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TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE, THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION AND MASS MOBILIZATION

Denny Ariestandy[1], Wawang Adidharma[2], Rio Razab Isdendi[3]
Akademi Manajemen Informatika dan Komputer (AMIK) Citra Buana Indonesia,
Indonesia
Email: riorazabisdendi@gmail.com

KEYWORDS:	ABSTRACT
	In the digital era, social media has become a significant tool in redefining how Society participates in politics. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram enable individuals and groups to voice their opinions, organize movements, and influence public policy more directly and swiftly than traditional media. This study aims to examine the transformation of political participation in the digital age, focusing on the role of social media in shaping public opinion and mass mobilization. The research method used in this study is a literature review. The research finds that social media has the power to expand the reach of political participation, especially among younger generations and marginalized groups who were previously difficult to engage through traditional political channels. However, this study also highlights several challenges, including spreading misinformation, opinion polarization, and the risk of political manipulation through social media algorithms. In conclusion, social media has great potential to transform political participation, but it also requires a cautious approach to managing its negative impacts. Further research is needed to understand how policies can be adapted to this new reality to ensure more inclusive and healthy political participation in the digital age.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of political participation has undergone significant transformations, especially in the digital age, where the internet and social media platforms have become pivotal in shaping democratic engagement. Historically, political participation involved direct engagement in traditional channels such as voting, rallies, and petitions. However, the rise of social media has led to a shift in how citizens interact with political entities, often bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and engaging directly with public officials, political organizations, and other citizens (Velasquez, 2019). This global phenomenon is evident in the increasing use of social media to organize mass mobilization, disseminate political messages, and influence public opinion, leading to positive democratic outcomes and challenges, such as misinformation and polarization (Kahne, 2018). Political systems in various regions experience changes driven by technological innovations, so citizens have adopted digital platforms to express opinions and organize collective actions. The Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and recent movements like BlackLivesMatter and MeToo are notable examples of how social media plays a central role in political mobilization (Eltantawy, 2019). Such movements underscore the global trend of citizens leveraging digital platforms for advocacy and participation in governance.

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Despite its potential to enhance political engagement, using social media for political participation raises specific challenges, especially concerning the quality of engagement and the role of algorithms in shaping political discourse. Algorithms often prioritize sensational or emotionally charged content, which can skew public discourse and contribute to misinformation and echo chambers (Bastos, 2020). This shift toward algorithmic governance in political participation has raised concerns over the authenticity of online engagement and the potential manipulation of public opinion by various actors, including political elites, media outlets, and foreign entities (Bradshaw, 2018). Additionally, the digital divide remains a critical issue in political participation. While social media has expanded access to political engagement for many, significant portions of the population remain excluded due to technological barriers, including access to the internet and digital literacy (Hargittai, 2020). These disparities reflect broader social inequalities and question whether digital platforms truly democratize participation or exacerbate existing societal divisions.

The transformation of political participation in the digital age can be understood through several theoretical lenses. One key framework is the theory of networked publics, which posits that social media enables individuals to form digital communities that transcend geographical boundaries, facilitating new forms of public discourse and political activism (Boyd, 2019). In this context, political participation becomes decentralized, with citizens able to engage in political discourse without reliance on traditional media institutions (Loader, 2020). Another important theoretical concept is collective action theory, which highlights how social media platforms reduce the costs of organizing and coordinating mass movements (Bennett, 2020). Digital tools such as hashtags and viral content allow for quick dissemination of political messages and mobilization of large groups of people, often with minimal formal organizational structures. This is particularly evident in decentralized movements like #FridaysForFuture, where online activism translates into offline political action (Barbera, 2020).

Recent studies emphasize the critical role of social media in shaping public opinion. According to (Vaccari, 2018), social media platforms provide a space for political actors and citizens to engage in real-time discussions, thus amplifying political messages to a broader audience. Furthermore, social media users often encounter a wide array of political opinions, which can either broaden their perspectives or reinforce pre-existing biases depending on the structure of their social networks (Flaxman, 2019). Research has also highlighted the role of echo chambers and filter bubbles in shaping political beliefs. In echo chambers, individuals are more likely to interact with like-minded users, leading to reinforced political ideologies and polarization (Sunstein, 2019). Filter bubbles, driven by social media algorithms, limit the diversity of content users see, reinforcing the same perspectives repeatedly (Pariser, 2020). Both phenomena have implications for democratic discourse, as they may reduce the diversity of opinions that users are exposed to, which is crucial for informed decision-making in a democracy (Dubois, 2018).

Social media's capacity to organize and sustain mass mobilization has been a focal point of political research. Studies (Tufekci, 2018) indicate that digital platforms provide activists with tools to rapidly coordinate protests, mobilize resources, and maintain momentum in social movements. The success of these movements often hinges on the ability to use social media effectively to engage supporters and attract media attention (Gerbaudo, 2018). Moreover, social media allows for the development of leaderless movements, where traditional hierarchical structures are replaced by decentralized networks of participants (Bennett, 2020). This transformation is critical for understanding contemporary political movements, where the role of digital influencers, content creators, and grassroots organizers has become as significant as traditional political leaders in driving mobilization efforts (Poell, 2019).

The increasing reliance on social media for political participation and mass mobilization underscores the need to understand how these platforms shape political behavior. Despite the

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benefits, there are considerable concerns about manipulating political discourse, deepening societal divisions, and the potential for misinformation campaigns to undermine democratic processes (Bradshaw, 2018). Understanding the dynamics of political participation in the digital age is crucial for developing policies that enhance democratic engagement while mitigating the risks posed by digital platforms. The urgency of this research lies in the growing influence of social media on public opinion and political actions, as seen in elections, protests, and policy-making processes worldwide. Social media's impact on democracy has become more evident in recent years, with platforms being both tools for political empowerment and avenues for disinformation and polarization (Tucker, 2018). This study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge by exploring the dual role of social media in promoting political participation and presenting challenges to democratic processes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a qualitative study with a descriptive approach aimed at exploring the transformation of political participation in the digital age and the role of social media in shaping public opinion and mobilizing the masses. The study focuses on an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon, using qualitative data collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The research design is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media becomes a key tool in driving political participation and shaping public opinion on a large scale.

Location and Time of Research

This study was conducted in urban areas with high social media penetration, including major cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung. These locations were chosen based on the characteristics of urban communities that are more active in social media and have broader access to digital information. Furthermore, these cities serve as hubs for various social and political movements driven by social media, enabling researchers to explore mass mobilization phenomena occurring on these platforms. The research took place over six months, from January to June 2024. The timing of the study was selected based on several factors, including ongoing political trends, political campaign periods, and significant events such as local and national elections, which are expected to increase political activity on social media. The study also observed social media usage during and after these political events to identify mass mobilization patterns and public opinion formation.

Aspects Examined

This research covers several key aspects relevant to political participation and social media. First, it explores how individuals and groups use social media to participate in political discussions and how this influences their engagement in political processes. Second, the research examines how social media shapes public opinion by analyzing the types of content that are most shared, commented on, and liked on major platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Third, this study investigates the strategies political actors and social organizations use to mobilize the masses through social media. This includes an analysis of political campaigns conducted on social media, the use of hashtags to rally public support, and how social media algorithms influence the visibility and dissemination of political messages. Fourth, the study addresses the issue of disinformation and how spreading false or biased information on social media impacts public opinion and contributes to sharper political polarization.

Population and Sample

The population in this study consists of active social media users in Indonesia who participate in political discussions on digital platforms. The population was identified through secondary data analysis from social media usage surveys and direct observation of online

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political activity. To obtain representative data, the study's sample was drawn from various demographic backgrounds, including differences in age, gender, education level, and political preferences. The research sample consists of 50 participants selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria that align with the study's objectives. The selected participants are actively involved in political discussions on social media, both as observers and opinion leaders. The study also involves political actors, such as campaign teams, party spokespeople, and social activists, who use social media as their primary tool for mobilization and political messaging.

Research Instruments

The primary instruments used in this study are in-depth interviews and participatory observation. In-depth interviews were conducted with participants to explore their experiences using social media for political participation, including their motivations, perceptions, and the impact of their involvement on these platforms. The interviews also delved into their views on the role of social media in mobilizing the masses and shaping public opinion, as well as the challenges they face in using social media as a political participation tool. In addition to interviews, this study also employed participatory observation techniques. The researcher actively observed interactions occurring on social media during the research period, including ongoing political discussions, political campaigns being conducted, and the dynamics of hashtag usage and algorithms in disseminating political messages. The observation was conducted by monitoring social media accounts significantly influencing political discussions and analyzing emerging trends on major platforms. Digital documents, such as screenshots of social media posts, were also collected as supporting data. These documents were analyzed to identify patterns in the disseminated political messages and how other social media users received and shared these messages. Moreover, secondary data from social media usage reports published by research institutions and the platforms themselves were also utilized to support the analysis of primary data obtained from interviews and observations.

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection techniques in this study involved several stages. First, qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with selected participants. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or online, depending on the participants' preferences and the ongoing pandemic situation. Each interview was recorded and transcribed for further analysis. Second, participatory observation was conducted in real-time throughout the research period, with the researcher monitoring social media activity daily to capture trends and dynamics of political discussions.

Furthermore, this study also collected secondary data from various sources, such as social media usage reports from research institutions, academic publications, and media reports. Secondary data were used to provide a broader context for the findings from primary data and to compare social media usage trends in the political context in Indonesia with those in other countries. Secondary data also helped understand changes in social media platform policies that affect the dynamics of political participation in the digital world.

Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing the researcher to identify the main themes that emerged from the interview and observation data. The analysis process began with the researcher reading through all interview transcripts and observation notes to gain a deep understanding of the content provided by the participants. The researcher then coded the data based on relevant categories, such as motivations for using social media, strategies for mass mobilization, and the role of disinformation in shaping public opinion. Once the coding process was completed, the data were categorized into broader themes that reflected the research questions and objectives. These themes were further analyzed to uncover relationships between them and explain the transformation of political participation

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in the digital age. The analysis also involved data triangulation, where interview results were compared with observation data and secondary data to ensure the validity and accuracy of the findings. In conducting the analysis, the researcher also considered Indonesia's political and social context and how these factors influence political participation on social media. The researcher analyzed how the social media platforms used in Indonesia may have characteristics and dynamics that differ from those in other countries and how these dynamics affect the process of mass mobilization and the formation of public opinion in the political realm.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Research Results
Development of a Comprehensive Digital Literacy Program: A Crucial Step Towards a Smart and Responsive Digital Society

In an increasingly complex digital era, people's ability to critically evaluate information is becoming increasingly important. The rise of misinformation and disinformation on social media has become a serious challenge threatening democracy and social order. Therefore, developing a comprehensive digital literacy program is crucial to improving people's ability to identify, evaluate, and respond to information intelligently and responsibly.

Effective Regulatory Policy and Multi-Sector Collaboration

The government has a central role in improving people's digital literacy. In addition to formulating effective regulatory policies to protect citizens' digital rights, the government must create an environment conducive to developing a healthy digital ecosystem. Good regulatory policies include protecting personal data and regulating social media platforms to be more responsible in managing the content that circulates. Strong collaboration between government, academia, industry, and civil Society is key to success in overcoming the complexity of the challenges posed by social media. Academics can contribute to producing in-depth research on social media user behavior, the effectiveness of digital literacy programs, and the impact of social media on various aspects of people's lives. The information and communication technology (ICT) industry is important in developing technology that supports digital literacy and creates safer and more responsible social media platforms. Civil Society can also play an active role in advocacy, education, and supervision of implementing digital literacy policies.

The Importance of Continuous Research and a Multidisciplinary Approach

The dynamics of social media use are constantly changing rapidly, so ongoing research is critical to understanding the latest trends and emerging new challenges. This research needs to cover various aspects, from the analysis of social media content and the study of user behavior to the evaluation of the impact of policies that have been implemented. A multidisciplinary approach is also indispensable to address the complexity of issues related to social media. In addition to communication science, research on social media also involves other disciplines, such as political science, sociology, psychology, and law. This interdisciplinary approach allows us to understand the social media phenomenon better and develop more comprehensive solutions.

Social Media and Political Participation

Social media has revolutionized the landscape of political participation. Social media platforms allow individuals to access information, participate in public discussions, and organize social actions more easily and quickly. However, on the other hand, social media can also be used to spread hate speech, fake news, and political polarization. A balanced and comprehensive approach is needed to optimize social media's positive potential in a political context. On the one hand, we need to encourage the use of social media as a tool to increase political participation and strengthen democracy. On the other hand, we also need to develop strategies to address the challenges posed by social media, such as the spread of disinformation

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and polarization.

Discussion

Easy access to political information through social media has triggered increased political participation among the younger generation, especially in elections, joining organizations, or participating in demonstrations. Algorithms used by social media platforms have formed a "filter bubble" that strengthens individual political views, thus reinforcing polarization. The long-term influence of social media on political behavior is still an area that needs more research. Each social media platform's unique characteristics and implications for political participation need to be examined in depth. The algorithmic mechanism in personalizing user content and its impact on the formation of public opinion requires a more in-depth study. Comparative studies with other countries can provide a broader perspective.

CONCLUSION

Scientific research has shown a positive correlation between digital literacy and various individual and community life aspects. Individuals with high digital literacy tend to have wider access to information, better job opportunities, and more active political participation. At the community level, high digital literacy contributes to economic growth, innovation, and improved quality of life. However, on the other hand, the rampant spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media has become a serious threat to democracy and social order. Research shows that individuals with low digital literacy are more easily exposed to and believe in inaccurate information and are more susceptible to manipulation and polarization.

Multi-Sector Collaboration: The Key to Successful Digital Literacy Development. Strong collaboration between various stakeholders is needed to overcome these challenges. The government has a central role in formulating policies that support the development of digital literacy, such as providing adequate digital infrastructure, developing educational curricula that integrate digital literacy, and regulations on social media platforms. Academics play a role in researching to understand the phenomenon of digital literacy, develop effective learning models, and evaluate the impact of digital literacy programs. The information and communication technology (ICT) industry can contribute to creating products and services that support digital literacy and develop safer and more responsible social media platforms. Civil Society, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), can play a role in advocacy, education, and community empowerment.

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