THE DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL IDENTITY IN THE DIGITAL ERA: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA, POLARIZATION, AND CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY

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Abstract
In this study, the researcher explores the role of social media in constructing political identity in the digital era. The research analyzes how social media platforms facilitate the expression and formation of individual and group political identities and how this influences the dynamics of communication and social interaction within the political realm. The main focus of this study is on two aspects: First, the changing dynamics of political communication and interaction. Social media provides new spaces for political expression but, on the other hand, can also facilitate the creation of 'echo chambers' that reinforce political polarization and the spread of disinformation. Second, the impact on democracy: this research examines how social media affects public perception and political decisions, and how these platforms can be used to mobilize political support. A qualitative approach is used to gain a deep understanding of the impact of social media in the contemporary political context. The findings of this study highlight the importance of digital literacy as a key to combating disinformation, and polarization, and maintaining the health of democracy in the digital era.

Keywords: Social media, political identity, polarization, disinformation

Abstrak

Dalam penelitian ini peneliti mengeksplorasi peran media sosial dalam mengkonstruksi identitas politik di era digital. Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana platform media sosial memfasilitasi ekspresi dan pembentukan identitas politik individu dan kelompok, serta bagaimana hal tersebut memengaruhi dinamika komunikasi dan interaksi sosial dalam ranah politik. Fokus utama penelitian ini adalah pada dua aspek yaitu: Pertama perubahan Dinamika Komunikasi dan Interaksi Politik, Media sosial menghadirkan ruang-ruang baru untuk ekspresi politik, namun di sisi lain, dapat pula memfasilitasi terbentuknya 'ruang gema' yang memperkuat polarisasi politik dan penyebaran disinformasi. Kedua dampak Terhadap Demokrasi: penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana media sosial memengaruhi persepsi publik dan keputusan politik, serta bagaimana platform ini dapat digunakan untuk memobilisasi dukungan politik. Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan untuk menggali pemahaman mendalam tentang dampak media sosial dalam konteks politik kontemporer. Hasil temuan penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya literasi digital sebagai kunci untuk melawan disinformasi, polarisasi, dan dalam rangka menjaga kesehatan demokrasi di era digital.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of political identity construction has become a crucial aspect of contemporary social and political dynamics, making it an intriguing research subject. This study focuses on how group and individual identities are formed, understood, and articulated within a political context. In the political realm, identity is often utilized as a mobilization tool. Politicians and political parties frequently leverage certain group identities, such as ethnicity, religion, or social class, to build a support base. This can lead to political polarization along identity lines, where group loyalty is prioritized over objective policy considerations. For instance, in elections, political rhetoric not only encompasses political promises but also emphasizes specific identities, such as nationalism, ethnicity, or even ideology. This phenomenon occurs not only in the formal political sphere but also extends into everyday social interactions. The way individuals identify themselves and others can be influenced by the political narratives and discourses circulating within society. This creates a cycle where political identity is continuously shaped and reshaped through the interaction between policy, media, and public perception.

Understanding the complexity of political identity construction in the contemporary era is essential. This research aims to contribute to comprehending the root causes and formulating solutions to address the various challenges posed by political identity construction. Political identity construction is driven by the political environment, including government policies, political discourse, and power dynamics. For instance, how a group is perceived in society can be influenced by political rhetoric and laws. Mass media and public discourse play a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing political identity construction. Through reporting, representation, and the narratives conveyed, the media can influence societal views toward certain groups. Although political identity is often shaped by external factors, individuals and groups also act as active agents in negotiating, challenging, and adapting their identities within the broader political context.

In general, identity politics is associated with political agendas, actions, and activism where members of identity-based groups organize and mobilize themselves to fight against injustices experienced due to hegemonic structures, systems, and practices (Benson, 2024). According to Esau dkk., (2023), identity politics refers to political practices and values based on various political and social identities. The complexity of political communication in Indonesia compels candidates to provide political information and open channels for political participation. The importance of political communication in electoral democracy must be designed in such a way that its meaning can be understood by voters. Candidates and their campaign teams must pay attention to various aspects, ranging from the content of political messages relevant to their voter base to the media used, whether in urban or rural areas (Iosifidis & Nicoli, 2020). Berry adds that the shift in political communication is due to the digitalization of media, particularly social media in the political realm. Candidates compete to win the hearts of voters, especially the millennial voter segment, to make them rational voters. Candidates must know which

voter segment they will target through various communication media, such as Instagram and Twitter, which are popular among the millennial generation.

According to Schirch, (2021)The use of social media has two advantages over mainstream media: first, it democratizes access because internet-based new media are cheaper and more accessible, allowing anyone worldwide to participate; second, it democratizes content, as new media provide unlimited information compared to conventional media. This technology creates space for people to express opinions, enhance public knowledge, and create more open and accountable political institutions. This can be achieved through access to information, reconnecting politics, and electronic town halls. Pene Before establishing the theme 'Dynamics of Political Identity in the Digital Era: The Role of Social Media, Polarization, and Challenges to Democracy' as the research focus, the researcher conducted in-depth observations on how individuals use social media to shape their political identities. An interesting fact emerged that many individuals undergo significant changes in their political identities after actively engaging in social media. This is intriguing as it demonstrates the complex dynamics between the use of social media and the construction of political identity.

Previous research has often focused on the positive or negative aspects of social media in social and political contexts. However, there have been few studies on how social media specifically impacts the construction of political identity. This study aims to highlight how social media serves not only as a communication tool but also as a medium that influences how individuals perceive and express their political identities. The researcher is interested in conducting this study based on three important aspects. The first aspect of this research is how social media, as a ubiquitous communication tool, facilitates the dissemination of ideas and the formation of public opinion. In this context, the study aims to understand how political narratives are shaped and influenced by interactions on social media. The second intriguing aspect is how social media enables individuals and groups to strengthen their political identities. This research aims to analyze how social media platforms are used to communicate political affiliations, mobilize supporters, and engage in political activism. The importance of social interaction in shaping political identity, and how social media facilitates or impedes this process, is the primary focus.

Lastly, this research also aims to investigate the negative implications of social media in the political context, such as the creation of echo chambers, dissemination of misinformation, and political polarization. Through this analysis, the study seeks to provide insights into how social media can affect the health of democracy and political governance. Overall, this research is important not only for academic purposes but also for its relevance in broader social and political discussions. In the dynamics of direct political contestation, there are opportunities for political actors to develop and strengthen their political image. However, there is also a risk that these portrayals may deviate into unfounded and misleading political narratives. Therefore, political actors need to prioritize logical and sensible ideas and concepts that they can effectively offer to their constituents. Vecchi dkk., (2020), politics is not merely objective reality but rather a virtual perception of one's character and actions in the political arena. Based on the discussion above, this research aims to explore how individuals construct and transform

their political identities through interactions on social media. This study is important as it provides new insights into the influence of social media on the construction of political identity, which is a crucial aspect in understanding the dynamics of contemporary social and political life.

METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative approach. This approach emphasizes observing phenomena to deeply understand their essence and meanings. In qualitative research, the careful selection of words and phrases is crucial in the process of analysis and understanding of the research subjects, considering that language nuances play a significant role in interpreting qualitative data. According to Juniatmoko, (2019), qualitative research is a type of research that aims to explore and understand the meanings of individuals' or groups' experiences within the context of social or human issues. Qualitative research emphasizes the human element, objects, institutions, and the relationships and interactions among these elements to understand events, activities, and phenomena. Generally, qualitative research can be used for studies on societal life, history, behavior, functional organization, social activities, and so forth. This is the reason for choosing the qualitative research paradigm in this study, to delve into and analyze how social media communication patterns influence the construction of political identity. The research aims to discover and understand the dynamics behind the phenomenon of social and political interactions on social media.

The approach used is qualitative descriptive, focusing primarily on collecting narrative and non-statistical data to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study. This method allows researchers to explore and analyze subjective aspects such as perceptions, motivations, and individual experiences. Through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, this approach aims to describe and interpret the complexity of social, cultural, or behavioral contexts of individuals and groups in their natural environment. The outcomes of this approach not only provide detailed insights into the research subject but also facilitate a broader and interpretative understanding of the meanings and contexts behind the collected data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The prolonged use of social media, particularly spending hours in front of screens, brings about complex and multidimensional impacts, especially from psychological and social perspectives. This phenomenon presents a new landscape in human interactions and identity construction. The crucial role of social media in the construction of political identity is evident in society's dependence on these platforms for social interaction. Social media serves not only as a means of entertainment but also shapes new trends in political and social communication. However, excessive use of social media, especially among the younger generation vulnerable to extreme narratives and polarization, creates negative impacts. This necessitates greater attention to media regulation and education.

Arora dkk., (2022) asserts that in the post-COVID-19 era, there has been an increase in digital literacy among the public. This is reflected in individuals' active pursuit of

information, contrasting with previous passive information consumption habits. This phenomenon has led to a decrease in interest in content related to political identity on social media platforms. In response to these trends, social media platforms have begun restricting content related to political identity due to its negative impacts on the digital ecosystem. Here is the table showing the percentage of information sources accessed by the Indonesian public based on a survey by Katadata Insight Center (KIC) and the Ministry of Communication and Informatics:

Table 1. Percentage of Information Sources

INFORMATION SOURCE	PERCENTAGE (%)
SOCIAL MEDIA	73.0
TELEVISIONS	59.7
ONLINE NEWS	26.7
OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT WEBSITE	
PRINT MEDIA	4.0
RADIO	4.0
NO ACCESS TO INFORMATION	1.2

Based on a survey conducted by Katadata Insight Center in collaboration with the Ministry of Communication and Informatics, it was found that the majority of the Indonesian population, 73%, obtains information through social media platforms. This reaffirms the crucial role of social media as the primary source of information for a significant portion of the Indonesian public. The heavy reliance on social media as an information source presents significant challenges in ensuring the integrity and accuracy of disseminated information, particularly in avoiding the influence of identity politics practices that can fuel polarization and societal division.

Socially, social media has transformed how we interact with and understand politics. The echo chambers created by social media algorithms reinforce existing viewpoints, often limiting exposure to different perspectives. This phenomenon triggers political polarization and social fragmentation, where individuals tend to group with those who share similar views and avoid or even oppose opposing viewpoints. This creates an environment conducive to the construction of political identity, where political affiliation and social views become core components of one's online identity. The role of social media in the construction of political identity demonstrates how information technology and communication have transformed individuals' participation in politics. The fact that individuals can easily disseminate information and mobilize supporters through these platforms indicates an increase in the democratization of access. However, this also brings negative impacts such as misinformation and political polarization.

The ease of information dissemination is often exploited to spread political narratives that align with specific interests, disregarding the truth of such information. This can reinforce biases and prejudices, and widen the gap in understanding among various societal groups. On the other hand, social media also provides opportunities for minority and marginalized groups to express their opinions, which may not have been heard in conventional media.

Political communication in the digital world needs to consider the audience as a highly heterogeneous subject, particularly due to diverse backgrounds and ideological interests. Therefore, political actors need to understand effective communication strategies to win opinions in the digital realm. In Indonesia, the complexity of political communication faced by candidates and political parties is increasing with the presence of social media. This research indicates that for political communication to be effective, candidates and political parties need to understand the dynamics of social media and how these platforms can influence voter perceptions. Wilson dkk., (2020) emphasizes the importance of employing effective communication strategies in utilizing social media to build political support, especially among millennial voters.

Yarchi dkk., (2021), "state, "Although the cause-effect relationship has not been fully answered, various theories have emerged explaining how these positive impacts can occur, which are then empirically examined. Briefly, from a psychological standpoint, it is explained that online exposure expands individuals' access to information, thereby potentially increasing their interest in political issues. This has the potential to trigger the development of new cognitive resources, distinct from traditional socio-economic factors, thus enhancing participation, especially among young generations." In Indonesia, the practice of using digital media as a campaign tool has been ongoing for quite some time. This is evident in this year's elections, where digital media plays a crucial role. Candidates and political parties utilize various digital platforms such as social media, websites, and instant messaging apps to reach voters, disseminate information, and promote their agendas. The use of these media not only expands the campaign's reach but also enables direct interaction with voters, providing a more dynamic and personal voice in the campaign process.

The Role of Social Media as a Key Factor in Political Identity

Social media has become a primary factor shaping and influencing individual political identity in contemporary society. Active use of social media enables individuals to engage in political narratives circulating on these platforms. They can voice opinions, disseminate political information, and participate in discussions on relevant political issues. Social media also provides space for individuals to express their political affiliations in ways that were previously impossible. For example, someone can easily show support for a specific political party or candidate by changing their profile picture or using specific hashtags related to political campaigns. Thus, social media plays a crucial role in shaping individual political identities and enables active participation in the political arena.

The use of social media also facilitates individuals in reinforcing their political identities. On social media, individuals often interact with like-minded people politically. They can join online political groups or communities that align with their political values and beliefs. These interactions not only strengthen individual political affiliations but also build solidarity within political communities. Individuals feel more connected to others who share similar political views, thereby reinforcing their political identity as part of that group. In some cases, social media is also used to organize political events or

demonstrations by groups with similar political identities. Social media also serves as a battleground for debates among supporters of various electoral candidates. This situation reaffirms that digital media has evolved into a vital public space where people can communicate and discuss various ideas and political issues. These debates go beyond mere exchanges of views and include in-depth analyses of policies, campaign strategies of candidates, and their impact on society (Weber dkk., 2021). This demonstrates how digital media has enriched political dynamics by providing a more inclusive and interactive platform for people to directly engage in the political process.

Formation of Echo Chambers

One interesting aspect of this research is the phenomenon of forming "echo chambers" on social media. An echo chamber is a group where individuals tend to interact with others who share similar political views, and the information and opinions circulating within it are ideologically aligned. This can result in a sense of isolation where individuals are only exposed to existing perspectives, thus reinforcing their existing beliefs. Echo chambers have a significant impact on political polarization by strengthening existing views and making dialogue between different groups with differing perspectives challenging. This phenomenon presents a crucial challenge in political contexts as it hinders the achievement of understanding and compromise among divergent groups.

In this study, the concept of 'echo chambers' on social media is analyzed as an environment where individuals are continuously exposed to and interact with information and views that reinforce their personal beliefs. This occurs due to social media algorithms that tend to display content according to users' views and preferences, thereby limiting their exposure to different perspectives. This phenomenon exacerbates political polarization as individuals become increasingly closed off to opposing views and more entrenched within groups that share the same views, thus leading to a lack of dialogue and understanding among groups with different perspectives.

Misinformation

The use of social media also presents challenges related to misinformation. Due to the ease of information dissemination on social media platforms, false or manipulative information can quickly circulate and influence public perception of political issues. This necessitates a high level of digital awareness and literacy among social media users to distinguish between accurate information and misinformation. It is important to consider how regulations and controls on misinformation can be applied in the digital environment. Building resilience against misinformation and educating social media users on how to identify false information are crucial steps in combating misinformation. Social media has implications for democracy and political governance.

The formation of echo chambers and political polarization can affect political dynamics within society. This requires special attention in efforts to promote dialogue, understanding, and compromise among political groups. The impact of social media on the construction of political identity also underscores the importance of digital literacy. Every individual should have the ability to differentiate between accurate information and

misinformation, as well as participate in healthy and civilized political discussions on social media. Overall, social media plays a specific role in shaping and transforming individual political identities, and understanding this impact is crucial in understanding contemporary political dynamics. Participation in responding to evolving political identity issues continues to increase as technology becomes more accessible, thus making access to social media easier.

This reflects the importance of technology in facilitating public dialogue and information dissemination in this digital era. Beyond increasing participation, technological advancements and social media have also changed how society interacts with political identity issues. Now, individuals can quickly disseminate their views, engage in discussions, and influence public opinion through online platforms. This creates a more dynamic political ecosystem where differences of opinion can occur rapidly and have a significant impact. Therefore, governments and political stakeholders must adapt to these developments to understand changes in public attitudes and perspectives towards political identity issues.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the significant role of social media in shaping political identity in the digital era. Social media enables individuals and groups to express their political views, strengthen solidarity, and create echo chambers that enhance ideological polarization. The algorithms used by social media platforms to display content aligned with user views contribute to differences and polarization of political identities. Social media is also used to disseminate political narratives, often without regard to accuracy, thus reinforcing biases and widening gaps among societal groups.

On the other hand, social media provides opportunities for minority groups to voice their opinions. This study underscores the importance of understanding the dynamics of social media and its impact on voter perceptions, as well as developing digital literacy to combat misinformation. In conclusion, social media plays a significant role in shaping political identities and contemporary political dynamics, emphasizing the need for adaptation from governments and political stakeholders to changes in public attitudes and perspectives.

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