Social Media in Electoral Communication: A Case Study of Strategic Initiatives by Bantul Election Commission for the 2024 Elections

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary landscape of democratic processes, social media has become instrumental in shaping political communication strategies. This study investigates the nuanced dynamics of social media utilization, specifically focusing on its impact on the effectiveness of communication strategies employed during the 2024 Elections by the Bantul Election Commission (KPU Bantul) in Indonesia. Recognizing the potential of social media in enhancing voter participation, KPU Bantul strategically employed platforms such as Instagram, websites, and YouTube to educate, engage, and mobilize the public. Through a qualitative analysis rooted in social media theory and communication strategy frameworks, this research explores the innovative methods used by KPU Bantul. Key findings encompass strategic networking and coordination, digital literacy initiatives targeting novice voters, challenges measuring social media impact, and the transformative potential of integrating social media within electoral processes. The study sheds light on the intricate mechanisms of social media utilization and offers practical insights for improving social media initiatives in future electoral contexts.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of democratic processes, social media has emerged as a pivotal factor influencing communication strategies in political contexts. This study delves into the intricate dynamics of social media usage, specifically focusing on its impact on the effectiveness of communication strategies employed during the 2024 Elections. With the proliferation of internet and social media usage in Indonesia, understanding the nuances of these platforms becomes imperative in enhancing voter participation and disseminating crucial electoral information. The General Election Commission (KPU) in Indonesia recognized the potential of social media and endeavored to harness it effectively for educating, engaging, and mobilizing the public for the upcoming 2024 Elections.

The genesis of this research lies in recognizing the profound influence wielded by social media platforms in shaping public opinion and facilitating communication between political entities and citizens (Dolan et al., 2017).

Chaffey (2016) identified that internet penetration in Indonesia is 15 percent, encompassing over 38 million users, with approximately 62 million individuals actively engaging on Facebook and other social media platforms (Muninger et al., 2022). Moreover, the average Indonesian internet user spends nearly 3 hours daily on social media via mobile devices, highlighting these platforms' extensive reach and impact (Ceia, 2020).

Social media platforms serve as virtual spaces wherein users represent themselves, interact, collaborate, and share information, forming essential social bonds (Carr & Hayes, 2015; Salim et al., 2023). These platforms, characterized by cognitive, communicative, and cooperative dimensions (Fuchs, 2021), assume a pivotal role in political landscapes. Notably, the 2024 Elections in Indonesia necessitate a strategic approach to engage the millennial generation, well-versed in the digital realm, thereby emphasizing the significance of platforms such as Instagram, websites, and Facebook (Moise & Cruceru, 2014; Mayangsari & Salim, 2021). The KPU strategically employs social media to conduct electoral technical socialization. This approach acknowledges the diversity among voters, necessitating targeted engagement with distinct groups and communities, including women's organizations such as Family Welfare Empowerment (PKK), religious-based groups, mosque congregations, arisan groups, and others (Biroroh, 2021).

The impending 2024 general and local elections, scheduled for February 14, 2024, and November 27, 2024, respectively, underscore the need for innovative communication strategies. Integrating social media within the electoral framework becomes imperative to amplify information dissemination. As Law Number 7 of 2017 mandated, the amalgamation of general and local elections necessitates a robust social media presence to ensure effective communication and outreach (Ida, Saud, & Mashud, 2020). The Bantul Regency Election Commission, in its 2020 local elections, serves as a notable case study, achieving an impressive voter turnout of 80.32% through strategic social media utilization (Khair & Adhani, 2021; Saud & Margono, 2021).

Social media, a pervasive online medium, encapsulates platforms such as blogs, social networks, wikis, forums, and virtual worlds, enabling user participation, content creation, and sharing (Olimovich, 2020). Kaplan and Haenlein (2012) define social media as a group of internet-based applications facilitating user-generated content creation and exchange, grounded in the foundations of Web 2.0. This interactive environment transcends temporal and spatial constraints, allowing unrestricted communication (Papa et al., 2018; Suprapto et al., 2020). While social media offers numerous benefits, such as facilitating marketing, business operations, and connections (Motoki et al., 2020; Ashrianto & Sosiawan, 2020), its uncontrolled nature necessitates vigilance regarding the information it disseminates (Meier et al., 2021; Sari & Yulianti, 2019; Noel, & Kaspar, 2021; Dodokh & Al-Maaitah, 2019).

Interestingly, astute individuals have harnessed the power of social media to enhance various aspects of their lives, including education, employment, information retrieval, and online shopping (Laksana & Fadhilah, 2021). Social media platforms have broadened our horizons, providing a gateway to a virtual realm called "cyberspace," where individuals can explore diverse experiences and connect with a global audience (Putri et al., 2019).

Strategic planning is pivotal in navigating the intricate web of intermediaries and media channels (Mahoney & Tang, 2016). The advent of advanced telecommunications technology, particularly the Internet, has heralded transformative changes, turning the Internet into a highly effective advertising medium and facilitating diverse business activities on a global scale (Maryani et al., 2020). Media convergence, a hallmark of modern mass communication, has ushered in an era where various media technologies seamlessly merge, reshaping the dynamics of information dissemination (Horbinski, 2019).

Effective communication strategies, as articulated by Rao (2019), involve a comprehensive understanding of the political communication process, meticulous planning, crafting persuasive messages, selecting appropriate communication media, and fostering community participation. According to Brenner and Igamberdiev (2021), formulating a communication strategy necessitates a nuanced consideration of both supporting and inhibiting factors. This intricate process hinges on four critical elements: (a) Determining the Audience (Pratama & Rosilawati, 2022). (b) Selection of Communication Media (Bin, 2021). (c) Assessing the Purpose of Communication Messages (Solomon & Theiss, 2020). (d) The Role of the Communicator in Communication (Tasente, 2020).

Prior studies, such as those conducted by Rao (2019) and McGregor (2019), have highlighted the integral role of social media in political discourse and public opinion formation. Additionally, recent work by Muhazir, Miranti, and Sayidatina (2023) has elucidated the political communication strategies employed by the Banyumas Regency KPU, providing valuable insights for this study. However, the specific effectiveness of social media initiatives orchestrated by KPU Bantul still needs to be explored.

This research aims to unravel the intricate mechanisms through which social media, particularly Instagram, websites, and YouTube, can be leveraged to augment the Bantul KPU's communication strategy for the 2024 Elections. By employing a descriptive qualitative analysis methodology and drawing upon social media theory and communication strategy frameworks, this study sheds light on the innovative methods employed by KPU

Bantul. The primary objectives include providing a comprehensive overview of social media's role in enhancing communication strategies, contributing to the theoretical underpinnings of communication science, and serving as a practical guide for KPU Bantul's social media initiatives. The uniqueness of this study lies in its focus on the Bantul KPU's social media effectiveness, offering a nuanced perspective within the broader discourse on social media and political communication.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative analysis descriptive research method to unravel the intricacies of social media dynamics and communication strategies. Qualitative research, rooted in conceptual exploration, offers a depth of understanding without numerical constraints (Valunaite et al., 2020). This paradigm, informed by comprehensive data collection and analysis from realistic contexts (Sugiyono, 2017; Zuraida, 2023), delves into the multifaceted aspects of social media use by the General Election Commission (KPU) Bantul.

The qualitative research methodology incorporates data reduction techniques (Hasugian et al., 2020) involving summarization and categorization, leading to conceptual units and thematic insights (Miles & Huberman, 2012; Cui & Shang, 2020). The collected data, encompassing interviews, journals, and internet sources, is systematically processed, providing a comprehensive foundation for subsequent analyses (Haryanti & Rusfian, 2019; Santoso, 2021). Musnif Istiqomah interviewed the head of the Division of Outreach, Voter Education, and Human Resources at KPU Bantul. These data-driven insights and theoretical perspectives facilitate an in-depth exploration of KPU Bantul's social media dynamics and communication strategies.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In contemporary electoral processes, integrating social media platforms has emerged as a powerful tool, offering extensive reach, unlimited potential, and cost-effectiveness (Kovaitė et al., 2020). This digital shift has redefined conventional communication, making it more efficient and all-encompassing. This study delves into the multifaceted role of social media, specifically focusing on the strategies employed by the Bantul Election Commission (KPU Bantul) in leveraging these platforms to enhance voter participation in the 2024 elections.

A. Strategic Social Media Utilization: Building Networks and Coordination

Social media integration within the Bantul KPU's outreach initiatives is characterized by strategic networking and coordination. Through partnerships with key entities such as Kesbangpol, Kominfo, and the Tourism Office, the KPU Bantul has orchestrated a series of events and activities. These endeavors optimize information dissemination through social media channels, including websites, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube, and facilitate collaboration between regional apparatus organizations.

> *"Through the media owned, both internal media and media which are collaborative with the local government which has been established for one year in the form of a cooperation agreement consisting of Kesbangpol whose role is as a strategic bridge responsible for conducting political education to the community, Kominfo has to do with information publication. With the tourism and culture service through the events carried out." Musnif Istiqomah, head of the Division of Outreach, Voter Education, and Human Resources at KPU Bantul, personal interview on November 4, 2022.*

The collaboration with BAKOHUMAS, a Public Relations Coordinating Agency comprising diverse agencies such as disabled people, police, media crews, and mass organizations, underscores the comprehensive approach to driving effective socialization initiatives (Nurrizka, 2016).

B. Digital Literacy Initiatives: Empowering Novice Voters

One of the notable endeavors of the Bantul KPU involves digital literacy initiatives targeting novice voters, particularly students within the school system. By engaging with student councils (OSIS) and conducting Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions, the KPU Bantul imparts essential democratic education. Through the innovative E-Pemilos system, digital education modules are deployed, fostering political literacy among young voters.

> *"In general, socialization is an event if there are stages. Voter education is also carried out, but outside the election stage, voter education is also carried out. Furthermore, the socialization program is limited to the stages of the election, so the socialization tips follow more of the rhythm or flow of the ongoing or ongoing stages. The 2024 election stages started on June 14, 2022, or 20 months before the voting day. On June 14, 2022, the Bantul KPU launched the 2024 simultaneous election stages to inform the wider community that we started the 2024 election on June 14." Musnif Istiqomah, head of the Division of Outreach, Voter Education, and Human Resources at KPU Bantul, personal interview on November 4, 2022.*

This proactive approach prepares the younger generation to participate actively in the electoral process, instilling a sense of responsibility and awareness from an early age (KPU Bantul's Instagram).

C. Challenges and Opportunities: Measuring Social Media Impact

While utilizing social media platforms offers immense potential, measuring the impact remains challenging. The Bantul KPU's engagement on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and websites provides valuable content, encouraging active voter participation. However, the effectiveness of these efforts remains difficult to gauge due to the absence of clear indicators of achievement.
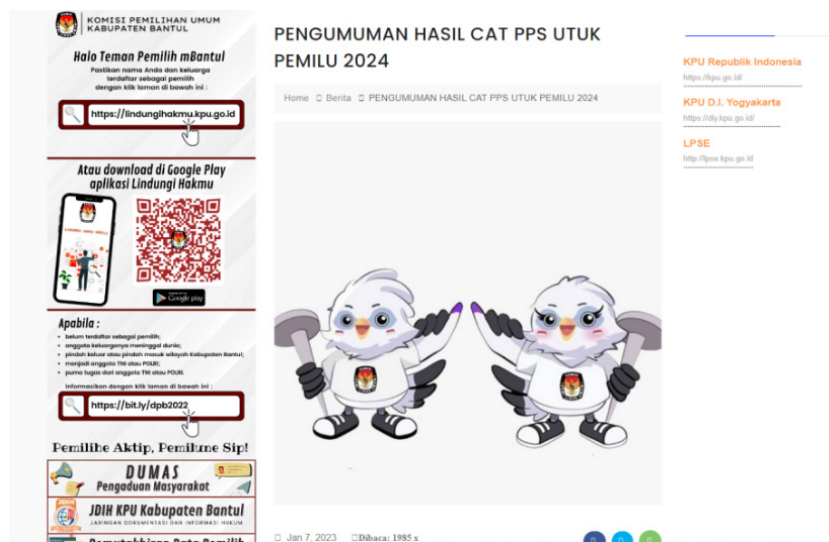

Fig. 1 Announcement of CAT PPS results for the 2024 election
Source: KPU Bantul website

> *"Social media has a strategic role because many of these media access, especially the millennial generation. Because now is the era of information media, one of which is social media. After all, with the rapid development of information technology, the KPU took the side to take advantage of social media so that its reach or reach was more expansive. In contrast, face-to-face socialization invites many people at a relatively high cost and differs from social media, which only has quotas". Musnif Istiqomah, head of the Division of Outreach, Voter Education, and Human Resources at KPU Bantul, personal interview on November 4, 2022.*

It is imperative to develop comprehensive metrics to assess the reception of information, segment-specific engagement, and source credibility. Additionally, enhancing the management of tools such as YouTube's community and channel sections is crucial for optimizing content dissemination (Sohal & Kaur, 2018).

D. Shaping the Future of Electoral Communication

Integrating social media within electoral processes represents a transformative shift in communication strategies. The Bantul KPU's initiatives exemplify the potential of these platforms in fostering democratic engagement and education.

> *"KPU Bantul cooperates with multiple parties, such as BAKOHUMAS (Public Relations Coordination Agency), which comprises various agencies such as the disabled, police, media crew, PKK, youth organizations, and mass organizations. It is hoped that many parties can carry out this socialization; the KPU is only the driving force for conducting socialization." Musnif Istiqomah, head of the Division of Outreach, Voter Education, and Human Resources at KPU Bantul, personal interview on November 4, 2022.*

Strategic partnerships targeted digital literacy campaigns, and proactive social media engagement are pillars in shaping the future of electoral communication. However, ongoing efforts are needed to refine measurement mechanisms and ensure the seamless integration of social media initiatives. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, harnessing the full potential of social media remains pivotal in enhancing the democratic fabric of society.
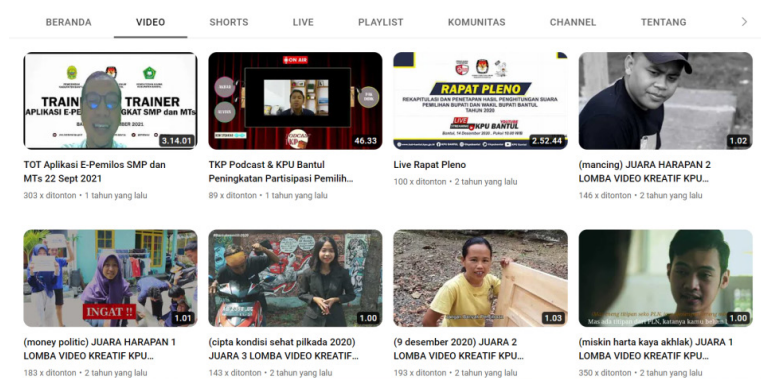
Fig. 2 Election Commission Bantul video on YouTube
Source: Youtube KPU Bantul

CONCLUSION

In the ever-evolving landscape of electoral communication, the Bantul Election Commission (KPU Bantul) stands as a pioneer, harnessing the power of social media platforms, including Instagram, website, and YouTube, to foster robust voter engagement strategies. Through a multifaceted approach, KPU Bantul disseminates crucial information about the 2024 elections and prioritizes educational outreach to novice voters. Initiatives such as creative content competitions and the integrating digital-based e-voter systems for student council selections underscore the commission's commitment to nurturing an informed and participative younger generation. Collaborations with public relations partners and stakeholders through Bakohumas exemplify KPU Bantul's strategic communication efforts. By promoting the 2024 election through active and engaging content on YouTube, website, and Instagram platforms, the commission ensures a vibrant presence in the public sphere. Creative video competitions and podcasts crafted in collaboration with the community serve as promotional tools and as sources of informative content, capturing the interest of diverse audiences and encouraging their active involvement in the upcoming elections.

There are significant avenues for further research and improvement. KPU Bantul's social media interactions with the public, especially the youth demographic, can be amplified through timely responses to posts and comments, fostering closer relationships and trust. Additionally, transparent promotion of election locations and procedures on social media platforms is paramount. Clarity in information presentation ensures that prospective voters are well-prepared, fostering a sense of responsibility and civic duty. The quality of images, videos, and information disseminated on KPU Bantul's social media channels is pivotal. Attention to the visual and informational aspects captivates the audience, making education about the 2024 general election engaging and accessible. Furthermore, language in captions should be meticulously crafted to be clear and persuasive, inviting the public to actively participate and acquaint themselves with the initiatives of KPU Bantul.

In summary, KPU Bantul's strategic use of social media has redefined electoral communication and paved the way for innovative and inclusive voter engagement. By continuously adapting and refining these strategies, the commission reinforces its commitment to building an informed, active, and participatory electorate, ensuring the vitality of democratic processes in Bantul and beyond.

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