Everyday Politicians towards Indonesian Election 2024

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Introduction

Live TikTok broadcasts conducted by vice presidential candidate Mahfud MD and presidential candidate Anies Baswedan became trending topics amongst the public. This activity was out of the 'daily routine' for electoral candidates to attract public attention. At least, more than ten years ago, candidates mostly campaigned by appearing on the stage to offer entertainment events for constituents (commonly known as 'panggung rakyat) or visitations (commonly known as *'blusukan'*) by going to traditional markets. Everything changed drastically because of the massive technological development. Social media has become a favorite tool for candidates to maximize political branding towards the election.

The appearance of Mahfud MD and Anies Baswedan in live TikTok broadcasts became a sign of political campaign activities starting in the digital space in Indonesia. However, this phenomenon is not surprising in political marketing studies because the United States of America (USA) election in 2016 showed a similar strategy.[1] Specifically, Donald Trump played a role as a fluid politician in social media, did the campaign on social media, and became the president of the USA. With the same strategy, Marcos Bongbong Jr. also played a role as a fluid politician who campaigned on social media and won the 2022 election in the Philippines.

Wood et al.[2] have identified two categories of politician persona development on social media: everyday celebrity politicians and superstar celebrity politicians. Furthermore, their studies show at least two indicators from each category: role-playing and marketing techniques. First, everyday celebrity politicians are coined to explain that politicians will be figures who are 'humanizing' or close to the

public. In getting public attention, the marketing techniques used are unstructured. Politicians will tend to build communication with the public with daily content, such as posting hobbies, daily activities, and meeting events.

Second, superstar celebrity politicians are those who are described as, unlike the everyday celebrity politicians, strong leaders who tend to keep their distance from the public. The nature of communication to the public is also different, in which communication techniques and the substance of the content from this category will be structured, such as those on program outreach or the program's success story.

Shifting Branding

The results of a Big Data analysis of content from X (previously Twitter) conducted by the Center for Digital Society (CfDS), FISIPOL UGM, on X accounts of the three presidential candidates for the 2024 Indonesia election[3] found a shifting trend from superstar celebrity politicians to everyday celebrity politicians. Data crawling of the big data analysis was carried out since the birth of the X accounts of each presidential candidate from 2013 to 2023. Specifically, the data deepening focuses on the narratives and interactions of X accounts of each presidential candidate.

Based on the number of tweets, Ganjar held the title of a presidential candidate who was 'diligent' in interacting on X, with 86,301 tweets from January 1, 2014, to October 8, 2023—followed by Anies Baswedan with 4,700 tweets from January 1, 2014, to October 8, 2023. Lastly, Prabowo Subianto had 2,543 tweets from October 1, 2013, to October 8, 2023. Uniquely, all of the presidential candidates played similar narratives as everyday celebrity politicians in the 2024 election in Indonesia. In particular, Prabowo Subianto and Anies Baswedan slowly shifted from superstar celebrity politicians to everyday celebrity politicians.

The beginning of Anies Baswedan's content on X showed his personality as an everyday celebrity politician. In the 2014 presidential election—when Anies Baswedan served as a spokesperson for Jokowi's winning team—one of the content on the X platform was often posted about volunteers for Jokowi's victory. Using the hashtag #MemilihOptimis, Anies Baswedan's goal of being close to the public was realized. However, this personal branding did not last long.

Since serving as the Minister of Education and Culture and Governor of DKI Jakarta until his presidential candidacy in the 2024 presidential election, Anies Baswedan mainly focused on contents about the

government's performance, the success of programs, or the publication of programs he initiated. There was a variety of structured contents. Recently, Anies Baswedan rebuilt his branding into an everyday celebrity politician by presenting live TikTok content that brought up several issues close to the public, such as young people's daily lives (e.g., about education such as writing undergraduate thesis, trying new experiences, etc).

Prabowo Subianto also experienced the same situation. Since running for president during the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, Prabowo Subianto had built his personality as a superstar celebrity politician. The nuances of contents often uploaded on Prabowo Subianto's account carried narratives about Islam and nationalism. Ahead of the 2024 election, most of Prabowo Subianto's social media content turned into those about his daily activities. One of the things that went viral was photos of cats at the end of 2022, which showed Prabowo Subianto's love for cats. This post affected Prabowo Subianto's branding as a person who loved cats. This post resonated with the cat-lover community who recognized Prabowo Subianto as a cat lover.

In contrast to the two presidential candidates, Ganjar Pranowo branded himself as an everyday celebrity politician from the beginning. When he served as the Governor of Central Java from 2013 to 2023, Ganjar Pranowo uploaded many contents regarding taking action against public complaints and his personal hobbies, such as jogging and cycling. This personal branding continued to be utilized ahead of the 2024 Indonesia election by uploading contents about "traveling Indonesia," showcasing him shopping and meeting with a number of traders, and even with Islamic leaders.

Politics in Digital Space

The birth of the digital space has opened up opportunities for election participants to build their branding. Following that, politics works more fluidly in the digital space by working in interactions through symbols, language, and visuals. Political communication patterns are increasingly fluid, requiring high sensitivity to identify content with political campaign nuances. For example, how do we interpret candidate's performance on infographics? Could this content be directed at candidates' abilities and successes when they become public officials? Campaigns in social media become potentially risky because of their implications to the voters' abilities in rational thinking, given them being easily 'influenced' by the direction of contents, including narrative, language, and visuals from posts on social media.

Considering the trend of building personal branding as an everyday celebrity politician, which was strengthened prior to the 2024 Indonesia election, strengthening public knowledge within the digital space must be carried out immediately by relevant stakeholders, such as organizations of election observers (e.g., Election Corner UGM, Perludem, etc). Likewise, election organizers need to think about the "rules of the game" in the digital space between election organizers, political parties, and candidates, both in the executive and legislative branches. The limits on social media content for election participants are still not clearly defined. Law Number 7 of 2017 about General Elections as the umbrella legal instrument for organizing elections does not yet contain specific clauses regarding campaigning in the digital space. Therefore, rebuilding the rules of the game on the digital spaces for political campaigns must be a priority agenda for electoral stakeholders.

Endnotes

1   Andrea Schneiker, "Populist leadership: The superhero Donald Trump as savior in times of crisis," *Political Studies* 68, no. 4 (2020): 857-874, https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321720916604

2   Matthew Wood, Jack Corbett, & Matthew Flinders, "Just like us: Everyday celebrity politicians and the pursuit of popularity in an age of anti-politics," *The British journal of politics and international relations* 18, no. 3 (2016): 581-598, https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148116632182

3   Center for Digital Society, "Narasi dan Interaksi 3 Bacapres di Media Sosial, *CfDS FISIPOL UGM*, 18 October 2023, https://digitalsociety.id/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/CfDS-UGM_Analisis-Narasi-dan-Interaksi-3-Bacapres-di-Media-Sosial-.pdf?x54867

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