

Campaigning #golkarsolid:

Branding Image Strategy of Golkar Party on Social Media

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Abstract—Social media has become one of the popular media in building a political image. In the case of Indonesia, almost all political parties have an official social media account that is not only used as a means to share information to its follower but also to build a political image. One of the largest parties in Indonesia, Golkar Party has an effective political communication strategy that is marked by the victory of some of their candidates in the arena of local elections in various regions in Indonesia. However, the case of leadership dualism that emerged in several major parties in Indonesia also shadowed this party. With the virtual ethnography approach, this article seeks to understand the strategic steps undertaken by the Golkar Party in strengthening their positive image in social media through the hashtag of #golkarsolid socialized through their official accounts on Twitter.

Keywords—*image; PR politics; branding image strategy; social media*

I. INTRODUCTION

Pemilukada (the election of regional leaders) has become an important momentum for political parties to succeed their candidates. The successful in Pemilukada has not only gained regional leaders, but also the political parties concerned will gain access to influence the local policy and the opportunity to build public confidence. The functionaries of political parties use Pemilukada as a battleground for influence and trust, by building and socializing positive image. Nevertheless, the victory of a political party in a Pemilukada is influenced by many factors. In addition to the competence and capability of regional head candidates, factors of ability and experience of party cadres are also important factor. Golkar Party has been political party with proven experience and capability. In Pemilukada which held simultaneously in 101 districts and cities in 2017 in Indonesia, Golkar Party won more than 50 percent. This fact not only demonstrates that Golkar has a fairly tough and experienced cadre but also signifies effective political communication, especially in terms of establishing and preserving a positive image as a reformist party.

At the same time, the emergence of social media has posed a challenge for political parties. Social media has the potential to deepen the atmosphere of political communication through hate speech and other things that can threaten the positive image of a party. The top leadership dilemma that struck the party in 2015 has affected the image of the previously known solid Golkar party. Apparently, this experience made the

party's functionaries is vigilant by conveying messages through the hashtag #golkarsolid on social media, especially Twitter.

For Indonesian people, social media and the internet has generally become one of the most popular media. A report released by WeAreSocial in January 2016 shows the number of active internet users in Indonesia reaching 88.1 million people. The rapid development of the Internet has many implications, including the birth phenomenon of digital natives. Prensky who coined this term to define digital natives as "people who were born and raised in an environment with digital technology" so the term is actually more cultural rather than technical [1]. This article argues that the intensity of Indonesian people in accessing social media has become a fundamental consideration for a number of political parties to build, to disseminate and to maintain a positive image. Therefore, this study aims to explore the efforts of the Golkar Party strategy to build a positive image through Twitter which is one of the popular social media platforms among Indonesian people.

Meanwhile, research on the internet in the political context has been largely done by several parties. The accessibility of social media that is increasingly accessible through smartphones has also affected the birth of new patterns of communication. As a new medium with its digital and convergent characteristics, social media allows every user to stay in touch with people without bounded in time and space.

One of the studies reveals the influence of the Internet on the reproduction of cultural forms, especially in the political sphere and family life [2]. Rao and Desai see that this media has created a new political tradition of SMS-based polls. In addition, both also find the phenomenon of family relationships built in new ways through the rise of Internet use [2]. In addition, Kent Asp observes the concept of the mediatization of political life which he discloses as a process whereby the political system is influenced and adapted to the demand of the mass media. One form of this adaptation is when statements of politicians in the public sphere are done by personalizing and polarizing issues so that their political messages have better opportunities in media coverage [3]. Research on the relationship of the Internet as a media to politics also began to be applied to analyze the loss of autonomy in the political sector because of its dependence on mass media through adaptation to media logics [4].

In the context of Indonesia, specific research on the dynamics and political communication strategies run by the

Golkar Party has been widely implemented. Some of them are research conducted by Sudewo (2006) which reveal about a strategy that runs by Golkar Party at that time is by doing internal correction of organization which includes structure change and organizational consolidation [5]. Almost similarly, Roni (2006) studied the internal democratization process in Golkar Party which managed to find groups with pragmatic interests [6]. The strategy to improve the image of the Golkar Party is done by convening a convention which, according to him, is a strategic step in getting a victory after suffering a decline in the vote in the previous general election in 1999.

Another study was conducted by Tandjung (2007) which revealed the Golkar Party's efforts in maintaining its existence in political turmoil in the transition era of Soeharto's leadership to BJ Habibie [7]. Tanjung sees that the Golkar Party's efforts in the middle of the transitional era are done gradually and not revolutionary so as to provide an opportunity for Golkar to maintain its life. The rise of BJ Habibie who in fact came from Golkar gave an opportunity to the Soeharto regime's supporters party to consolidate the organization in order to anticipate the worst that could destroy its existence.

Furthermore, another research conducted by Dirk Tomsa (2008) on the existence of Golkar Party in maintaining its dominant political position in the era of multi-party in post-new order [8]. This research provides information about the "establishment" of the Golkar Party which apparently has no difficulty in maintaining its existence and political position in the post-reform era. Tomsa suspects this is because the Golkar Party has a legacy of institutional hegemony in the past [8]. Not only that, Tomsa also sees Golkar's ability to maintain its existence because it has strong institutions with cadre distribution in various bureaucracy and community organizations and has good access to the grassroots. Tomsa's research is also reinforced by Muchtar's (2015) findings that the strong influence of the Golkar Party is also due to the socialization and implementation of a new paradigm that serves as a guide for reform that leads the Golkar Party into a democratic, independent, solid, strong, rooted and more responsive party [9].

As for research on political discourse in social media one of them is done by Hayes, et al (2015) which explores the behavior management of political communication among social media users, especially Facebook [10]. Social media is increasingly being used by them in spreading their political views and as a facility for political communication within their networks.

Although some of previous studies provide an overview of the social media, internet and political relations and political communication strategies of the Golkar Party, specific research on the strategy of building a positive image of Golkar Party in social media has not been found. This positioned a discussion of the strategic steps undertaken by the Golkar Party in building and maintaining a positive image by using social media becomes significant.

Overall, this research is in the framework of the discipline of political communication, especially the one of PR politics, one of which includes the image branding of a political organization. Theoretically, one of the goals of political

communication is to create public opinion that is commonly found in discussions about public relations. Public relations itself aims to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between all parties who have interests in order to achieve mutual benefit and satisfaction. With regard to this, public opinion is synonymous with freedom in the sense of openness in expressing ideas, opinions, needs, complaints of constructive criticism and freedom of writing [11].

On the other hand, politics is a fundamental part of human life. The essence of public relations itself is a communication activity that takes place within an institution or organization. In other words, public relations are a mediator that bridges the interests of organizations, institutions or companies with the public. Effendy (2006) formulates the PR function as follows; (1) to support management activities in achieving organizational goals; (2) to foster harmonious relationships between the organization and the public, both external and internal public; (3) to create two-way communication by disseminating information from the organization to the public and channeling public opinion to the organization; and (4) to serve the public and advise the leadership of the organization in the public interest [12]. Thus, it can be disclosed that the main purpose of political public relations activity is to gain political support from the internal and external public in achieving the specific objectives of the organization or political institution.

Thus, a political organization such as a political party has a fundamental task to maintain a positive image of its organization in order to have a good reputation so that the public has a positive opinion of it. For political parties, a positive image is a very basic capital in order to keep them favorable and ends with support from their constituents. A good image of an organization, a company and especially a political party is an intangible asset but has a huge impact.

Theoretically, Canton argues that the image is the impression, feelings, public image of the company. This impression is deliberately created from an object, person or organization [13,14]. Therefore, to get a positive image, the impression must be formed through public relations activities or public relations which is a management function to achieve specific targets in a clear and detailed work program, finding facts, planning, communicating, and evaluating the things that have been achieved [15].

Practically, a person's choice of a political party or a candidate for a regional head will depend also on how far the person knows the political party or the candidate for that area. In other words, the positive image or reputation of the political party or candidate carried by the political party becomes the primary consideration for the voters. The voters' knowledge of political parties or candidates for regional heads is generally obtained through the mass media they access frequently.

Theoretically speaking, symbolic forces are implicitly contained in interactional terms, in contrast to the usual interactions characterized by the exchange of response stimuli. Three premises on which this model is based: First, human beings act on the individual's meaning to the environment of the society [16]. Second, the meaning directly interconnects with the social interactions that individuals do with their social environment. Third, the meaning is created, preserved and

changed through the process of interpretation by individuals in relation to their social environment. In other words, the messages of political communication as a positive image-building effort are more symbolic so interpretation is usually left to the audience.

However, social media has become a new, public-based power, not just a particular corporation or organization. No exception, the popularity of social media has led to public relations activities of organizations and political parties have also adapted to use social media as a means of building their positive image. Phillips and Young (2009) describes why the publicist should understand and social media so that the approach and strategy used by a PRO in the past, but must be adapted to the most popular media, namely social media [17]. Internet and social media have made it easier for public relations activities that are then popularly known as digital PR or cyber PR. Technically, cyber PR activity usually uses some internet features like e-mail, blog, social media which one of them is Twitter. In PR activities, Twitter can be used to convey offers, provide information or connect readers with links containing important information [18].

One of the technical reasons is illustrated by Ling's (2004) explanation that social media is almost the same as a mobile phone capable of creating a phenomenon he calls "hyper-coordination" which is more coordinated than ever among fellow users [19]. Similar to mobile phones, social media can be used in the most expressive and more emotional way. Users can not only send and receive messages through it but can also build and form communities, share information and represent themselves as they wish [20].

Theoretically, Fuchs (2008) initiated a discussion of social media by describing the development of Web 2.0 technology that has involved individuals to publish together, process and complement data, the web as a platform or program that can be developed, to users with networks and channels which is very long [21]. In the web or computer network (internet) there is a system of inter-user relationship that works based on computer technology that is connected to each other. The connectivity between users is also at the same time forming a kind of networking like the global community offline with the complete order; values, structures, and social realities. Fuchs (2008) calls this concept a techno-social system, a social system that occurs and develops with intermediaries as well as technological device involvement [21].

Some experts propose the definition of social media. Some example describes social media as a collection of software that allows individuals and communities to get together, share, communicate and collaborate with each other in games or the like. Van Dijk (2013) defines social media as a media platform that focuses on the existence of users who are able to facilitate them in the move and collaborate [22]. Therefore, social media can be seen as an online medium (facilitator) that reinforces the relationship between users as well as a social bond. That is why one of the strengths of social media is its nature that allows users to become add-ons of content so that social media seems to be a perfect overview of the evolution of media-based communication practices.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

The study used a virtual ethnography method popularized by Christine Hine [23]. In conventional ethnography, researchers are required to engage directly with the location and object of research and strive to be native to truly understand the context. These objects are produced and studied through ethnography; community, society is understood in a spatial context [24]. However, virtual ethnographic objects are not on location but on topics that appear in the media that can give rise to virtual reality like the internet.

Practically, Hine (2000) describes four levels of analysis, namely; media space, media documents, media objects and user experience [23]. Nevertheless, this research focuses only on media documents, i.e. the realities that appear in the form of media texts including writing, drawing or sound. Therefore, the unit of analysis used includes all types of posts that are distributed through the official social media account Twitter Golkar Party. Specifically, the post will be directed to all posts by using #golkarsolid hashtag.

At the operational level, the focus of this research is directed to every official Golkar Party account post both on Twitter by using the #golkarsolid hashtag to understand the purpose and context of the information presented as a positive image development strategy step. Search is not just information either in written form, video or image, but also on the growing comments of each post to know the context in more depth.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Utilization of social media for political interests has a long history. Nevertheless, one of the most popular examples is when Barack Obama's winning team uses Facebook and other social media to build Obama's image as a coveted American citizen. Many people believe that Obama's victory is somehow supported by his social media team that is so solid and creative in shaping a positive image.

This section brings up the image branding strategy of Golkar Party through Twitter. Twitter itself is a social networking service in microblog form that allows its users to send, read, and share text-based messages up to 140 characters which became popularly known as a tweet. Since its founding in March 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Twitter has become one of the top ten most visited sites on the internet. The high popularity of Twitter causes this service is used for various purposes, for example as a means of learning process, communication media to political campaigns. Twitter is seen as a constant communication channel because it works for 24 hours 7 days with potential public targets around the world. In addition, Twitter also has a fast response so it does not take long to get a reply to the information submitted. Same with other types of cyber PR, Twitter also aims to cultivate, nurture and to build a dynamic relationship.

In Indonesia, based on the latest data released by WeAreSocial in 2017 is the most popular social media in after YouTube and Facebook. The determination of Twitter is done for several technical reasons, among others; Twitter is a social media that is categorized on microblog and is more "serious" comparing to YouTube or Facebook. A tweet of the Twitter's

account holders Twitter more often used as a reference of official information than others. In addition, Twitter became the first social media to introduce the practical function of hashtag (#).

Golkar Party's official Twitter account was first launched in December 2009 under the account name @golkar5 which until now has performed as much as more than 17 thousand tweets with 83 thousand followers as can be seen in Figure 1.



Fig. 1. Twitter official account of Golkar Party (@golkar5). Accessed on August 10, 2017

In the context of social media, a hashtag is used to facilitate other users to find certain messages or themes. Technically, a hashtag is a type of metadata tag used in social networking services and microblogging by putting a sign (#) at the beginning of the word as a context marker (it could be an event, place, jargon, and so on). The hashtag file is consequently collected into message types with the same hashtag.

The figure can be understood through three levels of analysis. At the media document level is used to see how media content is produced and disseminated on the internet. The text built as an encoding process becomes an important highlight in this level for translation (decoding). At this level, the ethnographer can explore the artifacts in the culture and how they are produced as part of the interaction within the virtual community. The text does not simply represent the opinions or opinions of entities on the internet, but also shows ideology, social background, political views, cultural uniqueness, to represent the identity of audiences.

At this level, we see that texts from cultural artifacts are produced or exchanged among entities so that the level of media documents becomes the main entrance to see how culture and knowledge are produced and disseminated as an important part of a culture. In the context of media studies, all kinds of media products are text and at the same time, they are cultural artifacts in a virtual context. Therefore, the text can be understood as a particular gesture.

Figure 1 generally shows the profile photo, header and description of the account in question. Profile photo emblazoned Golkar Party logo complete with the yellow background which is the primary color of this party. While the header shows the image Chairman Setya Novanto was giving a speech on an occasion with the background of the Golkar Party's logo. While on the top right picture Joko Widodo, President of Republic of Indonesia in a larger size is located. Visually, this page not only represents Golkar Party as a political party but also implies the message that Golkar Party is

a party that gives support to Joko Widodo to re-run as President in 2019 based on the decision of *Rapat Pimpinan Nasional (Rapimnas, Golkar's National Leadership Meeting)* in 2016.

On the second level, virtual ethnography deals with the content or documents presented in the account pages within which the Twitter platform can be tracked from a specific hashtag. In this research, the content or documents that are focused is the #golgarsolid hashtag that relates to their consistency as a party that remains solid in selecting and recommending the figure as a candidate for *Pemilukada*.

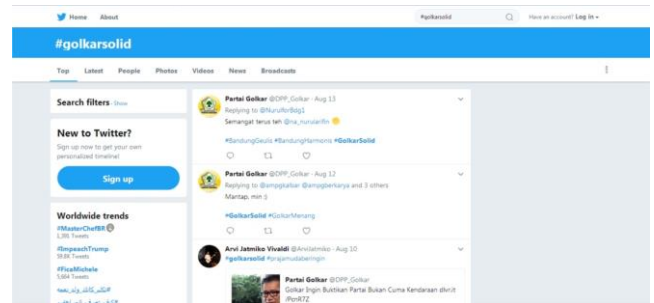


Fig. 2. Tweets using #golgarsolid hashtag. Accessed on Agustus 10, 2017

Ethnographically, it can be concluded that the lures that appear with the #golgarsolid hashtag are not entirely related to the context of the election but also relate to the recovery of their image as a solid party after the party's internal conflict. By using the #golgarsolid hashtag, Golkar Party is conveying the implied message that they remain solid, including in choosing and orbiting candidates for regional heads in various regions of Indonesia as well as clarification about the condition being imaged maintained.

At the next level of interaction, the official Golkar Party Twitter page shows the interaction between users, both those who tweet and those who retaliate. In fact, there are also who share tweets so that it can be accessed more widely. This also indicates that the use of social media, especially Twitter can add its own resources in the media used to build and strengthen the image of the Golkar Party in the public opinion.

IV. CONCLUSION

Ethnographically, using three levels of analysis can be interpreted that the image branding effort done by Golkar Party through the #golgarsolid hashtag is supported by the level of cultural artifacts commonly used in the context of social media which in this case is Twitter. The use of #golgarsolid hashtag is considered effective to restore the image of this party amid the dilemma that had plagued them. Hashtag #golgarsolid is supported by visual data that strengthens this account as an official account of Golkar Party.

In addition, content and documents presented in this account are also more contextualized with their existence and efforts to succeed *Pemilukada* in various regions of Indonesia. In addition, through content and documents posted using hashtag #golgarsolid can be interpreted as an effort to convey a message to the public that Golkar Party is always solid in every way even though this hashtag is not always used in the context

of the General Election or Pemilu. This context is related to the next level that shows the virtual interaction among fellow Twitter users who further strengthen the position of Golkar Party in public opinion.

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