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Social Media Emotion in Politics: An Indonesian Case Study of Political Environment on Facebook

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Abstract. The objective of the study was to investigate social media users' attitude toward the current political environment displayed on their social media platform. The study is interesting due to the fact that nowadays even simple chats on social media can go awry when politics comes across as a topic. The study was conducted during and after the recent 2017 political election in Jakarta, Indonesia. Survey study was conducted in collecting the data with the total of 704 social media users participated in this study. The results indicate that social media is not a friendly zone when it comes to political debates. Few social media users got a thrill out of the opportunities for political debates on social media. However, many of the respondent's express frustration and weariness over the content and tone of political environment on their social media timeline.

1. Introduction

In a political environment defined by widespread polarization and partisan friction, even simple conversations can go awry when the subject turns to politic [1]. These phenomena are also occurred in Indonesia. Starting from the last presidential election in 2014 until the current political situation in the capital city of Indonesia in 2017, the heat of political arguments among politicians and the people are far from over.

The political heat not only occurs in form of face to face discussions but also takes place on the internet world by using social media. The usage of social media has become an integral part of people's lives. The existence of social media has been coloring our life, forming a new culture of communication, including political communication [2].

The social media employment indeed becomes an integral part of the political world. It becomes so important that every political candidate prepares a special task force to handle it. This task force is working 24/7 to monitor any of the growing information online. Moreover, political loyalists and followers also involved heavily online in building the image of their chosen candidate. The loyalists and follower's involvements are often stimulating heated debates on social media just to show how perfect their political ideas and their political candidates compared to the others [2].

Subsequently, online social media environments present new challenges. In these spaces, social media users can encounter statements they might consider highly offensive – even when they actually do not actively seek out this material [3]. Similarly, political arguments can infiltrate into the users' lives when

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comment streams on otherwise unrelated topics devolve into heated arguments or partisan quarrel. It is without a doubt that political debate and discussion is indeed a regular fact of digital life for many social media users. Based on that rationale, the authors attempted to investigate social media users' attitude particularly in Indonesia toward the current political environment displayed on their social media timeline.

1.1. Computer - mediated communication

The rapid development of information and communication technologies in recent years is associated with a corresponding growth in interest in computer-mediated communication (CMC). CMC is an umbrella term which refers to human communication via computers [4]. Temporally. CMC can take form in any internet based application where interaction takes place both in real time, or where participants are not necessarily online simultaneously.

CMC has been considered as a part of communication studies along with the advancement of computer and digital technology. One of the definitions of CMC that will be applied in this study is that CMC can be any form of social interaction that is mediated by digital technology and furthermore can shape a communication behavior [5]. There are four aspects in Smith's CMC perspective: 1) Virtual interactions is a spatial, 2) virtual interaction via system is predominantly asynchronous, 3) CMC is a corporeal because it is primarily a text-only medium. and 4) CMC is astigmatic.

The role of CMC in this study serves as the basis of theoretical framework since the current study attempts to describe the political conversation among internet mediated computer users.

1.2. Relevant works on social media and politics

Research on social networking sites and politics possesses a short but quickly growing history and have involved an interdisciplinary method of analysis. Self-presentation online, impression management and method of usage have become a common point of interest for several researchers.

User profiles on social networking sites as conversational pieces, arguing that user profiles present the basis for a network identity performance on their social media account [6]. True self-expression was positively correlated with using social media (Facebook) for communicating with others, general self-disclosure, emotional disclosure, attention-seeking, and acceptance-seeking, but was unrelated to seeking connection with and expressing caring for others [3]. The results suggest that those who feel able to express their "true self" online are more active on Facebook, have more self-oriented motivations for posting, and post more personally revealing and emotional content.

In terms of politics and social media, Twitter can be used by politicians to boost their voting potential [7]. Her study found that the tactical strategies employed by the politicians were determined to be calculated methods by which the candidates hoped to motivate citizens, activate voters and differentiate themselves from their competitors.

The social media influence in today's Indonesia and provides examples of how political actors and citizens use social media in the political process [7] [8]. In the other hand, the social media user's engagements in stimulating the "Arab Spring" Phenomena in the Middle East [9].

Another research regarding social media users toward political discussion online was reported by Pew Research Center survey of U.S in 2016. The report showed that some politically active social media users enjoy the heated discussions and opportunities for engaging on an interactive online form of debate. However, a larger share expresses annoyance and aggravation at the tone and content of the political interactions they witness on the social media platforms.

These previous studies play an important role in shaping the current theme of study. However, the current study focuses on how social media users, particularly Facebook user's perceptions to the heated political discussion and how do they react to the phenomena. In a simpler way, this research, propelled by the past studies reviewed, posed the following questions; (1) How do Facebook users react to the tone of political debates online? and (2) What attitude and behaviour emerge from witnessing the wave of heated political discussion online?

2. Methods

Quantitative study is employed to answer the research questions. Survey method is used to gather data from individual units inside a population by using the associated survey data collection technique, such as questionnaire construction. Survey method includes instruments or procedures that ask one or more questions that may, or may not, be answered [10]. The method is suitable with the current study because the author focuses to measure the social media users' reactions in numbers and surveys can provide important information for this kind of research field. The instrument consists of 32 questions related to the following points [1]:

1) Practical engagement,
2) Facebook posts about politics,
3) tone and discussion quality,
4) attitude alterations on social media
5) functions of social media in viewing politics,

Survey study was conducted in collecting the data with the total of 705 Facebook users participated in this study. Facebook users are chosen because Facebook with more than 1.8 billion monthly active users, remains the most popular social media outlets across the globe [11].

The selection is based on a statistical fact that the highest percentage of Facebook users in Indonesia are between the ages of 18 - 25 with 41,8%. The data were collected from March until June 2017. As a case study, online political discussion regarding Jakarta general election is chosen as the basis of documenting and collecting the data. All respondents voluntarily participated in an online survey. then, follow-up interviews with the respondents are conducted to strengthen the data.

3. Results and discussion

The survey was conducted by involving 705 respondents. However, one respondent was considered invalid because the questionnaire cannot be read due to corrupted soft file of the document. The focus of the study is to find out the Facebook users' attitude toward the online political interactions they witness on their Facebook timeline. The key findings of the survey are as follows:

3.1. In terms of practical engagement most of the respondents did not actively involved in a political movement or political party.

86% of the total respondents admitted that they are not an active member in a society (not a political party) who influence public policy / government. Then, 63% of the respondents have never attended political mass mobilization event, campaign, or oration. However, many users find a lot or often see political related content posted by their Facebook friends on Facebook timeline. It indicates that users tend to be more involved online instead of having a practical political movement.

3.2. More than half of Facebook users are worn out by the amount of political content they encounter, and about three in five of the users describe their digital interactions with those who have opposite political views as frustrating and stressful

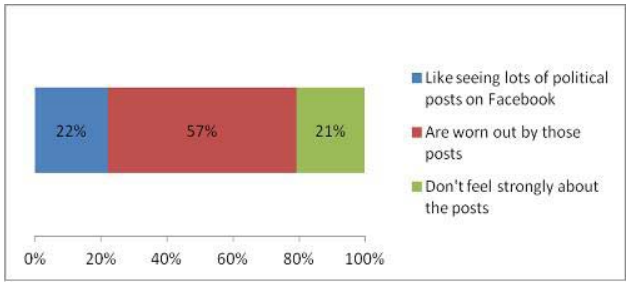


Figure 1. Users attitude toward political discussion online

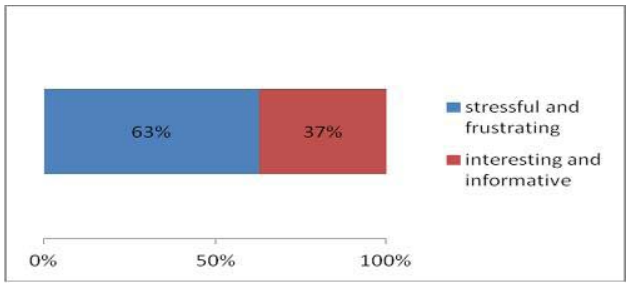


Figure 2. Users opinion when discussing with those who have opposite political views

From the previous figures it can be seen that majority of the users feel overloaded by political content and view their social media interactions with those they disagree with as a source of frustration and annoyance. Moreover, there was a very high percentage of users who think that the political posts often offend ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations issues (74%). At the same time, a substantial minority of users enjoy the ability to consume political content and engage in discussions with people with different point of views (37%).

3.3. Many users see Facebook as a negative place for political discussions, but others see it as simply "more of the same"

Table 1. Users opinion on tone and discussion quality on Facebook

	The discussion are less...	The discussion are more...	The discussion are the same
Respectful	60%	8%	32%
Likely to find a solution	60%	7 %	33%
Focus on policy debates	56%	16%	28%
informative	55%	15%	30%
angry	8%	60%	32%

The table above describe the respondents view when they were asked about the tone of the political discussions they see on Facebook. a substantial share of social media users feels these platforms are uniquely angry and disrespectful place for engaging in political arguments. 60% of users strongly agree with the notion that social media political debate tend to be insolence and very unlikely to end in a mutual resolution.

Meanwhile, roughly more than a half of users feel the political conversations they see on Facebook are angrier (60%), less informative (53%) and less focused on important policy issues (56%) than those they experience in their actual daily life.

3.4. Majority of the respondents attempt to ignore political arguments on social media as best they can.

All in all, Facebook users try to hold back from engaging with the political arguments that enter their timeline feeds: 73% of them say that when their friends post something about politics that they disagree with they usually just let it go and ignore it, while 27% usually respond to these posts with a particular comment. In addition, a high percentage of respondents (70%) agree that they are often surprised by their friend's views and the way their express themselves on Facebook in regards to political issues.

However, if the posts are getting over the top and considered as disturbing, the respondents chose to unfollow, block and or unfriend their Facebook friends. There were more than a half or to be exact 65% of the respondents selected to set sheer off from other users who displayed excessive negative posts. The details can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. Reasons for blocking, unfollow and unfriend your Facebook friends

Reasons for blocking, unfollow and unfriend you Facebook friends	**%**
Post too much political content	10%
Often post things that are not according to your view	12%
Posts that you often think of offensive	13%
Postings are often rough and disturbing	65%

A follow up question regarding on why do Facebook users dare enough to post rough and disturbing contents show that People won't express their message in social media through a face-to-face situation (90%). Since they would not see directly and also separated by distance, the users tend to show their true colour when expressing their thoughts. This fact is in line with Seidman (2014) who states that those who express their true self online use Facebook more for self-oriented motives, rather than other-oriented motives. Their self-oriented motives may be apparent to their Facebook friends, causing them to not respond in kind.

3.5 Majority of users feel Facebook still have a positive role in getting people involved with issues they care about and introduce new perspectives into the political conversation

Based on the survey, most of the respondents still believe that social media offers an especially compelling environment for engaging with news, information and discussion about political issues. Some of the positive response that have been extracted from survey can be seen in the following figure.

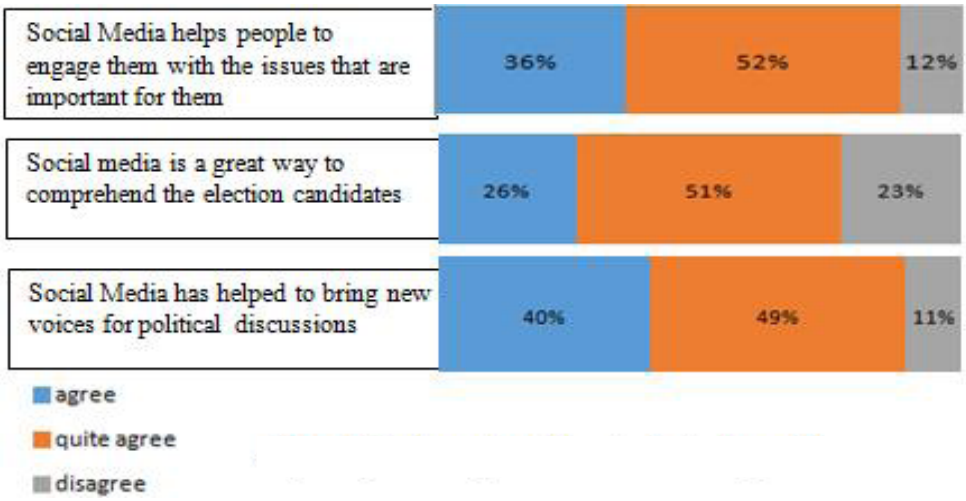


Figure 3. Functions of social media in viewing politics

Figure 3 indícate that despite the respondents' negative view of the tone of political discussions on social media, a high number of users view social media in a relatively positive response when it comes to facilitating engagement and involvement with political issues.

A total of 88% Facebook users feel that the application helps users to get involve with issues that matter to them either agree (36%) or somewhat agree (52%). Similarly, the respondents share that social media is a good medium in bringing new perspectives for political discussions with 40% of respondents who agreed and 49% who quite agree with the notion. Meanwhile, a slight majority feel that social media help people learn what political candidates are really like very (26%) or somewhat (51%) well.

These responses indicate that in spite of the negativity on social media political discussion, the users seem able to see positive sides of social media in terms of its functions. Those functions are as a medium of information and a channelization of the user's perspectives.

4. Conclusion

Political debate and discussion have become a regular character of digital life for many social media users, including Facebook users. As political discussions move into otherwise personal social media spaces, users are confronted with a range of social challenges, such as navigating posts from friends and family members that they find offensive and disturbing.

For the majority of Facebook users, this disturbing kind of political contents are considered as the source of frustration and annoyance. A substantial share of Facebook users is worn out by the tone and volume of political material they encounter on this social media outlet and view the digital debate as an inherently angry and disrespectful in comparison to other venues for discussing politics

It is not surprising that the users tend to ignore the provocative posts. In fact, blocking and unfollowing other users are part of the option when they think that the content has going too far and become less sensitive to others feelings. Even though the Facebook users express intense concern at the tone and content of digital conversations on politics, a moderate percentage of users also indicate their appreciation for the ability of social media to foster various perspectives, facilitate political actions and to connect people in wide scope to causes that are relevant to them.

For further studies, a qualitative stud y need to be conducted to gain a better understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations behind the heated posts. This approach will be suitable to capture a detailed view on the phenomenon.

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