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Hashtags & Handshakes: The Triangle Affairs of Social Media, Marketing Culture, and Electoral Politics

Panel 3

Role of Media, Journalism, and Information Literacy
in the Disinformation Era

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Abstract

In our increasingly digitized world, the synergy between social media, marketing culture, and electoral politics has become a pivotal force, reshaping the dynamics of political engagement. This paper embarks on a multidimensional exploration of this transformative relationship, unveiling the intricate ways in which these elements intersect and influence contemporary politics.

Social media, as a ubiquitous tool for communication and information dissemination, has profoundly revolutionized electoral campaigns. Drawing lessons from past elections, we discern a striking pattern of intensified division and polarization. These divisions are exacerbated by the algorithms underpinning social media platforms, which prioritize content that elicits extreme affect and emotion, thereby perpetuating echo chambers of political discourse.

Central to this paper is the examination of how marketing culture, deeply embedded within social media platforms, plays a pivotal role in shaping the nature of political content. By prioritizing sensationalism and personalization to maximize user engagement, marketing culture on social media platforms catalyzes the dissemination of emotionally charged content. Consequently, electoral campaigns increasingly harness this strategy to captivate and mobilize voters, often resorting to disinformation campaigns that exploit affect/emotion.

The rising prominence of campaign teams and the digital campaign industry further accentuates this dynamic. Political campaigners strategically capitalize on the algorithmic predisposition for extreme affect, amplifying their online presence to advance electoral objectives. These teams have become integral players in navigating the complex digital landscape of electoral politics.

As the digital landscape continues to evolve, understanding the intricate connections among social media, marketing culture, and electoral politics becomes imperative for safeguarding the integrity of democratic processes. This paper invites readers to explore the captivating interplay of these elements and their implications for the future of politics in the digital age.

Keywords: *Social media, marketing culture, algorithms, electoral politics, campaign industry, affect*

Introduction

Four months ahead of the Indonesian Presidential Election, in November 2023, the social media campaigns of presidential and vice-presidential candidates were already in full swing. Since August 2023, the campaign team of Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rangkabumi has already made a significant investment, amounting to over 8.8 billion rupiahs, for their social media advertisements, on Facebook and Instagram. Following suit, Ganjar Pranowo-Mahfud MD's team spent 4 billion rupiahs, while Anies Baswedan-Muhaimin Iskandar's campaign spent Rp 1.3 billion.²

Notably, the majority of Prabowo-Gibran's advertising expenses were concentrated on two accounts, namely Indonesia Adil Makmur and Bakti untuk Rakyat. In contrast, Ganjar-Mahfud's paid advertisements were distributed across over 160 accounts, including Melihat Indonesia, Ganjar Nusantara Indonesia, GanjarFans, Ganjar Gaspol, and others. Similarly, the campaigners of Anies-Muhaimin allocated their social media advertisement budget to multiple accounts such as Unboxing Anies, Menyimak Fakta, Aminkan Indonesia, Aksi Tanggap Anies, and Suara Anies. Three times presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto has campaigned on social media platforms ahead of other candidates. In the last three years, his primary Facebook page alone, "Prabowo Subianto," has run 618 ads with a total cost of 8.5 billion rupiahs. Additionally, his main supporters' page, "Bakti Untuk Rakyat," has run 1,216 ads, incurring a cost of 2.1 billion rupiahs during the same period.

Apart from the presidential candidates, several political parties have allocated resources for social media campaigns, with some initiating their efforts years in advance. Notably, Golongan Karya (Golkar) and Partai Solidaritas Indonesia (PSI) stand out as the parties with the most significant expenditures on Meta platforms. Over 90 days (from mid-August to mid-November 2023), Golkar and PSI invested more than 1.1 billion rupiahs and 419 million rupiahs, respectively. In the last three years, the cumulative spending on Facebook and Instagram by Golkar and PSI reached over 13 billion and 4.8 billion rupiahs, respectively. To provide context, it is worth noting that these figures surpassed the 1.3 billion rupiahs spent by GoJek Indonesia, an on-demand multi-service digital platform and fintech payment super-app, during the same period. In contrast, other political parties maintained more conservative spending, such as Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) with approximately 700 million and Nasionalis Demokrat (Nasdem) with 450 million rupiahs, both falling below the 1 billion rupiahs threshold.

These expenditures underscore the crucial role of social media advertising in political campaigns, particularly during elections, in Indonesia. Contemporary electoral campaigns have indeed integrated social media platforms as a key component, allowing candidates to connect with broader and more diverse audiences than ever before. Research points to a fundamental shift in campaign strategies, emphasizing digital platforms as the primary mode of engagement, particularly during global presidential cycles (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018: 28). This

² All data on social media (Facebook and Instagram) advertising expenditures in this paper is compiled by the author from the Meta Ads Library.

trend is evident in Indonesia, signifying a convergence of social media platforms, the marketing culture within which advertising operates, and the realm of electoral politics. This synergy has emerged as a pivotal force, reshaping the dynamics of elections in the country.

In this paper, I embark on a multidimensional exploration of this intricate relationship, unveiling the nuanced ways in which these elements intersect and exert influence on contemporary politics. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, it becomes imperative to grasp the complex interconnections among social media, marketing culture, and electoral politics; this understanding is crucial for gaining insights into the future and addressing challenges to democratic processes. The structure of the paper unfolds as follows: commencing with a brief historical overview of the integration of social media in elections, it proceeds to a section that underscores the deepening division and polarization, drawing insights from lessons learned in past elections.

Subsequently, attention is directed to the pervasive influence of what I term “algorithmic marketing culture,” followed by an examination of its entanglement with binary politics in the realm of electoral politics and the formation of “algorithmic enclaves.” Another section delves into the emergence of “algorithmic politics” marked by the professionalization of social media campaigns, elucidating how strategists strategically leverage the algorithmic inclination for extreme effect to amplify their online presence, advancing their electoral objectives. In closing, this paper encourages readers to explore the dynamic interplay of these elements and contemplate their implications for the future of politics in the digital age.

Social Media and Elections—A Brief Historical Overview

The Internet in Indonesia started in education and research institutions as early as 1993 (Lim, 2003a). In 1995, the technology reached the public through the arrival of commercial Internet service providers (Lim, 2003a) and became much more popular after 1996 with the availability of Internet cafes (*warnet*) throughout the country (Lim, 2003b). The utilization of the Internet in elections began in 1997 when all three parties—Golongan Karya (Golkar), Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP), and Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (PDI)—launched their official websites, largely as part of formality.

The complexity of the political landscape increased in the first post-Suharto general election in 1999, with 48 parties participating. In that year, only 0.44% of the population was online (see Figure 1). Despite the low penetration, Partai Keadilan, later renamed Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS), notably leveraged the Internet as a campaign tool. While other parties had minimal or no online presence, the conservative Islamic party PKS maintained over two dozen websites tailored to target voters in various urban localities (Lim, 2017: 414). Given the low Internet penetration, it wasn't a central tool in any party's campaign strategy and had no direct impact on the results. Nevertheless, it served as an effective and noteworthy means of scrutinizing the fledgling democratic process (Hill, 2003: 526). The 1999

election marked the first occasion when Indonesian voters could observe the online computation of poll statistics through a publicly accessible official website.

The 2004 election signified a historic moment, being the first time Indonesians directly voted for the nation's president. In this election, more parties had an online presence; however, "the Web was poorly utilized, if at all, as a campaign medium. The existing sites were frequently inadequately designed and maintained, with little anticipation that the Internet would serve as a significant source of political information" (Hameed, 2007: 206). There was an absence of engagement features on these websites. Websites were not perceived as platforms capable of transforming the political process itself by fostering increased citizen involvement in the proceedings (Hameed, 2007: 206).

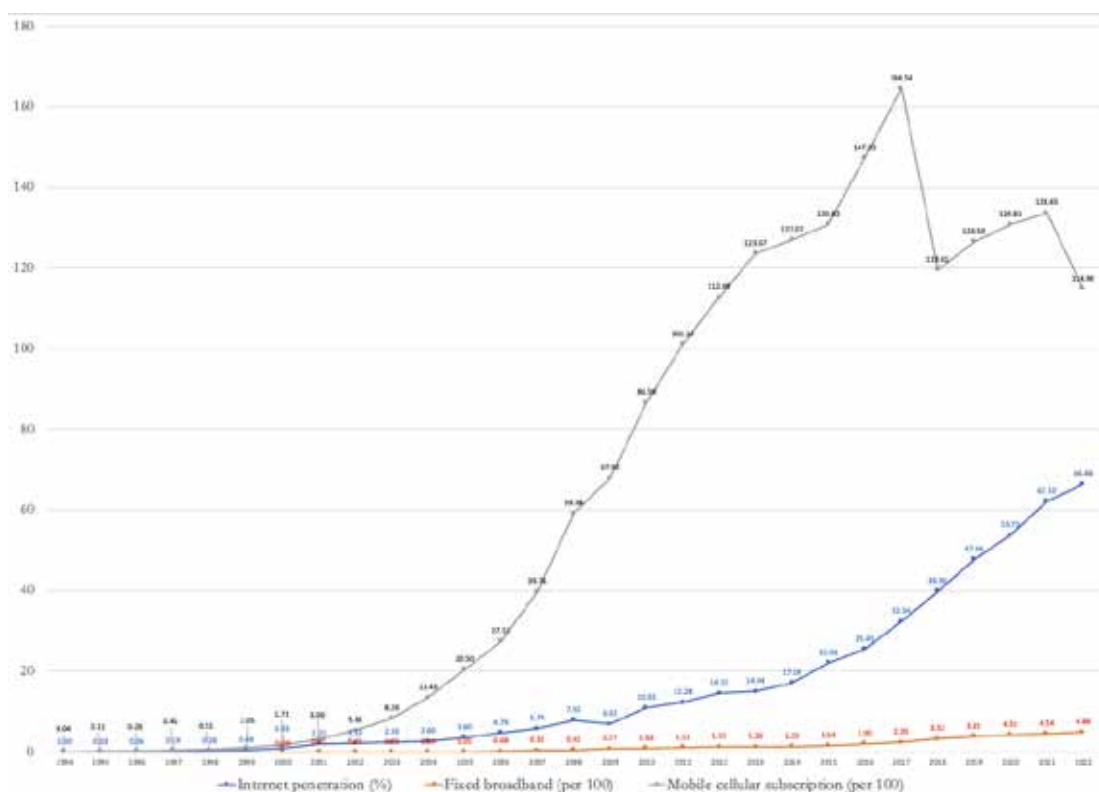


Figure 1: Internet penetration (% of the population), fixed broadband subscription (per 100 people), and mobile cellular subscription in Indonesia (per 100 people) (1990-2022)

In 2009, 27 out of the 44 national parties that participated in the election had created their websites. The advent of Facebook and Twitter saw the beginning of the use of social media platforms in the 2009 elections. Blogging and social media quickly started serving as valuable resources for political information, networking, and mobilization among activists (Lim, 2013). However, while many politicians maintained their own Facebook accounts, coupled with the increasing professionalization of political party websites, digital media, in general, remained of secondary importance for campaigning in this election (Ufen, 2010). Social media platforms were not well utilized by any party, except for PKS who created its official Twitter account just months before the election. In this election cycle,

digital campaigning was still largely unidirectional rather than participatory. Web presence existed only as a minor element of political marketing.

While the growth of fixed broadband remained stagnant, Indonesia experienced a rapid surge in mobile cellular subscriptions, reaching a significant milestone of 112 accounts per 100 individuals in 2012 (see Figure 1). With the majority of Indonesians accessing social media through mobile phones, the country witnessed a substantial increase in mobile social media usage, boasting around 45-50 million Internet users in 2012. Indonesia ascended to become the third-largest nation on Facebook with 43 million users and the fifth-largest on Twitter with 29.4 million users (Lim, 2013: 639). Social media users were predominantly concentrated in urban areas, with over 60% of traffic originating from select cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, Medan, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Semarang. Jakarta, with 7.4 million users, even earned the distinction of being inaugurated as the capital of Twitter and the second-largest city on Facebook.

Hence, it comes as no surprise that the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election saw a substantial incorporation of social media platforms into the realm of electoral politics. Unlike their counterparts who heavily allocated resources to television and print advertisements, the winners, Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), leaned heavily on social media. Their campaigns were marked by the marketization and professionalization of campaigning, especially online, complemented by robust support from voluntary campaigners in both offline and online domains (Ahmad & Popa, 2014). Jokowi's Twitter account, originally established in September 2011 for the gubernatorial election, has since evolved into his official Twitter account and was subsequently employed in later elections. The Jakarta election served as a significant blueprint for social media campaigns in subsequent elections.

Fast forward two years to the 2014 presidential election, and the pivotal role of social media in campaigns became even more apparent. Characterized by sharp polarizations, both candidates, Jokowi and Prabowo, strategically incorporated social media as a vital component of their campaign strategy (Holmes & Sulistyanto, 2016). Their campaign teams extensively utilized these platforms to shape a positive image around their respective candidates while simultaneously portraying their rivalry in a negative light. Social media campaigns predominantly revolved around personalities and featured personal attacks against the opponent, often accompanied by hate speech, racist and discriminatory messages, misinformation, and disinformation, commonly referred to as 'hoax' in the Indonesian context (Hui, 2020).

The embrace of social media persisted in the highly divisive 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election (Pilkada DKI) where users were divided between pro and anti-Ahok camps (Lim, 2017), and the 2019 presidential election further extended and amplified the trends observed in the preceding elections (Irawanto, 2019; Hui, 2020). The social media campaign in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election cycle is likely to adhere to the trajectory set in previous elections—continuing to exploit the role of personalization in politics, leveraging emotional appeals, and integrating the frequent use of political mudslinging and personal attacks as integral components of the overall strategy.

Mis/disinformation, deepening division, and polarization

Past Indonesian elections discussed earlier have sparked significant concerns among academics, political observers, policymakers, and the general public regarding the role of social media in the dissemination of mis/disinformation, coupled with the concurrent rise of polarization (Hui, 2020; Salahudin et al., 2020; Warburton, 2020; Ali & Eriyanto, 2021; Halida, 2023). At the heart of these concerns is the prevalent hypothesis that social media creates filter bubbles, segregating and polarizing users into ideological echo chambers (Spohr, 2017; Sunstein, 2018). Alongside this hypothesis, some authors highlight the impact of social media's echo chambers and filter bubbles in facilitating the spread of hate speech, amplifying the dissemination of mis/disinformation, deepening polarization, and enabling the rise of extreme populist communities (Spohr, 2017; Gorodnichenko, Pham, & Talavera, 2018; Govil & Baishya, 2018).

In response, some scholars contend that while social media contribute to the personalization of news, the perceived impact of filter bubbles and/or echo chambers may be overstated (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2016; Dubois & Blank, 2018; Zimmer et al., 2019). Moreover, when examining the polarization associated with the rise of extreme populism, some scholars advocate for more nuanced arguments that situate research on social media and populism within socio-economic and political conditions (Fuchs, 2019; Gerbaudo, 2018; Postill, 2018). In alignment with this standpoint, I concur with Greenfield (2017: 299), asserting that social media platforms do not operate in isolation as independent entities; their impact on our lives is a result of their integration into larger-scale social, technical, and physical systems. Put differently, numerous variables can introduce complexities that hinder making absolute and definitive assertions.

Focusing on the specific relationship between algorithms, information exchanges, and social media users, my previous research has illustrated that social media interactions and their persuasive potential depend on the convergence of complex forces (Lim, 2020). In essence, the surge of mis/disinformation and the deepening division and polarization are not causally linked to social media but are correlated with it. However, this correlation is not solely due to the platforms' algorithms' tendency to divide users into isolated bubbles that they cannot escape from. Instead, as will be discussed in the following sections, I posit that such impacts largely stem from biases ingrained in three factors. First, "algorithmic marketing culture" signifies the necessity for social media algorithms to cater to targeted advertising. Second, the limitation of political choices for citizens stems from the practice of binary politics, ultimately clustering social media users into "algorithmic enclaves" (Lim, 2020). Third, the intensification of "algorithmic politics" (Lim, 2023a) marked by the rise of professionalization of social media campaigns and the manipulation of public discussions.

Algorithmic marketing culture, branding, and affect

Social media platforms have undergone a notable evolution over the past decade, transitioning from a landscape without automated content-filtering algorithms to an increasingly algorithmic environment. In this milieu, according to Ted Striphas (2015), algorithms significantly impact culture by shifting many of its processes to technology. He introduces the term “algorithmic culture” to argue that the authoritative principle of culture has changed due to the delegation of cultural labor to machine-driven automated reasoning (Striphas, 2015: 395). These processes also reshape the function of culture, as instead of relying on the authority of culture to present content to the audience, they utilize “crowd wisdom” for content presentation (Striphas, 2015: 406). Here, algorithms achieve this by identifying what is “hot”, “trending,” and “most discussed” (Gillespie, 2014: 167).

Here, I interject that the fundamental design principle of social media algorithms is not primarily geared towards serving the user or achieving “crowd wisdom” based on the consensus of the crowd. Instead, algorithms are increasingly tailored to align with the overarching goal of revenue generation through targeted advertising. Put differently, these algorithms undergo continuous adjustments and redesigns to align with the prevailing marketing culture, aiming to maximize the reach and effectiveness of targeted advertising. This, of course, is not surprising. Social media platforms inherently embrace the platform capitalism model, emphasizing a relationship between the platforms and users primarily centered around commercial interests and the collection of user data (Srnicek, 2017). The design of social media algorithms adheres to the principles of marketing culture, portraying users not only as consumers but also as products themselves, “the raw materials that platforms package and sell to advertisers and other third parties” (Lim, 2023b: 184).

Hence, I propose the term “algorithmic marketing culture” as a conceptual framework to elucidate the interdependent interplay between algorithmic operations and marketing principles that authoritatively shape the circulation, visibility, and popularity of content among social media users. At the core of this culture lies the notion of branding, which encompasses the symbolic value and psychological representation of a product, with attaining virality representing the ultimate goal of marketing strategy (Holt, 2016). In this context, algorithms make no distinction between content produced and circulated by commercial brands and ordinary users. The visibility, popularity, and virality of user-generated content, political content, depend not on its inherent quality but rather on its performance as brands (Lim, 2023b).

In the realm of marketing, especially within the context of social media marketing, the success of a brand is heavily reliant on the potency of affect. In essence, affect serves as the prevailing currency in the social media communication network (Lim, 2020). The pivotal factor in the dynamics of viral communication is the necessity for users to be adequately stirred, prompting them to share and reshare content. Accordingly, research indicates that content is more prone to be shared when it elicits high-arousal emotions, encompassing joy, excitement, anxiety, and anger (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Essentially, the bias of

the algorithmic marketing culture leans towards content that exhibits extreme affect.

When extrapolated to the domain of electoral politics, content produced and disseminated by political actors—including candidates and political parties—alongside their supporters, undergoes scrutiny through the lens of algorithmic marketing culture. As a result, not all political messages receive equal treatment. To enhance the chances of content going viral, it is essential for the messaging to align with robust political branding, complemented by a compelling and memorable hashtag³, promoting hashtag politics.⁴ Content revolving around policies and socio-political and economic agendas seldom evokes intense emotions, making them less likely to achieve virality. Conversely, content related to the persona of candidates, whether portraying them in a highly positive light or subjecting them to intense criticism, holds a higher likelihood of going viral due to its capacity to evoke strong emotional responses.

This pattern elucidates the prevalence of “black campaigns”—a term employed by Indonesians as a substitute for smear campaigns, to characterize “campaigns that seek to undermine the image of electoral candidates through rumors, half-truths, or completely fabricated information” (Hui, 2020: 156). Examples of such campaigns include accusations against Jokowi, alleging him to be a communist, non-Muslim, and a puppet of a political party; scrutiny of Prabowo’s citizenship, temperament, and his son’s sexuality; and sectarian and racist campaigns against Ahok (Hui, 2020: 157).

This is not to suggest a lack of substantial content in past elections. On the contrary, numerous individuals and communities made efforts to assist voters in understanding candidates’ track records, missions, visions, policies, and future development agendas by providing facts, reliable information, and objective analysis.⁵ However, the influence of algorithmic marketing culture presents a challenge for such informative content to attain high visibility compared to more controversial content. Consequently, the social media landscape is more amenable to “black campaigns,” including mis/disinformation, hate speech, and discriminatory messages, thus contributing to the intensifying division and polarization among Indonesians.

³ Hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by a hash mark (#), used within a message to identify a keyword or topic of interest and facilitate a search for it.

⁴ Hashtag politics refers to the use of hashtags on social media platforms as a strategic tool for political communication, activism, or engagement. It involves creating and popularizing specific hashtags to promote, discuss, or organize around political issues, events, or campaigns on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok, and Facebook. Hashtags are used to aggregate content, foster online conversations, and mobilize individuals around a shared political cause or topic.

⁵ Examples include: IndoProgress' reflections on the 2014 presidential election, accessible on their website <https://indoprogress.com/>; Magdalene's commentaries addressing concerns and issues related to the election in <https://magdalene.co/tag/pemilu-2014/>; and fact-checks provided on the Fakta Pilpres blog at <https://faktapilpres.wordpress.com/>.

Algorithmic enclaves and binary politics

The prevalence of algorithmic marketing culture in the social media landscape, as mentioned earlier, is not the sole factor contributing to polarization. Algorithmic recommendation and ranking systems play a crucial role in shaping online communities, but they do not dictate users' choices (Lim, 2020). Previous research I conducted indicates that algorithms do not uniformly confine users to echo chambers, and their impact on individuals varies based on the nature of discussions and socio-political contexts (Lim, 2020). In other words, the emergence of polarized communities on social media, especially during election campaign periods, cannot be solely attributed to algorithms; human users and the socio-political contexts surrounding them also play significant roles in shaping this phenomenon (Lim, 2020).

In my prior research, I introduced the term “algorithmic enclaves” to capture the dynamic interplay between algorithms and users on social media platforms in the formation of online communities. I define these enclaves as “discursive arenas where individuals, shaped by constant interactions with algorithms, engage with each other and unite based on a perceived shared identity online to defend their beliefs and safeguard their resources, often against a common enemy” (Lim, 2020: 194). Members voluntarily shape these enclaves through their agency, coalesce around their own hashtags, and perform their own exclusive hashtag politics. Algorithmic enclaves maintain a perpetual self-reinforcing loop, aiming to sustain current users and attract potential future users through repetitive processes. Given their ability to reinforce one another across platforms, such as triggering an algorithmic response on Instagram based on a Facebook post by the same user, these enclaves become efficient vehicles for disseminating problematic message content. In other words, mis/disinformation can be amplified and swiftly propagated through the algorithmic network (Lim, 2020).

These enclaves are more prone to form when discussions embrace a binary discourse, framing the main issue and related topics exclusively as either X or anti-X, thereby attracting supporters aligned with one of these positions (Lim, 2017). The prevalence of such binary discourse often originates from binary politics—a system that provides limited choices, resulting in two dominant coalitions or parties and their respective opposition. In post-Suharto Indonesia, despite the participation of numerous political parties, elections tended to distill into binary choices, especially in presidential elections.

The practice of handshake politics, where parties and political actors merge in groups and coalitions, sometimes driven by political and business interests, contribute to this limitation of choices. Voters frequently found themselves having to choose between two candidates, not always due to wholehearted support for their chosen candidate, but as a stance against the other candidate. This phenomenon was evident in the 2014 Presidential election, where a significant portion of Jokowi non-supporters voted for him to prevent the return of the

authoritarian New Order regime represented by Prabowo, as exemplified by the Jari Tengah Ungu movement.⁶

The characteristic of this binary dynamic frequently involves a substantial infusion of religious and racial sentiments. A study conducted by Leiliyanti and Irawaty (2020), exploring Twitter usage during the 2014 Indonesian presidential elections, highlights the emergence of highly exclusive algorithmic enclaves. These enclaves formed as supporters of opposing political camps interacted and coalesced online around shared religious and political sentiments. This dynamic persisted beyond the election, influencing public discourse throughout Joko Widodo's presidency and on various significant socio-political issues that unfolded during this period.

The prevalence of binary politics extended to lower-level elections, such as gubernatorial and mayoral elections. For example, the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, initially involving three pairs of candidates, eventually revolved around campaigns either for or against Ahok (Lim, 2017). The binary dynamic reflected in past elections, combined with the influence of algorithmic marketing culture, presents a significant challenge for communities and individuals whose positions differ from the pro- and anti-camps to be heard and visible. As algorithmic enclaves around electoral politics gain prominence, social media users with dissenting views become more hesitant to share their opinions, reflecting a spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), where a reluctance to discuss political issues emerged due to higher perceived disagreement with social ties.

Algorithmic politics, professionalization of campaigns, and manipulation of publics

Beyond what transpires techno-socially on the social media landscape, we also need to examine the practices around electoral political campaigns. In the last three major elections in Indonesia, the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections and the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, we witnessed the incorporation of “algorithmic politics”, namely politics that revolves around the algorithmic

⁶ Jari Tengah Ungu (literally translated as “the purple middle finger”) is a symbolic and unconventional form of expressing conditional support for the Joko Widodo - Jusuf Kalla pair during the presidential election in Indonesia in 2014. The movement involves dipping the middle finger in ink after voting, which carries a set of meanings and objectives. It symbolizes, first, a critical stance—dipping the middle finger symbolizes a commitment to maintaining a critical stance, avoiding extreme alignment with either side, and encouraging a balanced and alert perspective. And second, visual distraction—the visual disturbance caused by the dyed middle finger serves as a constant reminder to stay engaged and proactive in pushing for change beyond the voting booth. The movement has four objectives. First, opposition to authoritarianism—the movement aims to counter what it perceives as authoritarian, militaristic, oligarchic, and anti-diversity leadership represented by Prabowo-Hatta-Bakrie. Second, conditional support—expressing support for the Joko Widodo-Jusuf Kalla pair with conditions, suggesting that backing is not unconditional but tied to specific expectations and requirements. Third, advocacy for public agendas—the movement seeks to maximize efforts in advocating for various public agendas, including human rights, grassroots democracy, anti-corruption, disability, women's rights, green economy, and environmental issues. Fourth, inclusivity—the movement aims to attract critical and undecided voters, encouraging them to join in and contribute to the objectives outlined. Source: Jari Tengah Ungu (2014).

manipulation of issues, primarily aimed at dominating media spheres to influence public opinion (Lim, 2023a: 39). Algorithmic politics encompasses varied political practices that exploit existing algorithmic biases to manipulate publics. It comes to the fore when political actors manipulate algorithms to influence citizens' choices in politics, not only in elections but also in routine political and policy-related issues (Tapsell, 2021).

The increasing integration of algorithmic politics in electoral politics is characterized by several key trends. First, there is a notable professionalization and financial backing, signifying the growing sophistication and strategic nature of social media campaigning. Financial support from elite individuals and groups associated with the campaign industry has emerged as a driving force, empowering campaigns to make substantial investments in advanced technologies, tools, and expertise (Saraswati, 2020; Wijayanto & Berenschot, 2021).

Second, social media campaigns exhibit a dual nature, leveraging platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube for both formal policy presentations and more covert, targeted strategies (Tapsell, 2021). On the formal front, these platforms are employed to reach out to voters, construct a positive image, and participate in issue-based discussions. Conversely, the clandestine side involves the dissemination of scandalous and often unverified material, particularly centered around identity politics.

The third trend involves the strategic integration of a paid campaign network aimed at manipulating public discourse. This type of campaign heavily relies on negative strategies, mobilizing hatred towards opponents and frequently employing paid buzzers,⁷ cybertroopers,⁸ and bots⁹ to generate disinformation, misinformation, and hateful content (Sastramidjaja & Wijayanto, 2022).

Embodied in these three trends, practitioners of algorithmic politics are leveraging the algorithmic inclination towards extreme effect within the algorithmic marketing culture. They exploit the nature of binary politics and amplify their online presence to advance electoral objectives by segmenting electorates into polarized algorithmic enclaves.

Concluding remarks

In this comprehensive exploration, the paper delves into the triangle affairs between social media, marketing culture, and electoral politics, unraveling nuanced intersections and their collective influence on contemporary politics. Lessons drawn from past major elections in Indonesia underscore social media's significant impact on campaigns, revealing a pattern of heightened division and

⁷ Buzzer is an Indonesian term used to describe "a netizen who is paid by a company to disseminate promotional information of a certain product or brand on social media sites. In political campaigns, buzzers are recruited to promote issues that benefit a particular candidate" (Lim, 2017: 417).

⁸ Cybertroopers describes individuals paid to spread political propaganda online, especially on social media platforms (Lim, 2023a: 188).

⁹ Bots or social bots can be defined as "a piece of more or less automated computer software, programmed to mimic the behaviour of human Internet users" (Larsson & Moe, 2015: 362).

polarization, often accompanied by the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation. This paper disentangles this dynamic, underscoring that while it is associated with the social media landscape, causation cannot be ascribed to it. Instead, it arises from and correlates with two main factors: firstly, the politics of hashtags, originating from the sociotechnical consequences of social media and their algorithms; and secondly, the politics of handshakes, grounded in the binary politics of Indonesia and the substantial influence of political actors manipulating the public through algorithmic politics.

To reiterate, socio-technically, such impacts—polarization and mis/disinformation in electoral politics—originate from “algorithmic marketing culture,” a term introduced in this paper to illustrate the dialectical interplay between algorithmic operations and marketing principles, particularly branding, where the visibility and popularity of content depend on its performance as brands. Within this culture, affect, defined as the prevailing currency in social media communication networks, becomes crucial for content virality. This dynamic extends to electoral politics, revealing that political content undergoes scrutiny through the lens of algorithmic marketing culture, favoring emotionally charged content over informative political messages. Furthermore, the impacts also stem from the nature of binary politics that limit political choices for citizens, ultimately clustering social media users into “algorithmic enclaves,” where groups with similar views reinforce their beliefs. Additionally, the intensification of “algorithmic politics” in electoral politics adds fuel to the mix, making the social media landscape a fertile ground for the manipulation of the public.

As highlighted in the introduction, the significance of social media campaigns for candidates and political parties in the upcoming 2024 Indonesian election has grown substantially. Alongside a notable surge in social media advertising expenditures, the engagement of social media campaign consultants, including those utilizing advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, has increased. The prevalence of algorithmic politics is likely to intensify, potentially leading to greater misinformation and deeper polarization. Essentially, the 2014 election is poised to grapple with the challenges identified in this study. Although changing this reality in the short term is nearly impossible, it remains imperative to navigate these obstacles for potential future transformations.

Recognizing that no single sector—be it government, platform tech companies, the private sector, academia, or civil society—can singularly address these challenges is paramount. Initiatives such as promoting transparency in algorithmic processes, ensuring accountability for the spread of misinformation, and fostering diverse perspectives on social media platforms are essential steps in mitigating the negative consequences highlighted in this study. Collaboration between policymakers and tech companies is vital for developing and implementing ethical guidelines that prioritize the public interest and democratic values in the design and deployment of algorithmic systems. Simultaneously, a shift beyond binary politics, offering more diverse political choices for constituents, is crucial. Ombudsmen, watchdog organizations, and a robust legal framework are essential to counteract intentional strategic practices of spreading misinformation and manipulating public opinion during elections. At the individual level, it is crucial to promote digital literacy, critical thinking, and media literacy

among citizens to cultivate an Indonesian society that is resilient to political manipulation. While these tasks are challenging, if not seemingly impossible, collectively addressing these issues becomes our only choice. This collective effort aims to work toward creating a more informed, resilient, and inclusive digital communication sphere, fostering healthier electoral politics.

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