



Analysis of the Role of Social Media in Shaping Public Opinion on Social Issues

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the role of social media in shaping public opinion on social issues that are developing in society. Social media has become the main platform for the dissemination of information and public communication, replacing the traditional role of mass media in shaping public perception. This research uses a qualitative approach with literature study methods and observation of public interactions on various social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. The research results show that social media has a significant influence in shaping public opinion, especially through content virality, the role of influencers, and algorithmic mechanisms that reinforce echo chambers. Social issues such as gender equality, the environment, and social justice become active discussion topics and are capable of creating digital social movements. However, the role of social media also brings challenges such as the spread of misinformation and opinion polarization. Thus, a deeper understanding of social media dynamics becomes important for the healthy and constructive management of public issues. This research is expected to contribute to the development of more effective social communication strategies in the digital era.

Keywords: Social media, public opinion, social issues, disinformation, digital communication

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has brought significant changes in the way humans interact, obtain information, and form views on various social phenomena[1]. One of the most prominent manifestations of this change is the emergence of social media as a highly dominant public communication medium[2]. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are no longer just tools for sharing personal information; they have evolved into highly dynamic public discussion spaces that significantly influence public opinion on various social issues[3]. Social media allows anyone to be both a producer and a consumer of information[4]. Its open, fast, and easily accessible nature makes social media a very effective tool for disseminating social issues, such as gender equality, social

justice, human rights, climate change, and public policy issues[5]. Not only formal institutions like mass media or social organizations use social media to voice issues, but also individuals from various backgrounds who actively contribute their views and influence public opinion[6].

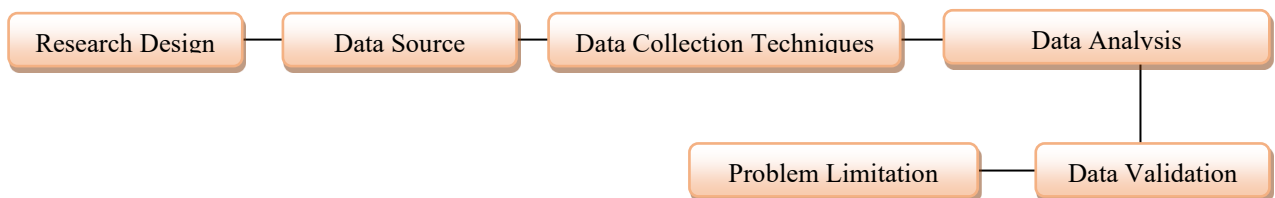
This phenomenon indicates a shift in power in the formation of public opinion[7]. If previously conventional media such as television, newspapers, and radio held the primary control in shaping public narratives, now that role has been divided and even shifted to social media[8]. In other words, social media has democratized the production and dissemination of information, allowing marginalized voices to surface and gain widespread public attention[9]. In the context of social issues, this can be a positive force because it enables grassroots advocacy and digital social movements that can influence policies or open up more inclusive public discussions[10].

However, the dominance of social media also brings impacts that are not always positive[11]. One of the main issues is the rampant spread of misinformation or fake news that can shape public opinion incorrectly, biasly, or even destructively[12]. Social media algorithms that tend to reinforce content that aligns with users' views (echo chamber) also contribute to the polarization of society on an issue[13]. As a result, although social media has great potential in raising social issues widely and quickly, it also carries risks to the quality of information and the resilience of society in facing opinion conflicts[14]. In the context of Indonesia, the role of social media in shaping public opinion has become increasingly interesting to study, given the high penetration of the internet and the use of social media across various layers of society[15]. Based on data from We Are Social and Hootsuite, as of January 2024, there are more than 167 million active social media users in Indonesia[16]. This figure shows that the majority of the Indonesian population considers social media one of their main sources of information[17]. This can be seen from various social events that rapidly develop on social media and trigger public reactions, such as issues of violence against women, environmental destruction by corporations, legal injustices, and various forms of social inequality[18].

With this phenomenon, a fundamental question arises: to what extent do social media play a role in shaping public opinion on circulating social issues? Can social media serve as a healthy and educational discussion space, or does it instead become an arena for narrative battles that confuse the public? These questions are important to answer in order to understand the dynamics of public opinion today, as well as to prepare appropriate communication and media literacy strategies for society[19]. This research aims to analyze the role of social media in shaping public opinion on social issues. The focus of the study lies on the mechanisms of information dissemination on social media, the roles of key actors such as influencers or public accounts, and how public opinion is formed, changed, or polarized due to exposure to certain content. Additionally, this research also highlights the positive and negative impacts of social media's role in the social sphere, as well as providing recommendations to enhance digital literacy and promote more responsible social media usage[20]. Through a qualitative approach based on literature studies and observations of social interactions on social media, this research is expected to provide a clearer picture of how social media influences the formation of public opinion, especially in the context of dynamic and multidimensional social issues. Furthermore, the results of this research are also expected to serve as a reference for stakeholders, such as the government, academics, social activists, and the general public, in designing effective and ethical social communication strategies in the digital era. By deeply understanding the role of social media, it is hoped that society can be more critical in receiving information, more active in engaging in healthy discussions, and more wise in forming opinions on the social issues that are currently developing.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the role of social media in shaping public opinion on social issues. This approach was chosen because it is considered most suitable for understanding complex, dynamic, and meaningful social phenomena, such as social media user interactions and their perceptions of emerging social issues.



Picture 1. Systematic Framework

2.1 Research Design

The research design is exploratory and descriptive, with the main objective of describing and understanding the patterns of public opinion formation on social media. This research does not aim to generalize statistically, but rather emphasizes a deep understanding of the context, meaning, and impact of social media use in shaping opinions on social issues..

2.2 Data Source

The data in this study was obtained from two types of sources, namely:

- a. Primary data: in the form of documentation and observation of social media content, including posts, comments, hashtags, and interactions between users on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

- b. Secondary data: obtained from scientific literature, journals, survey reports (such as from We Are Social, Katadata, and LSI), as well as online news relevant to the research topic.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques are carried out through:

- a. Data collection techniques were carried out through: Non-participatory observation, where the researcher directly observes the activities and interactions of social media users on specific social issues without engaging in discussions.
- b. Documentation study, namely the collection of data from digital documents such as social media posts, screenshots, and online conversation archives.
- c. Literature review, to strengthen the theoretical foundation and place the findings in the context of previous research.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis and thematic analysis methods. The procedure includes:

- a. Data reduction: selecting and filtering content relevant to the research focus.
- b. Categorization: grouping data based on main themes, such as types of social issues, forms of public opinion, key actors, and public responses.
- c. Interpretation: interpreting the patterns of interaction and meaning that emerge from the data, and linking them to previous theories or research.
- d. Conclusion: compiling findings that represent the role of social media in shaping public opinion on social issues.

2.5 Data Validation

To maintain data validity, the researchers applied the source triangulation technique, which involves comparing data from various social media platforms and library references. Additionally, the researchers also conducted an audit trail, which involves systematically documenting the research process to ensure transparency and accountability of the analysis results.

2.6 Problem Limitation

This research has several limitations, including:

- a. Only focus on certain social media platforms, especially those popular in Indonesia.
- b. Did not conduct direct interviews with users, so the analysis results are interpretative of open data.
- c. The social issues studied are limited to topics that have become trends and have a significant digital footprint within the period of 2020–2024.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research reveals several findings that show how social media plays a role in shaping public opinion on social issues. Through the observation of several popular hashtags and content related to social issues on social media, it was found that social media not only serves as a space for sharing information but also as an arena for opinion formation, digital advocacy, and pressure on public policy.

3.1 Social Media as a Platform for Expression and Social Participation

Observation results show that social media, particularly Twitter and Instagram, serve as open spaces for the public to voice their opinions on social issues. The public actively expresses support for the passage of the bill. In this case, social media serves as a channel for public participation that brings together the voices of civil society, activists, journalists, and public figures in one discussion space. This phenomenon shows that social media is capable of bridging the limitations of public participation in conventional realms, while also fostering collective awareness through massive digital campaigns.

3.2 The Role of Influencers and Communities in Influencing Public Opinion

One important finding is the significant influence of accounts with a large number of followers, such as activists, celebrities, or community accounts, in shaping public opinion. For example, when a public figure posts an opinion or supports a certain issue, the post often goes viral and sparks further discussion among their followers. This shows that the formation of public opinion on social media is greatly influenced by certain actors who have social authority or credibility in the eyes of the public. They act as opinion leaders who can influence the direction of the conversation and perceptions regarding the raised issues.

3.3 Information Dissemination and Virality as Mechanisms of Influence

Social media allows for the rapid and widespread dissemination of information through features like retweet, share, and repost. One concrete example is the virality of the hashtag, which emerged in 2019 and resurfaces during certain periods

as a form of criticism against government policies. This virality creates a sense of urgency and expands the reach of the issue, even being covered by national and international mass media. This process shows how public opinion is formed from the intensity of exposure to certain information, whether through text, images, or videos that are shared massively.

3.4 Challenges: Polarization and Disinformation on Social Media

Although it has positive potential, social media also becomes a fertile ground for the spread of misinformation and opinion polarization. In several cases, such as issues related to pandemic management or government policies, hoax or manipulative content has been found, which then triggers divisions in opinions among users. This polarization is reinforced by social media algorithms that tend to strengthen echo chambers, showing users only content that aligns with their previous views. As a result, critical and open dialogue is hindered, while horizontal conflicts in the digital world become more intense.

3.5 Impact on Policy and Public Awareness

One indicator that social media is effective in shaping public opinion is its ability to prompt responses from the government or relevant institutions. Some issues that go viral on social media have proven to receive serious attention, even prompting policy changes, such as the postponement of legislative discussions, clarifications from state institutions, or the emergence of public discussions in mainstream media. On the other hand, the public, which was previously passive towards social issues, has become more involved, whether in the form of online campaigns, fundraising, or real actions on the ground. This shows that social media can enhance critical awareness and expand social participation in society.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research conducted, it can be concluded that social media plays a very significant role in shaping public opinion on social issues. Through ease of access, rapid information dissemination, and open participatory spaces, social media has become a modern communication tool capable of strengthening collective awareness and encouraging public engagement in socio-political discourse. Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook not only serve as channels for individual expression but also as dynamic arenas for public dialogue, where various views and interests converge. One of the main strengths of social media lies in its ability to create issue virality through hashtags, visual posts, and the roles of influential figures (influencers). Public opinion is formed through intense interactions in the digital space, where society can openly support, criticize, or reject certain issues. Findings show that social pressure on social media can even influence the agenda of mainstream media and government policies. However, social media also has a negative side, such as the spread of misinformation, hoaxes, and the polarization of opinions that can muddy public discourse. Therefore, strong digital literacy is needed among the public so that social media can be used wisely and constructively. Overall, social media has become a new force in the process of shaping public opinion, especially in responding to social issues related to justice, policy, and human rights. The positive and responsible use of social media can be an important catalyst in building a more aware, critical, and participatory society.

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