

# Democracy in Post-Truth Era: The Public Sphere Practice in Indonesian Presidential Election, 2019

Juan Malik Frederick Turpyn<sup>1\*</sup> Muchammad Nasucha<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Universitas Al-Azhar Indonesia, Jl. Sisingamangaraja No.2, DKI Jakarta 12110, Indonesia.

\*Corresponding author. Email: juan.turpyn@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

Recently, the practice of public sphere on social media has existed as the distinguishing reality in the post-truth era. Many dynamics of political life and society in this era illustrate that emotional attractiveness is more influential in shaping public opinion than facts, the existing reality. The reality and truth disappear due to the emotion of an interest from party and some group affiliations. Also information on the internet makes it accessible to the public. Democracy in Indonesia now can be considered running properly. The election held every 5 years indicates that the condition of democracy is fine or even better. Wisely, there are a lot of pros and cons cases happening in Indonesia each time election is held, for example in the 2019 election. This study tries to find out how the practice of public sphere on social media is in the post-truth era particularly in the presidential election, 2019. The method used here is mix-method: quantitative through social media observation and then followed with a qualitative method to get deeply on the social aspects of the public sphere. The case chosen is the moment of the 2019 Indonesian presidential election and reviewed from existing relevant social media, the candidate's social media. Finally, this research found that the practice of public sphere on social media in the post-truth era show some perspectives and the truth according to each party and agent.

**Keywords:** post-truth, social media, public sphere, democracy in Indonesia, President Election

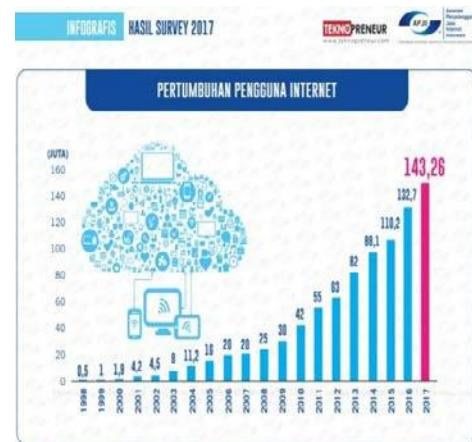
## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the practice of public sphere on social media has become a hot topic for discussion, the truth during and before the post-truth era looks very significant. Social media becomes a sophisticated tool for campaigning for or disseminating information massively, and this contrivance also give contribution when a person or a group wants to brainwash other people or groups quickly and effectively. The social media are identical with development of internet which is known as the latest development of the communication system and until this moment it is still the main choice used in various communication contexts, both communication between individuals and mass communication, and even more than those two communication levels and contexts as dynamic of life.

Various dynamics of political life and society in the post-truth era illustrate that the emotional appeal is in fact more influential in forming opinions in the public, compared with the actual facts. The discovery of this qualified technology makes someone more easily judge something or even understand something that is not yet true. This emotional attraction factor does not originate alone, but can originate from media exposure where there is indeed an assumption that this technology can overcome and resolve barriers in time and space relations [1] that now we live in a global village where there is no significant obstacle from space and time to communicate with each other throughout world. People in Indonesia alone can easily communicate with those in Alaska or other places far apart using internet technology only. At this time we can access any feature with our fingers, whether we want to send short messages or even communicate via telephone.

Actually the development of this technology must be considered carefully, the communication culture of the Indonesian nation at first can be distinguished by various divisions. Social Economic Status can also be predicted based on the available communication culture, for example, a few decades ago there were only very few mobile phone users in Indonesia. But, now educational, socio-cultural, to economic and political orders are easily accessible. Why? Because now so many people have used mobile phones, everyone uses mobile phones easily, connected to internet to communicate or access other features.

The ease of accessing whatever the community wants must be the main attention of the government, there must be education so that all elements of the community understand it. Technological developments in telecommunications are necessary, but there must be relevant support from the government regarding education on the internet. These things are clearly seen that technology can be easily accessed and has a central position in Indonesian human life.



**Figure 01.** Growth of internet users in Indonesia for last 18 years

**Source 01.** <http://isparmo.web.id/2018/08/01/data-statistik-pengguna-internet-di-indonesia-2017-berdasarkan-survey-apjii/>

From the above data, it can be seen that the number of internet users grows significantly. In 1998 there were only 500,000 people using the internet, then ten years later in 2008 the figure increased to 25 million people, and exactly 3 years ago in 2017 internet users in Indonesia had reached 143.26 million people. This significant increase is what we must pay attention to, because it is interesting to discuss when the development of communication is associated with an important aspect of daily life, namely communication in the public sphere, as cited in Nasucha [1], stating that public communication in the public sphere in fact discusses the topic of populist economics or micro and macro economics, in addition to discussing politics from the top to the minority, then this communication can discuss developments happening related to social and cultural life, education, to law and security. Some opinions question what exactly are the important points and concepts we can take? And what about the practice of public sphere in social media in this post-truth era and in the era before post-truth?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Post-Truth

Entering into the developments in the digital era, of course, information and knowledge are more accessible anywhere and anytime. In this era, information seems to be "flooding" social media and internet lines; this can certainly result in a number of social impacts. This era is also called post-truth era or disruptive era widely. The definition of post-truth, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is a situation where the facts actually do not have much influence in shaping public opinion because an individual's emotions or beliefs are considered more influential. Entering into the developments in the digital

era, of course, information and knowledge are more accessible anywhere and anytime. In this era, information seems to be "flooding" social media and internet lines; this can certainly result in a number of social impacts. This era is also called post-truth era or disruptive era widely. The definition of post-truth, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is a situation where the facts actually do not have much influence in shaping public opinion because an individual's emotions or beliefs are considered more influential [2].

There are some perspectives on this newest era. This era is called post-truth era because in the post-truth period, the use of reason underlying the truth and observing facts is not the main basis. Intellect is deemed less important in influencing public opinion, behavior or thinking. But the fact is that person who influences the public with a sensation or emotionality of an issue can control the reality [3]. When understanding the concept of post-truth, it is very important to explore the change by considering the psychological, social, technological and another context conditions, especially in our object, Indonesia. Realm about it tells information and agreement deeply.

This post-truth context does not occur in the past few years, if you look at the literature that in 1992 Steve Tesich wrote in The Nation magazine, and in the Government of Lies section "We as humans who are not restricted or free, must have the freedom to determine us want to live in a post truth world." Steve's writing purpose was to discuss the Gulf War and discuss the coalition state in the Arabian peninsula [4]. Only a few dozen years later, precisely in 2004 Ralph Keyes alluded to The Post Truth Era, Ralph with comedian Stephen Colber discussed the truth and subsequent phases. The word post-truth and truthiness are certainly popular by Stephen as a representation of the post-truth era itself.

Ralph introduced the term "truthiness" on the basis of what he concluded. This term means something that is more or less true, although in fact it is not certain or not true at all [5]. In a number of understandings, truth is indeed an element of subjectivism. This certainly makes practice in the field contested by the explanation of the stigma that is in that scope. Truth in the real world can indeed be shaped by massive stigma, and it must be known that the beliefs of individuals or groups can change thoughts and opinions on an issue that is ongoing in society. There are many persons in this post truth era who try to spread information that is not yet true, there are also those who try to mediate disputes about information by taking corrective actions. Sometimes corrective action is untrue, and confidence in that incorrect information can increase significantly during this time. After discussing the definitions and ideas about post-truth, an expert in this field explains the understanding of the main characteristics of post-truth politics, as follows (Al-Rodhan, 2017) [6]:

- Provide information to the community that is provocative and divisive.
- Ignoring the data and the actual facts in the field.
- Helps broadcast news that is not necessarily true.
- Combine the power of buzzer with conspiracy theories

whose validity has not been tested yet.

- Spread fictitious narratives about certain figures or events.
- Package content that is dishonest in developing public opinion to strengthen the position of a figure, group, or certain interests in society who are gradually accustomed to the use of audio-visual, online, android, and social media.

## 2.2 Public Sphere: Looking into the definition

Opinions arising in reality or in social media are the result of deliberations and the results of discussions that are built with other individuals or groups. It is clear that in order to communicate and exchange ideas, an appropriate container is needed so that the message can be channeled properly, and the concept of this container has been prepared by experts from European countries. The concept of Public sphere or public space was first introduced or propagated by Jürgen Habermas, an expert or a scholar from Germany. He explained that public space is a place where exchanges and discussions on discussion of issues of education-culture, politics, law, economics and even issues that exist in the social sphere. In Habermas' opinion, public space is a neutral zone. And inside there should not be a place for domination from the government, political parties, business groups or other interest groups that are quite influential in the public [7]. All agents take the equal position as the unity. So Habermas promoted a concept where public space is used as a place for debate and discussion with each other. Habermas views discussion space as a forum, space or place where citizens can discuss anything related to the discussion material so that interaction can be created about different matters as well [8]. It is considered widely as the primary pillar of democracy system. And Nasucha regarded it not only as the element of democracy, but also as the parameter to gauge the quality of democracy [1].

Habermas also mentioned several public sphere criteria, namely: "A domain of our social life where such a thing as public opinion can be formed (where) citizens ... deal with matters of general interest without being subjected to coercion ... (to) express and publicize their views." If interpreted, the criteria are "A scope of our social life in which things such as public opinion can be formed by a number of people who later can become public interest without coercion. Some people deliberately publish and disseminate information that is not necessarily true in the eyes of the public or the public." From this understanding, we can conclude that the criteria of the public sphere are that there must be a domain (scope), public opinion, and society [9]. Also, there's a correlation between public sphere and the post truth, as we know the discussion space will certainly be related to the truth about this matter, and sometimes reality is just a perception or interpretation of each individual. Of course it needs to remember that there is no a strong moral framework as a common reference. The existing assumptions certainly

become the basis for the post-truth movement in the form of fake news or facts that are not yet true [10]. So from that, the concept and the culture about discussions must be explained by those who already know and understand the fundamental of communication.

An expert, Alan McKee, contributed to expressing his opinion about this public space. In his opinion, there are several notions that can describe the public sphere; the understanding of the idea is as follows (McKee, 2005) [11]:

- Public space is a scope of social life in which opinions can generally be formed among citizens, and can be discussed with various matters relating to the public interest without coercion or pressure from other parties in expressing and publishing their views.
- Public space is a term related to contextual that is used to describe the space in which these people can relate to one another.
- Public space is a space in which there are conversations, ideas, and people's minds can meet.
- Public space is a virtual space where citizens of a country exchange their concepts and discuss an issue, the aim being to reach agreement on various matters concerning public interests or group interests.
- Public space is a place where information, ideas and debates can take place in society and political opinions can be formed.

### **2.3 Democracy**

Democracy is an idea that is actually in favor of the people. Since hundreds of years or even thousands of years ago this system of government has been implemented in a number of countries or governments in the world. Democracy can be defined as political understanding based on the idea of "power of the people" or "people power" which can actually be explained also as the power of the people, by the people and for the people. Democracy in daily life is seen as a better alternative to other political systems in a number of countries [12]. Democracy is basically related to freedom, but they are not identical with each other. Democracy is also defined as a thought of a collection of ideas and principles about freedom, and in it there are a number of procedures and practices regarding freedom that are formed based on a long and complex history [13]. Democracy is also explained as a pattern of active government to invite all elements of society to make decisions. This democracy will be based on the principle of people's sovereignty in which all human beings have the same obligation in the public [14].

Experts on state law and foundation expressed their opinions on democracy, the first view coming from Joseph A. Schmitter. In his opinion, democracy exists as an institutional planning in reaching political decisions where each individual gains the power to decide the competitive struggle over the people's voice. Another expert, Sidney Hook, also explained that democracy is a form of government in which important decisions are directly or indirectly based on the majority agreement given freely

from adult citizens. In a more universal sense, another Expert Philipp C. Schmitter defined democracy as a system of government in which the government is held accountable for its actions in the public sphere by citizens, who act directly or indirectly through competition and cooperation with representatives they have been elected. [13].

We also know that democracy is a system of government in a country where citizens have the same rights and obligations in the eyes of the public. In addition, they also have the right to participate in running the country or to oversee the running of power either directly, namely the public sphere, or through their representatives in the government [15]. So finally after understanding some expert opinions about democracy, we can conclude that democracy is a state process that relies on the main role of the people as the highest holder of sovereignty. For the sake of the creation of a democratic state, strong supporting aspects are certainly needed to support it. Democracy must also need parties who have public values and ethics that are right on target. A democratic country certainly has the characteristics and basic characteristics relevant to it, as follows (Budiardjo, 2012) [16]:

- There is constitutional protection
- There is existence of a free and independent legal entity. (Impartial).
- There is existence of free and confidential elections.
- There is freedom to associate, organize, oppose, and express opinions.
- There is existence of citizenship education

Based on these characteristics and characteristics, the country expectedly will be created fairly and its growth can be observed transparently. Humans have diverse backgrounds and kinds of life; this diversity is what we need to respect and not to exceed the limits. Based on the unity and diversity it can certainly make a better democratic state going forward.

## **3. METHODS**

Each research certainly has a strong base so that research implementation can run smoothly. In this study, researchers used a mixed-method with quantitative social media observations and then performed a qualitative method with support from the public sphere theory framework. Mix Method is a research method by combining two methods at the same time: quantitative research methods and qualitative research methods. And it is hoped that later this research will obtain more valid, comprehensive, reliable and objective data [17]. Other experts also said that this study was a combination of quantitative and qualitative research. The data in this research must also be combined. With the hope that researchers can dig deeper information and formulate research problems can be answered [18].

Mix method research can provide more credible and valid data results in solving research problems, because researchers have free space to use all data collection tools

according to the type of data needed. Meanwhile, when using quantitative or qualitative research we can only use it on one particular type of data collection tool. [19]. Mix method research can also help each researcher answer research questions that cannot be answered by quantitative or qualitative research.

The previous section explained about the mix method research. And now researchers will describe the definitions of both quantitative and qualitative joint research. The quantitative approach is a study, the results of which are in the form of a report aiming to systematically describe the facts or characteristics of a particular population or area factually and clearly [20]. Meanwhile qualitative research is the one certainly using a scientific setting with the intention of interpreting phenomena occurring and is carried out by involving existing methods such as interview techniques, observation, and document utilization [21]. So using the combination of these two methods, it is expected to help researchers answer the formulation of problem.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Entering the first part of the discussion, the researchers analyzed three research objects from 3 parties who participated in the 2019 election contestation event last year. The first one is the incumbent, the account of President Joko Widodo; the second is the account of the opposition, the account of Prabowo Subianto. And finally there is an account from a neutral party, he is a political observer namely Haris Azhar. The accounts to be analyzed are their respective Instagram accounts. The public sphere is explained by Habermas as a space, in which the public can freely create or create a public opinion in a scope related to educational, social, political or economic conditions. So is Instagram actually included into the public sphere? The answer is yes it is of course. Instagram is a mobile application based on iOS, Android and Windows Phone where users can shoot, edit and post photos or videos to the main page of Instagram and other social networks [22].

In addition to posting their photos or videos, users can build relationships with each other. And discussion can be held between the two or Instagram account users the comments column. Responses from other people can arise indirectly from a post or a discourse in the comments column, and they will feel more confident until the discussion will continue to grow and unconsciously can form public opinion. In this case, there are certainly parties who benefit from the campaign for and the marketing of an object. Especially the campaign team or marketing politics certainly use this discussion space to lead opinions or direct people to provide support for a discourse or issue. Researchers here take 3 (three) objects aforementioned and researchers will explain one by one.

#### 4.1 Account of Incumbent Candidate 01, Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin

There are 21,884 comments on this posting on Candidate 01 account. The researchers here also took a number of samples to analyze the matter of comments in this public discussion room. From these comments, it can be seen that some people are supportive, while some others are contra and take actions against the post. In fact, some others people are neutral and actually not related to these posts.



**Figure 02.** Posted on Jokowi's Instagram Account as Incumbent

In the scope of communication, the condition of cyberspace raises an idea & concept of discussion space as an answer to the public's need to discuss in the realm of the public sphere. Examining this context later in the discussion room, a public opinion will be formed, where this public opinion will usually affect the policies of a country. Public opinion will end up in or lead to criticism or control by a group of people. The following is the discussion room of Candidate 01's comments:

From these comments, we can analyze a number of comments, in which there are both positive and negative comments, and even there are neutral ones.

From a number of comments and discussions we analyze and conclude that from candidate 01 there were many public discussions, so that the categorization of this public discussion is as follows:

1. There are discussions not relevant to the topic discussed (the 2019 presidential election victory), indicating the neutrality of political participation.
2. There are expressions of appreciation, congratulations and hope to lead Indonesia for the next 5 years.
3. The emergence of topics and discussions regarding indications of fraud in the previous presidential election, satire, and sensitive offensive actions.

Topics covered are:

1. Indications of Cheating
2. Personal and sensitive innuendo
3. Current state of the country
4. Topics not related to the presidential election (request for tips).

#### **4.2 Account of Incumbent Candidate 02, *Prabowo Subianto – Sandiaga Uno***

Opposition is another side of the incumbent, and usually there is a difference between the incumbent and the opposition. Here we can analyze the Opposition Leader Account, Prabowo Subianto. In the scope of communication, the condition of cyberspace raises an idea & concept of discussion space as an answer to the public's need to discuss in the realm of the public sphere. Examining this context later in the discussion room, a public opinion will be formed, where usually this public opinion will affect the policies of a country. Public opinion will end up with or lead to criticism or control by a group of people. Following is the discussion room of Candidate 02's comments:

From the discussion room, we have seen polarization of diverse discussions. There are some comments that pros and cons about the content too.

From the discussion room, we have seen polarization of diverse discussions. Each individual's personal opinions will eventually become a public opinion, the way to do this is to make the opinion a public consumption and then result in public debate widely and fairly, public debate is also possibly presented in an open manner.

From a number of comments and discussions we analyze and conclude that there are many public discussions of the comments available on Paslon 02, the categorization of public discussions is as follows:

1. Telling sadness and complaints because they were not chosen for the candidate pair they were fighting for, and prayed for the goodness of candidate pair 02.
2. Hopes and desires for the candidate to fight against indications of cheating to win the ongoing political contestation.
3. An argument arises about the current state of the country.

So based on the data we can find that the topics covered comprise three things: (1) Indications of Cheating, (2) State Conditions, and (3) Hope for *paslon* (candidate pair) and the country going forward.

#### **4.3 Account of Neutral Position, Political Observer Haris Azhar**

Haris Azhar is a political observer often talking about the direction of politics in Indonesia. He often discussed about the 2019 elections as well, and this is one of the posts of

Haris Azhar and the following discussion space that occurs in it.

From a number of comments and discussions we analyze and conclude the discussion space that appears in the comments column of Haris Azhar, one of the Political observers, in which there are many public discussions of the comments available. The categorization of this public discussion is as follows:

1. Comments that are sarcastic or sarcasm about the 2019 presidential election. Explanation of hopes that political contestation runs smoothly.
2. Public perception about the condition of the political situation that is happening.

And the topics covered are: (1) Indications of cheating, (2) Requests for recommendations regarding the presidential election, and (3) Allusions about the presidential election.

Various communities also commented on this discussion column, and many of them also discussed out of the context being discussed at the moment.

In the context of discussion in this column, the public sphere has a number of meanings and interpretations as a public space that is not real or virtual and this domain plays roles in holding the public interest and the discussion has varying elements. So the three parties play an important role in the eyes of the public, and after conducting in-depth study and analysis the analysis, results are summarized as follows:

| No | Candidate 01   | Candidate 02  | Neutral Position   |
|----|--|---|--|
| 1  | Cheating Indications: it is said that they won because of cheating | Cheating Indications: asking to fight indications of cheating | Cheating Indications: elections and presidential elections which have been made miserable and fraudulent |
| 2  | Current country conditions   | Current country conditions                                    | Requests regarding the presidential election   |
| 3  | Personal and sensitive satire                                      | Hope for the candidate and the country going forward          | Allusions about the presidential election  |
| 4  | Topics not related to the presidential election (request for tips) | Topics related to the presidential election                   | Topics not related to the presidential election (request for tips)                                       |

From the results of the analysis on the three research objects, there is a similarity of topics discussed, namely the "indication of fraud". And this makes the "indication of fraud" a topic discussed widely and not yet tested for the truth and the facts that are on the ground.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Indeed, in recent times the practice of public sphere on social media has become a hot topic for discussion, the truth in the post-truth era and before the post-truth era looks very significant. Ease of accessing whatever the community wants must be the main focus of government's attention, there must be education so that all elements of the community understand it. Technological developments in telecommunications are necessary, but there must be relevant support from the government regarding education on the internet. We conclude that the comments of the three research objects are equal, so that there is a discourse about "indications of fraud". These three objects originally only posted an election post, but there was one individual creating the issue of the fraud and made the discussion room more extensive and massive. If you want to be associated with the post-truth, people and society will trust the discourse without referring to the existing reality.

So if you want to be strengthened with the foundation of post truth, that is, a situation where the facts actually do not have much influence in forming public opinion because an individual's emotions or beliefs are considered more influential. This discourse on "indications of fraud" has increasingly shaped public opinion because it is only an individual's beliefs. The beginning of this personal opinion will trigger a debate and leads to appearing opinions that are affecting people and public at large. Public Sphere actually has the advantage of being able to create public opinion and open space for democratic discussion. But it must be noticed the shortcomings of this public sphere, because in fact the information appearing sometimes comes from unreliable origin. And in reality, the information conveyed is actually used by a number of people to realize the interests of each person, or a number of people even a number of groups. Information with commercial purposes is sometimes also changed its function to provide personal information, or disclose information that has the purpose of defaming them. The practice of public sphere in post-truth era on social media in fact does play a significant role in creating public opinion. And the truth of information in the post-truth era is dominated by certain parties, factually the ruling party, in order to create facts that are inversely proportional in real life. In contrast to the era before the post-truth, the space for discussion in the public looks very diverse and there is no fear of excessive domination of a party.

Sometimes these individuals or people initially only talk about small things which later will intentionally be exaggerated. These things occur easily if there are individuals who have internet and server connections that are keyed, not even a few people it actually falsifies their identities with fake or anonymous accounts. Ultimately this condition makes us difficult to know who he is, and to find out the truth of their respective identities. So, the truth is highly subjective. Each of agents surely owns information encouraged by ideological frame of party or

their affiliation. Moreover all agents promulgate and struggle to win the public with their information consisting of their agenda.

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