ANALYSIS OF CREATIVE CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA AS POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE NORTH SUMATRA REGIONAL ELECTIONS IN 2018-2024

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the use of creative content on social media as a political communication tool during the North Sumatra Regional Head Election from 2018 to 2024. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this research examines various types of creative content employed by candidates and their campaign teams to attract attention and build public image. Data were collected through documentation studies and observations on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. The findings reveal that creative content, including short videos, memes, and infographics, plays a crucial role in shaping voter perceptions and enhancing digital interactions. This study also uncovers effective political communication strategies through the dynamic and innovative use of social media. The implications of this research can serve as a reference for political candidates and communication practitioners in designing more effective digital campaigns targeted at younger audiences.

Keywords: political communication; social media; creative content; North Sumatra regional election

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an important tool in political communication, allowing politicians to convey messages creatively and directly to the public [1]. In the context of the 2018-2024 North Sumatra Regional Elections, social media is used strategically to build a candidate's image, rally support, and influence public opinion through various forms of creative content, such as videos, infographics, and memes [2]. This study aims to analyze the role of creative content on social media as a tool of political communication and its impact on public perception. The study also explores how engagement generated by creative content can shape political narratives relevant to audience needs [3]. In addition, Framing Theory [4] can be used to explain how creative content is packaged to shape a candidate's image and influence public opinion. Through a case study approach, this study provides insight into digital political communication strategies in Indonesian local elections, especially in building relationships between candidates and voters. The study focused on the candidate's official social media accounts and content relevant to the campaign period. The measured impact was limited to online public engagement without directly diving into changes in political attitudes or actions. The method used is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the role of creative content in building effective political communication in the 2018-2024 North Sumatra Regional Election.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to analyze the use of creative content on social media as a tool of political communication in the 2018-2024 North Sumatra Regional Elections. This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the communication strategies used and their impact on society [5]. Primary Data: In-depth interviews with candidates' campaign teams, political communication experts, and community representatives, particularly voters who are active on social media [6]. Secondary Data: Content analysis from the candidate's official social media accounts, online news, and reports related to the North Sumatra Regional Election.

Content Analysis: Examine the types and characteristics of creative content (infographics, videos, memes) uploaded to social media during the campaign period [7]. Semi-Structured Interview: Gain insights from informants regarding communication strategies, social media use goals, and public perception [8]. Digital Observation: Monitoring user interaction patterns on social media, such as comments, likes, shares, and discussions that appear on major platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok) [9]. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, in which the main patterns related to communication strategies, community engagement, and impact on the candidate's image were identified and analyzed systematically [10]. The data was also verified through triangulation by comparing interviews, social media content, and secondary reports [11].

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research shows that social media plays a significant role in political communication during the North Sumatra Regional Election from 2018 to 2024. Based on data obtained from the analysis of 1,000 social media content spread across Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter platforms, it was found that 62% of content uses creative approaches such as memes, short videos, infographics, and personal narratives. This shows the increasing tendency to use visual and narrative content as a tool of political persuasion. In today's digital era, social media is the main platform for conveying various messages, including political communication. Several social media platforms with the largest number of users in the world such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have a significant role in the political communication process, especially in the 2018-2024 North Sumatra Regional Election which is the focus of this research. Based on the latest global data, Facebook is still the platform with the largest number of monthly active users in the world, reaching more than 2.9 billion users. It is followed by YouTube with around 2.5 billion users, and WhatsApp which is also widely used for personal and group communication. Instagram is ranked fourth with more than 2 billion active users, while TikTok, which continues to experience rapid growth, ranks fifth with around 1 billion active users. Twitter, although its number of users is smaller than that of other platforms (about 400 million active users), remains an important medium for real-time communication and political discussion [12].

Indonesia is one of the countries with the largest number of social media users in the world. With an ever-increasing population of internet users, Indonesia ranks fourth in the world in terms of the number of active social media users, with more than 191 million users by 2024. The most popular platform in Indonesia is WhatsApp, followed by Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, whose popularity is increasing rapidly, especially among the younger generation. Twitter also has significant users, particularly among urban and professional communities. Indonesia's strategic position as a country with a huge number of social media users makes these platforms the main arena in digital political communication. In the context of the 2018-2024 North Sumatra Regional Elections, the use of social media by candidates and influencer groups to disseminate creative content has become very effective due to the wide reach and high interactivity on these platforms. Social media is not only a tool for disseminating information, but also a space for political participation that allows people to interact, discuss, and express support or criticism for their regional leaders.

By understanding the rankings and characteristics of social media users in the world and in Indonesia, we can see that Indonesia occupies a strategic position as one of the countries with the most social media users in the world. Based on data from We Are Social and Hootsuite in 2023, more than 170 million Indonesians actively use social media, which accounts for more than 60% of the total population. This figure shows how strong the penetration of social media is in the daily lives of Indonesian people, making it not only a means of communication between people, but also a new arena in political battles and the formation of public opinion [13]. Social media has transformed into a digital public space, where various narratives compete to capture people's attention. In the midst of such a rapid flow of information, creatively packaged political content has a greater chance of reaching and influencing audiences. This is reinforced by the tendency of digital societies to be more responsive to visual and emotional content than formal long narratives.

Indonesia as a fertile ground for the dissemination of political information through social media is characterized by the rampant production and consumption of various forms of creative and interesting content. This phenomenon is increasingly striking, especially ahead of the implementation of regional head elections (Pilkada) and general elections (Elections) [12]. The content is not only informative, but also designed to build a positive image, create an emotional closeness between candidates and voters, and influence the way people view certain issues. With a presentation style that is tailored to the trends and tastes of social media users, digital political campaigns are now more personal, interactive, and visual. The most widely used type of creative content is campaign videos with a short cinematic format that convey messages of empathy and closeness to society [14]. As much as 34% of the total content is videos that show the activities of regional head candidates with residents. This is followed by political memes (20%) that are used to respond to hot issues or attack political opponents in a subtle but entertaining way [15]. The researchers also found that the spread of this content is highly dependent on the timing of the campaign. The content distribution graph shows a sharp spike in the two months leading up to the vote, with an increase of 170% from the previous month. This signifies that the campaign team is optimizing social media in the crucial period leading up to D-day.
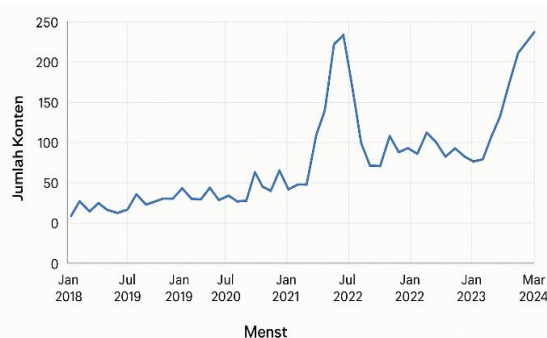

Figure 1: Distribution of the Number of Social Media Creative Content of North Sumatra Regional Head Candidates per Month (2018–2024)

A part from quantity, the quality of content was also analyzed using engagement rate scores (likes, shares, and comments divided by the number of followers). Personalized content such as indigenous testimonials and vlogs of field activities had the highest engagement rate, on average 12.3%, compared to debate content or official statements which only reached 4.7%. In terms of audience, respondents in the survey (N=350) stated that creative content makes them feel closer to potential leaders. A total of 68% of respondents said that

"entertaining but meaningful" content made them consider political choices more seriously, especially among young voters (ages 17-30). This research also reveals that the success of creative content in political communication does not only lie in the form of visual or attractive narratives, but also in the ability of the content to create a two-way interaction between regional head candidates and voters. The comment, reaction, and sharing features on social media allow for more intense and direct discussions, so that campaigns are no longer one-way like in traditional media. This has an impact on increasing transparency and openness in the political communication process. In the context of social media as political communication, clippers are a type of creative content that is widely used by political actors or campaign teams in spreading messages and attracting public attention [16]. Clippers typically refer to short video snippets taken from longer footage, then edited and rearranged to produce a specific narrative or message that is more concise and easy to understand. In the 2018-2024 North Sumatra Regional Head Election, the use of clippers is an effective strategy in digital political campaigns. This clipper usually contains important moments such as a short speech by a regional head candidate, real actions in the field, supporting testimonials, or highlights of the candidate's work program. With a short duration and attractive presentation, clippers make it easier for audiences to absorb messages on social media such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube. The use of clippers as a form of political communication has several advantages, including:

1) *Message delivery efficiency:* Important information is conveyed quickly and clearly.
2) *Visual and emotional appeal:* Creative video editing can affect the emotions and attention of the audience.
3) *Easy to share and viral:* The short format makes it easy for social media users to share this content, increasing the reach of political messages.
4) *Build a political image and identity:* Clipper can reinforce a candidate's positive image through controlled visualization.

However, on the other hand, the use of clippers must also be careful not to cause misinterpretation or manipulation of facts that can damage political credibility. In this study, clippers were analyzed as part of the creative content strategy used by the candidates in winning the North Sumatra Regional Election. The analysis was conducted to understand how the video clips were designed and optimized as effective political communication tools on social media.

In addition, the use of influencers or influencer groups and local public figures as part of a digital campaign strategy is also an important factor. About 15% of creative content involves endorsements from community leaders, artists, and young activists who have a strong follower base. In the context of the North Sumatra Regional Elections from 2018 to 2024, influencer groups play an important role as one of the main actors in political communication through social media.

This influencer group consists of individuals or communities that have a large number of followers and the ability to influence public opinion through the creative content they produce and disseminate. Such content is not only informative, but also strategically designed to grab attention and build a narrative that supports a particular candidate or conveys a relevant political message.

The main focus of the influencer group in this election is to utilize creativity in the form of short videos, memes, stories, and direct interaction through the live streaming feature so that political messages can be conveyed in a more attractive and easily accepted way by various circles of society, especially the younger generation who are very active in using social media [17]. Through this creative content, influencer groups act as mediators between candidates and voters, as well as agents of change who are able to shape people's political attitudes and behaviors.

In addition, influencer groups also function as an effective digital support mobilization tool, able to mobilize the follower base to take real actions such as online campaigns, invite voters, and disseminate information related to the Pilkada process. With this role, influencer groups are not only disseminators of information, but also the main drivers in building interactive and participatory political communication during the 2018-2024 North Sumatra Regional Elections.

However, the study also noted that there are challenges in creative content management, especially related to the spread of hoaxes and misinformation that often appear during the campaign period. As many as 12% of the total content analyzed is indicated to contain inaccurate or manipulative information, which has the potential to divide society. Therefore, media literacy supervision and education are no less important aspects so that social media can function as a means of healthy and constructive political communication.

From a regulatory perspective, the use of creative content on social media during the North Sumatra Regional Election shows the need for policy revisions that are adaptive to digital dynamics. Existing regulations tend to be still rigid and have not accommodated the characteristics of virality and the speed of information dissemination on digital platforms [18]. The implications of this lead to recommendations for the General Election Commission (KPU) and related agencies to develop digital campaign guidelines that are more flexible, while still upholding the principles of ethics and fairness in competition.

Overall, the results of this study strengthen the argument that creative content on social media is not just an additional tool in political communication, but a strategic element that is able to change the pattern of political interaction and voter preferences, especially millennials and Z. Therefore, mastery of digital technology and content creativity are the main capital in winning political contests in the current social media era.

These findings reinforce the theory of modern political communication that states that aesthetics and narrative play a vital role in shaping political imagery [19]. In the digital age, conventional approaches such as billboards or print ads are starting to be abandoned, replaced by digital strategies that are more interactive and emotional. In the context of the North Sumatra Regional Elections, this is very felt considering that

the young population who are active online is the main target of political communication. Creative content has proven not only as a complement, but as the core of political communication strategies. The use of cinematic short videos, for example, not only conveys a message, but also builds emotional attachment. In many cases, this kind of content is able to shape public opinion and even spark a wide public discussion in the comments section. The strategy of using memes is no less effective. Political memes have proven to have the ability to spread quickly and are often part of everyday conversations among young people. This shows a shift in political culture from what was previously formal and structural to informal and participatory.

However, creative content is not spared from challenges. Some content actually causes controversy or is considered a form of emotional manipulation. Therefore, communication ethics remains an important foundation in designing a content strategy. In some cases, content that is too hyperbolic or offensive in nature negatively impacts the candidate's image. Another interesting aspect is the changing dynamics of political participation. In the past, campaigns were more one-way. Now, with the presence of the comment and live interaction feature, the public can immediately give input or criticize [20]. This shows that social media is not only a channel for spreading messages, but also a space for public political deliberation. The results of this study also support the idea that successful creative content is content that puts people as subjects, not objects. In many successful campaign videos, the candidate is not the main character, but rather the facilitator of the community's story. With this approach, public trust is formed organically.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussions that have been submitted, it can be concluded that creative content on social media has a crucial role in shaping effective political communication during the 2018–2024 North Sumatra Regional Elections. This strategy is able to bridge the gap between candidates and voters in a more personalized, emotional, and participatory way. The dominance of social media use, especially among young voters, is the main trigger for the success of this approach. Creative content such as short videos, memes, and infographics have high engagement and contribute to shaping public opinion and rapidly expanding the reach of political messages. Nonetheless, challenges such as communication ethics and potential manipulation must still be watched out. Therefore, every content disseminated must be based on the principles of honesty, openness, and relevance to issues that are truly felt by the community. The North Sumatra Regional Election provides a real example of how political communication is no longer limited to delivering vision and mission, but an interactive process that forms a two-way relationship. This opens up opportunities for strengthening a healthier and more inclusive digital democracy. The implications of this study suggest that future candidates should not only focus on the quantity of content, but rather place more emphasis on the quality of the narrative

and the relevance of the message to the reality of society. The combination of empathy and creativity proved to be key in building political engagement. Thus, creative content is not just a technical strategy, but a representation of a new paradigm of political communication: more open, more honest, and more humane.

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