

THE ROLE OF INFLUENCERS IN FORMING POLITICAL OPINION AMONG ELECTION VOTERS IN MEDAN CITY

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of influencers in shaping political opinions among voters in the city of Medan. With the increasing use of social media as a source of political information, this study highlights how platforms such as TikTok influence political perceptions and attitudes. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing a case study on the TikTok platform. The results of this study indicate that influencers are not only information providers, but also agents of social change and communication bridges between politicians and the public. The importance of this study is considering that now is the era of everyone using social media platforms, the presence of this study can provide guidance for politicians, political parties, and campaign teams to use influencers strategically and ethically in reaching voters in the election. TikTok is the dominant platform for obtaining political information, while influencers show a critical attitude by verifying the truth of the news received. The conclusion of this study confirms that social media has a significant impact on shaping political opinions. with good digital literacy being the main factor in filtering accurate and reliable information. However, there are challenges in the form of low political literacy and the potential for information bias. Therefore, digital literacy and critical attitudes of voters are the main factors in filtering political information. This study is expected to be a reference in a more ethical and effective political campaign strategy in the digital era.

Keywords :: *Influencer, Social Media, TikTok, Political Opinion*

INTRODUCTION

The role of influencers in shaping Indonesian political opinion has become a topic of interest in politics and social discussions. Influencers play an important role in shaping public opinion and informing voters, especially political opinion among election voters, about various political, social and economic issues that are key points in the election. The presence of influencers in shaping public opinion, especially among voters in the Medan city election. Influencers act as a communication bridge between politicians, the public, and disseminating politics. In this context, influencers are social media account holders with many followers and play an important role in disseminating issues to the wider community. The formation of public opinion in political communication is largely determined by the role of political media, especially mass media. In the socio-political context, public opinion is very important in achieving political imagery, because without support from the community, political imagery will not be effective. Concretely, political imagery will be in line with public opinion that develops in society. Public opinion is understood as the same opinion and expressed by many people who are formed through intensive discussions as answers to questions and problems concerning the public interest.

The role of influencers has expanded to politics, including local elections. Social media is now one of the main tools for political actors to influence public perception, influencers play a strategic role, With the platforms Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, they can deliver political messages in innovative and relatable ways. Therefore, politicians and political campaign teams have started Using digital strategies involving influencers to reach voters in the Medan city election. In shaping public opinion, influencers not only convey information related to candidates and campaigns, but also serve as a bridge between politicians and voters, helping to build a positive image and mobilize support. In the implementation of government policies, the role of influencers is very important in shaping public opinion, especially in regional elections. Public opinion can be expressed verbally or non-verbally, for example, behavior, body language, facial expressions and symbols used. Public opinion is identical to the internal freedom and openness to express ideas, opinions, and constructive criticism.

Public opinion is the effect of freedom to express ideas and public opinions. However, behind the scenes the convenience provided by social media as a means of public communication also has dangers. This role is increasingly important in the political context, where Influencers are used by various parties, including business and political actors, to influence public opinion. The findings show that the presence of influencers not only influences political views on elections, but also functions as a communication bridge between politicians and the public. By utilizing social media platforms, influencers can convey political messages in an innovative and interesting way, thereby increasing political participation among voters in the Medan city election. lack of political literacy of voters, which makes them easily influenced without critical thinking skills, and the potential for the spread of biased or manipulative information by influencers who work with certain parties that can influence political decisions in an objective manner.

Influencers not only function as disseminators of information, but also as agents of social change who can increase political awareness among election voters. In addition, the findings show that the relationship built between influencers and their followers allows political messages to be better received, thanks to the trust that has been built. The influence of influencers on a person Political opinions are influenced by credibility, emotional connections, and the level of political interest of the individual. It is important to have a critical attitude towards the political content received and to use it wisely. Political campaigns in the 2024 election will experience major changes and progress thanks to the presence of influencers, especially on the TikTok platform. This is especially true for the presidential and vice presidential campaigns. Presidential and vice presidential candidates compete to get support and assistance from influential people. This influencer-driven strategy has succeeded in increasing support and popularity.

THEORY

This study uses political communication theory which states that the formation of public opinion is greatly influenced by the media. In this context, influencers are seen as new political communication actors who have power in framing and agenda setting. Public opinion theory is also used, where opinions are formed from intensive discussions in society in response to issues of public interest. In addition, the uses and gratifications theory explains that social media users actively choose content to meet their information needs and political identity.

RESEARCH METHODS

The method used is descriptive qualitative with a case study approach. The focus of the research is on the phenomenon of TikTok use by influencers in influencing political opinions of voters in Medan City. This method was chosen to explore in-depth understanding of communication patterns, narratives, and perceptions formed in digital interactions between influencers and their audiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study highlights the important role of influencers, especially on the TikTok platform, in shaping the political opinions of voters in the 2024 election. Along with the shift in information consumption patterns from conventional media to digital media, influencers are now central figures in modern political communication. They not only convey information, but also shape perceptions, build the political image of candidates, and influence the direction of political support through creative and emotional content.

1. The Role of Influencers as Political Communication Actors

Today's influencers have a position that is almost similar to public figures in the world of politics. They are the new actualization of citizen journalists or citizen communicators, who bridge information from political elites to the general public, especially the younger generation who tend not to follow formal news channels too much (Ardiyanti, F. (2021).

The forms of content they produce are very diverse, such as:

- A short video explaining the candidate's work program in a light and easy-to-understand manner.
- Personal narrative that touches on emotions (for example personal experiences related to education, economics, or health)
- Political parody and satire which is inserted in entertainment or comedy videos

The success of influencers in shaping political opinions is greatly influenced by the personal credibility and emotional closeness that has been built with their audience (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Followers feel like they have a "close friend" relationship with influencers, so the messages delivered are more trusted than messages from political figures directly. This is in line with the Two Step Flow theory of Katz and Lazarsfeld which states that public opinion is more influenced by opinion leaders than by the media itself (Katz & Lazarsfeld, (1955).

2. TikTok Platform as Dominant Media

TikTok has become the most influential social media among young voters. The short video format and engagement-focused algorithms allow political messages to spread virally in a short time. Features such as duets, stitches, and live streams also expand the space for interaction and debate between influencers and followers (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

One example in Medan is the emergence of creative campaign videos from non-political accounts such as culinary or lifestyle accounts that suddenly insert messages of support for certain candidates. For example:

- A cooking influencer inserts a narrative that a certain candidate is championing local culinary MSMEs
- Video review of local tourist attractions includes a call to action to support young candidates who care about the environment

This phenomenon shows that TikTok is not only a means of formal political communication, but also a social ecosystem where politics is packaged, marketed, and negotiated creatively and non-rigidly.

3. Challenges: Low Political Literacy and Potential Information Bias

Although the presence of influencers has a positive effect on increasing political participation, there are a number of serious challenges that must be considered:

a.Low Political Literacy

Most young voters still have limitations in understanding political issues in depth. They are more interested in figures and communication styles, rather than the substance of work programs. As a result, politics becomes an arena for popularity, not a competition of ideas.

b.Information Bias and Covert Propaganda

Many influencers receive financial support or political endorsements, but do not state it transparently. This poses a risk of spreading subjective and manipulative opinions, because political messages are wrapped in entertainment or personal experiences, without clarification that it is part of a paid campaign.(Nugroho et al., 2012).

c.Spread of Hoaxes and Disinformation

Some content spreads unverified information, especially during the campaign period which is prone to hoaxes. Without digital literacy and the ability to verify information, young voters easily fall victim to propaganda or negative framing.(Gunawan, 2023).

Therefore, it is important for there to be an initiative from the government, KPU, Bawaslu, and civil society to:

- Improving political and digital literacy through political education in schools, campuses and digital communities
- Encourage influencers to include a disclaimer if their content is sponsored.
- Developing collaborative fact-checking mechanisms on social media

4. Political Image Building Through Mass Media

In political communication, the process of forming a political image can be done by packaging political messages to then be distributed to the public. Then the existence of mass media is used as part of the instrument for forming and delivering political messages. This kind of portrait is what Stayer calls part of a new way of communicating politics. This means that campaigns carried out through interpersonal communication (direct-campaign) are starting to be abandoned and replaced by forms of campaigns in the media (mediated-campaign). Campaigns using media are widely carried out by politicians, especially using mass media. When referred to in various literatures, there is no doubt that mass media has a strategic role in social life. In addition to the use of mass media, political campaigns can also be carried out through other media, such as new media that continues to develop rapidly. The new media in question, for example, the internet, which is now a trend and is considered very outdated if it does not use it. A number of institutions are very interested in creating websites on the internet with attractive visual displays. The goal is for imaging and disseminating information about the programs they offer. A number of institutions also utilize social media that is assisted by the internet in its use, for example Tiktok, Instagram, Facebook, Blog, Twitter and so on (Akhmad Danial, 2004).

Social media as an interactive medium for communication has proven its effectiveness in social communication and political communication. The accuracy of messages delivered via mobile phones (short message service), Twitter, Facebook, newspapers, radio and television is very urgent. The strategic role of social media and mass media in political communication has been shown to be successful and capable of rallying strength, support for movements to build a positive image (Dennis McQuail, 1994). Through mass media, someone will obtain information about objects, people, images and places that are not experienced directly. The existence of media is deliberately presented to convey various messages about the social and political environment. All messages containing political content can shape and maintain the political image and public opinion of a party. In the current era of information flooding, a candidate or party that does not use mass media properly will almost certainly fail to gain public support. This argument emphasizes that the existence of media has an important role in the effectiveness of delivering political messages and forming a positive image and public opinion for political parties or their candidates.

The formation of public opinion cannot be separated from the role of key actors who influence the dynamics of political communication. found that message personalization and the candidate's ability to build emotional connections with voters through personal narratives are significant factors in shaping public opinion. Meanwhile, political candidates and campaign teams need to utilize influencers responsibly to provide balanced political education to the public. In the dissemination of political information, influencers play two main functions. First, they function as a channel of information between the public and the government, translating and publishing government initiatives so that they are more easily understood by the general public. Because so many people use social media, influencers play an important role in today's politics. The government can collaborate with influencers to disseminate information. Second, influencers improve the check and balance mechanism by balancing power with the opposition (Henri Subiakto and Rachmah Ida, 2012).

Here are some TikTok contents from Rian Fahardhi and other Influencers related to the 2024 Medan Election and local politics, complete with engagement details and visual-narrative elements:

1. Anies Baswedan's Support "Hope for Presidential Candidate 2024"

- Title/Theme: "Support Anies Baswedan with the hope of change and courage"
- Duration:~30 seconds
- Engagement:149K likes, 3.8K comments
- Summary: Rian expressed support for Anies Baswedan, bringing him as a symbol of change. The delivery style is full of hope and optimism, supported by the overlay text "Real change for the country" (Rian Fahardhi, 2024).

THE ROLE OF INFLUENCERS IN FORMING POLITICAL OPINION AMONG ELECTION VOTERS IN MEDAN CITY

Nadra Husna Harahap and Anang Anas Azhar

- Visual imagery: Dynamic text overlay, energetic background music, clips of Anies speaking, combined with footage of everyday life in Medan.
2. Invitation to Use the Right to Vote "The Voice of the People"
- Title/Theme: "The Valuable Right to Vote: Don't Abstain from Voting!"
 - Duration:±45 seconds
 - Engagement: 25.5K likes, 291 comments
 - Short transcript: "Hello Gen Z, this is serious: your votes are serious! Remember your votes are the voices of the people. So don't abstain! Vote for those with real programs..."
 - Visuals & overlays: Overlaying the text "For the president-elect", "Don't abstain from voting!", Rian appears in front of the camera, expressive, and gives a personal and persuasive impression.
3. Honorary Teacher Issue – "Teacher Salary Increase"
- Title/Theme: "Mr. Alvi, an honorary teacher, should also get a pay rise!"
 - Duration: ~30 seconds
 - Engagement: 79K likes, 3.6K comments
 - Summary: Rian highlights the fate of honorary teachers as part of an important welfare issue in social media and local politics. An invitation for voters to be aware and choose candidates who prioritize education.
 - Visual: Warm narrative style, footage of teachers teaching, text overlay "Love of Education = Love of Country".
4. Muhammad Billy Fachrul Lubis "Mr. Parody Legislative Candidate"
- Platform: TikTok
 - Character: Playing the role of "Mr. Candidate" with the typical jargon "Yok Yok Yok" and a parody of a willing candidate (Billy Fachrul Lubis, 2024).
 - Duration: 30–60 seconds per video
 - Content:
 - A parody of the campaign format, starting from asking for proposals, going around the village, to candidate-style discussion sessions.
 - It touches on many of the people's complaints about facilities, bureaucracy, and money politics, but is still wrapped in light humor.
 - Engagement & Impact:

"Most netizens' responses were positive, because they felt that this was something they had been worried about for a long time."

 - TikTok Followers: ~116K
 - Audiences feel a direct connection to local issues and the entertaining way they are presented.
5. "Ricowaas_Official" Medan Regional Election Campaign
- Platform: TikTok (@ricowaas_official)
 - Content:
 - Documentation of the official campaign series for the 2024 Medan Mayoral candidate pair, such as closing, public meetings, and strengthening the volunteer team.
 - Focus on transparency and progress of candidate performance before entering the voting day (Rico Tri Putra Bayu Waas, 2024).
 - Engagement: The video received around 111 likes indicating increased interest after the inauguration.
 - Style: More of an official campaign publication, presenting the aura of the candidate and team in a professional manner.

The political content of these TikTok influencers has succeeded in conveying a clear and relevant political message in the context of the 2024 Medan election, building an emotional and action narrative from candidate support, an appeal not to abstain from voting, to attention to the issue of honorary teachers, and using innovative digital communication techniques, raising public concerns, relatable + educational with a touch of comedy, transparency of campaign activities, professional and informative.

These contents show the diversity of Medan influencers' strategies in approaching the 2024 Election and Regional Election issues, from parody, official support, social education, to live coverage. Each style presents a different resonance with the audience, from laughing, critical, to vocalto local issues. Overall, the role of influencers on TikTok in shaping the political opinions of young voters in Medan is very significant. They have emerged as new political communication actors who are able to change the face of political campaigns to be more emotional, personal, and digital. However, behind these opportunities, there are serious challenges in the form of low political literacy and the potential for information bias. Collaboration from all parties is needed to ensure that the role of influencers remains within the corridor of political communication ethics, so that the campaign does not only become a viral event, but also a means of healthy, informative, and responsible public education.

CONCLUSION

Influencers play a central role in shaping the political opinions of voters in the election, especially young voters in Medan City, through the TikTok platform. Their influence is determined by their credibility, emotional closeness, and the way they convey information. However, a positive impact can only occur if the community has good digital

THE ROLE OF INFLUENCERS IN FORMING POLITICAL OPINION AMONG ELECTION VOTERS IN MEDAN CITY

Nadra Husna Harahap and Anang Anas Azhar

literacy. This study emphasizes the importance of ethical and educational campaign strategies in utilizing influencers, as well as the need to increase political awareness of the younger generation so that they are not only the objects of the campaign, but also the subjects of active and critical political change.

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