Research article

The political satire of Mojok.co in the 2019 Indonesian election

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to discuss Mojok.co’s style of political satire as an alternative to political discussion. Mojok.co packages political messages that are easy to understand. This article presents Mojok.co’s sophisticated style in packaging political messages in a ‘naughty’ style but evokes political awareness. This study employs a qualitative content analysis which enables to collect data in the form of words, meanings, symbols, ideas, themes and other forms of communication messages. Qualitative content analysis allows the communication media content to be recorded and further analyzed. The content analyzed in this study is political content on Mojok.co’s Instagram account related to the 2019 election. The results of this study show that the content on Mojok.co demonstrates satire, joking, and ridicule discussion on politics. Moreover, Mojok.co’s satire content functions as supporting elements of the image display so that the audience can easily understand the messages. Mojok.co’s infographic content design combines the elements of colour, illustration, and typography to represent the signs. Mojok.co’s satirical style also offers joyful political discussions. The meaning of politics can be interpreted in a simple, light, and entertaining discussion. Therefore, political satire can be an alternative style of discussion.

1. Introduction

Social media has been influencing political communication changes. Social media with various platforms and user models is essential in shaping political ways and views. The production, distribution, and consumption of social media become one of the reasons why one conveys their aspirations in the context of political communication discussions (Casero-Ripollés, 2018). The use of social media in the form of image posting offers many advantages. One of the advantages is that one will easily understand the communication messages via visual images compared to verbal messages (Farkas and Bene, 2021). Also, social media enables people to present a visual identity (Newman, 2015). Digital-based alternative media can carry out this effort through Instagram. Instagram can display photos, images, and videos as a medium for conveying political messages. The political message is also targeted at young audiences.

A research carried out by Lalancette and Raynauld (2019) reveals that Instagram, which provides visual displays, has the power to change people’s political choices or preferences. Moreover, Adi et al. (2018) explain that visual displays are a new force for political communication. Visual text (image illustration, in this case) offers a specialty in conveying messages. Its specialty can be described into three elements. First, visual text can be grasped more quickly and can be understood immediately. Second, the visual text offers an impression. Third, the visual text provides a stronger symbolic value. These elements can drive political choices. Moreover, Illustration image becomes a powerful virtual campaign strategy.

One of the alternative media that utilizes digital media and Instagram to deliver information is Mojok.co. This media shows its identity on Instagram account, namely @mojokdotco, to be easily recognized and distinguished from other alternative media. Mojok.co is quite active in using social media of Instagram, viewed from the frequency of posting a content on Instagram, which is three or even more content a day (see Figure 1).

Through the uploaded image, Mojok.co shows the audience that their content represents their media tagline, ‘A little naughty, a lot of sense’. The content that Mojok.co displays on social media is often mind-blowing, humorous but remains informative (Suminar, 2017). Mojok.co was founded on August 24, 2014, and actively used Instagram in September 2017. As an alternative media that publish articles/opinion essays on the website of https://Mojok.co, this media prefers to position itself as calm and fresh media amidst huge information waste, which is realized by providing ‘space’ for writers with a strong sense of locality (Utomo, 2015). Therefore, Mojok.co can be a medium of...
entertainment but consistent in highlighting the latest issues. Mojok.co encourages a critical stance in politics through a satire style (Suminar, 2017).

The concept of ‘Naughty’ in Mojok.co can be viewed from the satire, sarcasm, and humor found in Mojok.co content. Furthermore, the concept of ‘a lot of sense’ of Mojok.co may refer to creativity in producing content. Therefore, Mojok.co is often considered satirical media.

When the media conglomeration has become part of political interests, the satirical media provides space for the public to escape from this saturated situation (Utomo, 2015). When entering 2019, Mojok.co created a mascot to strengthen its media identity in responding to events that grew in society.

Mojok.co consistently disseminates information about the simultaneous general elections held on April 17, 2019. From January 1, 2019, to April 16, 2019, Mojok.co had shared a lot of political content, approximately 218 contents on Instagram. In reporting political situations and events, Mojok.co’s content is characterized by full of satire. Starting from writing articles using satirical language, Mojok.co forms a particular satire language called ‘Mojok language’ (Utomo, 2015). Mojok language appears on the visual display in the form of writing and image.

This article discusses Mojok.co’s satirical content regarding the 2019 Indonesian political issues. Mojok.co is present as a criticism addressed to the mainstream media in reporting the political news. As an alternative media, Mojok.co turns people’s eyes to the bustling media market (Kenix, 2011).

Mojok.co utilizes visual language in the form of images as objects. This image can create a perception for everyone who views it. Image or graphic design is a communication medium that bridges information providers and the public (Kenix, 2013). Due to the presence of alternative media that utilizes images as a medium of communication, political communication is not only dominated by the mainstream media (Mahaswari, 2017; Sujoko, 2020). However, this has become a discourse that allows everyone to dialogue with critical reasoning (Rill and Cardiel, 2013).

This article aims to elaborate Mojok.co’s style of political satire as an alternative to political discussion. Mojok.co packages easy-to-understand political messages. This article explains Mojok.co’s sophisticated style in

Figure 1. The Mojok.co Instagram account viewed using a smartphone. (Source: Instagram account of @mojokdotco).
packaging political messages in a “naughty” style but trigger political awareness.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social media and politics

Digital civilization may change the socio-political order of the society. The socio-political order transformation will not only change political institutions, but also “rearrange” the perspective, behavior, and social structure of the society.

Gilardi (2016) explains that the digital technology also influences the democratic process itself. Political mobilization, campaign strategy, polarization of public opinion, tools and channels of public governance begin to change. Also, Gilardi et al. (2021)’s research shows that social media significantly influence the agenda setting of political interest groups.

Internet has a power to change the social order. The internet will be the main asset for someone to win the discourse battle. The presence of social media which is utilized as a source of information has changed the pattern of social or intra-individual interaction (Syahputra, 2017). Social media is not a neutral artifact, but a political and social space having strong democratic implications. The consolidation of social media in political communication has placed technology at the center of academic debate. Digital platforms have changed political information, but do not replace journalism and conventional media (Casero-Ripollés, 2018). Visual communication signifies a democratic and interactive atmosphere. However, most politicians are busy with self-branding to gain support from the public than having direct contact with audiences (Ekman and Widholm, 2017).

Social media allows the emergence of new communication practices in the form of satirical information (Casero-Ripollés, 2018). Social media has encouraged more meaningful political communication in the midst of society. It introduced new things that featured highly in the distribution of political information. Political information is also interpreted differently by the public. The distribution of information through social media is what makes politics a hot topic in the community (Fuchs, 2021).

Social media as part of new media has several characteristics. Lister et al. (2009) explain three main characteristics of new media. First, amplificatory, new media support long-distance communication that connects individuals with each other without a distance barrier; Second, durable, new media enable to record and store all forms of communication history that have been carried out. Third, alternative, new media offer alternative to deliver communication messages. In other words, new media are alternative media among the existing conventional media.

New media that are widely used by the Indonesian people include Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram (Perangin-angin and Zainal, 2018). The new media are often used as a channel for delivering political messages. YouTube and Instagram are characterized by the dissemination of photographic and audiovisual content, with a particular focus on entertaining. Therefore, although political information can circulate on any platform, the parameters of its distribution can differ significantly depending on the characteristics of the channel which situates its dissemination (Casero-Ripollés, 2018).

2.2. Visual identity construction

Identity refers to the characteristic that distinguishes individuals, groups or objects. The meaning of identity as something that can be compared naturally emphasizes the level of similarity between one another in a specific area or particular points that are mutually agreed upon (Maalouf, 2011). Identity shows how individuals and collectivities are differentiated from other individuals and collectivities (Finkelstein, 2010; Rambaree and Knez, 2017). Identity has different meanings and can be broadly understood. Like an individual, a company also owns an identity, which is commonly referred to as a corporate identity (Melewar et al., 2006; Abratt and Kley, 2012).

Corporate identity is one of the visual communication designs in the form of images or symbols created as simple as possible to communicate the image of a company effectively and efficiently (Balmer and Gray, 2000). Corporate identity is one of the visual and graphic expressions of the company. Similar to self-identity, corporate identity aims to make a company easily recognized by the public. In addition, a corporate identity which consists of visual and verbal identity, intends to differentiate the company from other companies (Bartholome and Melewar, 2011). The company’s visual identity elements can be name, brand, typography, color, and so on (Dequeux et al., 2017).

The elements that make up a visual identity include the design of a graphic design. As a visual form of the company’s identity, graphic design is an object that is full of image and reputation. Visual identity is created to attract the audience’s attention, but it also contains value, image, and reputation to be achieved. Therefore, careful planning and strategies are required to construct the visual identity.

Identity construction may refer to how we view ourselves and how others see us through our behavior, language style, and thinking concepts (Bamberg et al., 2011). Identity can be viewed from various perspectives, one of which is from the level of company’s achievement for a different image and deals with the effects of aesthetic displays such as names, logos, designs, letters, colors, and so on (Elliot and Wattanasuwun, 1998). Therefore, graphic design can construct the company/media’s identity. Van den Bosch et al. (2005) explain that visual identity can support reputation through design quality.

The essential visual components that govern the instrument of a visual identity include logos, letters, colors, and composition (Melewar et al., 2006). One of the factors contributing to the visual branding failure deals with the lack of uniqueness of the visual components themselves (Phillips et al., 2014). Therefore, a visual identity should be designed more uniquely. The uniqueness of a visual identity is formed through its graphic style. Moreover, the uniqueness of the graphic style can be made from the color and shape of the logo (Alessandri, 2014).

Baker and Balmer (1997) explain that the typology of graphic styles can be classified into five styles. The first style is fragmentation which refers to a graphic style created by taking part of the logo to be fully or partially shaped. The second style is a distortion that deals with the deviation in form carried out by widening or narrowing, lengthening or shortening, but it still looks similar to the other parts of the logo. The third style is a modification which refers to a graphic style that changes part of the logo to make it distinctive. The next style is incorporation which combines the existing forms in a part of the logo with other forms that are not visually stronger. The last style is an organization which refers to a graphic style formed from the compilation of some logo shapes.

The five typologies of graphic style can create a unique visual identity due to adopting a logo that is initially designed as unique as possible to distinguish it from the others. In addition, the distinctive graphic style adopted from a logo will strengthen the visual identity of a company and may provide a consistent impression (Balmer and Gray, 2000).

2.3. Satirical media as alternative media

Politainment is a fusion of politics and entertainment. Politainment includes at least two things. First is political entertainment where the entertainment industry exploits political topics in various entertainment formats. Second, entertaining politics, i.e. political actors use celebrities through the media to create a good image and to promote certain issues in order to gain the voice support of the public (Nieland, 2008; Riegert and Collins, 2015).

Politainment provides a more relaxed community discussion space, where political issues are no longer a serious discussion, but something which is full of entertainment. Politainment reduces the political agenda to present ideas, programs, data, credibility, and capabilities.
Politainment directs political discussions as the entertainment of the audience. All things related to politics and politicians (political actors) are packaged into entertaining content (Schultz, 2012). Politainment can be viewed as a result of the increasing mediation and political professionalization that is a hallmark of modern democracy where media logic becomes a key feature (Riegert and Collins, 2015).

In a situation where conglomerates position the media to represent the political elite’s interests, the satirical media provide space for the public to ‘sigh’ and escape from the saturated condition (Utomo, 2015). Satire refers to a style used to express insinuation to a situation or person (Simpson, 2003). Satire is an indicator of the highest point of freedom of speech (Pollard, 2017). Anyone can deliver satire messages to anyone as many objects can become the subject of satire and jokes, one of which is politics.

Political messages are delivered as a reaction to express the failure of the mainstream media in reporting an event accurately (Utomo, 2015). Like the previous definition of satire, satirical messages are intended to attack a person or authority deemed worthy of being attacked. In this sense, “attacked” has a symbolic meaning which opens up space for expressing an opinion for anyone who views or reads the satirical messages (Freedman, 2009). Satirical messages themselves contain humor to attack an opponent or enemy while entertaining.

Satirical messages are becoming increasingly popular among the younger age group as they offer a better level of authenticity that contradicts the reality constructed by politicians, advertisers, and media constructors (Jones and Baym, 2010). The existence of technological developments in the form of the internet further expands satirical messages and provides more space for these satirical messages. Satirical messages can easily be found on Youtube channels, blog pages, and websites. This phenomenon occurs due to the strengths of the internet, which offer an opportunity to grasp the public’s spontaneous will to produce, create, or receive satirical messages (Kaid, 2004).

Groups that disseminate satirical messages via the internet are becoming more creative and exploring themselves better (Rahmati, 2012). This is because strict rules and policies do not limit the space on the internet compared to conventional mass media, which is somewhat more restrictive and limited. Moreover, messages shared via the internet are easier to go viral and accessible to the public anywhere and anytime.

Satire also fits into the nature of new media as satire brings political conversation seekers on social media closer to message makers. The meeting of the political satire and new media nature combined with the political stigma becomes substantial and a tendentious subject of discussion. Satire becomes an alternative in political discussion (Sujoko, 2020).

3. Methods

This study employs a content analysis method (Stemler, 2015). Content analysis is a research method that makes reproducible inferences and valid data by considering the context. The content analysis deals with communication or communication content (Neuendorf and Kumar, 2015). The content analysis includes classifying the symbols used in communication based on specific criteria and performing thorough analyses in making predictions (Neuendorf and Kumar, 2015).

Qualitative content analysis allows to gather data in the form of words, meanings, symbols, ideas, themes and other forms of communication messages (Kassarjian, 1977). In addition, the text-based data in qualitative content analysis enables to be recorded and analyzed further (Neuman, 2011). This data collection technique was chosen as it allowed to collect and thoroughly analyze the data on social media. Also, the qualitative content analysis enables researchers to carry out in-depth analysis to examine why a text is produced and what the perception towards the text are (Rolhe and Burnett, 1991). This can be performed by investigating images such as symbols and the level of meaning like the connotation of a word (Sloan and Quan-Haase, 2017).

This study analyse the political contents of the Mojok.co’s Instagram account regarding the election events from January to April 16, 2019, containing infographics, illustrations, and satirical images. During that period, there was 190 political content uploaded by Mojok.co. This study is limited to analysing images that meet the elements of infographics, illustrations, and satire. Based on these three categories, 25 political content were analysed. The analysis includes describing the findings of the signs based on the object of research. Then, the satirical meaning displayed by Mojok.co is revealed.

The analysis results are summarized descriptively by describing the signs classified based on their objects on the Mojok.co Instagram account and examining the intent or message being conveyed. Ethical approval was established from the Institutional Research Committee of Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta for all facet of this study.

4. Results and discussions

4.1. Political satire

Satire is one of the ways to laugh at ourselves while criticizing political actors. Political satire encourages the creation of a dialogical space through soft emotional demands (Lee and Jang, 2017). The existence of satirical media has marked the dynamics of the political communication study. Political communication in the new media era has successfully developed a new paradigm and changed the preferences in attitude (Perloff, 2013).

Political-satirical media has become a criticism for media conglomerates. Media conglomerates affiliated with political power have caused saturation. In other words, satirical media provides space for the public to escape from boredom by offering an alternative political perspectives (Hoffman and Young, 2011).

In the 2019 political year, Mojok.co consistently disseminated information about the simultaneous elections held on April 17, 2019. From January 1, 2019, to April 16, 2019, Mojok.co has uploaded approximately 218 political contents on its social media of Instagram.

The content of Mojok.co describes the existing political situations and events expressed with full of satire. Starting from publishing articles written using the satirical language, Mojok.co characterizes its style with the distinctive satirical language called ‘mojok language’ (Utomo, 2015). Mojok language is not only used in the article writing but it is also represented in its visual content in the form of writing on the image content of Mojok.co.

The image published on Mojok.co’s Instagram represents its visual identity. It shows how Mojok.co responds to an event, especially politics, which is relevant to its identity. The symbols contained in the image represent visual identities constructed through graphic design.

Lee and Kwak (2014) explain that the symbol affects a person’s psychology. By looking at an image, someone will get an overview of an event, primarily when the visual design depicts political factors. This is a political education in the form of satire. One of the visuals shared by Mojok.co deals with Jokowi’s magic cards (see Figure 2).

Mojok.co consistently utilizes illustrations to depict objects on its Instagram. In political content, the illustrations are always used to describe situations and figures who become the objects. The use of illustrations in Mojok.co’s political content is applied alternately or simultaneously in one image. Kusrianto (2007) states that illustration is classified into two categories, namely realistic and non-realistic illustrations.

The realistic illustrations in Mojok.co’s political content are utilized to describe the real person or convey facts and data. Furthermore, non-realistic illustrations in Mojok.co political content are used to insinuate or insult a political figure, situation, or condition.

The use of non-realistic illustrations allows describing things that are even difficult to display in images that have to wait for certain moments. Also, non-realistic illustrations are not limited to any situation or circumstance, as non-realistic illustrations can be described based on the
designer’s ideas and imagination. The nature of non-realistic illustration depicts shapes that are not anatomical and not perspective in real situations.

The illustration presented in the infographic content is the picture of Jokowi wearing a long coat, bow tie, and playing cards. The illustration of Jokowi’s image has a visual resemblance to Jokowi’s figure. Jokowi’s illustration can also be an index as it has body anatomy and a face that resembles Jokowi. In addition, the image of Jokowi wearing a long coat, bow tie, and playing a card indicates Jokowi as a magician. Long suits, bow ties, and playing cards symbolize the portrayal of Jokowi as a magician.

Describing Jokowi as a magician is one of Mojok.co’s jokes to make fun of government policies. The image of cards symbolizes a magician as it is one of the magicians’ playing tools. A magician likes to do tricks that look simple but are complicated in reality. In short, a magician often uses certain tricks to simplify something complicated.

The card image also resembles the original shape of a card. Therefore, it can be categorized as having an iconic element. In addition to the card illustration icon, it also has an index where the cards Jokowi plays are Jokowi’s magic card, as one of the government programs in dealing with social, economic, and educational problems in the community. Therefore, a card image in the content design symbolizes Jokowi’s card work program.

The infographic above describes the types of card programs promoted by Jokowi. Eight cards will later be handed over to eligible citizens. Five of them have been released since 2014, and the next three cards will be released in 2020.

Besides using an image, the color in the design of Mojok.co infographic also has a particular meaning. The red color on Jokowi’s cheeks symbolizes feelings of shame. The dominant red color on the background of graphic design may give a striking impression to be easily recognized and viewed by readers.

Images are used as media to convey messages since visual text language (in this case illustration images) offers specialities in conveying messages. These specialities are divided into three. First, visual text can be identified more quickly and understood directly. Second, visual text is more impressive. Third, visual text offers a stronger symbolic value.

Satirical messages intend to attack individuals or institutions who have authority that are deemed worthy of being hurt or attacked (Plevriti, 2014). The attack is not physical but utilizing a symbolic meaning that opens up space for interpretation for anyone who reads the satirical message (Freedman, 2009). Satirical messages basically use humor as their main weapon, attacking political enemies while entertaining. Jones and Baym (2010) further explain that satire is now becoming popular among young people because it offers a degree of message authenticity that is more ideal than the antithesis of reality produced by politicians, advertisers, and media.

In this case, Mojok.co can be said as alternative media that provide space for young people to express their ideas and opinions in public spaces. Mojok.co as a public space gives new style for the younger generation in discussing issues sparked in the society. This strengthens the idea of Jones and Baym (2010) that young people have a different way of understanding politics, one of which is through political satire. Thus, Mojok.co can play a more active role as alternative media to provide new views on issues that are developing in society—especially young people—and provide a variety of information for the public interest.

4.2. Discourse contestation

Mojok.co insinuates Jokowi’s work program by portraying Jokowi as a magician who often performs tricks by chanting a magician’s mantra in order to be something or how the trick will fail or succeed.

The satire used by Mojok.co is undoubtedly against the conventional media, which the conglomerate has controlled. The media conglomerates are behind Jokowi as the incumbent. What Mojok.co has done indicates a discourse contestation on the presidential election. This contestation enables the use of graphic memes/visuals to undermine the dominance of mainstream media coverage (Wadipalapa, 2015).

The discourse contestation in the new media of Instagram has the power to change. The research conducted by Trevisan et al. (2019) in
Italy shows that Instagram is a very dynamic platform that can grasp political discourse. Politicians in Italy use Instagram as a means of communicating with supporters or opposing groups. Through Instagram, political mapping becomes clearer. Mojok.co has entered the system. As a power of new media, Mojok.co encourages the government’s support groups to be critical and enhance the opposing groups to think clearly rather than emotionally.

Instagram as new media has become an open arena for active political discussion. The nature of the new media that reaches many circles gives hope that political conversations are not only “controlled” by some politicians. The public sphere of social media allows for performing agenda setting as stated by Gilardi et al. (2021). The nature of social media that is widely used by young people can transform the pattern of relations and the political landscape as investigated by Syahputra (2017).

5. Conclusion

In summary, the political satire in the 2019 election that has been presented by Mojok.co has become a fascinating historical record. Political satire encourages someone to easily follow the candidates they support without being critical. On the other hand, being an opposing group is not just rejecting but having critical arguments.

Political satire through social media can be an alternative style of discussion. Politics are no longer considered taboo to be discussed. Political satire encourages someone to easily follow the candidates they presented by Mojok.co has become a fascinating historical record. Political satire through social media can be an alternative style of discussion, due to the development of political communication as a means of political education seems limited to readings and references. Interpreting images in the dimension of political communication as a means of political education seems important in future research.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Sunarso Sunarso: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Benni Setiawan: Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Ni Putu Pande Satya Anjani: Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

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Data included in article/supp. material/referenced in article.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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