Media Performance During General Election

Ika Karlina, Atika Budhi Utami, Tri Wahyuti

Universitas Paramadina

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Abstract: Media play a vital role in democracy. Media functions as social control and as a means of information allow the public to receive free access to information. In the age of openness, fact-checked information should be provided to people rather than biased news. The research discusses the media coverage of the general election, which was conducted simultaneously in Indonesia on 17 April 2019. The study is based on the media performance concept by McQuail (Mazzoleni, 2015) that independence, objectivity, informativeness, and diversity are the indicators to measure journalist performance. The method used is content analyses of 192,800 tweets of news site's Twitter accounts and 800 samples of news gathered from February to April 2019. Samples are taken from tweets posted by seven accounts of major news sites in Indonesia: Detikcom, Kompascom, Tempoco, Sindonews, Merdeka, Viva, and Okezone. Of the 192,800 tweets, 60,876 related to the election. The main topics of the news coverage in the seven news sites in this study are the candidates (49.08%), topics related to the election in general (15.58%), infrastructure (9.41%), law (7.08%), social welfare (6.76%), environment (6.65%), economy (5.74%), energy (2.45%), national security (2.25%), presidential debate (2.01%).

1 INTRODUCTION

Media play an important role in democracy. Darmastuti (2012) stated that the functions of media are to monitor, to educate, and to entertain. Media monitor public activity based on its standard. Media provide educative and informative messages as a means of the learning process to the public. To entertain, media deliver a relaxed and fun program or coverage to the public. These ideal functions of media have slightly evolved due to several factors. One of those factors is technology. The advancement of communication technology affects all aspects of life, including the media. Online media are mushrooming. Thus, media reporting and media coverage have changed its course to compromise with the characteristics of online media.

As a means of information, media is misused, and political agenda is widely inserted in media coverage. Political parties represented by political figures and individuals try to steer media in such a way that media often take sides and be partisan. This has become a growing concern in a democratic country like Indonesia. Some studies have revealed this existing issue.

Studies about media and its role in democracy mainly discuss media control, media freedom, new media, and policy. We chose several studies conducted abroad and in Indonesia. Research conducted by Firmstone and Coleman (2014) discussed the perception of local government, journalists, and citizens towards the changing mode of media from conventional to digital one in public engagement. This research has revealed that both conventional and new media are crucial to building and maintaining communication with the public. However, due to the transition between mainstream and new media, instability over changing roles occur. Another study conducted by Leschenko (2014) was to describe press freedom during Yanukovych administration. The media was oppressed and used for government propaganda. As a result, some journalists took to the street and protested. This prompted the so-called EuroMaiden, a reform movement in Ukraine. Indonesia, the third world's largest democratic nation, faced strict media control during the New Order reign. Media in the New Order were controlled tremendously while critics to the government were regarded as subversive criminals. Wahyuni (2000) states that as a social institution, media interacts with other institutions, namely state, society, and market. This

interaction intertwines and affects media expansion and political communication in Indonesia. The research describes that there are only two administrations, namely President Habibie and President Abdurrahman Wahid, who marked compelling changes in media-related policy. Syam (2006) studied that the reform in 1998 brought a significant impact on the press. Press has found its long-lost character: Freedom.

Since 2000 the Internet has thrived rapidly, and as a result, it has converted the way people live, communicate, consume, travel, and many more. Media and journalism, as its core has faced a revolutionary era when coverage, consumption, distribution, and ownership transform. On the one hand, this shift creates a positive impact, such as the increase in media consumption through new media. On the other hand, this brings to biased media coverage due to a lack of verification and speed-driven information.

This study argues about media coverage during Indonesia's latest simultaneous and the most complicated election.

2 RESEARCH QUESTION

1. What were the main topics of news coverage during the 2019 Indonesia Presidential Election?
2. Who were the main sources of news during the 2019 Indonesia Presidential Election?
3. What was the dominant method of news coverage during the 2019 Indonesia Presidential Election?
4. How was the media performance structure used?

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Online Journalism

The development of online news media in Indonesia is growing rapidly. This is based on the needs of people in the current digital era who are experiencing the need to search for information in digital form. With the public's need for news presence on a digital platform, much conventional print media began to turn to online media. Even some of the print media in Indonesia has been closed. The development of online news media has not only changed the way of delivery from the conventional era to the digital era, but also the workings of journalists who have also changed, as we are familiar with the term online journalism.

According to James Glen Stovall (in Hadi, 2009), online journalism is known for its dimensions of flexibility, capacity, immediacy, and permanence. Reporters can enter their news reports in various forms for information, both in full text, accompanied by biographical information on sources, diagrams, maps, and images that can help readers understand the subject matter of the news. It can even include audio from sources and video scenes where the news is taken. This is the flexibility of the internet media rather than print or broadcast. However, in online journalism, there are also restrictions that are located on the server computer in terms of quota or data space where the information is stored and the length of time for access. Online journalism can send news instantaneously and simultaneously (instantaneous reporting) in the form of breaking news events according to its context with global coverage. Something that is felt difficult for broadcasters to provide information on breaking news. This is what is called immediacy. Meanwhile, online journalism is called permanent because reporters work long hours for a digital document that can be stored in a computer server for a long time and maintained quality. The quality of information stored online is so powerful, easy to be traced but also prone to duplicate. Because the web is an open medium and full of networked technology, so it is easily duplicated and stored in a different location from the original.

According to Hadi (2009), interactivity in online journalism is a relationship between reporters and their readers (public) and a meaningful relationship with a new form of journalism. According to Williams, Rice, and Rogers (in Hadi, 2009), defining interactivity as "the degree to which participants in communication processes have control over, and can exchange roles in, their mutual discourse." So internet communication control is on the user. One study of the use of the internet gets six dimensions of interactivity, namely (1) the internet is able to provide information rather than just persuasion; (2) control lies with internet users; (3) many activities are carried out by (active) users; (4) communication that occurs in both directions; (5) the time spent in communication is more flexible than scheduled and (6) communication takes place in a place that is 'created' by consumers.

Although the digital age has developed rapidly, the role of journalists in carrying out their work must be maintained; on any platform, a journalist delivers

the news. According to McNair (in Elridge II, 2018), key roles of journalists include being: (1) source of information, (2) a watchdog on power, (3) a mediator between government and people, (4) an advocate of social issues. These four roles must be a reference in conveying the news. As a source of information, a journalist is required to be able to give the right message to the public. Whereas the role of the watchdog on power can be interpreted as a journalistic activity that carries out the function of controlling the running of the government, thus the journalist becomes a mediator between the government and the community. In carrying out this role, journalists are also expected to be an advocate on social issues in society.

A professional journalist is also required to be able to do work as a journalist who understands his work. On news that appears on platforms such as print and online, the news content at least fulfills the following basic things (Wendratama, 2017: 38-55): (1) Focus, (2) Facts (accurate and verified), (3) News Value, (4) Answers, (5) Sources, (6) Clarity, (7) Ethics. Focus is the most important element in the good news. Focus can also be interpreted as a news angle. The second element is Facts. This is related to how deep news has passed verification to be feasible to be conveyed to the public. The purpose of verification is to obtain the truth. The third element is the News Value. News Value is the journalist's reference when presenting the news. Some considerations can be made, such as the value of novelty, importance, interest, irregularities, and so on. The next element is the Answer. This is related to news that has met the formula 5W + 1H. The next element is the Source, which is interpreted as the ability of journalists to deliver news sources so that they can be trusted. The element that is considered important is also Clarity, which is interpreted as the working principle of journalists in presenting an issue that must have good clarity in the structure of news writing to provide evidence such as photographs or multimedia that reinforce the content of the news delivered. The last is the element of Ethics, and journalists must do the right way, both justified according to universal rules and the rules of the society in which the journalist works.

3.2 Media Performance

In seeing whether a journalist's performance is appropriate in carrying out its functions, there are various concepts by which data are used as a reference. But there is one concept that can be used as a reference, namely the concept conveyed by McQuail. According to McQuail (in Mazzoleni, 2015), the four main indicators that can measure journalist performance are independence, objectivity, informativeness, and diversity. The concept of independence is an indicator that is difficult to assess because when making these measurements, we also measure the structure that occurs in the media, such as media regulations that are based on law, economic regulations, and others. How the media really uses their freedom is another story and more difficult to judge, although evidence can be obtained from observing practice. Thus, the more critical, investigative, argumentative, participatory, and stimulating media are in reporting journalists, the more independent they can be justified.

The second indicator is the objectivity. In this context, journalists are prosecuted to be neutral and concentrate on facts that can be verified and avoid bias. A more developed view expressed about the objectivity of journalists is measured how capable they are giving confidence to the public by conveying information that has a level of trust and reliability.

The third indicator is the informativeness. Informativeness can be interpreted as a term that refers to some basic features of the public role given to, or accepted by, mass media in modern society. This has several sub-principles. First, there must be comprehensive monitoring of events and conditions in the national community and in the wider international environment, important for warning of risks, hazards, or problems that arise and are relevant to public outreach. Second, the information published must be based on good evidence and as far as possible in accordance with observed reality. This must be sufficiently complete in terms of essential, accessible, and understandable, and presented in ways that are effective in achieving learning outcomes and increasing public awareness of relevant facts.

The fourth indicator is diversity. The basis for assessing the diversity of media settings is the extent to which content and sources or media voices reflect population composition in proportional and relevant terms, for example, in relation to political allegiance, social class, ethnicity, geographical location, and so on.

3.3 Structural and Performance Differences on Media

According to McQuail (2010:162), there are three levels of media operation: structure, conduct, and

performance. However, in this paper, we only discuss the structure and performance of the media. Media structure lays the media system, while media performance indicates the content.

Based on the freedom principles, media structure includes the independence of channels, access to channels, and diversity of contents. Media performance encompasses reliability, critical stance, originality, choice, change, and relevance (McQuail, 2010: 165).

At the level of structure, media freedom means no censorship, equality of information access, and independence from ownership intervention. These values are basically conflict-driven because absolute freedom is futile. Media freedom is limited by power, controller, and owners or those who have no power like the audience. Meanwhile, at the level of performance, media freedom evaluation is somewhat difficult to conduct due to the misuse of communication freedom itself. Therefore, the media should fulfill the investigation and verification of their coverages. Media performance should be innovative and independence that would lead to ingenuity, resourcefulness, and variety.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, we conducted a content analysis of 192,800 tweets from news sites' Twitter accounts and 800 samples of news that we gathered from February 22 to April 24, 2019. Content analysis involves setting categorizations, measuring the reliability of the categorizations, classifying samples into the categorizations, and drawing conclusions based on the frequencies and contexts of the messages (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). We operationalized the news into two types of information units: words and symbols (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). We used words to analyze the topics of news coverage and symbols to investigate the news sources, method of news coverage, and method of verification.

Due to the difference in the unit of analysis, we took different samples from the population of collected news articles. To examine the main topic of news coverage, we took the whole population of tweets posted by seven accounts of the major news sites in Indonesia: Detikcom, Kompascom, Tempoco, Sindonews, Merdeka, Viva, and Okezone. Today, as people get their daily news from social media, news sites post every article on Twitter to reach more audiences. The unit of analysis in this sample was a word, and the categorizations were

referred to like the topics of presidential debate (Indonesia Commission of General Election, 2018): economy, energy, law enforcement, infrastructure, national security, environment, social welfare, and the presidential debate. We added three categories for the topics, which were the candidates (Jokowi and Prabowo) and the general election.

To examine the main news source and method of news gathering, we took 800 samples from the 192, 800 population. Before we choose the sample, we cleaned the data and only selected news related to the general election. From the population, we randomly selected samples based on the proportion of articles that each of the news sites posted during the data collection.

The unit of analysis in this sample was a symbol, as Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005) define it as a "discrete unit of content that contains meaning." In this study, we operationalized the news source into ten categories: politician, candidates, campaign team or spokesperson, university professor, expert, survey agency, non-government organization (NGO), Indonesia Commission of General Election, or KPU, citizen, and other. We also operationalized the method of news gathering into eight categories: face-to-face interview, mediated interview, field coverage, press conference, press release, social media conversation, public discussion, and other. The reliability scores for both categorizations were 0.78 and 0.80.

In addition, we investigated whether any effort of verification in each article and if whether any potential impact the news had on citizens' life or public discussion related to the general election.

5 FINDINGS

From all the 192,800 tweets, we found 60,876 related to general elections. During the 2019 Indonesia general election, the main topics of the news coverage in the seven news sites in this study were the candidates (49.08%), followed by topics related to the election in general (15.58%), infrastructure (9.41%), law (7.08%), social welfare (6.76%), environment (6.65%), economy (5.74%), energy (2.45%), national security (2.25%), presidential debate (2.01%). Although the post about candidates dominated the news coverage, we found that there were more articles related to the incumbent candidate President Joko Widodo/Jokowi (27.42%) compare to other candidates Prabowo Subianto (21.66%). This finding also accoutred in the 800 samples of news articles that we chose. We

found 1,891 words related to Jokowi and only 1,381 words related to Prabowo. Meanwhile, words related to the election, in general, were only 498.

The main news sources related to the 2019 Indonesia general election were the candidates (22.76%), followed by campaign team or spoke person (19.21%), politician (18.75%), others (15.39%), Indonesia Commission of General Election or KPU (8.2%), citizens (4.66%), NGO people (3.45%), survey agency (2.79%), academician (2.79%), and expert (1.95%).

The main method of newsgathering that the online news sites applied was face-to-face interview (51.22%), followed by field coverage (24.94), mediated interview (7.34%), quoting press releases (4.23%), press conference (3.89%), public discussion (3.11%), others (3.11%), social media conversation (2.11%).

In addition to those three findings, we investigated whether any effort of verification in each article. Apparently, 69.92 percent of the articles did not contain any verification method, and only one third (30.07%) of the articles mentioned that the news had been verified. When we looked further into what verification method that the journalist did to check the information, most of them just referred to the previous articles that they run before (41.66%). Other verification methods were checking the information with the press releases sent to the news media (29.58%), phone interviews (15.83%), social media posts (10%), and interviews via texting or messenger (2.91%).

Furthermore, we analyzed whether the news contents had any potential impact on citizens' lives in the next three months. We found that most of the news would not bring any changes to citizens' lives for the next three months (67.91%) and only 32.08 percent of the articles that would potentially bring changes to citizens' lives. Most of the news, however, could contribute to the public discussion related to the election (66.2%) and 33.79 percent of the news could not even contribute to enriching the public discussion related to the general election.

The last finding of the media performance structure used in the research displays uniformity of coverages. During the election periods, online media tend to play safe. This was probably due to the strict control and interruption from the media owners and also a reluctance to being different.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The 2019 Indonesia general election was the first election where voters chose the presidential candidates, members of parliaments, house representatives, and local representatives at the same time. Issues related to the election logistics, elections officers and supervisors, and the performance of the Indonesia Commission of General Election, 2018, needed more attention from the journalists and mass media. Unfortunately, the mass media tended to cover news related to the political debates initiated by the candidates

Politicians—candidates, political party representatives, and campaign team/spoke person—dominated the news coverage during the 2019 Indonesia general election. The category of "Others" also dominated the news coverage. When we analyzed further, most of the news sources fell in this category were government officials and ministers in Jokowi's administrations. Voices from the citizens, who would use their votes and determine the election results, apparently were not considered important by the mass media. At the same time, there were only 8 percent of news came from the Indonesia Commission of General Election. This commission role was critical as they continued to show poor performance in managing this first simultaneous election.

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