problematic in using social media on *TikTok*.

First, from the supervision side. Chairman of the Honorary Council of Election Organizers (Dewan Kehormatan Penyelenggara Pemilu - DKPP) Muhammad said that social media campaign opportunities provide challenges for general election supervisors because the supervisory committee also has limitations in directly controlling social media accounts (Alfani, 2018). This means that forms of black campaigns and fake news are increasingly difficult to detect and eliminate because there are so many netizens who are marketing candidates.

Second, from the technical side of the use of algorithms on each social media platform. *TikTok*'s most important feature is its distinctive use of artificial intelligence, which analyzes users' interests and preferences through their interactions with the content, rather than based on connection networks. The TikTok algorithm provides a personalized information flow through the For You Page (FYP), a feed of videos that are recommended to users based on their activity on the app (Penney, 2017). The existence of the For You Page (FYP), according to Afandi (2024) makes its users addicted. FYP is hyper-personalized means that users can be trapped in an 'echo chamber' so that they only see content they like. With the *TikTok* algorithm, someone can be exposed to fake news or black campaigns continuously. Without realizing it, the content we consume has been designed to follow users' interests, even if it is a black campaign or fake news.

One of the most uploaded moments on social media in the 2024 Election is the Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidate Debate. There were 5 debates that were broadcast on television. During the session and after the debate, social media was flooded with reviews about the event. Social media wars occur at every presidential and vice presidential debate event (Rizal, 2023; Nababan & Rahyu, 2024).

In contrast to other social media which are filled with war of words, *TikTok* is dominated by short video content. The campaign style on *TikTok* is different from other social media users. The 2024 election will also be the first *TikTok* election in Indonesia. Therefore, this research will explain the campaign style of *TikTok* users in the 2024 elections, especially around the holding of presidential and vice presidential debates.

From the explanation above, research into the political activities of netizens on TikTok is important because TikTok is the fastest growing social media and has hundreds of millions of users in Indonesia. The political campaign model based on the activities of ordinary netizens is the online/electronic word of mouth form which in the marketing field is considered more natural and therefore more trustworthy. Therefore, it is safe to say that political decisions in the 2024 elections will be determined by which politicians come to power on TikTok through the campaigns of their supporters.

2. Method

This study used a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. Data sources were from *TikTok* posts during and after the 2024 presidential and vice presidential debates. The data search was carried out by observing *TikTok* posts during the debate period. The debate schedule is as follows:
1. First debate, presidential candidates: December 12, 2023.
2. Second debate, vice presidential candidates: December 22, 2023.
3. Third debate, presidential candidates: January 7, 2024
4. Fourth debate, vice presidential candidates: January 21, 2024.
5. Fifth debate, presidential candidates: February 4, 2024.

By following the *TikTok* algorithm pattern, researchers collected FYP (For Your Page) videos related to the presidential and vice presidential candidate debates. As explained in the introduction, the *TikTok* algorithm provides a personalized information flow through the FYP. Apart from FYP videos, researchers also searched using keywords. In each debate, researchers use several variants of keywords, such as "debat capres", "debat cawapres", and "debat capres 2024". Researchers also use keywords that refer to the order in which the debates are held, for example: "debat capres 1", "debat cawapres 2", dan so on. To ensure that the uploaded videos corresponded to the debate sequence, researchers adjusted the upload date and the clothing of the candidates in each debate differently.

After obtaining content that matched the research theme, the researchers removed posts from official accounts of candidates, supporting political parties, or media organizations. As mentioned in the introduction, this research focuses on netizen political campaigns. What is meant by netizens here are individual accounts, not official accounts of political parties or politicians. The selection of content from non-political netizen accounts is to fulfill the assumption that common netizens' uploads are a form of political campaign with an electronic/online word of mouth strategy. Researchers also did not include uploads from media organization accounts on the grounds that there were several media organizations affiliated with the political parties and presidential candidates.

Cervi, Tejedor, and Lladó (2021) created 11 analytical categories that can be used in studies of *TikTok* and political communication. This research includes these 8 categories, except for the categories of location, content and emoticons. These three categories are considered less relevant for the theme of this research. The data search in this study was guided by the 8 selected categories. Researchers did not limit the number of videos studied and did not determine which accounts were studied as long as they still met the category of ordinary netizen accounts.

3. Result and Discussion

3. 1. Highlight of the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidate Debate

The first debate was held on December 12 2023 with the themes of government, law, human rights, eradicating corruption, strengthening democracy, improving public services and citizen harmony. The first debate featured three presidential candidates: Anies Baswedan (01), Prabowo Subianto (02), and Ganjar Pranowo (03). The first debate was quite heated because the presidential candidates exchanged sarcasm, both regarding the program and the personality of the presidential candidate. Presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto has been criticized the most, both by presidential candidates Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo.

The second debate will be held on December 22 2023 with the themes of economics (people's economy and digital economy), finance, tax investment, trade, APBN-APBD management, infrastructure and urban areas. This second debate featured the vice presidential candidates, namely Muhaimin Iskandar (01), Gibran Rakabuming Raka (02), and Mahmud MD (03). The second debate still had quite high tension where the vice presidential candidates debated each other on related issues.

The third debate held on January 7 2024 again featured the presidential candidates. The themes of the debate are defense, security, international relations and geopolitics. In this debate, presidential candidate 02 was once again cornered by his opponents. As Minister of Defense, Prabowo Subianto's performance in the field he supervised was criticized as being unsuccessful by his opponents.

The fourth debate is the final debate for the vice presidential candidates. The debate was held on January 21 2024 with the themes of sustainable development, natural resources, environment, energy, food, agrarian affairs, indigenous communities and villages. In this debate, mutual attacks between the vice presidential candidates occurred. In this debate, apart from issues related to the debate theme, ethical issues and trap strategies used by vice presidential candidate 02 were even more prominent. Gibran Rakabuming Raka is considered to be trying to trap his debating opponents with specific terms, which unfortunately the other vice presidential candidates can answer. Not only traps, gimmicks with insulting body gestures are also carried out, giving rise to debate ethics issues.

The fifth debate is the final debate which again presents the presidential candidates. Held on February 4 2024 with the themes of social welfare, culture, education, information technology, health, employment, human resources and inclusion. This fifth debate was an anticlimax to the previous debates. The three presidential candidates prefer to use the words agree, agree, good, etc.

3.2. "TikToker" Political Campaign Style during the 2024 Presidential-Vice Presidential Debate

3.2.1. Genre

There are several TikTok genres that are unique to this social media platform, namely video, duet, stitch, voice changer, and challenge. In general, "TikTokers", whether supporters of candidate pairs 01, 02, or 03, all use video genres in their uploads. Supporters of candidate pairs 01, 02, and 03 generally use video, duet, stitch, and even voice changer genres. Based on the genres available in the TikTok application features, the most interesting genre is stitch. This can be seen from the upload of the account @hhhusen3 with 51.6 thousand followers which was uploaded on December 22 2023 during the 4th vice presidential debate. The upload has been viewed 6.7 million times. The 26 second video is a video that uses the stitch feature where the account owner reads comments containing sarcasm at the 02 presidential candidate when making body gestures that are considered impolite during the debate.

Figure 1. Example of post using the stitch feature

Source: https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSNoWqJs3/

3.2.2. Format

TikTok is a platform that provides many features to complement user uploaded videos. "TikTokers" videos are mostly equipped with text and music. Video captions usually contain narration to highlight the user's opinion about the ongoing debate. The video formats used by "TikTokers" are usually equipped with music, text, effects, or variations and combinations of these formats. For example, the owner of the @baladamintanjungpura account uploaded content from one of the candidate pairs using video format with effects and music. Where in the upload the format uses a song that is currently viral, Hamil Duluan PS 1 – DJ Buncit with additional slow motion effects.


Figure 2. Example of video format with effects and music

Source: https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSFkpAN9k/

3.2.3. Source

Most of the video sources uploaded by "TikTokers" are video clips from the debate or relevant images and videos such as when the candidate pairs and supporters enter the debate location and videos of the supporters. However, there are also those who take irrelevant sources and narrate them accordingly to support the "TikToker" candidate. One of them is an upload from @clipperbangwindah including two anime figures who have nothing to do with the debate event. In the video, the account owner and four of his friends made a reaction video with a narrative of admiration for the closing statement of presidential candidate 02 at the fifth
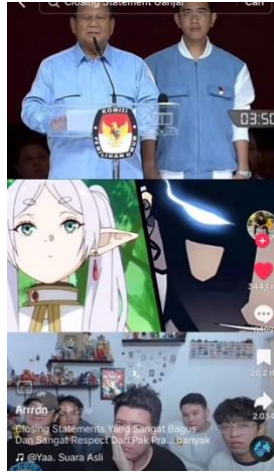
debate.

Figure 3. Example of image/video sources from other media that are not relevant

Source: https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSFNAxMoB/

3.2.4. Main Actors

In many "TikToker" uploads during the campaign period, the account owner generally does not appear in the uploaded video. The main actors in "TikTokers" posts are dominated by the presidential and vice presidential candidates they support. However, there are several accounts that highlight themselves as the main actors in posts related to the presidential and vice presidential candidate debates. One of them is the @khoorus account which displays reaction videos regarding the debate event. One of the uploads is about the style of presidential candidate 03 who wore sneakers during the first presidential debate.

Figure 4. Example of a "TikToker" (account owner) who is the main actor

Source: https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSFdTEHjF/

3.2.5. Main Actions

"TikTokers" often share uploads that attract the attention of social media users. TikTok was originally known as social media filled with dancing content or dance-like movements. Therefore, the main activity in uploads on TikTok often shows dancing activities, apart from talking, singing, and so on. This dancing activity was also shown in one of the post of a "TikToker" @guviandesta. In his upload, he shared the moments of the first presidential debate. During the question and answer session, presidential candidate 02 made movements like dancing, attracting the attention of netizens. This video has been played 5.7 million times and has 163.2 thousand TikTok likes.
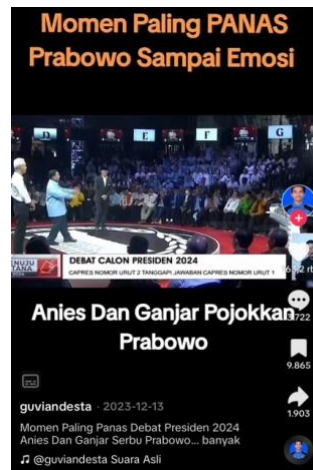

Figure 5. Example of a video of the main activity of dancing

Source: https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSFkppVQT/

3.2.6. Text

Writing text is one of the main focuses of "TikTokers" when sharing their uploads. Often a post shows text that is in the form of informing, expressing or comparing. One of the uploads from the owner of the @ruang.rakyat account, which has 283.8 thousand followers, made a video that had expressive text. The upload has the text "Check Matt!!!! Anies immediately came down after being murdered by Prabowo - *Skak Matt!!!! Anies Langsung Down Setelah di B4ntai Prabowo*". This video has been watched 21.7 million times and has received 763 thousand likes.

Figure 6. Example of post with expressive text

Source: https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSFkwAgXh/

3.2.7. Emotions

TikTok is a platform that allows its users to highlight emotions. This is possible because the super close-up video format is often found on TikTok. Taking pictures very close to the face makes expressions such as sadness, happiness, surprise, anger, fear, disgust, etc., easily readable. One of the uploads from the account owner @cherinmay25 who made a video clip of presidential candidate 02 wiping away tears was added with a combination of TikTok users who also cried over the moment when Prabowo was debating with presidential candidate 03 at the 3rd debate. This video has been watched 4.3 million times and has 196.4 thousand likes.

Figure 7. Example of a video with crying emotions

Source: https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSFkT3ARH/

3.2.8. Type of Interaction

The interaction of netizens on TikTok in an upload greatly influences the success of the video. Interaction can make content go viral. There are several types of interactions on TikTok, such as containing information and promotions, considerations and discussions, even participation and mobilization. One of the uploads from the @mahrus411 account captured the moment of a television program which informed and promoted the success of presidential candidate 01 in the first debate where Anies Baswedan was said to have scored higher than the other presidential candidates.

Figure 8. Examples of post with information and promotional interaction types

Source: https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSFkK5vuK/

3.3. Discussion

TikTok is a platform owned by ByteDance Ltd, a technology company from China. TikTok initially focused on entertainment. This platform is based on motion and audio visual (Ambarwati & Utina, 2022). One of TikTok's main features, Dance Challenge is the most popular on the platform. TikTok, which was launched in September 2017, was blocked by the government in July 2018 because its content contained pornography, religious harassment, etc. (BBC, 2018).

The dominance of entertainment features and the large number of young users make TikTok attractive for political campaign activities. Political parties and politicians are also flocking to create and polish their TikTok accounts. If 2014 was the first Twitter election in Indonesia, then 2024 will be the first TikTok election (Utama, 2023).

Due to the uniqueness of TikTok's main features, political campaign content on TikTok cannot provide in-depth political education to its users. This is evident from researchers' searches on TikTok regarding the 2024 presidential candidate debate event. From the campaign style described above, most TikToker posts are tailored to highlight the advantages of the candidate they like. By utilizing TikTok features, these uploads highlight audio and visual updates, but are not supported by content that is relevant to the ongoing debate.

In other words, a lot of content does not reflect the content of the debate event itself. Even though it contains posts about the presidential debate, it is rare for "TikTokers" to make videos about the data presented by the debating candidates. Videos of debates are cut in such a way as to highlight one of the candidates. Usually, the video duration is very short, only a matter of seconds. In fact, TikTok has extended the video duration to 10 minutes. This duration actually allows "TikToker" to upload more complete video clips of the debate and still highlight the advantages of the candidate pairs being supported.

Instead of providing complete information, "TikTokers" campaign style prioritizes emotional narratives that are not supported by appropriate facts or data. One of the most interesting post on TikTok during the debate for the three presidential candidates, there was a trend of crying videos on TikTok because of the expressions of Presidential Candidate 02 which received repeated attacks from Presidential Candidates 01 and 03. This crying video became a trend on TikTok with hundreds of uploads by both female and male "TikTokers". Meanwhile, the theme of the debate that led to Presidential Candidate 02 being critized was not revealed by the "TikTokers".

Penney (2017) stated that political social media participation at the citizen level has become a crisis in how activism is defined. Fuentes (n.d.) defines digital activism as a form of activism that uses the internet and digital media as key platforms for mass mobilization and political action. Political participation on social media has become a mean of political marketing. In terms of campaign regulations, netizen uploads cannot be regulated by election organizers. Therefore, netizen have the freedom to express their support. Unfortunately, from the "TikToker" campaign model in the 2024 presidential election, political participation on social media does not show competing ideas that brings up political debate on social media.

4. Conclusion

The 2024 presidential election has been successfully exploited by "TikTokers" with a campaign style that adopts the sophisticated audio-visual features provided by the platform. Social media is flooded with posts related to the presidential election. As a movement on social media, TikTok has increased the political interest of the younger generation. If the political campaign movements of "TikTokers" are considered successful in quantity, then their campaign model is actually degraded in quality. The debate among presidential and vice presidential candidates, which should be filled with facts and data, instead only emphasizes emotions. In the future, political campaigns on TikTok need to receive increasing attention from researchers. With an increasing number of users, TikTok is a platform that can lead the public agenda in various domains, including the political sphere.

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6. Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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